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Racism, Ragheads and Rednecks.

By Ryan Al-Natour

October 2007 became the starting point in a series of events that made the suburb of Camden (located in the far south-western Sydney area, Australia) known internationally. After a charity called the Quranic Society submitted a development proposal to build an Islamic school in the area, the expressions of hostility towards the proposal by local residents were overt and well-documented in the media. Petitions, flyers and anti-school bumper stickers were formed and widely circulated (Bowie 2007c:11). Anti-school rallies attracted crowds in large numbers expressing disdain towards Islam (Kinsella 2007d:1, Bowie 2007b:1). A wooden crucifix with biblical inscriptions appeared on the proposed site (Kinsella 2007b:19), and several groups within (Bowie 2007a:11) and outside of Camden, including a Nazi white supremacist group (Hildebrand 2008) became involved against a perceived Arab invasion of the Macarthur district (the Camden area). The council rejected the application and the charity appealed this decision in the Land and Environment Court, where it was rejected again in June 2009 (Bowie 2009:1).

In December 2007, a public information forum on Islam and the proposed Islamic school was organised in Camden. Outside this forum, a local resident stressed to *ABC* reporters that his opposition was ‘not about racism’ (*PM* 2007), yet expressed an opinion which suggested otherwise: ‘If it does get approved, every ragger [“raghead”] that walks up the street’s going to get smashed up the arse by about 30 Aussies’ (*AM* 2007a). The offensive term ‘ragger’ (“raghead”) used to describe Middle Eastern people – particularly of the Islamic faith – can be understood as racist, and the advocacy of violence towards a particular social group based on the imaginings of their religious beliefs or their genetic make-up further falls within the guidelines of racism. This was not the first or last time in which an opponent of the proposed Islamic school would firstly deny that their opposition was racist, and then would proceed to express a racist view.

In this article, I will firstly discuss a theoretical framework on ‘race’ and racism. In setting the scene for the case study of the Camden controversy, I will then briefly describe the typical hostile oppositions that Islamic development applications have faced in the Sydney area. I will then illustrate how discourses of ‘race’ and racism have been approached in the case of the proposed Islamic school in Camden. This discussion will be based on television, newspaper and radio sources, which are media spaces used to express racist opposition. Finally, in this article, I point out the motivations and rationalisations behind the contradictory practices of denying and practising racism in light of the case of the proposed Islamic school in Camden.

‘Race’, Racialisation and Stereotypes

According to Charles Husband, it was in a 1508 poem by William Dunbar that the term ‘race’ was officially recorded in the English language (Husband 1994:7). Since then, the term has been attributed a number of meanings. On conceptualising the usage of the term ‘race’, Miles and Brown point out how it has popularly been approached using a ‘biological’ lens. Biological differences are the key signifiers used to describe ‘races’, which, Miles and Brown correctly argue, are imagined differences. Further, the authors point out that such biological or somatic characteristics are designated to signify differences between human beings, arguing that ‘...biological differences are secondary to the meanings that are attributed to them...’ (Miles & Brown 2003:88). Specific human characteristics such as height, weight, leg and arm lengths, shapes of ears and eyes, hair and eye colour, facial structures and even body hair have been used as signifiers to detail the imaginings of particular ‘races’ (Miles & Brown 2003:88). As a tool of categorisation, skin colour is a common signifier that has been used to distinguish different groups of people (or supposed ‘races’), where the most common of signifiers include a popular Black/White dichotomy (Ratcliffe 2004:16). As a racial signifier, skin colour has been attributed particular meanings that are imagined in a way that creates an inferior/superior divide among social groups.

Thus, it is flawed to think of ‘race’ solely in terms of skin colour. Husband acknowledges that notions of ‘race’ are popularly based on ‘colour lines’, yet also points out how racial observations are not always the case. Interestingly, Husband cites Charles Kingsley’s racialised observation of the Irish in 1860, an observation which would be regarded as extremely odd and strange had it occurred in today’s world. In a letter to his wife, Kingsley writes:

But I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I don’t believe they are our fault. I believe there are not only many more of them than of old, but they are happier, better, more comfortably fed and lodged under our rule than they ever were. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours (cited in Husband 1994:6, originally cited in Curtis 1968:84).

This absurd yet fascinating account of Kingsley’s ‘haunted’ experience illustrates the way colour is attributed in a method that assumes a moral hierarchy. As Husband (1994:6) reveals, Kingsley was not referring ‘to an exotic tribe of albinos’, rather a ‘horrible country’ where he observed the ‘white chimpanzees’. Through the dehumanisation of the Irish people, and the justification of an occupied rule in Ireland, Kingsley appears disappointed that he shares his ‘whiteness’ with the Irish. Though colour is used as a signifier to create a moralised hierarchy of ‘races’, we also see that colour is one of many variables that are used in constructing and marginalising particular racialised Others. A conquest of occupation was facilitated for the English through the establishment of a racial hierarchy that placed them on top, and which demonized the Irish (despite the perceived ‘colour’ similarities between the two), placing them

below the English.

The process of racialisation facilitates the circulation of the myth of different ‘races’, or what Ashley Montagu would call man’s [sic] most dangerous myth’ (Montagu 1974). As described in the aforementioned example, the Irish were racialised as ‘white chimpanzees’. On the nature of racialisation, Miles and Brown make 3 significant points: (1) racism presumes a process of racialisation, as it represents the Other through the lens of negativity; (2) images, stereotypes and other constructions are involved in this process of representation; and (3) racism operates as a platform to interpret the actions and operations of the world today (Miles & Brown 2003:104-105). Stereotyping further facilitates the racialisation of particular people, groups and communities and is central to the politics of representation. The politics of representation – in terms of stereotyping – concerns the constructions of the Other and how we use the Other to define ourselves. The constructed Other helps determine the Self – what we are and how they are not like the Self (Pickering 2001:55). Such stereotypes of racialised Others are used to define the Self as ‘safe’, conventional or normal. Further, stereotypes can serve to rationalize ‘bigotry, hostility, and aggression’ (Pickering 2001:48). Thus, any expressions of racist thought can be easily communicated through stereotypes.

In recent times, narratives of nationhood, patriotism and ‘way of life’ rhetorical strategies, have attempted to guise racially motivated perspectives. These narratives are part of what is termed the ‘new racism’ (Barker 1981; Dunn et al 2004). In the ‘new racism’, the processes of racialisation work through narratives of ‘our way of life’ that are designed to specifically exclude particular Others from a particular space. Further, the argument of ‘genuine fears’ and the protection of the nation’s ‘way of life’ are used to justify the processes of racism. Barker argues that these discourses of ‘genuine fears’ and the ‘common sense’ approach of protecting our ‘way of life’ illustrate that ‘racism is theorized out of the guts and made into commonsense’. Barker goes on, ‘This, then, is the character of the new racism’ or what he calls ‘pseudo-biological culturalism’ (Barker 1981:23). Dunn et al also observe how discourses of the nation and patriotism are used in the new racism, where notions of cultural diversity are seen as a threat to patriotism and the nation (Dunn et al 2004:426). Such practices of the new racism have dangerous consequences, where racism is almost normalised.

Experiences of Sydney Islamic Development Applications

Stereotypes, racialisation processes and aspects of the ‘new racism’ have appeared in the narratives of opposition against Islamic development applications in the Sydney area. For instance, mosque opposition has been a core display of racism against Australian Muslims. Anti-Muslim sentiment has a long history in Australia; whether against the Malay pearlers or Macassan fishers occurring approximately 200 years ago; or whether it was the stereotypical views toward Afghan workers at the time of the White Australia Policy. Further, the events of September 11 2001 fired up existing racist attitudes towards Muslims. Throughout history, at times when Australian Muslims have tried to build their lives in this country,

Islamic developments and communities have often been met with racist opposition (Dunn 2001:292).

A common approach to Islam in Australia is homogenisation, this is definitely the case in documenting opposition to Islamic development applications. Cultural variations among Muslims need to be taken into consideration. There are areas in Sydney which consist of Muslims from a variety of backgrounds: Turkish, Lebanese, Indonesian, Pakistani, Bosnian, Syrian, Indian, South African, Sri Lankan and Iranian to name a few. Numerous Islamic organisations in Australia are also varied to cater for different religious denominations, whether they are Shi'a, Sunni, or other Islamic denominations. Also, within the Sydney area, most Muslims reside in the Western Suburbs (Dunn 2004:343- 344). These different ethnic backgrounds are usually dismissed and all Muslims become a monolithic entity in the course of stereotyping, and the ethnicity of 'Arab' is a usual component involved in the stereotyping of Muslims. Therefore, anti-Muslim prejudice works with anti-Arab prejudice, as though all Arabs are Muslim and all Muslims are Arab.

Apart from Camden, the most recent controversies over local council Islamic development applications include the controversy over an Islamic Prayer Centre in Annangrove, the proposed school in Bass Hill, and proposed Islamic schools in the suburbs of Hoxton Park and Austral. Poynting et al discuss the controversy over an Islamic Prayer Centre that was proposed in the Sydney suburb of Annangrove in 2002, located on the far western fringe of the Sydney area. Annangrove is described by the authors as a 'strongly middle class, Anglo-Celtic Hills district' (Poynting et al 2004:222), and is described by an ABC radio journalist as 'the Bible Belt area of the Hills district' (*PM* 2008a). Similar to the proposed Islamic school in Camden, the Prayer Centre received a considerable amount of hostility from certain local residents, and even the local Mayor had expressed a bizarre concern over the welfare of women in the area in his own opposition to the proposal. Also, certain local residents claimed that a prayer centre would be incompatible with the 'quiet community' of Annangrove, which was supposedly threatened by outsiders. Locals would even assert that Muslims should 'stay in Muslim areas', referring to Sydney areas with concentrated Arab populations such as Bankstown and Punchbowl (Poynting et al 2004:222-3). The Annangrove proposal received up to 8000 letters of objection, the site was vandalized on numerous occasions and severed pigs' heads were placed around the property in an attempt to contaminate the site (*AM* 2007b). After being rejected by the local council, this application entered the Land and Environment Court and the council's decision was overruled.

Even in the Bankstown region (located in south-west of Sydney), an Islamic development application was the subject of overt racist hostility, but not to the same extent as in the case of Camden or Annangrove. Opponents of a proposed school in Bass Hill, a suburb located within the Bankstown vicinity, had cited numerous objections against the school. Some objections would cite traffic concerns, others asserted that the establishment of a Muslim school would increase 'sectarian and social tensions' among children due to their religious differences (Gilmore & Price 2007). As one local resident expressed 'It's not traffic. This is how I see it: it's the religion. But unfortunately, they said, "Don't talk about religion." I have to talk about it.' (*Lateline* 2009). The resident was obviously referring to the planning regulations which would ignore racist objections towards the proposal. The Bankstown City Council rejected the application for the

school, yet at the same meeting, approved the expansion of a brothel. One of the applicants who attended the meeting interjected ‘You support the brothel and reject our school’. After he was threatened that he would be removed from the meeting, a number of Muslims who were also present walked out (*Four Corners* 2008). The case then entered the Land and Environment Court, and the Council’s decision was overturned. The Court’s judgement mentioned ‘the elephant in the courtroom’, a reference questioning ‘whether the Council would have raised quite as many contentions as it did if the application had been for an Anglican school’ (Murray 2009).

Also, in recent times, opposition towards Islamic development applications occurred in Hoxton Park, a suburb within the Liverpool district (also in the South Western Sydney region). Protests against a Muslim school in Hoxton Park were minimal in comparison to the attention drawn to the Islamic development applications in Camden, Bass Hill and Annangrove, where only 100 people attended a public rally against the school. Campaigns against the school had even reached cyberspace, where an anti-school website had listed traffic and pollution concerns, and even suggested that such increases in traffic would make the area ‘not safe’ for children (Long 2009). The Liverpool Council approved the school for Hoxton Park in June 2009. Also, the Council rejected a different development application for an Islamic school in Austral, also located under the Liverpool jurisdiction. The Austral application, which also inspired local opposition and campaigns of protest, was rejected based on rural zoning issues (McLean 2009). In recent years, it is as though hostility towards Islamic development applications in the Sydney area – whether based on traffic concerns or racist objections – has become a predictable response by any local community.

Anti-Muslim sentiment, as displayed in opposition to Islamic developments in Sydney, has led to the homogenised image of all Australian Muslims as the Other. In some cases, opponents of mosque development applications would stereotype Muslims as ‘fanatical beings’. Kevin Dunn researched the various opposing views towards mosque development applications, as they were documented in the archives of local Sydney councils and letters to local papers, and he observed: ‘The stereotype of the fanatical Muslim was present in the discourses of opposition to mosques or Islamic centres throughout Sydney. Opponents of mosque development applications made reference to Muslims having a fanatical belief in their faith’ (Dunn 2001:297). Dunn also linked the common media stereotypes to the views of these opponents, which usually regurgitated these media stereotypes. Common phrases in the media such as ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ or ‘fundamentalist Muslim’ include stereotyped images of ‘militancy, intolerance and violence’ (Dunn 2001:297). In the news media, such representations are successfully communicated through the promotion of fear which ‘helps sell papers’ (Poynting et al 2004:237), playing a crucial role in shaping public opinion (Hall et al 1978:63). Yet these anti-Muslim stereotypes (which are almost identical to anti-Arab stereotypes) also emerge from sources other than news media – such as the entertainment media. The research of Jack Shaheen explored the representations of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood films. Shaheen examined over 900 films and found that the vast majority would vilify Arabs and Muslims through popular stereotypes. Upon reflection on the various stereotypes that depicted Arabs as fanatical terrorists, Shaheen writes ‘...(T)he time is long overdue for Hollywood to end its undeclared war on Arabs, and to cease misrepresenting them and maligning them’ (Shaheen 2001:34). Parts of the news media and the entertainment media have played a role in stereotyping Arabs and Muslims. These mediums have such strength that they

have crossed over into the domain of public opinion and have become present in the opposition towards Islamic development applications in the Sydney area.

As a form of racism, anti-Muslim expressions are becoming increasingly frequent, particularly in the post-9/11 world where such stereotypes are widely held and expressed. A report on the discriminatory practices towards Arab and Muslim Australians, as conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, highlighted that hostile acts of verbal abuse and physical violence towards Arabs and Muslims increased after September 11th 2001 (HREOC 2004). No doubt, the role of stereotypes constantly played out in the media was one of many contributions to such an increase. Yet such racist expressions are also becoming normalised. Dunn et al report on the normalcy of racism in this context and the dangerous nature of this normalisation process. If such racist views become common and normalised, these views then remain unquestioned and much more difficult to challenge. In the case of the frequent opposition documented against Sydney Islamic development applications, Sydney itself becomes an urban context where ‘racial hatred is insidiously normalized.’ (Dunn et al 2009:3). In examining the case of the proposed Islamic school in Camden, I documented numerous efforts of certain opponents of the school who would attempt to normalise views that are usually considered racist.

Narrating Racism in Camden

Given the long history of hostility towards Islamic development applications, it was perhaps no surprise that the proposal of an Islamic school in Camden also received a hostile response. A variety of public spaces were utilised to express narratives of ‘race’ and racism involved in the issue of the proposed school. Through television, newspapers and radio media sources, I have documented how certain opponents of the proposed Islamic school in Camden have transformed and modified their definitions of racism to suit their interests. The sources analysed in this article consist of letters to the local paper, election platforms, an anti-school flyer and interviews conducted by journalists.

At various points throughout the Camden controversy, certain opinions in the ‘Your Say’ pages of the local paper (the *Camden Advertiser*) narrated racism in a method that attempted to support their argument. One Camden resident expressed concern that the school had a hidden agenda – to bring an influx of Muslims who ‘hate our way of life’ with a desire to change it. The resident admitted, ‘I will probably be called a racist but it is not racism, it is fear of the unknown’ (Stewart 2007:6). Another attempted to justify a view that singled out Muslims by demonising young Muslims. ‘Of all migrants that have come to Australia, young Islamic people seem to have more trouble integrating into society than other new migrants’. This was followed with the denial of racism and the assertion that suburbs with concentrated Arab populations were dangerous as a result of their presence. ‘I am not a racist person – far from it as I too come from a migrant background.’ (Bennett 2007:2). Another resident also denied that opposition towards the proposal was based on racism, rather a form of patriotism, arguing that ‘(B)ecause we uphold our traditions, morals, heritage and Christian culture, the media choose to report us as being “rednecks”. I ask these reporters:

where is your loyalty? We are passionate, trustworthy Australians with a sense of loyalty' (Yewen 2008:2). The moral barricades of this society were aligned with constructions of mainstream national identity. Notions of 'our way of life', traditions, and Christianity had built this construction, allowing the opponent of the proposal to dodge (or attempt to dodge) the label of 'racist'. Interestingly, one opponent of the proposal from Camden Park mentioned that she was frustrated with the outbursts of racism in the area to the point where she felt ashamed of telling people that she resides in Camden. This resident argued that the media was presenting the Camden community 'as a bunch of racist redneck hicks' and expressed that she was not surprised considering the large amount of objections on religious grounds. She questioned why these opponents would base their opposition on racist ideologies (Lysaught 2007:18). Even though this resident was opposed to the school on environmental grounds, she was still able to distinguish her own opposition from other opponents.

A local political candidate of the Christian Democratic Party echoed the political ideologies of his party colleague, the Reverend Fred Nile. Using the issue of the proposed school as an election platform, the candidate promised that if he were elected, he would change the current anti-discrimination legislation to restrict the rights of Muslims to build schools and mosques, further proposing a moratorium on Muslim immigration. When a journalist asked the candidate whether his views were bigoted, the candidate was quick to dismiss the idea: 'We're not intolerant, we actually love Muslims but we don't like what they practise and some of their beliefs, because they're not favourable to our society and community harmony' (Kinsella 2007a:10). Again, the discourses of nationalism and the functioning of society were used to justify policy platforms that singled out Muslims. Under the guise of patriotism, the racial vilification of Muslims worked with the construction of the national Self. The candidate had such 'love' towards Muslims that he felt the need to racially vilify them.

An anonymous Camden resident told the *Camden Advertiser* that he would print 16,000 anti-school flyers. One of them read: 'What's wrong with the schools that are already established in the local area? It is ABOUT TIME Aussies stand together whatever religion or race of people' (Bowie 2007c:11). The author of this flyer made a conscious effort to represent Australians as racially and religiously 'diverse' in calling for opposition against the school. The denial of racism and the patriotic opposition towards the school worked together here, and the call for racial and religious harmony was used in the recruitment of opponents of the school.

The views that appeared racist towards the school attracted the attention of the mainstream media. *The Daily Telegraph* picked up on rumours of a possible anti-Muslim riot that was to occur in Camden on Australia Day, 2008. Based on these rumours that predicted an event of public disorder that would mirror the Cronulla riot of 2005 (Hildebrand 2008), Camden hosted a heavy media presence on January 26th 2008 and no such events occurred. The editor of the *Camden Advertiser* expressed disappointment in that the reporting on Camden by the mainstream media was disproportionate to the amount of media in Camden anticipating a race riot, she writes: '...the Sydney media is giving Camden the Campbelltown treatment: it only rates a mention if something has gone wrong' (Senescall 2008:4). Here, racism is also identified in terms of its newsworthy appeal.

On the ABC's *Q&A* program, a resident asked whether it was fair for people to quickly put the 'racist tag' on his views, asking the panel: '...is it a particular race we oppose here, or is it something like the impact that this school will bring upon Camden and the possible influence it will have on the Camden culture?' (*Q&A* 2008). A fellow audience participant proposed that local councils should have the right to stop an 'invasion by Muslims', further opposing the idea that such a view could be racist, arguing that 'Islam is not a race, so it's not racist to oppose Islam'. A different resident who supported the proposal argued that some of the opposition on environmental grounds was 'poorly hidden racism' (*Q&A* 2008). These three different views outline three various dimensions in the discourses of racism in relation to the proposal. According to the first, the term 'racist' was a label unfairly applied to a view that desired to preserve the contemporary Camden culture from a Muslim school. In this view, it was not racist to preserve the existing Camden culture by excluding a social group based on their religious and ethnic backgrounds. The second had defined racism as discriminatory treatment based on the perceived biological differences among humans, and had neglected other definitions of racism, such as the adverse treatment of an individual/social group based on their cultural/religious backgrounds. By limiting the definition of racism, this audience participant was attempting to justify a racist view. The third view identified the insidious operations of contemporary racism in Australia, where other concerns such as 'town planning' and 'environmental laws' are utilised to raise objections against the school.

When the Camden Council unanimously opposed the Quranic Society's application, various opponents expressed a variety of opinions. While one resident asserted that Australia was an 'Anglo-European society' exclusively for Christians, another resident claimed he was not racist, it was 'just all the crime and stuff that other foreign people bring into the town' (*AM* 2008). Both these views exclude minority groups, whether they were recent migrants or a population that resided in Australia 40,000 years prior to European settlement. Here, notions of the Self were Anglo-European law-abiding Christians, and the Others were criminalised 'foreign people'. By dismissing racism, the opponents of the school were able to construct the racial and religious characteristics of the mainstream Self, while portraying the racial and religious identities of the Others in a negative light. One local resident, Kate McCulloch, temporarily became a Sydney household name once she exited the council meeting and vented a monologue of racist propaganda that she felt was acceptable and patriotic. Dressed in an akubra hat with multiple stickers of the Australian flag, McCulloch's monologue vilified Arabs and Muslims in multiple ways. McCulloch argued that some 'take our welfare', oppress women, cannot assimilate into the Australian way of life (Dart & Creagh 2008), and were suicide bombers (Murphy 2008). From the decision to reject Muslims on a local level, McCulloch's monologue further advised that she did not want Muslims in Australia arguing they were a 'dictatorship' (*ABC News* 2008). Further, 'scores of people' approached her with support because they felt they were restricted due to the racial vilification laws in Australia (Murphy 2008). Not surprisingly, her activism against the application led to her interest in a political career with a notoriously xenophobic political party. Anointed by the media as the 'next Pauline Hanson', McCulloch planned to stand for the One Nation Macarthur Seat in the next federal election (Ramachandran 2009). Even though McCulloch's views were racially vilifying Muslims from so many angles to the point where she admitted that the existing racial vilification laws needed to be changed to accommodate her views, she still made the effort to dismiss the view that she could be racist, advising that it was '...just a word. I have many English, Irish, Greek and

Italian friends.’ She further claimed that she even had a Turkish friend who doesn’t want anything to do with Muslims (Dart & Creagh 2008). By establishing that she had a Turkish friend, and friends of other European backgrounds, McCulloch attempted to remove the tag ‘racist’ from her overtly racist views. In the course of expressing racism, McCulloch discussed topics of nationalism and the presence of Muslim in Australia. By taking a ‘patriotic’ stance against the school, McCulloch treated a local council issue as though it affected the entire nation.

Yet one of the most contradictory expressions of racism surfaced when a plan to build a Catholic school in Camden received the support of a local residents’ group that had marketed anti-Islamic school t-shirts with the slogan ‘Keep Camden Rural’. The president of the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group rejected the idea that his opposition was racist:

‘Why is that racist? Why is it discriminatory? It’s very simple: people like some things but don’t like other things. Some of us like blondes, some of us like brunettes. Some of us like Fords, some of us like Holdens. Why is it xenophobic just because I want to make a choice? If I want to like some people and not like other people, that’s the nature of the beast’ (Creagh 2008).

The media spokesperson for this group quickly denied that they were racist, arguing that he would support a Muslim school if it was on a different site; he was sick of the opposition being branded as ‘racism’ (PM 2008b), and that Muslims, the Greens and the ‘politically correct’ owed the people of Camden an apology (Dart & Creagh 2008). Yet only months earlier, this spokesperson denied that any Muslims lived in Camden and raised concerns that Muslims will be the majority in Camden should an Islamic school be established. ‘Only a town with no self-esteem or pride in its cultural and community past would not greatly resist a “Muslim takeover”’ (Wannet 2007:8). The arguments of ‘keeping Camden rural’ did not apply to a proposed Catholic school in the area, only a Muslim school received such opposition.

Radio shock-jock Alan Jones had denied racism in discussing the issue of Camden after reading about a ten year study conducted by Professor Kevin Dunn that exposed NSW to be the most ‘racist state’ in Australia. The article featured Professor Dunn commenting on the Camden controversy, mentioning that according to the research results, there was nothing different about the Camden area in comparison to other parts of NSW. The article also featured a young Muslim girl discussing an experience of racial discrimination, where she had been physically assaulted at Town Hall station (Price 2008). Without even examining the findings of the *Challenging Racism: The Anti-Racism Research Project*, Jones immediately jumped on the defensive arguing that Australians are tolerant, ethnic groups weakened Australia, and claimed that certain migrants did not respect the Australian flag. According to Jones, the ‘poor taxpaying Australian’ in areas such as Camden was called a ‘racist’ for opening ‘his [sic] mouth’. Here, the typical ‘Aussie Battler’ appeal that reflects exclusively masculine dimensions is posited against an image of the ‘lazy migrant’. Jones concludes, ‘...that’s not racism. That’s called defending your own patch’ (Jones 2008). The tone in this opinion piece was typically populist, designed to influence his audience. The contradictory position put forward by Jones vilified Muslims while he simultaneously claimed that he was tolerant. Mainstream

Australians are disadvantaged, according to this view, because they are unable to react in a hostile and racist manner to minority groups without being accused of racism. Jones demonstrated an understanding that racism is something evil, and transformed an understanding of racism into defending the ‘national interest’. Had Jones read the report, he would have perhaps understood the serious operations of racism in Australian cities. The findings of the study found that cities, which are areas of cultural diversity, are also places where racism is frequent. Such racisms are ‘everyday’ to the point where they are becoming a normalised practice, something ‘expected or normal’ (Dunn et al 2009:8). Perhaps the denial of racism, or the enthusiasm to deny racism, shadows the normalisation of racist views.

‘I’m not a racist, but...’

As a concept, ‘racism’ carries negative undertones and any accusations of racism are not taken lightly. Also, the concept of racism has interchangeable moral and political undertones, where the claim that a view is racist denounces the view as ‘immoral and unworthy’ (Miles & Brown 2003:3). Being identified as ‘a racist’ is unattractive, so phrases like ‘I’m not a racist, but...’ are followed with a racialising perception. In the case of the United States an example would be ‘...I really resent it that all these Mexicans come up here to have babies so that American taxpayers will support them’ (Hill 1998:683). Phrases such as this become clichéd to the point where the users of the phrase attempt to communicate something positive in defining a particular social group as a problem (Hage 1998:184). In the aforementioned example, the ‘something positive’ is communicated through the phrase ‘I’m not a racist, but...’. It is an attempt made by the speaker to establish a ‘good character’ before they vent out what could even be a soliloquy of racial hatred or perceptions. Also, it is an attempt to justify and normalise a racist view.

Charting the arguments of racism in the rhetoric opposing the proposed Islamic School in Camden is a complicated process. As a local resident expressed on *Q&A* that some of the environmental and planning objections against the school were covering racially motivated perspectives (*Q&A* 2008). The slogan ‘Keep Camden Rural’ used by the local residents’ group was placed within a broader argument of environmental and town planning objections in order to dismiss racially motivated opposition. Interestingly, a Macarthur ‘Greens’ representative had assessed the proposed site and found it suitable, claiming that other groups overstated their environmental concerns (Bowie 2008:11). Yet various political actors from other parties, including Kevin Rudd in his election campaign before he became the current Prime Minister, opposed the proposal on environmental grounds (Kinsella 2007c:9). Since rumours of a proposed Catholic school in the same area circulated, the residents’ group that upheld the ‘Keep Camden Rural’ slogan shifted their position on development applications in Camden (Creagh 2008). In light of this new proposal, the maintenance of Camden’s semi-rural characteristic was not a priority any longer. The sudden disappearance of the need to ‘Keep Camden Rural’ highlights the perspective of the aforementioned local resident, where planning and environmental concerns appear selective, depending on the religious and racial background of the applicant. Here, there is no explicit racial vilification, what we see is differential treatment where one proposal sparks numerous petitions, 2 rallies, and over 3000 letters to the local council, and the other

does not have such an impact.

In a context where anti-racism federal legislative measures override the powers of the states (Fenna 2004:179), racist attitudes have persisted despite the legislative anti-racism achievements. Several examples of the ‘new racism’ are identifiable in the case of the proposed Islamic school in Camden. Firstly, through the resurrection of stereotypes: Muslims and Arabs have been constructed as incompatible with the existing White majority in Camden. Secondly, by couching their opposition within a ‘nation’s interest’ rhetorical strategy, opponents have rejected a communal Australian identity that deviates away from an Anglo-European Christian mainstream. And thirdly, by asserting that such views have been ‘unfairly’ attacked as racist, the issues of existing mainstream privileges are overlooked with efforts to change the existing anti-vilification laws to remove any the legislative possibility of branding their views as racist. These adjustments have defined the concept of racism in a way that renders meaning as consisting of overt practices of discrimination, as highlighted in the White Australia policy era.

Ghassan Hage observes how racism operates as a nationally inclusive and exclusive practice. Views that are often understood as racist, such as a person labelling others ‘wogs’, telling them to go back to their own country, illustrate how a ‘racist’ attempts to ‘direct traffic’ within the national space, determining who is included and excluded (Hage 1998:17). By calling for a halt of Muslim immigration, or expressing a fear of an increase in the number of Arabs in the Macarthur district, certain opponents of the proposal have operated in the same way. As Hage observes, the practice of exclusion allows the patriotic nationalist to hold a superior position, perceiving themselves as ‘spatial managers’ who attempt to maintain a ‘homely nation’ (Hage 1998:47). By constructing the threat to Camden as an imminent ‘Muslim takeover’, Arabs and Islam were defined as ‘Them’, while the ‘Us’ associated themselves with mainstream Australia, holding a special position due to their religious backgrounds and racialised identities. This practice of directing traffic was achievable through the deviant constructions of ‘Them’ – the target of hostility

At the heart of the denial of racism in Camden were the stereotypes that made up the perceived threat. As various opponents draped themselves in the Australian flag and called for an end of Muslim immigration, hostile opinions towards the school relied on stereotypes of Muslims and Arabs that are not new within the Australian context (as explored by Poynting et al 2004 and Collins et al 2000). By constructing and stereotyping the Other as a dangerous patriarchal terrorist posing a threat to the Camden lifestyle, the dismissal of racism was strengthened by these negative stigmatizations. Stereotypes benefit those who are not on the receiving end of stereotype-driven judgement. They also offer simplistic methods of judging people, allowing decisions to be made with minimal effort (Locke & Johnston 2001:109). Thus, the usage of stereotypes in the case of the Camden controversy allowed the opponent to both deny racism and demonise Muslims at the same time. Rumours that the proposed Islamic school in Camden is part of an attempt by Muslims to invade Camden, where crime rates were set to rise as a result of an increasing Arab and Muslim presence; and rumours that terrorist attacks were likely to occur, were clearly fuelled by stereotypes and the intensification of Islamophobia since the events of September 11th 2001. To be a non-prejudiced person means that one ‘must exert mental energy to consciously inhibit the stereotype which has been automatically activated’ (Locke & Johnston 2001:112), therefore the adherence to stereotypes in constructing the

Muslim Other is a lazy approach to dealing with social differences. Certain opponents of the school made the effort to declare they were not racist, yet did not make the effort to question or rethink the logic of the stereotypes that shaped their opposition towards a school that would cater for children and youths.

Conclusion

The purpose of this investigation was not to encourage the stereotyping of all Camden residents as racists, rather, it was to analyse how racism was narrated in this recent controversy. Arguably, the absurd views expressed about the proposed school could be found in other parts of Australia. The case of the proposed Islamic school in Camden details how certain opponents of the proposal have either denied racism or have changed the meaning of racism to suit their views that appear to racially vilify Arabs and Muslims. The complexity and confusion within these arguments shows that the consequences of being overtly racist would discredit a particular view, yet little do such opponents of the proposal know that denying racism at the same time as being racist only discredits their arguments further. Thus, phrases such as ‘I’m not a racist, but...’ were commonly utilised in two methods attempting (1) to protect the opponent of being branded a naughty label – ‘a racist’, (2) to justify the racial and religious vilification of Muslims in Australia.

Only one media source shows an alternative racialised view in Camden. In arguing against the proposal, a local resident told a *Triple J TV* reporter that Australia is an easy going country and Muslims had no place here. When the reporter questioned whether the contents of her opinion were racist, the resident shrugged her shoulders and agreed that it was ‘probably racist, yeah, but that’s just the way it is’ (*Hack TV* 2008). Unlike other arguments, this straight-to-the-point view was a minority view amongst the dominant views that attempted to dodge racism on this issue. The resident did not feel the need to protect herself from a ‘naughty label’, nor did she feel the need to establish that she had friends of different backgrounds to herself. While we assume that such blunt racism is becoming ‘rare’, we need to acknowledge that the insidious practices of new racisms are becoming much more frequent and dangerously normalised.

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Putting the Doctorate into Practice, and the Practice into Doctorates: Creating a New Space for Quality Scholarship Through Creativity

By Tara Brabazon and Zeynep Dagli¹

There is much debate in an environment of Quality Assurance, vocationalism and research impact about the diverse modes of doctoral education. Traditional models, methods and protocols have been challenged, transformed and shaped by professional and practice-based candidatures. Yet the key problem and issue is often unspoken: can the international academic community create a culture of equivalence between the diverse doctoral forms? How are the very specific regulations for PhD by prior publication aligned in standard and quality with professional doctorates that often involve coursework? Similarly, how are newer modes of credentialing aligned with the ideologies of artistic quality that often infuse practice-based doctorates? How do the diverse doctoral forms effect the enrolment and examination of the “traditional” thesis?

When discussing the specific challenges of practice-based research in the portfolio of doctorates, a *Times Higher Education* article conveyed concerns with existing academic protocols.

Practice-based PhDs, where doctorates are awarded for “non-textual” submissions such as a work of art, are becoming more common. Yet researchers in the creative fields still lack a “properly developed language” to describe what they are doing.²

To create, discuss and apply this language, a conference was held at Northumbria University bearing the title “All Maps Welcome: doctoral research beyond reading and writing.” The goal was to investigate “non-textual” forms of communication in scholarly processes. Unaddressed in such a title was whether doctoral education should welcome ‘all maps’ and indeed if there are consequences when decentring ‘reading and writing.’

Our paper acknowledges these difficult questions, enabling a language to explore the pathways, benefits and difficulties emerging through practice-based doctorates. The writers of this paper were a research team of supervisor and student. A film-based doctorate was submitted by Zeynep Dagli with the title *The eyes of death: the visual movement from witness to spectator*. Four films were examined alongside a seventy thousand words exegesis of print-based doctoral research. Considered attention was placed on the relationship between the visioning of film and print, through the development of a new theory of grief. Problems emerged through the supervisory process and management of the candidature. When Tara Brabazon took over supervision, the doctorate had passed through many years of enrolment, many supervisory hands and many (often negative) judgements about quality and scholarship. The supervisory file was bursting with personal statements from research managers questioning the calibre of the “art” being produced. A complex series of debates ensued about the “correct” matrix of examiners. Ultimately, Zeynep Dagli submitted the completed thesis to a different university than the one in which the research had been commenced, to ensure an independent examination. The doctoral thesis then passed through international examination protocols with great success and the films have been exhibited in a range of film festivals. She is now Dr Zeynep Dagli.

From this experience, our article probes the process of practice-led research from a supervisory team that had to manage diverse and often unsubstantiated statements about art, quality and – most significantly – research. A gratifying conclusion to this doctorate was reached, but it involved the candidate moving institutions to overcome the conflictual interpretations of cultural value and research expertise. The first section of this article learns from this experience to reflect on the process to assist other supervisors and doctoral students. We investigate the distinctions between the production of media artefacts inside and outside a university, inside and outside a doctoral programme. The second part works within these contextual considerations, offering perspectives from the position of a supervisor and student who have had to negotiate the tussle between art and research. We conclude with one resolution to the ‘problem’ of practice.

But is it art?

There are (at least) four distinct doctoral programmes in our universities: the “traditional” PhD comprised of 80,000 to 100,000 words of text, a practice-led qualification, the PhD by prior publication and an array of professional doctorates.³ The Doctor of Creative Arts (DCA) wavers unstably between professional and practice-led models. The fundamental question is how to construct regulations and protocols that acknowledge this diversity but also build a culture of equivalence in examination procedures and outcomes. In other words, (how) do we ensure that a PhD in one form is equal in scholarly merit to another? The answer is – in reality – that such a goal is almost impossible to achieve. Regulations may be precise. Supervisors may be trained with professionalism. Still, there are specificities in these doctoral modes that are not only methodological and theoretical, but also raise concerns about scholarly rigour.

These problems of translation and application have increased during the last twenty years. When humanities

doctoral candidates entered an archive filled with documents to construct a print-based thesis assessed by examiners who were also assessed through the same process, the criteria and expectations were clear. Divergent results still emerged in reports, but the debates and dissonance were triggered by questions in approach, rigour, repeatability, bias, theoretical perspective, method or the absence of a key monograph.

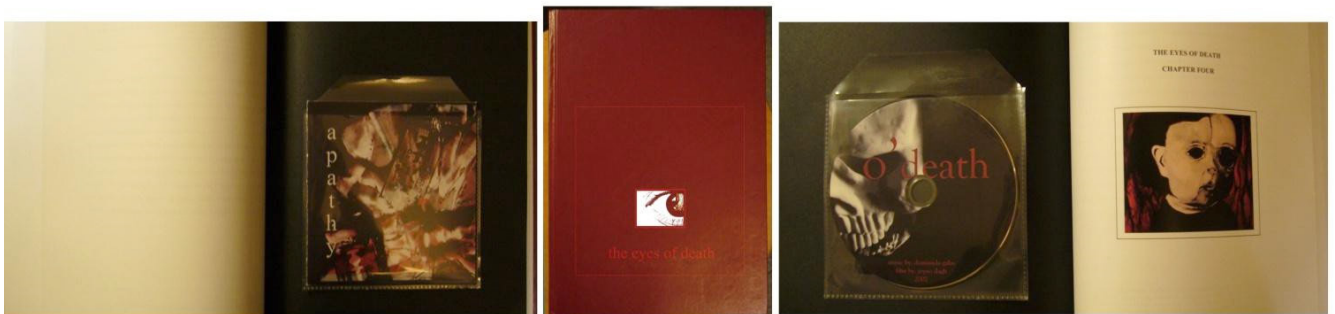
With the range of popular cultural and diverse media sources increasing in their presence and use in the last two decades, a gap emerged between the type of evidence cited and the document presented for examination. For example, Tara Brabazon's honours dissertation on the Goon Show and research Masters investigating the Beatles⁴ included a sonic appendix featuring "aural footnotes" at the end of the written script. These were submitted almost two decades ago: the auditory material was presented on an analogue cassette encapsulated in a polystyrene appendix at the conclusion of the dissertation.



Despite the popular cultural topics selected, these theses deployed traditional source materials and methods and were supervised and examined through conventional academic protocols. The historians who assessed these submissions treated the tapes as a quirky extra, adding a sonic element to research projects about radio and popular music. Yet the written dissertations remained the core documents evaluated.

The early 1990s was a transitional period for the traditional disciplines, building on many debates about media choice in the presentation of oral history research. The translation of interviews into print bled meaning and emotion from the testimony. Although the goal of oral history was to render the invisible visible and return the voices of disempowerment to a print-saturated discipline, the sonic texture was often lost – and certainly edited – for the page. Such debates predated new concerns, as popular cultural studies candidates started to enter doctoral programmes, often attended by postmodern and poststructuralist theorizing. How were these scholars to prove to examiners – in form as much as content - that they understood the complexities of popular music beyond lyrics, dance culture beyond the secular hagiography of a great DJ and film beyond the auteur? Collapsing diverse media into print on a page was not always appropriate. As the internet and read-write web proliferated alongside theories of multimodality, this problem with presentation intensified.

As these debates about cultural value infiltrated popular cultural studies, practice-led research started to generate controversy. There were many reasons for the disquiet, but those of us who have been in doctoral examination boards know the quiet truth that few admit: split decisions between examiners were and are very common in this mode of PhD. In other words, practice-led theses dominate the number of examination panels when there is complete disagreement with the quality of the research. There is a theory for this stark division in results. The wider the gap between media submitted for a doctorate, the greater the likelihood of a variation or split result from examiners. Safe theses reference printed sources from established archives and constitute an original contribution to knowledge based on footnoted evidence. More risky are the candidatures that mobilize popular cultural sources. Most challenging are those doctorates composed of two or more separate objects or artefacts, as it is necessary to coordinate them into a streamlined analysis and argument. For example, Zeynep Dagli deployed a much more integrated format and dialogue between films and text.



There are other reasons for differential results between doctoral modes. Practice-led PhDs are flooded with assumptions about art, cultural value and quality. It is like postmodernism never happened. Too often, supervisors, examiners and managers of postgraduate programmes confuse and conflate art and technical skill. These judgments are of a distinct order from evaluating the calibre of research. To be clear: competency in a medium – words, sound and/or vision – must be a condition of entry into any candidature. The capacity to abide by scholarly protocols is a similarly crucial imperative. Technical expertise with hardware, software, vocabulary and grammar are necessary. But it is important not to confuse technical competency in a media or form and a value-laden determination of art. These assumptions sideline a more robust discussion of academic standards.

Instead of commencing this honest discussion about the examination protocols of mixed platform doctorates, it is fascinating when reviewing the literature “celebrating” practice-led research. There is a focus on “newness,” “innovation,” “excitement” and “creativity.”

The turn to creative practice is one of the most exciting and revolutionary developments to occur in the university within the last two decades and is currently accelerating in influence. It is bringing with it dynamic new ways of thinking about research and new methodologies.⁵

I have argued that “new” knowledge in creative arts research can be seen to emerge in the involvement with materials, methods, tools and ideas of practice.⁶

PhDs, practice-led or otherwise, may be described as art outside a university. That is not a designation or label for an examiner or a manager of candidatures to use. In procedural terms, candidates submit two or more components that – when combined - create an original contribution to knowledge. The media object is tethered to the exegesis and has no independent role beyond developing evidence. Estelle Barrett offers an informative if disturbing description of “creative arts enquiry”: “We propose that artistic practice be viewed as the production of knowledge or philosophy in action.”⁷ There is a slippage between method and epistemology in such a maxim, along with a confusion of evidence and interpretation, object production and knowledge production. Even if her statement is taken as true, then an odd relationship emerges between the resultant exegesis and the artistic practice that has “produced knowledge.” Barrett extends her argument however, affirming difference, separation and distinction from “traditional” research.

Rather than attempting to contort aims, objectives and outcomes to satisfy criteria set for more established models of research, I believe there is a need to generate appropriate discourses to convince assessors and policy-makers that within the context of studio-based research, innovation is derived from methods that cannot always be pre-determined, and “outcomes” of artistic research are *necessarily* unpredictable.⁸

There are many comments to make as a result of such a statement. Firstly, all research outcomes are unpredictable. If the results are predetermined then the research question is not only redundant but also superfluous and flawed. Secondly, there is a problem with the affirmation of “innovation from methods.”

Research – particularly doctoral theses – that focus on methods is a more basic form of scholarship than theses that are theoretically rich. Spending analytical time on ‘the how’ operates at a lower level than projects probing ‘the why.’ When comparing research projects that are practice-based, the candidates spend much of the exegesis unravelling process, “how” they created the artefact. Method substitutes for analysis. While some fine and innovative scholarship can emerge through method-based projects, more incremental knowledge is generated. The other question for “assessors and policy-makers” – particularly in an environment of a Research Evaluation Framework where impact is a variable to assess the value of scholarship - is if innovation in method creates sufficient impact. The other problem with an argument such as Barrett’s is that by desiring to enlarge the criteria by which scholarship is assessed, she is questioning the value of academic standards. While such a discussion may be innovative and beneficial, there is a cost. Practice-based research becomes ghettoized, disconnected from a wider research environment, focusing on ‘the how’ and not ‘the why.’ At that point, different standards and regulations are applied to diverse doctorates. A hierarchy must result. Intriguingly, in academic advertisements for appointments in North America, there is a new phrase being used to find a scholar holding not only a doctorate, but an “earned doctorate.”⁹ While this phrase is – seemingly – used to remove honorary doctorates from consideration, in effect it is creating a difference between supposedly equivalent degrees, opening a discussion of process, standards and training. A much more hushed and implicit knowledge circulates amongst supervisors when selecting examiners for their postgraduates, being wary of an academic who has attained a PhD by prior publication. The rationale for this caution is that because these scholars have not conducted the large-scale research project to “earn” a doctorate, they will not understand the protocols, difficulties and shape of a conventional PhD.

When applying such arguments to an institution’s entire doctoral programme, the consequences become clearer, if more worrying. Stephen Goddard, who completed an exegesis and creative work for a doctorate, outlined the systemic processes of practice-led research.

What characterises creative arts research practice in universities that offer doctoral degrees is the requirement not only to understand a substantial practical project, but also a reflective exegesis that contextualises the methodologies and significant contributions of the research. The specific components of the exegesis are defined by each institution and re-negotiated by each candidate according to different emphases. Fortunately, and by design, the function of each candidate’s exegesis can be redefined in relation to the practice it seeks to elucidate.¹⁰

The problems in such a process are obvious. Goddard suggests that doctoral examinations should be an individualized process, customized for the specific candidature. Obviously, this is incorrect. There must be regulations, processes and protocols to ensure not only professionalism and parity *within* an institution but the maintenance of standards *between* institutions. While there is a national disparity, along with intra-national distinctions, the aim and aspiration of international doctoral research is that a doctorate submitted at MIT should be equivalent to a PhD examined in Auckland or Sunderland Universities. The problem when conflating practice-based methods with often- unspecified statements about art and quality means that institutional protocols are seemingly individualized. Therefore, it is harder to validate and

verify the standards of a programme. Goddard makes the statement that “it is possible (within enlightened institutions) for creative arts researchers to re-interpret and make sense of the specified requirements of the exegesis.”¹¹ There is nothing enlightening, democratic or empowering about individualizing scholarly standards. The consequences of such a statement on examination and examinations are deeply worrying. If a doctoral researcher “re-interprets” requirements (regulations?) for an exegesis, then what precisely are examiners’ examining? Again, the focus is placed on ‘the how’: how the postgraduate “re- interprets” the form of a doctorate, instead of developing a doctoral-level dialogue between form and content to generate an original contribution to knowledge. Without clear criteria and internationally validated regulations, examiners are offering much more personal, opinionated and unanchored judgements about doctorates. Actually, doctoral candidates are protected from irrational, opinionated or biased examiners if the guidelines, criteria and regulations are clear. Then the student understands expectations and how they operate and apply on an individual project.

It is too easy to individualize a doctoral process. Instead, PhDs are like all degrees and must be structured by and embedded in both institutional and international standards. One way to ensure that assumptions about cultural value do not mask a discussion of academic value is to transform the vocabulary of practice-led research from “art” to “artefact.” Through such a shift, students will have transparency in the evaluative criteria of their examination process. The artefact is not assessed in isolation. Similarly, the exegesis is not evaluated independently. The relationship between the two elements configures the research project. Too often, practice-led candidates prepare for their oral examination thinking that they can talk about their art for two hours.

It is too late in the midst of a viva voce to realize there is a breach in expectations or assumptions between a candidate and examiners. The aim is to handle this problem during orientation days for new candidates. If a student would like to make a film, then institutional candidature managers need to intervene early. A film is not a PhD. If the student would like to make a film, then walk away from the campus. Make a film. Do not assume that a film is inevitably and intrinsically research. It may be, but the scholar must make the case. Making a film is not the same as constructing a doctorate. A film may be great and important, but it will not necessarily be relevant to a PhD programme. This premise is as true for words as for vision. Because a student can write does not mean they can write a doctorate. The problem emerges when discussions of art and creativity overwrite recognitions of research. For example, Smith and Dean realized, with great honesty,

creative practitioners have sometimes argued that theorisations or documentation of the creative process risks subduing the creative fire or reducing the range of responses to their work. However, such arguments reinforce the mystification of the creative artist and romantic ideas about the spontaneity of the creative process. Creative practitioners traditionally had an ideological investment in such mystification because it shored up the idea of the creative genius.¹²

Creativity is not the same as research and is not intrinsically of value within a doctoral programme. Further, as Web 2.0 platforms permeate all research disciplines and areas, the skill and talent of the individual artist

is being discredited. Smith and Dean realized that by building a relationship between practice-led research and research-led practice,¹³ it is easier to create both credibility and equivalence between disparate doctoral formations. While Graeme Sullivan may refer to this type of statement as “rationalist planning,”¹⁴ the impact of enabling individualized statements about art and value to determine whether or not a doctorate should be awarded must discredit the value of a degree and infringe on some individual postgraduates.

If doctoral candidates use mixed media in their research, then they must ensure that they manage the movement between these platforms technically, theoretically and methodologically. They must ensure that all elements of the submitted doctorate are coordinated into a tight, precise and convincing intellectual bundle that constitutes research. Claims for artistic quality are not a technique for marginalizing academic protocols. Indeed, in a 2.0 environment that is better described as the read-write web, “traditional” doctorates increasingly include video, sonic files and wiki media as part of the evidential base of the research. In other words, traditional doctorates are using sonic and visual media as part of their PhD. Such a movement means that the ‘specialness’ of practice-based research is declining. A consequence of convergent digitized media is that more theses will present a diversity of outputs. Such a change means that the distinctiveness of these theses – supposedly requiring new regulations and criteria – is reducing.

When the language of practice-led research transforms from “art” to “artefact” and the exegeses explores the why of scholarship rather than the how, then there is greater parity between doctoral modes, facilitating rigour through examination. The OECD’s Frascati Manual from 2002 offers careful and significant advice for “experimental development” in research. They support, “creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge ... and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications.”¹⁵ The choice of language in this statement is instructive. The aim is to create artefacts (a ‘stock of knowledge’) that constitute new information. Chicken stock is not a meal. When added to soup, it provides flavour. Art is not a doctorate. It can create a new way to think about evidence. It can be the basis of research. It is not *the* research. Carole Gray, a great supporter of practice-led research, described this type of scholarship as “initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners.”¹⁶ If research is defined as that which we do not know but are motivated to discover, then Gray’s definition is inadequate. She has forgotten that PhD students are part of a higher education institution. All modes of doctorate must slot into the regulations of a university and demonstrate parity with other equivalent qualifications. They are not about “the needs of practice and practitioners.” Consider postgraduates in business schools investigating the contemporary banking system. While their research may be of interest to the financial sector, should it be shaped by the “needs of bankers and banking,” or criteria valued by the international academy? The relevance of “gown” to “town” (or “academy” to “city”) may emerge. It may not. This is a separate conversation about relevance and impact. It must be distinct from a discussion about scholarly protocols and international standards.

Those involved in candidature management are required to log the difference between holding technical skills with a camera, software or hardware and mouthing (theoretically and politically unsustainable)

claims about the value of art. Neither popular culture nor high culture is research. Cultural forms may offer evidence, models, modes or metaphors. However, the mechanism for connecting an object with a scholarly environment should be stated, not assumed. The best doctorates take on these challenges and provide correctives to problems aligning practice and research. The use by doctoral candidates of wiki-enabled media, Flip cameras, Zoom microphones and other mobile devices are capturing data in new ways and summoning innovative dialogues between text, sound and vision. Oral history programmes, as an example, can be enhanced, blended, augmented and transformed by this theoretical and technological hybridity. They may test the parameters of auditory literacies through movements between sounds, words and ideas. The resultant theses do not separate the object from the exegesis or justify their work through claims of artistic quality. Probably this mode of justification is derived from self-consciousness or a self-protective mechanism that has historically demeaned the arts in relation to the sciences.¹⁷ However, such justifications not only waste time, but are also mis-placed. The goal is research, not art. The goal is not to justify art as research, but to evaluate practice-led inquiry as a repeatable, rigorous and transparent method.

What may happen – when the 2.0 platforms become more stable and a full cycle of undergraduate and postgraduate students have been trained in their reflexive use – is that students may not choose between a traditional dissertation or an artefact and exegesis. There may be – and Tara Brabazon is seeing this amongst her current doctoral candidates - a continuum of research opportunities where students create objects with their mobile phones and self-standing recorders and cameras to read old theory through new media. Their use of 2.0 platforms confirms that definitions of technical expertise are changing. It has never been easier to use a camera or editing software. Students are not creating the next Fellini or Kraftwerk masterpiece. That is not their aim. The point of research is not the creation of art, but the building of evidence. Nimkulrat has confirmed, she moves between the roles of “practitioner” and “researcher.”¹⁸ The best investigations of practice-led research do not frame it as special, distinct or different, but embedded in a wider field of academic scholarship.¹⁹

A distinction is also made between practice-led research and practice-based research. The difference is not seismic, but the former tends to deploy the artefact as a demonstration of the research, whereas the phrase practice-based describes an artefact more deeply embedded into the cycles of scholarship. Smith and Dean have been particularly focused on questioning the trajectory and field of practice-led research, arguing for the need for an “interactive cyclic web.”²⁰ The evocative application of this phrase can be seen between the two parts of Stephen Scrivener’s argument.

The visual arts community places great significance on the art object and the art making process. Consequently, many visual artists wish to see a form of research in which art and art making are central: that is to say, the art making process is understood as a form of research and the art object as a form of knowledge. If one takes this position and accepts the common understanding of research then one must be able to explain how visual art contributes to knowledge.²¹

Scrivener has captured the steps in logic in configuring practice-led research. As an object-driven process,

the focus is on the process and the “art.” This means that process overlays method and “art” becomes an outcome. Such a confluence of terms is not actually accurate or inevitable. The crucial final sentence from Scrivener captures the key problem. There are so many, perhaps too many, assumptions about art “as” research and art “as” scholarship. More theoretical and empirical work is required so that the relationship between these words is tracked and mapped rather than assumed. Simon Biggs realized that such a course of action “may render ... art practice utilitarian.”²²

The great strength of these robust and productive conversations about practice-led research, particularly when elitist notions of art are displaced from the discussion, is that they ask that all of us as researchers, supervisors and students to arch beyond our practices, behaviours and protocols and consider the context and systems of our research. Sharon Bell captured the consequences of a too easy and glib splicing of art and research, creativity and scholarship.

As an academic, I have been in the habit of commencing my CV with a statement that emphasises the marriage of creative and academic interests – specifically film-making, research in the fields of anthropology and ethnographic film, and tertiary teaching and administration. If recited quickly this sounds credible, perhaps evoking an effortless combination of scholarly and creative interests with academic leadership. In reality this has often been a “marriage of inconvenience” as I have struggled to accommodate creative interests in tandem with the development of a “credible” research profile and increasingly demanding roles as a senior academic leader.²³

The question is, should the category of Doctor of Philosophy be widened further to incorporate a range of creative practices? Another option already exists to accommodate these differences: the Doctor of Creative Arts (DCA). This qualification enables the specificity of the degree to be logged, verified and examined through the regulations. There are fewer assumptions or misaligned cross-disciplinary justifications by differentiating between the mode of degree. Greater precision in terms of the descriptive potential of doctoral titles emerges and clear criteria for assessment can be assembled. The success of the Doctor of Education exemplifies this premise.²⁴ The key is to ensure that instead of cramming an even greater array of practices, approaches, methods and structures into a Doctor of Philosophy, the differences can be noted by a change in nomenclature. Generalizations – that can often spill into pretension – are then avoided. For example, Colin Renfrew extemporized that,

Today, I would claim, the visual arts have transformed themselves into what might be described as a vast, uncoordinated yet somehow enormously effective research programme that looks critically at what we are and how we know what we are – at the foundations of knowledge and perception, and at the structures that modern societies have chosen to construct upon those foundations.²⁵

Phrases like “looks critically” are marked as an error in first year papers. Similarly, “modern societies” is so general that it is analytically useless. Significantly, such a statement was made in 2003, before the

arrival of the digitally convergent, mobile visual platforms such as the Flip. Because of the hyperbole, there is little mechanism for change, critique or extension in such a statement. Ian Biggs investigated “the pedagogic potential of a particular model of creative practice-led research in the context of the ‘politics’ of doctoral study and submission.”²⁶ Biggs has realized that there needs to be more discussion about the form and content of the document/object/text and how it is submitted. Therefore, it is important to configure the role, function and positioning of practice-led research so that an honest, reflexive and coherent case be made. From this maxim, the second section of our paper inverts this argument. Instead of a ‘top down’ study of doctorates from the perspective of regulations and candidature management, we probe the consequences of the ambiguity and assumptions to both staff and students.

New beginnings: new applications

Every study, particularly doctorate study, starts an experience of research, discovery, exploration and invention. The goal is to lead to the transformation, adjustment and arrangement of thought through the discipline of academic enquiry. Instead of being arbitrary and extraneous, it operates with rational and logical insight and into a methodological elucidation

Many discussions of doctoral candidatures do not ask the fundamental question: what prompts the practitioner↔researcher to undertake three years of doctoral study? There are many answers to this question: to be able to create a dialogue between theory and practice, to raise questions that cannot be raised within practice, to probe the applications within the theory and/or to follow the process of thought in order to identify the intellectual pathway in/to the creation of visual propositions. These projects at their best combine visual and theoretical implications in order to reach to an understanding of the relationship between theory and practice, word and expression, language and silence. In the doctoral literature, there are numerous studies and approaches²⁷ to the practice-based doctoral studies in terms of the challenges of writing, the role of the practitioner and conceptualizing the practice within the research. It is often stated that what distinguishes practice-based doctoral study from conventional PhD programmes is “the high value placed on generating practice-based knowledge to address ‘real-world’ problems, whereas traditional PhD programmes intend to give rise to ‘professional researchers.’”²⁸ As discussed in the first half of this paper, such a statement of differences were initially unsustainable and now are increasingly so. For example, Media Policy Studies is an example of research that solves “real-world” problems. Similarly, the statement “professional researcher” is used as a pejorative.

In practice-based doctoral study, the research challenges the practitioner to create and then to raise awareness of the critical and analytical process, enabling the development of a dynamic, reflexive and interpretative discourse. This process also generates professional practitioners, adopting a dual role of practitioner and theorist, as described by Graeme Sullivan.²⁹ It is useful and convenient to highlight Sullivan’s approach with regard to the multiple possibilities in negotiating the relationship between theory and practice. Sullivan suggests four ways of reading and understanding practice within a theoretical

framework, conceptualising visual elements as part of the research. Visual knowledge can be understood as “transformative, constructivist, conceptual and contextual.”³⁰ He states.

Visual arts knowledge is *transformative*. This means that knowledge creation in visual arts is recursive and constantly undergoes change as new experiences “talk back” through process and progress of making art. Second, visual arts knowledge is *constructivist*. This means that knowledge is produced as a consequence of integrating theory and practice and this praxis results in descriptive awareness, explanatory insight, and powerful understanding. Third, visual arts knowledge is *conceptual*. This means that knowledge is grounded in the practice of making that uses knowledge that is available through personal cognitive systems and culturally accessible domains. Fourth, visual arts knowledge is *contextual*. This means that knowledge that is produced by artists enters into communities of users whose interests apply new understandings from different personal, educational, social and cultural perspectives. These features of visual arts knowledge are by no means definitive, and each aspect owes a legacy to paradigms of theory and practice that, under certain circumstances, may be used as explanatory systems, interpretative frameworks, or imaginative forms.³¹

Within the practice-based PhD, the practitioner aims to probe all these features - transformative, constructivist, contextual and conceptual - by integrating the subjective and objective into a new object for academic scrutiny. The knowledge accumulated within the mechanism of transforming, constructing, contextualising and conceptualising configures the structures for research and discovery. This underlines the qualitative novelty of the study in comparison to the conventional doctoral programmes.

With intellectual experience, researchers↔practitioners arrive at speculations, elaborations and evaluations. Word and language are concerned with knowledge, research and discovery that will pursue a solution through analysis. Practice keeps the questions open, invites experience and interaction. Practice is the starting point, enabling theoretical and intellectual reflection within an academic framework, adopting a dual role, that of a practitioner and a theorist. Language choice is of concern in order to communicate abstractions into a rational and logical argument, and construct a study that weaves the critical and analytical examination with a dynamic, reflexive, creative and interpretative discourse.

In practice-based PhDs, the structure of the research must be carefully determined. As argued in the first part of this paper, media and platform selection is crucial, as is the justification of the movement between diverse forms. When the candidate steps away from the conventional structures s/he is threatened with a range of labels about scholarship, academic or artistic quality. Such descriptors are difficult to manage while trying to offer an original contribution to knowledge. In the experience of the two writers of this article, the practice-based candidature can become a battle, a fight and a struggle that can lose its purpose and meaning on the way. The key is to ensure that there is a continual tether to not only the institutional regulations, but international best practice. At its best, a PhD should be an explorative, experimental and experiential journey in order to create something original. However what is required are not only experienced examiners, but candidature managers that continually verify and align institutional protocols with

wider processes.

Submitting our thesis

The key is to discuss the diverse forms and modes of doctorates with clarity, placing attention on the shape of enrolment, nomenclature title and examination systems. For example, at Murdoch University in Western Australia, there is a clear differentiation between ‘professional doctorate’ and ‘traditional doctorate’.

The major differences between professional doctorates and the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) are that the former include substantial coursework (a PhD includes no coursework), and that the thesis must make a distinctive contribution to the profession (a PhD thesis must make a distinctive contribution to the knowledge of the subject with which it deals).³²

Such a statement makes it much easier for students and supervisors to organize the candidature and understand how the thesis will be examined.

Such clarity is needed for all modes of doctorate, with attention to originality, method, outcomes and audience. If this article has a goal, then it is to affirm the value of the Doctor of Philosophy programme, as the highest available qualification in our university system. Certainly higher doctorates are granted as a result of research produced subsequent to the doctorate. Higher doctorates include a Doctor of Letters, Technology or Music. The University of Manchester for example confirm that,

Higher doctorates are awarded by the University in recognition of published work and/or other material of high distinction resulting from research, which makes a substantial, sustained and original contribution and addition to investigation, knowledge and/or scholarship, and has established the candidate’s authoritative standing in his or her subject.³³

The University of Western Australia specifies that, “Higher doctorates are awarded essentially for work of which the whole or a substantial part has been published or accepted for publication, the form of publication acceptable to be determined in each case by the board or faculty concerned. (Approved exception is the Doctor of Music).”³⁴ Both definitions of the higher doctorates include the provision for non-print based materials. Both of these ‘old’ universities acknowledge that “other material” of high distinction may be included, particularly with regard to music. With these provisions available for the higher doctorate, why is this diversity of titling and format not encouraged and increased at the base doctoral level, proliferating the doctoral awards and rendering them more accurate and descriptive?

The Doctor of Philosophy enrolls scholars who have been successful at undergraduate study and are granted an opportunity for future scholarly development. The key distinction between a research masters-level qualification and a doctorate is the “original contribution to knowledge.” The lesser qualification

can demonstrate a strong synthesis of ideas and a good understanding of a discipline. The Doctorate offers something new in method, source material, approach, argument or interpretation in a specialist subject. Bob Hodge has referred to these as “disciplinary doctorates” in “hierarchically organized knowledges.”³⁵ In the late 1980s in the United Kingdom – and shaped by the Research Councils – the PhD began to include phrases and imperatives for “research training.” This imperative has rendered British doctorates heavier on methods and lighter on originality. It is not uncommon for British doctorates to deploy half of their wordage in discussions of method and a literature review. These chapters are lost from a scholarly monograph and are difficult to publish in any form. Such a structural emphasis on more basic knowledge of processes, along with the shrinking spaces for academic monographs to gain a publisher and audience, means that most theses are read by examiners, lodged in libraries and/or archived digitally, and are rarely cited or read. While a few refereed articles may emerge, the outcomes of this scholarly effort are decreasing in their visibility. Particularly in the humanities and social sciences, which are underfunded and disconnected from industry, doctorates are an underutilized source.

In this underused, yet historically and academically important space of the “traditional” qualification, both practice-based and professional doctorates have propelled into popularity. New opportunities are available for diverse modalities of writing and presentation of original scholarly ideas. The diversity of media creates spaces for new forms, discourses and innovation. The problem emerging through such diversity is how to ensure equivalence. In the United Kingdom, the QAA in 2001 inferred that the learning outcomes for these diverse modes of doctorates should be the same.³⁶ Such a task is frankly impossible. More criteria and scaffolding are required to manage the differences (and similarity) between a practice-based Doctor of Philosophy and a Doctor of Creative Arts. Bill Green and Adrian Kiernander asked a series of questions about how a Doctor of Creative Arts transforms the status, process and agenda of postgraduate scholarship.

What counts as and constitutes research? What counts as and constitutes a doctorate? What is the relationship between “research” and the “doctorate,” as a specific academic-educational credential? What relationship is there, or perhaps should there be, between “research” and doctoral education? And finally: what are the specific circumstances and challenges for the Creative Arts in this context?³⁷

These questions offer an opportunity to consider the spaces between a conventional PhD in the Creative Arts, a Doctor of Creative Arts and the possibilities of professional doctorates in the Creative Industries. Through their study, Green and Kiernander confirm that creative arts “might well go either way.”³⁸ Like all liminal formations, a space for professional doctorates in creative arts – rather than practice-based work – raises a serious epistemological issue: what profession is actually being discussed, labelled and described in and through this qualification? The “outcomes” or “results” do not often have any immediate practical application in the way required by professional doctoral theses. Unlike nursing, education, medicine, engineering, commerce or management, there are no professional bodies that accredit, examine or assess the competency or excellence of “the professional” creative artist. In response to this absence, Gillies limited his definition of Creative Arts to the visual and performing arts, including design, music, drama and dance.³⁹ Film and digitally convergent screen and sound platforms have a more complex positioning

in a postgraduate environment.

The professional doctorate has been part of a movement to align industry and the academy. As the Council for Graduate Education confirmed, the professional doctorate, “is the personal development of the candidate (either in preparation for professional activity or to advance further personal skills and professional knowledge) and advancement of the subject or profession.”⁴⁰ While most of these doctorates are not in the commercial sector – with the Doctorate in Business Administration being rarely awarded – they are undertaken for career progression and to develop a more rounded view of a profession, becoming a “reflective practitioner.” The status and function of a practice-based doctorate, particularly in film, can also be useful for “career progression” or reflection on process. The difficulty is that media-oriented and sourced doctorates rarely fit concisely into the needs of the knowledge economy.

In 1993, the British government was concerned about the future of the Doctor of Philosophy.

The Government welcomes the growth of postgraduate courses. It is concerned, however, that the traditional PhD is not well-matched to the needs of careers outside research in academia or an industrial research laboratory.⁴¹

This White Paper demanded an increased commodification of ideas. With the infiltration of research training into the discourse of doctorates, there is a substantive distinction between the resultant doctorates in the United Kingdom when compared to the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand where the focus is more strongly on the original contribution to knowledge rather than the more basic restatements of methods and literature reviews that prevails in UK.

The first Doctor of Philosophy was awarded by an English university in 1920. A D. Phil at Oxford,⁴² it was followed by a PhD awarded from Cambridge the following year.⁴³ Harvard awarded a Doctor of Education in 1921. A much wider gap awaited the first PhD awarded in Australia, which was in 1948 from the University of Melbourne. The University of Sydney followed three years later.⁴⁴ Of most significance for this article, Australia’s first professional doctorate was the Doctor of Creative Arts from the University of Wollongong in 1984. It predated the qualifications in law (1989)⁴⁵ and education (1990). In other words, while Australia delayed the introduction of a Doctor of Philosophy, the nation’s universities pioneered innovative and diversified higher degrees. Bourner, Bowden and Laing noted a distinction in the English university sector which survives to this day: pre-1992 universities “protected” the doctorate by proliferating other more descriptive and different titles, while post-1992 universities denied the diversification of doctorates.

Whereas the “old” universities have been concerned to protect the “gold standard” of the PhD by allowing the development of alternative titles for professional doctorates, the “new” universities have been more concerned to avoid proliferation of new doctoral titles so that variants have been squeezed into the PhD. This may reflect the greater self-confidence of “old” universities as long-established awarding bodies.⁴⁶

What they have recognized is that older universities have been more satisfied to use diverse doctoral designations, while “new” universities overloaded too many genres of original scholarship into that title.

Such under confidence in new universities must end. This article, written by a supervisor and former doctoral student, asks that doctoral titles be diversified. The time has come to stop pushing inappropriate methods, approaches and presentation into a singular qualification: the Doctor of Philosophy. By encouraging and supporting a diversity of doctoral titles, with clear descriptions, criteria and instructions for examiners, staff and students can make informed selections about their enrolment. Examiner dissonance will decline. Such a system is better for postgraduates, more effective for staff and most importantly, offers a way to secure the future of the academy in all its diversity, rigour and breadth.

Notes

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On the Hyphenated Edge – Hyper-Existentialism, Hybridity and the Magical Hyper-real in the Writings of Michael Mirolla.

By Yuan-chin Chang

Abstract

This paper examines the role that fictocriticism, metafictional techniques and approaches, and hybridity play in the writing of Canadian novelist, short story writer, poet and playwright Michael Mirolla. The paper examines the congruence between his theoretical writing about meta-fiction and other forms of meta-writing, and the short fiction he has produced. The paper also looks at the influences, conscious or unconscious, that have exhibited themselves in his work, in terms of hyperrealism, hybridized writing, and the blending of fiction and critical writing. One other influence is examined here – that of the graphic artist M.C. Escher, indicating the verbal representation in many of Mirolla's writings of Escher's lithograph themes: mirrors, impossible architecture, and the repetition of motifs in an attempt to indicate the nature of change and movement. The paper concludes with some remarks on the difficulty and density of Mirolla's writing.

I. Introduction

In the silence that follows, or perhaps it is only your concentration that shuts everything else out as you strain to see, to understand, they slowly unravel each other's bandages. Gently unwind the strips of white gauze, inch by inch, around and

around, and lower them floating to the ground. And the first to go are their feet. And then their legs and torsos vanish. And this is followed by their arms.

And their heads. And finally their fingers, their plucking nimble fingers. And the only things left on that platform are seven mounds of cloth, light as the feathers of invisible birds. But, of course, that's all there is in the first place.

-- Michael Mirolla, "Bandages" from *Hothouse Loves*

Italian by birth and Canadian by upbringing and schooling, novelist, short fiction writer, poet, playwright and literary critic Michael Mirolla knows all about hybridity and hyphenated existence. He also understands the difficulty of navigating such a space – both as a person and in his writing. Rather than bemoan that fact, Mirolla has worked to create a literary space within these boundaries formed by genetics and language.

This hybrid literary space is not an easy one to describe, or define. In fact, in a critical essay, Mirolla labels it as both dangerous and tenuous, with one of its key properties being the fluidity of its form and shape and the inability of definition to grasp it fully. In the essay, he compares the writer carving out such a zone to a circus high-wire act:

Both perform in the upper reaches of the world's Big Top tent, and often find themselves a little too far from the ground for either solid connection or guaranteed safety. Both, despite any natural fear of falling, must negotiate the distance between start and finish while putting on the kind of show that is at once believable, seamless and entertaining. And both must engage in a balancing act that sees them place numerous objects at the ends of their teeter-totter poles (chairs, tables, balls, and even humans in the case of the high-wire act; words, phrases, sentences and other literary artifacts in the case of the writer). ("Denying Labels" 1)

Mirolla attempts to delineate a literary space that relies not so much on identity, facile identifications and personal interaction with an external world, as on internal rules of logic connected to the realms of meta-fiction, of writing about the act of writing, and on a playfulness that relates as much to Beckett, post-absurdist theater and the dark humor of the *Divina Commedia* as it does to broad slapstick, farce, puns and other forms of wordplay. This is also the foundation and the building block material of his creative work, as seen in novels such as *Berlin* (2009) and *The Boarder* (2007), short story collections the likes of *The Formal Logic of Emotion* (1992) and *Hothouse Loves and Other Tales* (2007), poetry collections (*Interstellar Distances/ Distanze Interstellari* (2009) and *Light and Time* (2008), or plays such as *Gargoyles*, *Snails*, and *A Revised Experiment*.

In its totality, the work strives to encompass a vision of writing that treats the work of art as something

unto itself, separate and inviolable, and not reliant on any externality for its value and valuation. It is a vision that goes beyond the merely existential, the real, and the bounded (physically, mentally, emotionally or spiritually) to the hyper-existential, the magically hyper-real and the hybrid beyond deconstruction, beyond analysis. It is also a vision that seems nearly impossible to maintain in a world so immersed in notions of actuality and factuality. As he states further on in his paper on the seeming non-future of the Italian-Canadian identity:

If we look at 20th century creative writing, and I am talking here about serious writing ... the literary endeavour in all its shapes and forms ... we see an ever- increasing awareness of the meta-fictional nature of that writing: be it novels, short stories, poetry, playwriting or film. Let alone the so-called “New Media”. In the simplest terms and without getting too technical about it, the writing no longer pretends to be an attempt to reflect some external “reality.” Rather, it is self-reflexive. Put another way: the “reality” that the work of art presents is not something that exists on its own “out there” but is rather something that is constructed during the act of writing. Representational art about the external world gives way to projective art about the internal world; construction takes the place of imitation. (“Denying Labels” 5)

This paper is an attempt to examine just how well Mirolla does in the maintaining of this vision throughout his oeuvre, how close he approaches to the ideal he himself has set out, and what he and his readers can look forward to in the future. It is less a critical analysis of his works than an assessment of the state of his art, as it were.

The structure of the paper consists of the setting up of a theoretical framework using the interconnected concepts of meta-fiction, *ficocriticism*, hybridized writing, and self-conscious fiction. This is followed by a close examination of Mirolla’s writings under these concepts. While Mirolla has written in numerous genres (the novel, short story, poetry, playwriting, and critical writing), this paper focuses on the two genres at which he has been most successful to date and which reflect his particular and peculiar vision best: the novel and the short story.

A final note to the introduction: Prior to the writing of this paper, Mirolla graciously consented to a series of personal communications whereby the author was able to further gauge his approaches to writing and the role of the writer in his/her creation. As well, Mirolla provided the author access to the short story collection, *The Giulio Metaphysics III*. While the collection has not been published as such, several of the stories have appeared in literary journals. Thanks to this material, the author was able to gain a deeper understanding than would have been possible from published materials alone.

II. The Construction of Postmodern Art

The words echoed through the club; the laughter

spread – as if the joke, the misunderstanding, the faux pas was being passed from person to person ... And the sound of that laughter – the roar of that laughter getting louder and louder – was the last thing Serratura heard before he collapsed head first onto Annie’s lap, cheek pressed firmly against her bulge.

-- Michael Mirolla: *Berlin* (2009)

If there is one theme to be pinpointed in Canadian writer Michael Mirolla’s writing, it has to be the inability of anyone to determine, beyond a shadow of a doubt, what constitutes the essence of human identity in a world where the center no longer holds. Once this over-arching theme is locked in, the other recurring concerns in his writing (a world that refuses to be pinned down, relationships that spin back and forth without ever being resolved, and contradictory, even nonsensical events) become easier to identify, if not make complete logical sense of.

While these are attributes of the majority of Mirolla’s mature writing, they are nowhere more clearly delineated than in his novel *Berlin* (2009). In fact, at one level, it could be argued that the structure of the novel is there to elucidate these concepts, while at the same time moving forward in a way that allows the reader to carry on the pretense of characters that have a realist basis. No matter how much we try to locate the characters of *Berlin* within an external world separate from that of the novel, the subversion of such an attempt is so strong that we as readers are left with a classic post-modern simulacrum, in a literary space that can only be described as magically hyper-real.

One of the most obvious theoretical influences in Mirolla’s writing is that of Jacques Lacan and in particular his theories on the nature of identity. The shape-shifting abilities and lack of rootedness when it comes to attempts to establish human identity are threaded throughout Mirolla’s mature writing. In fact, even in an earlier piece such as the novella *The News Vendor*, Mirolla seems obsessed with mirror images and the fitting of one identity into another — to the point where the central plot of the story centers around the efforts of the nameless lead character to shape himself into the image of Sully or Cully the news vendor in order to eventually replace him physically. As well, in his *Giulio Metaphysics III* collection, the main character in each of the inter-connected short stories is named “Giulio,” even though some of the character’s traits, actions, physical locations and mental states are not only different but often contradictory.

This mutable identity fits in with the ideas of Jacques Lacan who argued against the ability to pull together or unite a subject under the conditions set out by Descartes. Instead, his notion of identity was based on the use of a type of mirror image as the foundation for self-consciousness (Lacan, 1977). At the center of Lacanian consciousness were two mirrors facing each other and reflecting each other to infinity, basically reflecting an emptiness.

According to Lacan, the rise of language in the human child “irremediably splits the child into a speaking subject decentered from an ideal ego whose unattainable image of perfection the child narcissistically wishes to find reflected by others” (Van Pelt 58).

Lacan uses the ideas of a post-Freudian psychoanalysis with respect to the unconscious and the id to completely undermine the process that analysts normally use. His argument is that this type of psychoanalysis is trying to draw up rules and regulations about something that cannot really be seen, an attempt at the “reconstruction of that sphere of the psychic system that is without affirmation or negation, of a sphere posited as nontemporal, as lying behind a wall of time that is impossible for any observer to cross” (Fuchs 14).

From this, it becomes clear that what the observer sets up or constructs is not something that actually “exists” or is “real” or a duplicate of something that is “true” but rather something original, constructed from the words used to describe it, as signs and signifiers. This makes the Cartesian construct of the ego into a paradox, the doomed-to-failure effort to pull together elements that cannot be brought together: “I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think. Words which make every attentive ear feel the agility with which the ring of meaning escapes our grasp on the verbal line. One would have to say: I am not where I am the plaything of my thoughts; I think of what I am, where I do not think I think” (Lacan 43). Mirolla’s fascination with language (especially meta-language and the relationship between the creation and creator, signified/signifier, commentary/description, critical analysis/marginalia) seems partly a reflection of Lacanian ideas, an attempt to concretize the theory. As Nina Ort says, once language is introduced, only one thing can really be assured about the psyche: “It talks (and almost anything in the psyche talks: the unconscious, the symptoms, and, least clearly, the subject, since it is not sovereign but subjected to the signifying process), but what it says or why will always remain an open question” (37).

Lacan uses the analogy of the Moebius strip to indicate how it is not possible to pull back completely when it comes to the relation between signified and signifier. The two are always sliding into each other, pushing each other along, overlapping, etc. And there is really no escape from this relationship as it is a closed loop. In an essay in which Mirolla laid out the reasons why he felt that the traditional first-person narrative had come to the end of its validity, he employs similar ideas about a closed loop -- or perhaps more telling a painting of oneself into a corner. In speaking of Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*, he states:

The result -- the only result that can logically arise -- of this self reflecting upon self is the loss of connection to the world beyond the boundaries of the self. And this means the kind of closed circle we see forming at the end of *Surfacing*. Or, at least, the author’s interpretation of what such a closed circle might resemble - for the truth of the matter is that a character trapped within a genuinely closed circle would have no means of communicating with the reader. The author, then, becomes an interpreter or a translator. In this case, Atwood translates for us the “I” character’s feeling of no longer being able to identify with other human beings, of - in fact - no longer considering herself a human being. But we can never truly know that feeling because, the moment it would happen to us, we would lose all ability to signal it. We would

be off howling, leaving those around us to come to their own inevitably not very favourable conclusions as to our state of mind. (“‘I’ of the Storm” 136)

In his analysis of the meaning of the word “postmodernism,” Lyotard describes it as a kind of skeptical attitude towards the idea that what the so-called “realist” narratives described was in some way an explanation of the modern world, a true making sense of it: “Postmodern designates the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts” (Lyotard xxiii).

Taking it a step further, Mirolla argues that even writers who have been identified as modern or pre-modern were, in effect, creating their own world rather than (re)presenting an external one. He cites Leo Bersani and his analysis of Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* and what is “often considered an exemplar of the realist/naturalist genre” (“Denying Labels” 6). Bersani called the novel “an early, only half-explicit, not yet fashionable attempt to locate the drama of fiction in an investigation of the impulse to invent fictions rather than in any psychologically, morally, or socially significant ‘content’” (Bersani x) and “the care with which Flaubert sought to make language transparent to reality consecrates the very opaqueness of language which he dreaded” (xviii). Mirolla himself adds:

In other words, the harder Flaubert tried to erase himself and present the “reality” around him without any veils ... the harder he tried to mold the word into the object ... the more he ended up putting up road blocks to that “reality” and obscuring the precise objects he wished to capture ... and this happened through the very act of dazzling readers with his writing skills and masterful ability to craft a fiction. (“Denying Labels” 6).

Mirolla cites an article by Brian Attebery in which that author “goes on to suggest that an instance of literary composition is actually three pieces of writing rolled or layered into one: the tale being told; the tale of the tale being told; and the critique of the tale being told. I would argue that there are a lot more permutations and combinations than these three ... that, like Borges’ self-referential stories in *Ficciones* (1962), where entire universes are reflected in a mirror, captured in the hexagonal rooms of the never-ending library, or initiated in the garden of forking paths, the possible roads to be taken are infinite” (“Denying Labels” 7).

Mirolla seems to understand clearly the multiple implications of such a suggestion, the “sudden opening up of numberless paths that is at the same time so thrilling and frightening ... Once we discard the idea of an essential identity which can be lost ... the possibilities open up in all their horrible splendour” (7). He goes on to list some of these possibilities for the writer, many of which he has come to employ himself in his efforts to stretch narrative techniques beyond the traditional set:

One is the use of meta-form techniques -- with the “I” author appearing to lay claim to the “I” narrator, for example: making the God of the creation manifest, in other words, within his or her creation. A second, related to the first, is the hermeneutic approach: an examination of and

commenting upon text and context. Another is the marginalization of the “I”, moving it from the centre of the story so that it becomes more like a true observational “eye”, more like the traditional omniscient third-person narrator. A fourth is the breakdown or fragmentation of the “I” - so that the reader comes to understand that it is unreliable and unpredictable, that it may or may not be telling the truth, that it may or may not truly remember the events it is relating: the take-it-with-a-grain-of-salt approach. (“I’ of the Storm” 140).

At the same time, Mirolla seems to be aware of the various dangers inherent in such techniques and approaches, calling them the types of techniques that distance the reader from the work of art, that make it more difficult to “get into” the characters:

As such, they drive one more wedge between the “I” and the reader’s perception of the “I”. The question then becomes: When is an “I” so layered, so distanced it is no longer an “I”? For example, if we have a narrator upon whom the reader can’t rely, how does that impact on the natural tendency to identify with the “I”? If an “I” narrator is suddenly seen as merely a puppet (even if an occasionally rebellious one) of a show-and-tell author, with whom should the reader ally himself? If the “I” is marginalized, how far can it recede before it becomes just another third-person narration? If the text is annotated and commented upon, can’t the same operation be performed on the new text (a literary fractal deconstruction) -- and where does one stop? (“I’ of the Storm” 141).

Where indeed? Perhaps the last set of “theoretical” influences might provide the hint of an answer. These consist of meta-mathematical logic (Gödelian theory) and the art of M.C. Escher. Apart from his other mathematical achievements when it came to logic, Gödel hypothesized his so-called Incompleteness Theorem, which states basically that in a self-referential system, such as human consciousness or even a highly sophisticated computer program, you can always come up with a formula (a statement) that is not part of the original system but which can be generated from that system. In a paper written while studying philosophy, Mirolla applies this notion to self-awareness and to what he called “the level of consciousness” (“The Cognitive Science Project” 7), a level he argues cannot be captured through any computational theory. The interesting thing, as Mirolla points out, is that someone like J.R. Lucas (1961) flags the same fallacy while “it uses (a) the notion of a formal system in its attack and (b) the results of highly rigorous meta-mathematical theorems -- Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorems -- to show that a mind could never be captured within any formal system” (“The Cognitive Science Project” 6).

There are hints of this throughout Mirolla’s work, serving as a reminder that any interpretation performed on any given piece of writing will in itself create another piece of writing, one that was not inherent in the original but which is somehow connected to it. Mirolla sometimes even brings this into play with his characters, creating a fluid series where one flows into the other or becomes the other or takes on impossibly different tasks while nominally being the same character (in effect, destroying Cartesian space by being in more than one place at the same time as most evident in the various “Giulios” that pop up throughout his work).

This brings us to the last of the influences examined here: that of the etchings and other graphic material of the Dutch 20th century artist M.C. Escher. Designs such as “Concentric Rinds,” “Rind,” “Dewdrop,” “Day and Night,” “Reptiles,” “Horsemen,” and especially “Drawing Hands,” as well as the impossible building series (“Relativity,” “Concave and Convex,” “Print Gallery,” “Belvedere,” “Ascending and Descending”) find their equivalences in many of Mirolla’s writings. On occasion, such as in the poem “February: Entropic Vistas on a Winter’s Day” from his *Light and Time* collection, he actually makes the connection obvious:

A perfect imprimatur
with edges as flawless as the stamping
of machine parts: Gödel’s incomplete dream;
Escher’s pre-destiny. Two by two.
Black and white. Background and foreground. A swan
bursts from cloud cover, velvet throat exposed.
In velvet, a snowflake cups the world.

The reference to Escher’s “Predestination” (large white birds being intercepted in mid-air by giant evil-looking flying fish with a mouthful of sharp teeth) makes up the central portion of the verse. Other references are more subtle but always there. In “The Architect,” for instance, from his *Hothouse Loves & Other Tales* short story collection, Mirolla describes an eternal house which seems to bear some resemblance to Escher’s impossible buildings: “... fragments of a manuscript or detailed geometric sketch. It is the design of a house that can’t possibly be built and thus, by extension, can’t be destroyed” (22). In his speculative fiction novel *The Facility*, Mirolla describes a set of creatures which he calls “The Scavengers” who bear an uncanny resemblance to Escher’s “Curl-up” etching, in the way they first rise up like gigantic segmented centipedes while devouring dead objects and other detritus and then form into balls to roll away back into the trans-dimensional space in which they exist in a dormant state until called up again into our world to devour the detritus. Finally, in the short story “Inside/Out” from *Hothouse Loves*, there is a reference to Cadmus, the main character, who “walks along a ribbon of road that sways like an orange peel” (*Hothouse Love* 204), thus bringing back a literary reflection of Escher’s “Rind” and his many other ribbons of heads and faces coming apart in empty space.

III. The Novel as Portal into the Hyperreal

He lies on the cool, wet grass, staring up at the sky.
For a moment, he imagines he’s still inside -- an
immense cave, perhaps -- and those aren’t really
stars up there but pinpricks in the ceiling. And the
mountains behind him nothing but papier-maché.
And the valleys a child’s diggings. And the highways

gift-wrapped ribbons. And the village a black cut-out silhouette. He stands up. A distant clock strikes three. Whistling, he walks down a familiar road. This time, he says, even if I get nothing else right at least I'll know enough not to mistake the Old for the New.

-- "The Proper Country" from *The Formal Logic*

The notion of "hyperreality" is one that contemporary philosophers and cultural critics bandy about in an attempt to explain what Baudrillard calls "the simulation of something which never really existed" (1981) and what Eco labeled "the authentic fake" (1990). Elsewhere, Baudrillard defines the hyperreal as a "postmodernist screen projected with simulations rather than representations" (*America* 91). What we get is a hyperreal construct, where the image of the real has replaced the real and where there is no way to uncover the difference between the original object and its simulacra.

Mirolla takes this construct a step further in a novel such as *Berlin*. Here, in what has been described as a confrontation with "the metaphysical and the surreal" (Baine, par. 7), Mirolla asks the question: What if, instead of the impossibility of distinguishing the simulacra from the real, there is no real in the first place? What if it has always been a simulacrum that we have been chasing? What if we ourselves are simulacra? Of course, this is a question that certain philosophers have been asking in one form or another down through the millennia, including Gautama, Plato and Sartre. It is very appropriate then that *Berlin* has as one of its main characters (perhaps "simulations" is a better word) none other than a philosopher. And not just any type of philosopher but one whose specialty is logic.

Using the framework of a novel-within-a-novel (and in some ways resembling Escher's "Magic Mirror" and "Drawing Hands" lithographs where one action taken on its own seems possible but the two together impossible), *Berlin* tells the story of Giulio Chiavetta (another of Mirolla's "Giulio" incarnations), a stationary engineer who has been institutionalized in a Montreal, Canada, mental facility. Chiavetta, which in Italian translates into "little key," suddenly awakes from the stupor he has been in since his arrival at the facility (on the day news breaks of the fall of the Berlin Wall) and tries to make his escape, claiming his need to return to Berlin.

At this point the psychiatrist at the facility, knowing Chiavetta has never been anywhere near Berlin, examines the computer in the room Chiavetta has occupied and discovers a series of texts entitled "Berlin: A Novel In Three Parts." In this is told the story of Antonio Serratura ("lock," in Italian), a Montreal philosophy professor who is invited to read a paper at a conference at Freie Universität in pre-fall-of-the-wall West Berlin. In this Cold War Berlin, Serratura finds an increasingly strange world (or rather set of worlds) that keeps constantly altering its shape, like some type of Proteus mixing mind and matter and keeping them in constant flux. As he tries to navigate through these changes (and he seems the only one to be aware of them as other characters seem to inhabit their own world and nothing else), he experiences a series of

events that make him question the basis of his own logic and even existence:

- A. Did the Swedish philosopher who liked putting on punk circus displays as part of her presentations kill herself with a drug overdose injection in the university washroom?
- B. Does Serratura end up in a transvestite bar watching a presentation of *Annie Get Your Gun* with a Jewish friend who sells gas stoves?
- C. Does he commit a brutal, cold-blooded murder, killing the beautiful, enigmatic wife of the man who was kind enough to invite him to Berlin in the first place?
- D. Are the brother and sister who run the hotel-pension where he's staying indulging in Sado-masochistic acts?
- E. Is there a tiny old man in the hotel who replays vintage Nazi propaganda movies in his bedroom and still thinks he's fighting on the Russian front?

This is only one layer. At the same time, Serratura has another mystery to solve and one that is much closer to home: a diary in Italian of German POW camp memories and impressions left behind by his father, a diary with some very alarming revelations (or so it seems) that add further to the confusion Serratura feels during every step of his journey. In the midst of all this, there is the central question of the relationship or connection between Chiavetta and Serratura:

- A. Are they one and the same?
- B. Is one really the invention of the other? If so, who is the inventor and who the invented? Or did they simply invent one another? Taking turns, as it were? One simulacrum creating the other simulacrum in an endless act of pseudo-birthing?
- C. Were they once one person, one identity, and then split apart in the descent into madness: Serratura Cold War and Chiavetta post-Cold War? Are they now trying to get back together? To re-form one identity? And what will be the result of that reforming?

In one way, there is an obvious parallel here between the Chiavetta/Serratura split and the Wall that separates one part of Berlin from the other. But just as Chiavetta and Serratura are hyperreal characters, so the two Berlins are hyperreal cities. Both sets serve as twisted mirror images (re: Lacan) that perhaps have no reflection in the real:

As Serratura turned the corner leading back to the right corridor, he thought he heard a harsh, scratchy voice coming from one of the rooms. It sounded as if someone's name were being recited over and over again at an ever increasing pitch--but he couldn't really be sure. And then

there was a loud burst of martial music, followed by a steady flickering of lights at the base of the door and what seemed thousands of voices all saying the same thing in a very insistent manner. Just as quickly, it stopped: music, voices, flickering of lights. All gone. (37)

Just as objects appear and disappear, events occur or do not occur, so does a good deal of the story line flicker between TV imagery of riots taking place (thanks to the visit of another hyperreal character, Ronald Reagan as President of the United States) and the unreality of the actual riots:

This time, gangs of youths were rampaging along the edges of the barbed wire he'd seen from the plane. Now, he could make out that it was several metres high, placed in rolled layers and practically impossible to penetrate. To make doubly sure, police on horseback patrolled the inside perimeter. The reporter on the scene was speaking from a temporary podium beneath the Brandenburg Gates. The podium and gates were eerily floodlit and, at times, it seemed as if the reporter were fading in and out, like the "Beam-me-up-Scotty" sequences on *Star Trek*. (44-45)

Like any simulacrum, like any set of holographs, this is one that we believe we can turn off as we wish: "The young woman on the sofa got up with a sigh, smoothed her skirt and switched the channel. A game show that resembled *The Price Is Right* -- Serratura recognized it because his daughter enjoyed shouting along when the host yelled: "Come on, down" -- was in progress, complete with contestants jumping up and down and scantily dressed, large-breasted hostesses who lounged about suggestively on the bedroom furniture" (45).

Mirolla takes every opportunity to point out the schizophrenic nature of the characters and the city, and how the two are intertwined. In fact, Mirolla has indicated that the original idea for the novel arose from an idea he had been mulling over for several years (a character who had split in two and was trying to come back together) and a fortuitous trip to Berlin. The distancing effects (as originally outlined in Mirolla's 1996 article "I' Of The Storm") come out in full force here. For instance, the three parts of the novel-within-a-novel are written from three different points of view: the first part in the third person; the second in the second person; and the third in the first person. Meanwhile, the sections where Serratura reflects upon his father are written consistently in the first person and within quotes. Chiavetta seems to live in a different world from that which he inhabits physically. For example, although single and without family, he'd marked down "Married, One Child" for his civic status. When asked by the psychiatrist the reason he'd been admitted to the hospital, he had replied: "Why, don't you know? I killed someone. I wasn't myself at the time but I still killed someone. And this is where they put people who kill people. Isn't it?" (70). The persons Chiavetta claimed to have killed were none other than his own wife and child: "There was one problem with Chiavetta's self-accusation: no proof was ever found that he'd actually killed someone – let alone a nonexistent wife and child" (70).

Other examples include the following: the conference that Serratura is attending is called the *First Wittgenstein World Symposium on The Realism/Anti-Realism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy*, with

papers presented including ironic ambiguities as *Meaning, Bivalence and Anti-Realism: Can Classical Logic Be Preserved or Must We Toss Out the Baby with the Bath Water?*, and *Intuitionist Logic: A Constructivist Approach to Non- Existent Objects*; Serratura mistaking a young couple from Georgia for members of the Hitler Youth Corps; the painting of a woman with a piece of cement wedged between her legs (“The cement seems not foreign but an outgrowth of the flesh itself, an organ added to combat some alien disease” (113)); a watch that keeps appearing and disappearing from Serratura’s arm; the old man midget’s doubled diary that resembles his father’s diary but only written in German, as well as the midget’s trunk imitating his father’s (again, the doubling and the slightly skewed mirror images without a reference point to indicate which is “real,” if any).

It is in the third section, however, the “I” section, where this sense of hyperreality is ratcheted up to the point where it spreads and takes over all else. It is here that the world becomes an unstable place or perhaps no place at all, if Mirolla has his way. Everything becomes margin and without a center anything is possible, including contradictions of all kinds. The last part of his father’s diary reads:

We’re all traitors, each and every single one of us. We’re all mass murderers. We’ve all compromised to stay alive, to scrabble out our measly, miserable existence, to chew on our potato skins and grub-infested cabbages. Only those who did themselves in at the very beginning managed to escape the stain of guilt and complicity. I have betrayed my friends. I have betrayed them over and over again daily. They know not who it is who betrays them, who constantly slips the knife into their backs and gives it the final twist. They continue to treat me like a friend, like someone they can trust. But I’m not worthy of their trust. I don’t deserve their friendship. I deserve only to die. (158)

If that unexpected admission of betrayal is not enough, the actual threads of the universe start to unravel (or at least Serratura sees it that way). The world around him takes some stutter steps, as if not quite knowing which way to go, as if it too has lost its way:

I pick up a cube of sugar and plop it into my mouth, sucking at the sweetness. LSD perhaps. To help you traipse off the top of the Europa Centre without a care in the world, to float down like a feather right into the World Fountain. That would explain a lot of things. Or would it? I must test the composition of the water: H₂O or XYZ? Ah, Twin Earthians, who can tell the difference? Who can ever tell the difference? (161)

At another point, all the various characters with whom Serratura has interacted (including the dead punk philosopher) appear before him when he awakes from having fainted. At this point, it appears as if the entire sequence of events has been manipulated and they have all been in on the deception: “I look from one to the other as they stand there, some with sheepish grins on their faces, others avoiding eye contact altogether. They resemble wax. Any moment now the flame will come too close and they’ll become shapeless, lacking any identity. Until, of course, they re-form into something new” (188). But is that really the case? In a fit of anger and a twisted notion of getting even, Serratura decides to outwit the cast of “actors”

(or agents) by doing the one thing they are not anticipating: he commits suicide by throwing himself in front of a subway train: “The last thing I hear is Celine’s cry of horror and despair” (193). But it is not the last thing he hears:

When all the other possibilities have been cut off, have been reduced to zero, I snap awake. I’m flat on my back, staring up at a pair of large, circular fluorescent lights. One is working properly, I note; the other flickers on and off. I shut my eyes again for a moment, still groggy, still uncertain, convinced that somehow my body has been turned inside out. Has been negativized, its internal structure exposed for all to see. (193)

So, perhaps it was not a well-orchestrated plot after all on the part of the characters. Or it may have been such a plot in one of the worlds but not in this one. By this point, Serratura has lost all sense of the real and lives completely in the world of the hyperreal. That is why he must commit one final atrocious act. That’s why he must kill Celine whom he loves but cannot have, the one real thing:

I shut my eyes. Out of the dark come more of the words, the words I can’t control, now strung along by some sequence I also can’t control. Words that make perfect sense, make perfect sentences--and yet don’t: “There is no second- order logical calculus.” That’s it. That’s it? Doesn’t that make sense? Of course, it does. “The set of second-order logical truths is too rich to be rationally subjugated.” Of course, that’s obvious. I suddenly blurt out: “The predication of relations. The predation of relationships. In the night. Russell’s paradox. The moxie of orthodoxy.” (p. 199).

Again, Mirolla creates a mirroring effect: Did Chiavetta also kill the one real thing? But Chiavetta did not have the one real thing. He had to create it. He had to create it in order to kill it. Now, Serratura must find some way to escape from himself, from the deed that he has done:

The only real way to avoid discovery is madness, that true loss of self, that true and utter shattering of personality. But there’s one little problem with that, one teeny-weeny problem with that. No map with which to find myself again if I ever change my mind. (“Change my mind”--now isn’t that a most strange, most wonderful expression?) No well-ordered formulae to bring all the pieces back together once the trip is deemed over and the coast is clear. Besides, madness can’t be willed upon someone, can it? I don’t think so. It must come on its own. Or I must allow it to find me, to leap upon me from some dark corner. (207)

Thus, we have Serratura seeking Chiavetta’s solution. But naturally he would: Is he not Chiavetta’s creation? Or is it? If it were Chiavetta’s creation, it would seem that the conversation would be about his absolute sanity rather than the seeking of non-sanity, no? But it does make sense if Chiavetta and Serratura are mirror images of one another, each one creating the other in a mutual bond from which they cannot escape. Well, perhaps they might have been able to escape, if the universe could provide them with a point of entry. Instead, Serratura sees it shape-shifting around him. Mirolla manages to sum it up in a very

powerful image, one both familiar and so utterly frightening:

I shake my head. No, no. There's a mistake here. A category mistake? I smile. This note has been sent to the wrong person. Really. It's addressed to the Serratura who hadn't killed Celine, the Serratura who ... who had jumped in front of the U-Bahn train, perhaps. Or the one still sleeping, the one held tenderly in Annie's arms, true love in his grasp at last as he fingers the lubricated condom 20 stories above the ground. Something has slipped, no question about it. After countless eons of infallibility and impossibly smooth running, the universal sorting machinery has missed a slot. And now it scrambles to set things right but only succeeds in making them worse, in missing more slots, in grinding away the gears like a motorist who has lost control on a very busy stretch of highway. (212)

While *Berlin* has often been called a "metaphysical detective novel", the truth is that there is nothing meta-physical here. The world is made up of words and it is the beauty in putting together those words that Mirolla believes is the only thing that is important. That the story has been structured in the form of a metaphysical detective novel is merely one more illusion in the never-ending but obviously fruitless attempt to deconstruct the hyperreal, to reduce it to some magic potion that will allow the real to appear at last. All appearances to the contrary.

IV. Fiction, Meta-Fiction, Fictocriticism

Towards the middle of the night, at precisely the right moment and on the first tick of 3 a.m., Giulio re-enters his proper country. It is the only time for which a visa has been granted, for which a visa could possibly be granted. He avails himself of the suitable channels, files the necessary papers and crosses the appropriate borders. Everything is in order, he tells himself, in perfect order.

-- "The Proper Country" from *The Formal Logic*

In his "Denying Labels and Identifications" article, Mirolla discusses the concept of what it means to know one's craft. He argues that the ability to put together words, phrases, sentences, etc. for "the creation of a meaningful-valid-useful-relevant story" (4) is only part of that craft:

The other part consists of knowing what others have done in the past and are doing in the present within that craft. In the driest terms, there must be a knowledge of the theory that stands behind the practice. Or else there is the danger of suffering the fate of re-inventing the artistic

wheel each time pen is put to paper. Not only is there the danger of re-inventing that wheel but also the real possibility of being crushed beneath its Juggernaut. (5)

In the article, he cites Amanda Nettelbeck (1998) and her discussion of “fictocriticism” which she says makes use of “[S]elf reflexivity, the fragment, intertextuality, the bending of narrative boundaries, crossing of genres, the capacity to adapt literary forms, hybridized writing, moving between fiction (invention/speculation) and criticism (deduction/explication) of subjectivity (interiority) and objectivity (exteriority)” (3-4). Mirolla argues that this type of writing “[w]hether one calls [it] metafictional, fictocritical or gives it some other post-modernist tag” (8) should not be assigned merely to discussions within esoteric academic circles:

Among the better-known examples of such writing are all of Beckett’s works, Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Calvino’s *If On a Winter’s Night a Traveler ...* and Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*. In the latter, O’Brien, a Vietnam War veteran, produces a collection of short stories where he mixes naturalistic and often graphic descriptions of jungle combat with commentary on the necessary invention and fiction found in such war stories, as well as insights from a character by the name of “Tim O’Brien.” (8)

It is also significant that Mirolla cites Patricia Waugh’s 1984 essays on meta-fiction in which she states:

Metafiction is ... an elastic term which covers a wide range of fictions. There are those novels at one end of the spectrum which take fictionality as a theme to be explored ... whose formal self-consciousness is limited. At the center of this spectrum are those texts that manifest the symptoms of formal and ontological insecurity but allow their deconstructions to be finally recontextualized or ‘naturalized’ and given a total interpretation (which constitute ... a ‘new realism’) ... Finally, at the furthest extreme ... can be placed those fictions that, in rejecting realism more thoroughly, posit the world as a fabrication of competing semiotic systems which never correspond to material conditions (qtd. in Mirolla, 8)

Mirolla also points out that this type of writing is not something that has appeared out of thin air or as some sort of game being played by intellectuals with too much time on their hands. It is grounded on the idea that the old canons have lost their basis and that the vision of “a set ‘reality’ (usually a reality based on Eurocentric principles or a variant of those principles as adapted by North Americans)” (9) can no longer be sustained. Again, citing Waugh:

Contemporary metafictional writing is both a response and a contribution to an even more thoroughgoing sense that reality or history are provisional: no longer a world of eternal verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures. The materialistic, positivist and empiricist world-view on which realistic fiction is premised no longer exists. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that more and more novelists have come to question and reject the forms that correspond to this ordered reality (the well-made plot, chronological sequence, the

authoritative omniscient author, the rational connection between what characters ‘do’ and what they ‘are’, the causal connection between ‘surface’ details and the ‘deep’, ‘scientific laws’ of existence). (qtd. in Mirolla, 9)

A large number of Mirolla’s own fictions are a reflection of meta-fictional concerns and approaches. This is true even of his early published stories such as “Was Socrates The First Absurdist” (originally published in 1973 in the *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, reprinted in *The Formal Logic of Emotion* (1992)). In it, Mirolla sets in motion a pseudo-scholarly scenario about Franz Hartmann, a German professor whose so-called revolutionary thesis about Socrates (as indicated in the title) becomes intertwined with his own life and that of a graduate student who comes to live with him and who serves as narrator.

In the story, Hartmann is so engrossed with his thesis and fear of rebuttals that he does not notice the fact the narrator and his wife are involved in an affair or even that his wife leaves him, taking their child with her. Nor does the narrator notice when Hartmann himself vanishes – in search of Socrates. At a certain point, the narrator discovers that throughout all the years, Hartmann has been carrying on a correspondence with himself, including vitriolic letters sent anonymously:

Why Dr. Hartmann carried on a correspondence with himself can be answered only by him – if at all ... The important thing for me is that I shall always believe in a continuous entity named Hartmann. If he has changed to the extent his handwriting no longer matches, it’s still not as drastic as a belief in metamorphosis. Besides, I’ve yet to see a transformation of a butterfly into a caterpillar. (“Was Socrates The First Absurdist” 63).

In a follow-up story, “The Anteroom,” Manfred, the son of the narrator from the original story, lands in Vancouver after responding to an ad by a certain Arturo Fe (“as in auto-da-fé,” as he describes himself). Manfred is certain that Arturo is actually Dr. Hartmann and, when he cannot get Arturo to admit as much, even under torture, there is the hint that Manfred may have burned down Arturo’s house, including the “anti-room” reserved for Manfred, and in the process killed Arturo’s poem-reciting wife and two children. In the story, we only hear the wife and children, with Manfred implying that Arturo has simply orchestrated the whole affair, creating his family from tape recordings and such; in the report of the fire, only the wife and children are listed. There is no mention of Arturo/ Hartmann. Actually, it is even more confusing than that as the news story reads:

“The remains of the Fe residence on Hastings Ave. in Burnaby. The tragic fire claimed the lives of four people” – something jammed up his windpipe, hot and pumping – “whom the fire department has tentatively identified as Mrs. Celia Fe, a widow; her children, Paul and Lucy; and a boarder as yet unidentified but believed to be a visitor from outside the country.” (“The Anteroom” 101)

While Mirolla played with the meta-fictional/fictocritical forms from early on, they reach their densest configuration in his later work, specifically in the short stories collected in the *The Giulio Metaphysics*

III. The title emerges as a continuation of the first and fourth sections of *The Formal Logic* (“The Giulio Metaphysics I” and “The Giulio Metaphysics II” respectively). The first section contained the story “A Theory of Discontinuous Existence” and the fourth “The Proper Country.” Both these stories are about identity: in the first, a questioning of what it takes to “string together” a particular identity or what makes a human being an integrated whole; the second consisting of the outsider returning to the land he may have felt should embrace him (having been born there) but which instead forces him to take on a series of identities over which he seems to have no control: doctor, priest, archeologist, avenger against family wrongs.

In *The Giulio Metaphysics III*, an amorphous character by the name of Giulio carries on a running battle with his creator: at first as an almost unconscious puppet, then rebelling, and finally taking over his own destiny. Or perhaps only seemingly taking over his destiny, given that the over-arching construct of Mirolla’s work is that there is no such thing as an external “destiny”. It is all controlled by the person who puts the words together – and this “person” is not so much an entity but rather a producer of words who in turn is displaced the moment he/she/it is uncovered as the “person” putting together the words.

Here is the Prologue to the manuscript:

I fall.

Tumbling head over heels. Arms flailing. Legs scissoring. No longer trapped within the boxy confines of the genre. Within the strictures that have tied and bound. Within the artifice and limiting parameters of the written-on-the-blank- tablet message.

I fall.

Tossing pages to the left and right. Up and down. Fragments of words, phrases, sentences. Accordion-like pieces of paragraphs that stretch away from me in an attempt to escape before snapping back into my face. Before parading military- style in front of my eyes. Before stuffing themselves into my mouth.

I fall.

Hoping to escape. To make a clean getaway. But the words are insistent. They insist on being read. They insist on being swallowed. They insist on being turned into flesh. They will not leave me alone. They demand a sacrifice. They want to nail me to the wall. Keep me fixed forever.

I fall instead.

Insisting in turn: “It’s the falling that keeps me free.” The mantra that I keep repeating as my arms flail and my legs scissor and I tumble head over heels. But I know it can’t go on forever.

I can't keep falling forever. The words will catch up to me. And they will crucify me.

In the meantime.

I.

Fall. (5)

In "A general introduction to pure phenomenology", the opening paragraph sets the tone and introduces the creator:

The porcelain cup out of which Giulio is sipping coffee once contained arsenic (a thousand years ago perhaps -- or yesterday). And will again someday. But no one knows when -- not even me. Or if there's a pattern to the fillings and emptyings. He swallows slowly, in tiny gulps, fingers wrapped around the greasy, battle- scarred container, letting the coffee drip organically into his half-awakened mind. (25)

It ends with:

My poor Giulio.

Come on, now. I'm sure someone out there has a little arsenic to spare. Just a tiny little spoonful. Tucked away in a mouldy box beneath a mouldy stairwell. Left over from an Agatha Christie mystery, yes?

I could reach right in at the beginning, before it really gets started, and stir it into his coffee. Mix it in nicely so that he'd hardly notice the slightly bitter taste.

That would wipe away a lot of confusion, wouldn't it? And I promise not to tell anyone who gave it to me.

Promise.

The creator is becoming more and more bold, appearing out of the frame of the stories much more arrogantly. It is almost to the point where there doesn't seem to be much concern for Giulio himself: the creator is edging Giulio out of the frame and questioning his/her own usefulness: "Sometimes, it just doesn't seem worth the effort. Here I am, filling reams of paper with funny little stick persons. I can make them cavort; I can make them cry; I can make them ask the reason why. But the thrill is gone. Know what I mean?" ("Intermezzo I: Moving on" 33).

In "He goes to school," the creator actually sets the scene with a sort of introductory explanation as to

what he/she is trying to achieve and why certain things are done:

Giulio considers himself an independent-minded and free-thinking individual. (That's always within the confines and definition, of course, of the sympathetic character. Couldn't have him suddenly and without warning go berserk, Uzi in hand, in an Israeli shopping mall, now could I? I could, however, have him suddenly and without warning fall madly in love – with a PLO intellectual. Or decide to go for his driving license -- even if it's a little late in his life for that.) In other words, within the confines of the sympathetic character, I allow him to do pretty much as he pleases when he pleases -- as long as he follows through on those choices. (56)

When we arrive at “Farewell ... or the extrapolation blues,” the creator's hand weaves itself to such an extent in the pattern of the story that pulling out those threads would cause the story to collapse. The manipulation here is obvious:

While enjoying a quiet moment in the den of the drug kings, Giulio reflects on a recent incident that took place involving himself and his daughter. A little background: In one of my more mischievous moments, I envisioned what the poor child (barely past her teens) would look like as a full-fledged Jehovah's Witness. And then I liked her so much in the guise I decided to keep her that way for as long as humanly possible -- with a few little quirks thrown in for good measure, of course. So now, blissfully oblivious of the fact it's *The Watch Tower* that needs peddling, she goes daily from house to house, *The Plain Truth* magazine in hand, submitting herself to every abuse possible for her adopted cause. (70)

Not only does Giulio's daughter vanish at one point (just as she is about to dip a biscuit into her coffee) but the entire neighborhood begins to alter shape:

What had been mere days before a lower middle-class neighbourhood, complete with comfortable single-family homes and languid shade trees, is now an inner-city ghetto. Stripped-down cars squat engineless in puddles of thick oil; waves of refugees and the homeless fight each other for every square inch of free space; gangs of feral children roam the alley ways, trying to break into any unprotected home; broken pieces of glass sprout like demonic fingers along the tops of six-foot high concrete block fences; the manhole covers explode and steam rises from the sewers, bringing with it the sleek, pungent, finger-snapping odour of poverty mixed with a dash of official ignorance. (73)

In “Scenes from a life ... scenes from some deaths,” a story consisting of a series of alphabetized vignettes that become more and more disparate, Giulio is about to be institutionalized for his own good when the creator “invoke[s] a previously unmentioned prerogative and create[s] what has been until now an unknown escape hatch for my Giulio” (92). But this escape hatch also serves to get Giulio out of his creator's clutches:

It's through the basement, naturally, at the far end of the basement. Where the cobwebs are thick and steely enough to stop marauding bats. Where the bloodied writing remains curdled on the wall. Where a damp, pre-matrimonial mattress still has the indents from their original love-making. (Ah, what bliss, the dust that we made rise in the slanting rays of sun.) Now, the same people who had wanted Giulio captured are waving at him, urging him on, giving him hints and indications, signs and directions: a paraplegic in a wheelchair spinning his wheels; a dog shrugging off a thick layer of snow; an old woman expertly wielding a sharp feather; a red-faced man with a debased coin in his hand; another man who parts his hair to the left; a nuclear family shaking away the blues; a smiling God in a bloody smock smoking an aromatic pipe; a blonde child trying on a matched set of black angel wings; an hermaphrodite in a cylindrical cap; the parts and pieces mixing and matching, matching and mixing. And then melding precipitously into one, into one multi-dimensional creature. (90)

In "Intermezzo II: Hello, it's me," Giulio fights back and takes over the role previously held by the original creator. In his telling of the story, they were not coming for Giulio but rather for the creator: "They wanted to toss that nice, little fine-meshed net of reality over you and you – tricky, tricky you – managed to divert it" (93). The diversion, according to Giulio, was the creation of Giulio. Giulio accuses his creator of only pretending to care, of having created this character who "doesn't eat, doesn't bathe, doesn't answer the phone, doesn't pick up his mail, doesn't respond to the voices and concerns of those around him, doesn't acknowledge love" (93). And all the while, it is the creator who is in control of Giulio's various states:

And there I was all the while, stuck under your thumb. My lips zipped shut. Unable to make any rejoinder, unable to react, unable to explain myself. Why? Because you didn't want me to. Because you wouldn't allow it. Because what you said, what you wrote down, what you edited, what you crossed out and re-wrote, that was the law. My thoughts didn't count. My desires weren't even considered. My wants and needs were worth less than those of a mosquito flitting along a storm window screen, looking for some way in before the rain and the thunder and the lightning struck, washing it away forever with the other flimsy detritus. So, what do you say? Does that sound about right? Close to the mark? Close enough, eh. Come on. Admit it. (93-94)

In the third part of the collection ("Families, Friendlies, Familiars III"), Giulio experiences a type of re-birth that turns him into a quasi-existential character, a type of almost Beckett like personage who seems to wander about the countryside without any real ability to organize or pull together his thoughts/actions. In a sense, he just is. "Into another kind of country" (with its obvious mirroring of "The proper country") begins with: "Startled, I awake." He finds himself on a bus and doesn't know who he is, or what he is doing there. Along the way, he seems to have picked up Norma, a lover of some type: "Do I know you? I want to ask. Have we met before? But somehow I realize that isn't the appropriate response" (102). The only clue to his identity is a blue sports bag with his first name on it. In it is a videotape which Norma suggests they take to one of the giant electronic stores to play. The images on the tape reflect the elemental composition of much of Mirolla's stories and bring together identity, media images, hyperreality and that

sense of absolute loss and frustration:

As the picture clears and comes into focus, I can see a man sitting on a wooden chair in the corner of a dark room. He's sitting on a chair naked: one hand over his private parts; the other covering his face, shielding himself from a very bright, very concentrated spotlight. And squirming. He's squirming as trickles of sweat ooze down his face and chest to form a puddle on the floor around him.

.....

At that moment, the camera closes in on him. On his face. I have to admit the resemblance is remarkable. It's like looking at myself in a mirror. Perhaps, that's what the screen is. I reach forward with my hand and touch it. No, it's no mirror. I shudder and step back again. (112)

In "His life in two chapters," the story is set up as a video shoot (which mirrors "The hyperborean's: a re-enactment," the story set up like a play in the first part), and then as a video game. In the opening sequence, Giulio and his unnamed wife indulge in sexual games where they shout out various nonsense phrases:

GIULIO (leaning forward to kiss her)

Cucarachas!

WIFE (returning his kiss)

Mothers-in-law!

[They push their mouths together hard and then the rest of their bodies, a grope that soon has them lying on the ground, enmeshed with one another.]

GIULIO (unbuttoning the front of her dress to expose a blood-red half-bra) Lactate infenestration!

WIFE (fumbling with his belt) Meat wagon sicophantasies!

[**GIULIO** runs his tongue along the top of her breast, then reaches in and pops it out of its half-cup. He takes the nipple in his mouth and begins to suck gently – at the same time slipping a hand beneath her dress. His **WIFE** tugs at his trousers and soon has them below his buttocks, hairy swaggerers with a life of their own. She hikes up her dress, now brown and mud-stained, and pulls him towards her.]

GIULIO (starting to pump back and forth)

Cata-cata-cata-tonic!

WIFE (between yelps and flesh-slapping sounds) Cata-cata-cata-strophic! (134-135)

At one point, there is a direct reference to a post-Kafka type of scenario:

A shiny **COCKROACH**, huge for its kind – perhaps four inches long. Cautiously, it crawls out, golden wings held tight against its segmented body. It sniffs the air with its sensory feelers, making sure nothing’s moving, nothing that can do it damage. Then, it begins to slide and slither across the rotting porcelain of the bath tub, unable to get a really good grip with its multiple legs. It comes up against the edge of the tub and stops for a moment, frozen, waving its cerci.]

GIULIO:

Hello, Gregor. Feel like talking?

[Instead of instantly fleeing, the **COCKROACH** rises up on its last two pairs of legs, rises up until it starts to grow. Until it seems as large as **GIULIO** himself. Or at least on the same level as him. Then its insect face begins to contort, to twist and morph until it resembles a human face, albeit a very old, very wrinkled, very ugly human face.]

COCKROACH: (wearily, as if hardly able to hold this size and position for more than a few moments at a time)

Three hundred twenty million years. Through thick and thin. We even had our own “age”, you know. The “age of the cockroach”. And we managed to survive that, too. That’s the only antidote for angst. So don’t talk to me about fathers who are unforgiving. Or mothers who abandon their offspring at birth. Let the little nymphs squirm if they’re able – and die if they’re not!

[The **COCKROACH** slithers down and back, once again nothing more than a four-inch giant of his kind. Head first, it scuttles into the drain and vanishes.

GIULIO rubs his eyes. Too late, he rushes to the drain and rams a thin stick down its throat. He jams the stick up and down. Then stops to inspect it closely, to see if there are any green guts sticking to it.]

GIULIO: Bastard! And here I thought you were a friend of mine. (142)

In the game portion, the reader can help decide Giulio's movements. The game has some of the same scenarios as seen in some of the previous stories but now much more obviously contrived and metafictional:

[**Level One (Park Extension): GIULIO** is walking along the street, hands in pocket and head in the air, happy-go-lucky and carefree. He's so happy he's actually whistling. And why shouldn't he be? He's a young man with the whole future laid ahead of him – at least that's what the drop-down text says about him: "Giulio, a 21-year-old male. Bright, well-educated, healthy, in the prime of life. Ready to take the world by the tail and spin it out into space. Ready to make a difference. To leave something lasting behind." ... Suddenly, out of the sky, there descends a vicious-looking Samurai warrior, covered in spike-like armor and wearing a lizard-head helmet. The warrior stands solidly blocking **GIULIO**'s way, legs apart, sword weaving menacingly in the air. Slowly, it removes its helmet. Surprise! The Samurai warrior turns out to be his **GIRLFRIEND**. Before **GIULIO** can ask what this is all about, what's the big idea, she smiles and turns sideways, sword tip planted in the ground. Her profile shows a definite swelling around the area of her belly, a swelling that seems to be growing bigger by the moment. The drop-down text says: "Reproduction: a process whereby living plant or animal cells or organisms produce offspring. Reproduction is one of the essential functions of living organisms, as necessary for the preservation of the species as food getting is for the preservation of the individual." (144-145)

At this point, the reader can help Giulio decide what it is exactly that he wants to do: from turning and fleeing to fighting back, from killing himself to simply sidestepping and moving forward.

In "Homeward bound," there is a mirroring of the second and fourth stories in the collection, "The man in the basement" and "A general introduction to pure phenomenology". But from another angle, as if the reflection is not a true one. Giulio, not really knowing who he is, descends into the basement to find a tableau of a middle aged man sitting at a tiny wooden table, almost like the kind a child would sit on to do his/her drawings. Giulio has the feeling that the tableau is only set in motion the moment he steps into the cantina – and stops again when he departs. The same thing happens when he steps outside – at first empty and then filled with all sorts of day to day activity. But the most frightening part of this scene is the idea that Giulio cannot escape his past (or whatever had been created as his past): "I walk away down the street as fast as I can – almost running. The house looms ahead of me. I turn back. It's there, at the other end, as if rising on its haunches" (163).

It is in this story that there is a moment of epiphany, a tiny sliver of the physical that intrudes on all the images and created scenarios, the assembled set of lies with which human beings filled their days. Here, there is a moment of pureness:

Suddenly, I don't care who I am or what they want me to be. I don't care if God is watching or if there's nothing out there but a dumb emptiness that goes on forever. I don't care if we have the rest of our lives to act out this moment or if someone's going to burst in at any moment.

Ready to hurl a bucket of cold water on us – as if we were little more than a pair of rutting dogs. I just don't care. She pulls me on top of her, on the source of the heat. I kiss her lips, her neck, her nipples. I lick her nipples, feeling the tiny bud beneath my tongue. Then I work my way back up. She opens her legs, placing them against my sides. Her hands work away at my penis, straightening it, aiming it. I lower myself and thrust, meeting solid resistance. I persist, pushing hard. She gives a cry, a sudden burst of pain. I almost pull away. But she holds me there, holds my buttocks tight, forcing me to continue. A second thrust. The resistance gives somewhat. She grimaces. A third thrust and I'm inside her. The grimace turns into a smile. I begin to move faster and faster, my hips seemingly possessed of a mind of their own. And then there's no stopping – not even when I spot the drops of blood on the towel beneath her. Not until I've spent myself and fallen away, struggling to catch my breath. (166)

But in Mirolla's world, this type of epiphany is not something that can last or be truly captured. Sooner or later, the discovery of falsehood is made, the deception is uncovered:

Their faces are twisted and full of hate. And they mean to do me harm. All except for the little boy. He's busy tossing bones against the nearest wall. I have no choice but to back up. They keep coming, filling up the entire landing. I want to ask how the man in the wheelchair managed to make it up the stairs but somehow it doesn't seem relevant. The truth is they've found me out. It was bound to happen sooner or later. They've recognized me as the impostor that I am. And they're right to be angry. After all, I'd be mighty pissed off if I discovered my best friend, my lover, my son was a fake. Someone whose actions – and even emotions – were carefully staged. I want to tell them I didn't mean to hurt anyone. That it was their fault really for assuming I was the person they thought I was. But it's a little late for that, isn't it? Besides, who'd believe me? Wouldn't they think it was just one more act for their benefit? Suddenly, the weeks spent on the cold and damp streets seem very inviting. (173)

In the end, it is Giulio who finds himself falling; it is Giulio who is the creator; it is Giulio who must be punished for that sin, for daring to step up. The last story, "You will land ...", is written in the second person and future tense, giving it a type of double distancing. Here, Giulio will slither and squirm through a desert where the wind is always in his face; he will feel often on the verge of dying: "The end. Finis. Done. Dropped. Kaput. But no. There's yet another squirm in you. Yet another slither. Yet another slink" (177). He will end up in a box-like container through which he can hear some scratching, the scratching that has haunted him throughout. There, he will be fed and kept alive, allowed to see the outside world through a porthole. But there will be no way out, no way "back to the real world" (181). He will find a spike, long and sharp. He will spend time trying to figure out what it is for: open the door? Kill himself? Scratch the porthole? Then he will realize what the spike is for:

Held in a two-fisted grip, you'll press that spike against the wall. Nail the words to that wall: "Giulio's mother, I will have you write in my cramped style, in my cramped, ever-so-peculiar style, Giulio's mother showed him the reality in dreams. For that, Giulio vows, she can never

be forgiven, must never be absolved.” (183)

Mirolla gives us a strong clue as to what is going on here (other than the obvious surreal or magical real surface) in his critical writing when he states (referring to the type of meta-fictional writing that he is trying to develop and sharpen, as it were):

Because its success does not rely on essences, identities, labels and identifications, on the continued existence of histories and hyphenations ... because at that point all that really matters is the ability to manipulate the fictional world and its infinitely rich elements ... because of all that, not even the inevitable erasure of the author ... of that universe’s god ... can undo the creations themselves. Put another way: while the non-existence of the writer is all but assured, the fictional landscape created — in all its beauty and hideousness, its fragility and robustness, its mirrors and libraries — will go on without you. I guess that’s as close to immortality as anyone will ever get. (11)

IV. Concluding Remarks

No, he is getting up again, shaking the crumbs of snow from his chest. He pulls something away from his foot and throws it back towards the clearing. We easily recognize it as a snare, a thin wire shaped into a noose. The last toe-hold has fallen away. There’s no keeping him back. He continues to walk, showing as yet no sign of stiffness. Soon, all we can see rising above the snow is his cap, the rest blending perfectly with the surroundings. Behind him, leaving x’s in the snow, a rabbit follows, thinking it knows a safe path when it sees one.

-- “The Truth-Tree Method” from *The Formal Logic*

The idea of a “safe path” is one that Mirolla examines in his writing (see “Dying Labels”), but it is also one that describes the attitude towards his writing by some readers. Mirolla’s writing is difficult, dense and often does not reveal its meaning through a casual or one-time examination. In fact, even those who have taken the time to study and appreciate his work more closely have spoken of its density. Here is what D. Cloyce Smith had to say on the amazon.com site about Mirolla’s *Berlin*:

I’ve never read anything quite like Berlin. There are perhaps inevitable comparisons to Borges,

Calvino, Kafka, and Vonnegut, but its realist underpinnings remind me of other works: the cabaret demimonde of Christopher Isherwood's *Berlin Stories*, the philosophical hijinks in Iris Murdoch's *Under the Net*, the increasingly addled scholars who populate the novels of John Gardner (not to mention the meta-fictional frameworks of *October Light* and *Freddy's Book*) and the weird and irresolvable circularities of David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*. Mirolla's novel is funny and fascinating, baffling and exasperating, but in the end the fractured worlds of its central characters -- both the person of Serratura and the city of Berlin -- come together to make a sort of wild, incoherent sense that you might expect to find in a universe of parallel worlds. This is a book to read twice: first for its mesmerizing storytelling, then to tease out the meaning of it all. (par. 3)

Similarly, another commentary on the same site speaks of going from one reality to another until the two realities, the mirror-images are no longer distinguishable:

In the end it is not entirely clear what is real and what is not. Much of what Serratura experiences did not or could not have happened outside his increasingly deranged mind, yet what is described in the final scene may be the truth about what happened to the author Chiavetta himself. Clearly Mirolla's intent is to play with reality just as philosophers play with reality, philosophers who, in the postmodern interpretation, cannot decide what is real and what is not real, or whether we can ever know, or even whether a question about reality even makes sense. (Littrell, par. 9)

In an interview Mirolla gave to Lowndes (2009), he explained something of the essential nature of his type of writing and the essence of the combination of magic realism and fictocritical writing for which he has come to be known:

Magic realism is like taking a trip with a shaman. One goes on a 'real' journey across realistic landscapes. But everything is heightened and has an inner glow to it. That inner glow is the essential magic that should emerge from a magical realistic short story or other work of art. In this world, everything is possible and transformations occur all the time. However, there is one rule in magical realism: one cannot go against the internal logic of the story, the determining framework controlled by the writer. In the end, like a shaman's journey, a magical realist story needs to be a healing of some type, a way to close the gap between what we take as real and what is really real. ("Hunter in the Abyss")

The evaluation of Mirolla's writing, how effective that writing is, the originality and impact of the entire body of work, is still open to debate. He is still producing, still refining, still examining and still questioning. At the same time, he realizes and understands that the lack of a canon applies to him as much as to anyone else. It is the fate of the writer today to carve out an area within the world of hyper-reality and hybridity – and then to watch that world be swept away.

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Ideology, Prosody, and Eponymy: Towards a Public Poetics of Obama and *Beowulf*.

By Tom Clark

Abstract

This article examines and integrates the categories of poetics and rhetoric by comparing concepts of the poetic in Barack Obama's 2008 election victory speech with concepts of political rhetoric in the Old English long poem *Beowulf*. Using close readings, the paper explores a nexus between these two modes of communication which is revealed both in the politicisation of poetry and in the poetical praxis of political communications. That is, practitioners in both domains necessarily follow the integrating logics that this paper explores. It finds a political aesthetic of sceptical conservatism that underwrites the agendas of both these epic-heroic texts.

Keywords

Public poetics; Barack Obama; *Beowulf*; rhetoric; poetic formula.

Each thing in this world had, as it were, an eponym in heaven, a perfect form from which it was derived — and it shared this derivation with all the other members of its class, or genus.

— Kenneth Burke¹

1. Introduction

There is a view, which I vehemently support, that public language is a type of poetry, and that public

speaking is therefore a type of performance poetry. Public language – by which I mean language produced for publics and/or by public figures and/or in a public situation and/or with a view to public purposes² – answers to priorities other- than-artistic, as we know. But it is not always distinct, of course — there has always been poetry oriented towards the public sphere, and there is no shortage of public sphere discourse that gets called ‘poetic.’ In other words, this paper³ explores an aspect of *the poetic* within a domain of language whose strategic outlook is typically distinguished from the strategic outlook of poetry. Renegotiating that distinction is an important theme in Terry Eagleton’s recent book, *How to Read a Poem*, in which he proposes that a ‘poem is a statement released into the public world for us to make of it what we may.’⁴

This paper attempts a more systematic version of Eagleton’s renegotiation. It proceeds by reference to two texts whose differences would normally be taken for granted, but whose collocation serves to illustrate a formal and purposive similarity that extends beyond merely figurative or heuristic considerations. Both texts straddle an important technological and cognitive divide between performed utterance and inscribed text.⁵ One of them, *Beowulf*, has been seminal in the study of English- language poetics.⁶ The other, Barack Obama’s 2008 election victory speech, seems destined to become seminal in the study of English-language political rhetoric.⁷ Importantly, many commentators have attributed to each, respectively, the qualities of political sensitivity and heightened poetics — so much so that the ‘political sensibility’ of *Beowulf* and the ‘poetic sensibility’ of Obama are both clichés of the commentary on each. My focus in this paper is on what, in another cliché, we might call their ‘crossover characteristics:’ the extent to which *Beowulf* passes comment upon political communication and the extent to which Obama’s victory speech reflects upon poetic communication. In doing so, we are able to identify a poetic aspect to what Burke has posed as a ‘dramatistic’ phenomenon.

Perhaps the most obvious reason for comparing these particular texts is that both hold such an overtly heroic interest value. Both portray ethnic outsiders who bring their superhuman capacities with them to the nations they serve and protect.⁸ In the case of *Beowulf*, the relevance of a Germanic heroic verse tradition is uncontroversial.⁹ In the case of Obama, a hero’s critical qualities of *sapientia et fortitudo*¹⁰ (‘wisdom and courage’) are evident in the extent of his success (winning an election for the political position most observers would reckon the world’s most powerful), in the uses to which he proposes to put that office (economic fireproofing, reducing human contributions to climate change, and demilitarising an extremely bellicose international polity), and in the widely shared and discussed sense that his success was particularly difficult to achieve (winning this election as an African American). That is, Obama’s heroism is proven by the historically transformative symbolism of his ascendancy to the presidency of the United States of America.

In addition to their moral and behavioural fathom of heroism, there are stylistic grounds to argue that both texts are pitched in an epic register. For *Beowulf*, that is a somewhat controversial statement: numerous commentators, at least since Tolkien,¹¹ have taken pains to distinguish it from the stylistics of classical Greek and Latin epic verse. Nevertheless, *Beowulf* is certainly epic in the sense that it relates an extensive series of episodes prominent in a grand sweep of (early Germanic) cultural history. It may also be epic

in the self-conscious sense that it was composed by a writer familiar with the classical epic tradition, especially Virgil's *Aeneid*, which seems most likely once we accept a literary theory of its provenance.¹² Obama's victory speech is objectively epic for the same reason as that his candidature is heroic: its relationship to a received history of the USA. We may also argue that it is self-consciously epic in the way it engages with epic traditions of religious and secular story, and the way it inhabits and co-opts their stylistic characteristics.¹³

And then there is the matter of naming. *Beowulf* is common among medieval poems in that its manuscript¹⁴ does not record its name. Editorial convention has it that this is the 'poem of Beowulf' – that is, the poem that relates the exploits of a hero called Beowulf – and so it merely assumes its chief protagonist's name. The naming reifies one aspect of the text, of course. It elevates the status-significance of this hero and his actions. Voloshinov makes a similar point about reification for those aspects of language that people identify as important through the act of reporting them in indirect speech.¹⁵ By creating an eponymous relationship between character and text, Voloshinov might argue, modern editors impart an ideology of valence: the naming decision is a valorisation; Beowulf becomes more intensely the focus of *Beowulf* once we are used to the idea that he is its name. Likewise, none of the alternative titles in the epic of Obama overshadows its principle title, which is his name. *Dreams from My Father*¹⁶ is in the epic of Obama. *The Audacity of Hope*¹⁷ is in the epic of Obama. His Democratic Party convention speech in 2004¹⁸ is in the epic of Obama. As are all his subsequent speeches. As is the election campaign tens of thousands of staff and volunteers built up around him. As is his past presidency of the *Harvard Law Review*.¹⁹ As is every news story that reports him, every public event he attends, every cause he supports, every bill he signs or vetoes as president of the United States of America. When we recognise that each of these episodes and many more beside them constitute the epic of Obama – when they are so named by his involvement in them – we reify him, its title.

These aspects are expounded at length in the coming sections of this paper. It is my aim to show how we may read these two texts, quite validly regarded the products of separate communicative genres, as products of the one family or species of language. In Eagleton's rendering, that is because they both are inherently political communications. But they both are inherently poems as well. In exploring the link between the formulaic poetics and the political dispositions of these texts, we are able to observe a crucial nexus that manifests both as the-political-in-the-poetic and as the-poetic-in-the-political. It is a nexus I have examined in some recent papers, in which I have set out to show a corollary of Eagleton's proposition: that public language (including its prominent sub-set, political rhetoric) is a species of poetry.²⁰ Those papers have argued that the styles of performed/uttered modes or categories of public language bear close and unmistakable relation to the formulaic styles that tend to characterise oral-traditional genres of poetry.²¹ As all traditions of rhetorical criticism observe, the nexus is simultaneously sensuous and intellectual — strategically speaking, it mobilises public response at both the syncretistic and the analytic level.²² That being true, we are able to contemplate political language agendas in aesthetic terms, just as we are able to contemplate the political significance of artistically motivated language. My argument to date has been that all public language is imbued with this nexus.

With self-consciously proficient public figures, critical awareness of this nexus becomes professional praxis. That is to say, professional communicators in the public sphere shape their practices according to an explicit theory of the nexus, and they rationalise the value of the theory to which they subscribe by reference to the practice that it informs. In talking about their own output, speakers and their speechwriters both clearly hold themselves accountable for working to a simultaneous and integrated brief for form and content.²³ In response, the nascent discipline of Leadership Studies has managed to utilise taxonomies from the classical (Graeco- Latin derived) tradition of rhetoric in constructing a highly aestheticised account of the new orator – today’s consummate leader, whether that be in the field of business, religion, sport, warfare, politics, or what have you.²⁴

Self-conscious reference to praxis in one’s work is a crucial feature of professional conduct; according to some it is the defining feature.²⁵ For the purposes of this paper, it may stand as a proxy, as a sign that the professional ethos is at work in a given situation. That is to say, if a given text reveals a self-conscious praxis with respect to that poetic-political nexus discussed above, we may take it as proof of a professional attitude towards public language. We should not be surprised to find such an attitude in a political speech by Obama, of course – he is a highly professional public communicator in an era of highly professionalised public communications – but it is remarkable how clearly a version of this consciousness is expressed in the Old English poem of *Beowulf*. When we see how poetic and traditionalised is this understanding of communicative praxis, it becomes instructive to trace it back into Obama’s intentionally poetic and tradition-rich rhetoric.

Words and deeds: towards a politicised praxis of communication in Beowulf

The Old English long poem we call *Beowulf*²⁶ is a literary work imbued with oral tradition. That is, scholars now usually agree that it was first composed in writing, rather than improvised in performance,²⁷ but it would have been performed for audiences including many illiterate people, and its literary composition was affectively styled after the aesthetic and topical characteristics of an oral-improvisatory Germanic heroic tradition stretching back into prehistory.²⁸ It was first written sometime before 1000 AD. The one manuscript that survives, albeit in damaged form, was written by two anonymous Anglo-Saxon scribes in the tenth century.²⁹ The story it tells concerns a hero from Scedeland (in modern-day southern Sweden), named Beowulf (‘Bee-wolf’), who had ‘the strength of thirty men in his handgrip.’ The gifted hero sets out across the Baltic because he has heard that Heorot (‘Hart’), the hall of the Danish king Hrothgar (‘Glory-Spear’), has been beset by a monstrous nightly visitor called Grendel. Hrothgar had previously sheltered Beowulf’s father, and so there is some measure of reciprocal obligation³⁰ in the hero’s decision to embark on this adventure. It is a long story, which covers three monstrous adventures, and plays out over 3182 alliterative ‘long lines’ of verse.

Aside from these skeleton details, and what action the poem relates clearly, there is enormous conjecture around the text on almost every imaginable level: its provenance, its concerns, and its meaning. Its

allusive, appositive, and often cryptic style does plenty to amplify the ambiguities. Indeed, some critics have made ambiguity precisely the point, celebrating it as an aesthetic strategy of the poem.³¹ That said, the power of the Danish state is expressly a central concern. The first sentence is unambiguous in that respect (ll. 1-3), although a literal prose translation cannot do justice to the alliterative and rhythmic emphasis it places on the word þrym³² – ‘might’:

Hwæt we Gardena in geardagum
 þeodcyninga þrym gefrunon
 hu ða æðelingas ellen fremedon.

(Well: we have heard of the Spear-Danes' people-kings' might, in days of yore, of how those nobles performed courage.)

The poem's introductory section goes on to prefigure the reign of Hrothgar, who ordered Heorot's construction, by setting out the life of his most famous ancestor, Scyld Scefing ('Shield, child of the Sheaf' — so-called because he was originally found as a 'destitute' baby floating in a bundle or basket of grasses in the water). Scyld's strikingly Mosaic origins commence the Scylding royal dynasty in Denmark. In Heorot's construction, apparently and ironically, is visible the end of that dynasty, which collapses soon after the death of Hrothgar. The resultant poetics are rich with doom (ll. 81b-85):

Sele hlifade

heah ond horngeap heaðowylma bad
 laðan liges ne wæs hit lenge þa gen
 þæt se ecghete aþumsweoran
 æfter wælniðe wæcnan scolde.

(The hall towered, high and great of gable; it awaited the storm of battle, the hostile fire; nor was it long to come then before the blade-hatred of in-laws would awaken.)

Indeed, *Beowulf* is a poem fascinated by political power. Its narrative enthusiastically explores power's rises and falls, its achievements and destructions, its orderings and hypocrisies. That exploration is effected by some superb poetry: the author had a finely tuned ear for juxtaposition, which is supported by the emphatic and elastic metre of alliterative verse, the appositive style of its phrasing,³³ and the digressive and cyclical style of its narrative.³⁴ These factors contribute to a poetics that is at once accumulative³⁵ and contrastive,³⁶ a political ideology that is both conservative and sceptical.³⁷ Taking a lead from Liggins,³⁸ I have previously argued that it is a profoundly ironical sensibility.³⁹ The result, if you accept that view, is that the ethno-political affiliations of the *Beowulf* poet become inscrutable, or even ambivalent. Whereas some have based their readings of this poem's politics on an inference of reverence and/or fondness towards the Danes,⁴⁰ the case for irony says that hints of reverence and/or fondness may be disingenuous, at least in part.

For all that, we have a heroic poem that explores the power of the Danish court in Germanic-legendary times, a topic that must have exercised the imaginations of power-brokers in England throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. Being framed as bound by heroic convention, the poem's observations and judgements are couched in the highly formularised phrasing and narrative tropes of traditional Germanic alliterative verse,⁴¹ a sure indication that the putatively historical characters are being judged according to the anachronistic standards of the Old English (Christian) poet, rather than of the Old Norse (pagan) milieu in which their actions take place. 'Judged' is hardly too strong a word (ll. 178b-183a):

Swylc wæs þeaw hyra
 hæþenra hyht helle gemundon
 in modsefan Metod hie ne cuþon
 dæda Demend ne wiston hie Drihten God
 ne hie huru heofena Helm herian ne cuþon
 wuldres Waldend.

(Such was their observance, the hope of the heathens: they thought of hell in their spirits; they did not think of Lord God, the Judge of deeds, nor in any case did they know to praise the Helm of the heavens, the Ruler of glory.)

In this example, relatively early in the poem, we see the focus on power expressed as a normative judgement on governance. There are myriad such judgements passed by the narrator and by most of the leading characters throughout the text. Their normative qualities make them natural vehicles for both the conservatism and the scepticism of this poem's ideological disposition. As mentioned, their phrasing gives them a particularly conservative yet sceptical quality.

This paper is particularly concerned with the comments that characters and the narrator pass on the business of public language, because those comments reveal an explicit and normative praxis of political communication, a praxis inextricable from the poetics that couch it. There is a critical moment in the establishment of the story, when Beowulf and his 14 henchmen land on the shores of Denmark. A doughty coastguard spies the party and challenges them, asking why they have arrived fully armed without the express leave of Hrothgar to do so. Beowulf declares that he is bound for Heorot, where he has business with the Danish king. To this the coastguard replies with a caveat on the court and its culture (ll. 287b-289):

Æghwæþres sceal
 scearp scyldwiga gescad witan
 worda ond worca se þe wel þenceð.

(Between each of two things a sharp shield-warrior must know the distinction, between words and deeds, if he is thinking well.)

In isolation, this may sound like folkish sophistry. The metrical alliteration in *gescad* ('distinction')

certainly invests it with a certain formulaic ring. But those formulaic qualities are essential to the epistemological system of the poem. The poetics that make them memorable (especially alliteration and emphasis) also make them trustworthy: a * *scearp scyldwigan gescad* ('sharp shield-warrior's distinction') has about it the phonic mantle of something that people have remembered and said over many years, handing this unit of knowledge down through the generations. In this, it resonates with the notion of 'rhetorically self-sufficient arguments' that numerous critical discourse analysts have applied to their readings of political rhetoric.⁴² Indeed, in this case we see how the poetic analysis of prosody and resonance can complement the ideational focus of critical discourse analysis.

I take these pains to address the epistemological properties of formulaic poetics,⁴³ partly because the aesthetics of folkishness do not inspire the same trust or confidence in a contemporary literate readership. It is important to allow for this quality in *Beowulf*, which could so easily pass us by, being readers rather than listeners. Reminding us of its importance, the poem brings the words/deeds dichotomy to our attention a second time. After Beowulf has slain the monster Grendel, an unnamed Danish *scop* (official poet) performs the story of the legendary fight in Frisia between Finn and the forces with Hengest. He relates how, in the nervous truce that followed the fight, soldiers on both sides were forbidden from attacking one another physically or verbally. He heightens the poetic effect of his digression by using anaphoric alliterations on þ and ð to highlight the relevance of the formula, and compounding l.1100's metrical alliteration with rhythmic symmetry (/x x /x | /x x /x), syntactic symmetry (— ne — | — ne —) and consonance (repetitions of -r-, n-, and the -r-c- compound) to amplify the formula's memorability (ll. 1096b-1100):

Fin Hengeste
 elne unflitme aðum benemde
 þæt he þa wealafe weotena dome
 arum heolde þæt ðær ænig mon
 wordum ne worcum wære ne bræce

(Finn, with undisputed courage according to the judgment of his councilors, pronounced oaths to Hengest, that he would hold those survivors of the woe in honour — that no man there should break the peace with words nor with deeds.)

In a simple sense, this prohibition on assaults by word or by deed points up an explicit understanding of communication as symbolic behaviour. That is a critical element of the political theory, because it both enables and requires the management of behaviour and interaction for symbolic political purposes. According to Edelman, that is the foundation of professional politics.⁴⁴

In a more complex sense, both these excerpts point to a balance, an economy, between the symbolic and the actual, the purport and the outcome, the word and the deed. Near the end of the poem, the aged Beowulf and a dragon mortally wound each other. Throughout their hero's last combat, most of the Geat thegns keep a safe remove from the danger; only a younger thegn called Wiglaf ('War-Survivor') comes to Beowulf's aid. He castigates the others, and by implication the entire Geat nation, pointing to a

diseconomy between pledges of support they had made and their performance on the proving-ground of battle (ll. 2633-2638a):

Ic ðæt mæl geman þær we medu þegun
 þonne we geheton ussum hlaforde
 in biorsele ðe us ðas beagas geaf
 þæt we him ða guðgetawa gyldan woldon
 gif him þyslicu þearf gelumpe
 helmas ond heard sweord.

(I remember that occasion when we partook of the mead, when we promised our lord in his beer-hall – he who gave us those rings – that we would repay him those war-trappings, the helmets and the hard swords, if this sort of need should befall him.)

In case the criticism was too subtle, Wiglaf goes on to make his complaint even clearer, concluding with a hypermetric (three-stress) verse (ll.2882b-2883):

Wergendra to lyt
 þrong ymbe þeoden þa hyne sio þrag becwom.

(Too few warriors gathered around the king when the trouble came at him.)

In other words, the concept of reciprocity binds symbolic and actualised behaviour in an ethics of political accountability.⁴⁵ Since leadership involves an inherently symbolic perspective on behaviour – leadership behaviour is always symbolic action – this ethics of accountability gives a particularly valuable account of leadership, as understood in a particular cultural time and place. (Never mind that we do not know conclusively where or when that time and place was.) This Germanic- legendary version of public language cleaves to a clearly articulated praxis – one we might also find in other texts from the premodern Germanic milieu – in which a reciprocal relationship between symbolic behaviour and actual behaviour is the principal ethical criterion.

At the same time as *Beowulf* elaborates a praxis of political communication into its narrative, it embeds that praxis into its poetics in ways that become surprisingly revealing when we turn to modern examples. Such an inherently contrastive conceptual model finds ready expression in such a fundamentally contrastive style of verse as we see in Old English. As Robinson showed,⁴⁶ an ‘a-verse’ (the first half of a long line) very frequently serves as an appositive amplification of the previous line’s ‘b-verse.’ This tendency is a consequence of the method of composition, which normally seeks to fill each verse with a metrically sufficient phrase drawn from common poetic usage.⁴⁷ Because the metrical demands on a-verses are higher than b- verses,⁴⁸ it is very common for alliterative poets to reserve their substantial advances in narrative

and conception for the b-verses, while using each a-verse as an opportunity to demonstrate their lyrical skills through an alliterative phrase that amplifies or otherwise plays off the previous line. When the one recurrent verse repeatedly meets these conditions, then it is demonstrably a phrase formula.

We have seen here that one such formula in the a-verses of *Beowulf* is *word- X worc-* ('word/-s [X] deed/-s'). The formula takes different endings depending on syntactical context, and its *X* stands for a conjunction, typically *ond* ('and') or *ne* ('nor'). It is alliteratively tailored to fill an a-verse whenever this concept is an appropriate amplification of the immediately preceding narrative. That 'whenever' is a substantial one, because we have already seen that this formula names the critical topic in *Beowulf's* praxis of political communication. That is to say, 'word/-s and/nor deed/-s' is inherently relevant to any discussion of leaderly behaviour in the conservative-sceptical conceptual system of this poem. For a story fascinated with political power, then, the poetics and the political ideology combine to make this formula a present possibility at the onset of each line. We hear its potential even when it is not uttered.

It is this relationship between verse and concept, prosody and repertoire, situation and communicative resources, that I wish to address as we turn to the rhetoric of Obama. We have seen that *Beowulf* shows a poem imbued with a clearly politicised praxis of communication; the question for Obama's victory speech is whether we can infer from it a reciprocal value, a poeticised praxis of communication. As it happens, after the 2008 election, we find a wealth of commentary around Obama's difficult 2009 campaign to transform the American system of financing healthcare that inadvertently focuses its anxiety on this very question. It does this by asking whether the potential that Obama offered in 2008 would become the actuality he achieved once elected president. In other words, there is a widespread fear that the answer will be 'yes,' that rhetoric might somehow be proven the crowning achievement of the orator. Most of this commentary draws explicitly on the distinction between the untested promise of words and the proving quality of actions, an inherently problematic distinction in political discourse, where most action consists of the exchange of words and other meaningful symbols. An international newspaper leader immediately after his inauguration as president captures the mood, and one of the characteristic phrase formulas, of this discourse:⁴⁹

Obama moves quickly to put words into deeds.

Obama's poeticised praxis: change we can believe in

Obama's 'prepared remarks'⁵⁰ on the occasion of his November 2008 election victory have already received immense attention, of course. His reputation as an orator was already very well established — by popular convention, Obama's emergence as a recognised name, as an orator of acknowledged might, occurred during his highly autobiographical Democratic Convention address in 2004.⁵¹ His speeches throughout the 2008 election campaign had done nothing to detract from that reputation. Indeed, several times, Obama's strengths as a political communicator had demonstrably influenced public perceptions of

his campaign.⁵² On numerous occasions, his confidence and range in the set-piece events proved strikingly charismatic. Additionally, the victory his campaign had accomplished was quite extraordinary. There had been a consensus that it was not possible for an African American to win an election for the USA presidency. In this moment, his speech was both a declaration and a demonstration that those received norms of history were no longer valid. The occasion of his election victory was thus doubly newsworthy: a great media ‘talent’ had won a momentous and historic victory.

The occasion’s news value meant the speech was immediately published as video and audio recording and as transcript by countless internet news outlets. Television and radio stations played it, or excerpts from it, in their news bulletins and other programs. Newspapers and news magazines published it whole or as edited extracts. Additionally, it has subsequently received extensive attention from the critics: journalists, academics, and others who make a point of closely reading the rhetoric of politicians. While all these people have their distinctive reasons for paying such regard to Obama, two types of reason stand out across the coverage. The first is the historic importance of his candidature and especially of his success. While there was a widespread appreciation of his historical importance before the victory, it undoubtedly grew as his campaign progressed. In such a view, the victory speech is a moment of definition or fulfilment – an epiphany, if you will – in which his historical importance became strikingly apparent. The second group of reasons relates to the aesthetic significance of Obama’s communicating style. Language and rhetoric commentators who analyse his speaking style are legion.⁵³ They are accompanied by performance studies commentators who analyse his body language and on-camera movement,⁵⁴ by media studies commentators who analyse his campaign’s graphic and phonic design,⁵⁵ and by at least two commentators on Obama’s hypnotics, who analyse his audience manipulation techniques on a rather more subliminal level than most others seek to comprehend.⁵⁶ The stylistic aspect of the Obama phenomenon also had its observers before the victory, but there is no doubt that attention to his aesthetics grew as his campaign success grew.

When we compare the Obama victory speech to ceremonial declarations by other candidates for head-of-government positions, it is this latter dimension that makes his performance so radical, so innovative. If we compare the concession speech that John McCain gave as the defeated candidate that same evening,⁵⁷ we find fundamentally similar ideas, including that similarity-making idea of time to unite as a polity. Obama hints at the extraordinary achievement of an African-descended president, but so does McCain. Obama dedicates the last section of his speech to a 106-year-old voter in Atlanta, Ann Nixon Cooper (see below), but including eyewitness testimonial to past injustices is a commonplace in mainstream political speeches around racial reconciliation.⁵⁸

What content analysis cannot find is what stylistic analysis cannot miss. Obama makes consummate use of linguistic and performative techniques that most capable political speakers would avoid. For starters, as Crystal points out,⁵⁹ his syntax is often remarkably extensive. The first five sentences, each laid out as a separate paragraph in the officially released transcript, easily tame a level of clause complexity that would be likely to humiliate the rhetorical capacities of most of his colleagues. The sequenced coordinating clauses he uses in the second paragraph are reminiscent of some virtuoso gospel church sermonising,⁶⁰ notably including some artistic appropriations of the style,⁶¹ but quite unlike the party-political rhetorical

tradition in America or elsewhere.

The stylistic feature most observed in Obama's 2008 victory speech has been another gospel church echo — the call-and-response sequence in its closing section:

This election had many firsts and many stories that will be told for generations. But one that's on my mind tonight is about a woman who cast her ballot in Atlanta. She's a lot like the millions of others who stood in line to make their voice heard in this election, except for one thing: Ann Nixon Cooper is 106 years old.

She was born just a generation past slavery; a time when there were no cars on the road or planes in the sky; when someone like her couldn't vote for two reasons — because she was a woman and because of the color of her skin.

And tonight, I think about all that she's seen throughout her century in America — the heartache and the hope; the struggle and the progress; the times we were told that we can't and the people who pressed on with that American creed: Yes, we can.

At a time when women's voices were silenced and their hopes dismissed, she lived to see them stand up and speak out and reach for the ballot. Yes, we can.

When there was despair in the Dust Bowl and depression across the land, she saw a nation conquer fear itself with a New Deal, new jobs and a new sense of common purpose. Yes, we can.

When the bombs fell on our harbor and tyranny threatened the world, she was there to witness a generation rise to greatness and a democracy was saved. Yes, we can.

She was there for the buses in Montgomery, the hoses in Birmingham, a bridge in Selma and a preacher from Atlanta who told a people that 'We Shall Overcome.' Yes, we can.

A man touched down on the moon, a wall came down in Berlin, a world was connected by our own science and imagination. And this year, in this election, she touched her finger to a screen and cast her vote, because after 106 years in America, through the best of times and the darkest of hours, she knows how America can change. Yes, we can.

America, we have come so far. We have seen so much. But there is so much more to do. So tonight, let us ask ourselves: If our children should live to see the next century; if my daughters should be so lucky to live as long as Ann Nixon Cooper, what change will they see? What progress will we have made?

This is our chance to answer that call. This is our moment. This is our time — to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids; to restore prosperity and promote the cause of peace; to reclaim the American Dream and reaffirm that fundamental truth that out of many, we are one; that while we breathe, we hope, and where we are met with cynicism, and doubt, and those who tell us that we can't, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes, we can.

As Crystal describes it,⁶² it is in response to the third uttering of 'Yes, we can' that the audience response becomes audible. From that moment, audience members join in the putative 'sense of common purpose' that Obama enjoys, and then all the remaining 'Yes we can' exclamations are echoed by the audience as well.

Importantly, 'Yes, we can' are words this audience – the audience in the room and the greater media audience to the speech – had heard before. After Obama had run second in the Democratic Party's New Hampshire primary behind Hilary Clinton, which caused many to believe she would surge to victory in the party's nomination contest, he made these three words his rallying cry in adversity. Admittedly, Obama uttered them with slightly different cadence then, a difference marked by the absence or presence of the comma after 'Yes.'⁶³ New Hampshire was a call to trust him, to continue to 'hope' for his success — there is none of *Beowulf's* fatalism here:⁶⁴

We've been asked to pause for a reality check. We've been warned against offering the people of this nation false hope.

But in the unlikely story that is America, there has never been anything false about hope. For when we have faced down impossible odds; when we've been told that we're not ready, or that we shouldn't try, or that we can't, generations of Americans have responded with a simple creed that sums up the spirit of a people.

Yes we can.

It was a creed written into the founding documents that declared the destiny of a nation.

Yes we can.

It was whispered by slaves and abolitionists as they blazed a trail toward freedom through the darkest of nights.

Yes we can.

It was sung by immigrants as they struck out from distant shores and pioneers who

pushed westward against an unforgiving wilderness.

Yes we can.

It was the call of workers who organized; women who reached for the ballot; a President who chose the moon as our new frontier; and a King who took us to the mountaintop and pointed the way to the Promised Land.

Yes we can to justice and equality. Yes we can to opportunity and prosperity. Yes we can heal this nation. Yes we can repair this world. Yes we can.

And so tomorrow, as we take this campaign South and West; as we learn that the struggles of the textile worker in Spartanburg are not so different than [*sic*] the plight of the dishwasher in Las Vegas; that the hopes of the little girl who goes to a crumbling school in Dillon are the same as the dreams of the boy who learns on the streets of LA; we will remember that there is something happening in America; that we are not as divided as our politics suggests; that we are one people; we are one nation; and together, we will begin the next great chapter in America's story with three words that will ring from coast to coast; from sea to shining sea – Yes. We. Can.

In early 2008, this call to faith was remarkable on several levels, not least the amount of public attention it received. It was replayed and quoted extremely widely. What is more, it was reused and appropriated by myriad others. Subsequently the fame of the formula itself became a campaign organising principle. Musicians and video artists 'smashed' footage of Obama's Nashua concession speech into their own creative work to reproduce it as a campaign slogan, an in-the-darkest-days-we-saw-the-coming-glory anthem, using YouTube and other online media to maximise the exposure for their work and his words.⁶⁵

It is a line they had heard others speak before Obama, too. The children's animé series *Bob the Builder* springs to mind, but it is a bit misleading to pick out any one. The point is, this is a ubiquitous phrase, a tried-and-tested phrase, a cliché. To be maximally inclusive and minimally offensive is a virtue in political rhetoric. This phrase achieves those strategic objectives very convincingly. For all the lack of offense, though, its poetics are remarkably dynamic. As a clause, it has the two stresses of a normal Germanic half-line or verse: '*Yés we cán.*' Printed (and performed) with three full stops, as in that last line of the Nashua concession speech, it becomes hypermetric, a stress trimeter that stands out from the regular run of pairs: '*Yés. Wé. Cán.*' This is a trick occasionally used for dramatic effect in Old English poetry. For example, the Old English verse rendering of *Exodus* depicts the destruction of the Egyptian armies thus: '*flód blód gewód*' ('the blood pervaded the flood' — l. 463b). Lucas renders this as the first verse of a new sentence, opening a new theme with resonance,⁶⁶ but I am more convinced by those conventional editions which have it at the end of a sentence:⁶⁷ the verse triad that caps off an enjambment- sequence of pairs. That happens to be exactly how Obama has used it in Nashua. It is how Wiglaf has used it after the death of Beowulf (l. 2883b, quoted above). In any case, alpha or omega, the trimeter highlights a rhetorical *coup*

de grace.⁶⁸

These elements of versification remind us of other ways in which Obama's 2008 election victory speech echoes phrasing that people have heard before. I mentioned its intentional inhabitation of the gospel church oratorical tradition above. That is itself a style of echoes and reprises.⁶⁹ Obama cites Martin Luther King Jr ('a preacher from Atlanta who told people that "We shall overcome"') as a source of the tradition, but he also cites the sources cited in King's most famous speech, 'I Have a Dream'⁷⁰ – the end of slavery, the experience of segregation, and the seminal role of that Republican White Male President, Abraham Lincoln. Obama conspicuously reprises King's mythical universe, just as he purposively echoes King's rhetorical flourishes.⁷¹

What is more, Obama's Nashua speech clearly avows a desire to fulfil that Mosaic destiny which King appointed to himself in his final speech at Memphis⁷² ('a King who took us to the mountaintop and pointed the way to the Promised Land'). And so he echoes Beowulf also: Obama, the hero of his own epic, epiphany of racial equality, overthrower of Halliburton's profiteers and warmongers, liberator of Guantánamo, cooler of climates and rebuker of rising tides, comfort to the jobless and protector of the homeless, scourge of oligopoly wealth and privilege,⁷³ is a *Scylding of the Americans*. His name itself scans, rhythmically and alliteratively, as a metrical epithet,⁷⁴ an a-verse pointer to the hero his success and dedication might equal:

* Barack Obama Beowulfes mæg.

(*Barack Obama, Beowulf's kinsman.*)

But Moses to Scyld to King to Beowulf to Obama is clearly not the most obvious line of poetic resonance. A much more overt echo dynamic is the call-and-response relationship that Obama and his audience generate, itself profoundly resonant with vernacular rhetorical and performative traditions. The decision to join in an occasion of call-and-response is a salient example of symbolic action. The striking intensity of the chorus response bears out Berlant's contention that 'publics presume intimacy,'⁷⁵ although in this case we need to see that the text Warner posits as the identifying characteristic of a given public is substituted by a living utterance. Indeed, it is arguable that the *text* of a political public is its politician, the utterer.⁷⁶ In amplifying the utterance, each extra voice demonstrates an affiliation to the orator and to her or his agenda. That is an affiliation to a political agenda, so of course it entails some measure of policy support, but it is more immediately an affiliation to an aesthetic: to a form that can be memorised and repeated, and which the audience is willing to memorise and repeat.⁷⁷

Assuming that Obama seeks intentionally to achieve this sort of result, one might surmise that his praxis of political communication is exceptionally aesthetic in orientation. This would be to confuse structure and competence, however. What is exceptional about Obama is the range and complexity of forms that he is confident to utilise in his rhetoric, but all professional public communicators answer to poetic standards — whether confidently or otherwise.⁷⁸

Additionally, we have the apparent problem of such unexceptional content. Or perhaps that should read ‘unexceptionable.’ There is an aesthetics of topical content as well as of phrasing style. According to topical criteria, Obama campaigned as a cautious social democrat, that is to say an agent for conservative aesthetics. This is a point of solidity, of credibility, amid his revolution of brilliant technique. Within the parameters of Obama’s principal election campaign slogan, ‘Change we can believe in,’ his topic selection represented – constituted – the *believability* that partnered the *change* his phrasing style offered: a new and consummate performance of all those topics we always knew mattered. In other words, ‘*chánge* we can *believe* in’ represented a finely honed praxis. It was an innovative recruitment of formulas from numerous poetic traditions to advance a policy agenda whose main aspiration was credibility.

The correlation of rhetorical agendas with policy agendas can be only partial. The relationship between them is inherently arbitrary, being to some extent a relationship between signifiers and signifieds. Nevertheless, the one does clearly cast some light on the other, and vice versa. Obama’s topical conservatism, taken in the context of his stylistic innovativeness, reflects a willing containment of policy reform. While his reformist aspirations are substantial, they are not boundless. The reform agenda is what he proposes, not more than that. In other words, Obama deploys an affectation of topical conservatism to communicate that he intends to ‘change’ few aspects of the political field other than those he has criticised directly.

It is here, in the relationship between stylistics and semantics, that the conservative-skeptical ethos raises its head most clearly. By contrast with medieval English literatures, the contemporary American polity renders any alternatives to a discourse of optimism – of ‘hope’ – particularly illegitimate. Obama’s *The Audacity of Hope* pays its respects to this topical stricture,⁷⁹ just as his corpus of political speeches does,⁸⁰ just as other successful candidates before him have.⁸¹ In other words, references to hope are reminders of the banished alternative. The American polity is conservative in its refusal to discuss proscribed topics (what polity is not?) and skeptical in the moment that it pleads the permitted. By dint of genre, *Beowulf* is allowed a cynical take on the destiny of world events that an American political leader cannot afford to indulge, but the underlying desperation is identical.

Obama’s victory represents a successful reframing of political-communicative aesthetics. Of course, that comes in the context of a broader reframing of political campaigns, a radical massification of campaign fund-raising, and an astonishingly disciplined approach to campaign business. It also comes in the context of widespread fear about the earth’s changing climate, a looming economic recession, and worldwide blowback from years of military adventurism – these may stand as Obama’s monsters, if you will – as well as his own determination to reform healthcare and the latent situational challenge of a severe downturn in the credibility of many of America’s institutions of power. These and other contexts are critical to the story here, of course. (It is not at all given that the same candidate with the same campaign style would have won under different circumstances.) But they are not the focus of this paper. This paper is interested in the communicative repertoire by which Obama and his campaign team encountered those contexts, and thrived in them.

The once and future poet

Whereas *Beowulf* begins with a historical frame on the coming narrative, Obama's victory speech ends by framing an understanding of the future through the eyes of a figure of 'living history,' the 106 year-old Atlanta voter, Ann Nixon Cooper. Such meldings of past and future are a classic framing technique for epic narrative, because they neatly establish the historical and/or legendary significance of the events narrated. For *Beowulf* the frame reiterates the (putative) might of the Danes 'in days of yore,' in whose realm the main narrative of the poem takes place. For Obama, it casts into relief the epoch-defining nature of the moment of his victory — an epochal quality that McCain also acknowledged, with grace and fine wordsmithing, in his concession speech:⁸²

This is an historic election, and I recognize the special significance it has for African-Americans and for the special pride that must be theirs tonight.

I've always believed that America offers opportunities to all who have the industry and will to seize it. Senator Obama believes that, too. But we both recognize that though we have come a long way from the old injustices that once stained our nation's reputation and denied some Americans the full blessings of American citizenship, the memory of them still had the power to wound.

A century ago, President Theodore Roosevelt's invitation of Booker T. Washington to visit — to dine at the White House was taken as an outrage in many quarters. America today is a world away from the cruel and prideful bigotry of that time. There is no better evidence of this than the election of an African American to the presidency of the United States.

In *Beowulf*, the past and the future are constantly alive in the main narrative, through its highly digressive style. Events are constantly compared to previous comparable events in legendary history, as well as to future events. History has its destiny; the future has its origins. They are also alive in the poetic genre to which *Beowulf* belongs — or, rather, the tradition to which it is affiliated. The verse style, the thematic concerns, the phrasing: these all reference poems past, as well as presaging poems to come. If you will forgive yet another cliché, there is a synergy between the past-and-futurity of *Beowulf*'s narrative and the past-and-futurity of its generic tradition.

This melding of memory and prolepsis is not simply epic in nature; according to Abraham,⁸³ it is a fundamental property of verse prosody. Abraham contends that poetic rhythm establishes language's meeting-point between a retained (remembered) past and a 'pretained' (anticipated) future. Within the versified moment of a poem, its patterned regularity and its creative potential, we are simultaneously aware of both dimensions. In simultaneously engaging hindsight and foresight, according to this view, *Beowulf* is making explicit the poetic fundamentals that carry its narrative. That narrative is framed in historic terms — both history of the retained past and history of the pretained future — because the grand narrative mode of history suits the legendary scale of epic. Aristotle argued that history looks backward, while poetry looks

forward.⁸⁴ This theory has it that both do both.

In Ian McEwan's novel *Saturday*, a verse-deaf London neurosurgeon called Henry Perowne comes to understand that 'Everything belongs in the present.'⁸⁵ His mother's dementia shows him how the present is the only moment in which past and future can exist for us. The ideologically expansive potential of this understanding becomes strikingly clear in moments where people communicate using aesthetically patterned sound symbols — these patterns are the prosody. Although Perowne can only comprehend prosody's power as a musical phenomenon, his elderly father-in-law, his pregnant daughter, and the home invader who intends to inflict suffering on them all understand that poetry can achieve it as well. That power of verse operates on a level which is not cleanly distinguishable from music.

As it goes with *Beowulf*, the same, surely, holds for Obama. A news article about his relationship to the rhetorical tradition of previous USA presidents quotes his account of the 'moment' of a president's speech:⁸⁶

'When you have a successful presidential speech of any sort, it's because that president is able to put their finger on the moment we're in,' Mr Obama said.

It is a strikingly apposite view. Obama's express, conscious, explicitly conceived purpose as a presidential orator is to bring his audience within the performative moment. That is to say, to bring their experiences into the ambit of verse, to induct his public into a poetics of leadership. The prosody, thematic range, and generic tradition that he employs are all instruments to that end. When those three aspects enable us to experience the dialectic between memory and foresight – the poetic moment – then, in Obama's terms, it is a 'successful presidential speech.'

Applying the concept to our main example of such a speech, that uncanny character in Obama's African American epic, Ann Nixon Cooper, stands for more than a testimonial witness. She is like that seeress-narrator in the Old Norse 'eddic' poem of the creation, *Völuspá*.⁸⁷ That is, Cooper recounts a foundational history of her world and, by a kind of rhetorical proxy through Obama's daughters, she anticipates a historical perspective on that world's pretained future. Thus Obama's listeners tap into a memory of the future, anticipated in the past, which is delivered in the poetic moment of his speech. All that sense of momentum, of potential, of panoramic or epic overview that empowers Obama's language, and which enthral his supporters — it is a demonstrably poetic complex of effects. This paper begins with the notion that they are purposive, strategic, intentional affects.

Notes

¹ Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives and a Rhetoric of Motives*, Meridian Books, Cleveland, 1962, p. 27.

² For a working definition of ‘public’ in this sense I am heavily reliant on the criteria set out in Warner’s signature essay, ‘Publics and Counterpublics’ (notwithstanding some caveats discussed in section 3). See Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, Zone Books, New York, 2002, pp. 65-124.

³ This paper is based on a seminar I presented to the School of Communication and the Arts at Victoria University (Melbourne). In developing it, I have also been grateful to receive advice from Alex Jones, Alison Clark, and Daniel Drache.

⁴ Terry Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem*, Blackwell, Maldon (Mass.) Melbourne Oxford, 2007, p. 32.

⁵ Cf. Umberto Eco, *Apocalypse Postponed*, ed. Robert Lumley, Flamingo, London, 1995, pp. 119-146; Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, Routledge, London and New York, 1982, especially Chapter 3 ‘Some psycho-dynamics of orality;’ Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, Cambridge University Press, Bath (UK), 1977 — but note Warner’s criticisms of ‘Whig-McLuhanite’ techno-determinist approaches to media and culture in his *The Letters of the Republic: publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) and London, 1990, especially pp. 5-6.

⁶ Rather than consign to footnote an entire essay of material, one need look no further than the annual ‘New Publications’ and ‘Research In Progress’ listings published regularly in the *Old English Newsletter* journal to see how much this one poem attracts the attentions of those who study the language and literature of Anglo-Saxon England and related fields.

⁷ This is notwithstanding David Crystal’s online caveat on the “greatness” of Obama’s speech: *DC Blog* 9 November 2008, <http://david-crystal.blogspot.com/2008/11/on-obamas-victory-style.html> (accessed 18/3/2009). The more revealing point is that a welter of debate around the merits of a given text can bestow seminal status upon it.

⁸ Compare the case of Australia’s current prime minister, Kevin Rudd. At the official launch of his successful 2007 election campaign, Rudd declared, ‘I’m from Queensland and I’m here to help.’ AAP, ‘I’m Kevin. I’m here to help.’ in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 April 2007, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/im-kevin-im-here-to-help/2007/04/27/1177459928740.html?page=fullpage> (accessed 18/3/2009).

⁹ Although close readings of the poem’s irony may go some way to complicate that relationship — see section 2 of this paper.

¹⁰ R. E. Kaske asserts this duality as a defining paradigm for heroic poetry in his ‘*Sapientia et fortitudo* as the controlling theme of *Beowulf*,’ *Studies in Philology* LV (July 1958), 423-457.

¹¹ JRR Tolkien, ‘*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics,’ *Proceedings of the British Academy*, XXII (1936), 245-295. Reprinted in Lewis E. Nicholson (ed.), *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism*, University of Notre

Dame Press, Notre Dame and London, 1976, pp. 51-103.

¹² As argued by Kevin Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1999; cf. Mark C. Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition: Oral Poetics and Literate Culture in Medieval England*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 2004.

¹³ These aspects are examined in section 3.

¹⁴ The manuscript is catalogued in the British Museum, London, as Cotton MSS, Vitellius A. XV, 129a-198b. There is a translated and annotated facsimile version of the manuscript: Julius Zupitza (ed.), *Beowulf. Autotypes of the unique Cotton MS. Vitellius A xv in the British Museum, with a Transliteration and Notes*, Early English Text Society, No 77, London, 1882. Kevin Kiernan has also edited a CD-ROM (HTML) facsimile of the manuscript: Kevin Kiernan (ed.) *Electronic Beowulf*, The British Library, London, 2004.

¹⁵ VN Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Trans. L Matejka and I Titunik, (London: Seminar Press, 1986), p. 117. Note the widespread belief that *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* was actually written by Mikhail Bakhtin — eg. Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge and London: Belknap, 1984). This is not a question we need to resolve here.

¹⁶ Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*, Three Rivers Press, New York, 1995.

¹⁷ Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope*, Three Rivers Press, New York, 2006.

¹⁸ Barack Obama, '2004 Democratic National Convention Keynote Address,' *American Rhetoric* website, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/convention2004/barackobama2004dnc.htm> (accessed 18/3/2009).

¹⁹ Fox Butterfield, 'First Black Elected to Head Harvard's Law Review,' *New York Times*, 6/2/1990, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C0CE2DC1631F935A35751C0A966958260&n=Top%-2FReference%2FTimes%20Topics%2FPeople%2FO%2FObama%2C%20Barack> (accessed 18/3/2009).

²⁰ Tom Clark, 'Towards a formulaic poetics of contemporary public language: the poetic formula in focus.' *AUMLA* 111 (May 2009), 103-129; _____, 'Towards a Formulaic Poetics of Contemporary Public Rhetoric: A Politician's Prosody.' *International Journal of the Humanities* 6 (2008), No 6, 37-42; _____, 'The Cup of John Howard's Poetry,' *Overland* 190 (2008), 22-28; _____, 'Towards a Poetics of Contemporary Public Rhetoric: Reporting Platitude and Cliché,' *AUMLA* Special Issue (December 2007), <http://www.aulla.com.au/Proceedings%202007.html> (accessed 21/3/2009), 199-207; _____, 'Towards a formulaic poetics of contemporary public rhetoric: the interpretative processing of platitude and cliché,' *International Journal for the Humanities* 5 (2007), No 7, 205-214; _____, 'Towards a Poetics of Contemporary Public Rhetoric: The

Performer's Need for Platitude and Cliché,' *International Journal of the Humanities* 4 (2006), No 2, 15-22.

²¹ In that respect, the theory is strongly influenced by the theoretical tradition of Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The collected papers of Milman Parry*, ed. Adam Parry, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971, and numerous successors. This paper is particularly influenced by the works of John Miles Foley, *Traditional Oral Epic: The Odyssey, Beowulf, and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song*, University of California Press, Berkeley Los Angeles and London, 1990, and more recently of Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition*, who have given close attention to the poetics of *Beowulf* and other Old English poems. A case not yet made, but which I believe the research would support, is that the orality-derived styling of much modern-day written public language bears comparable relation to the orality-derived styling of much pre-modern literary verse (such as *Beowulf*).

²² This is to adopt the distinction made famous by Jean Piaget, *The Language and Thought of the Child*, trans. Marjorie and Ruth Gabain (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), p. 134.

²³ Speechwriters and political advisers from numerous countries and from across the spectrum of partisan ideology make this point clearly and repeatedly. See, eg., Dick Wirthlin with Wynton C. Hall, *The Greatest Communicator: What Reagan Taught Me about Politics, Leadership, and Life*, John Wiley, Hoboken (N.J.), 2004; Graham Freudenberg, *A Figure of Speech: A political memoir*, John Wiley, Milton (Qld.), 2005; Mary Matalin, James Carville, and Peter Knobler, *All's Fair — Love, War, and Running for President*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1994.

²⁴ This scholarship is of variable quality, ranging from quite precise technical description to New Age mush. Its characteristic assumptions about leaderly oratory urgently need deconstructing. Jan Shaw has surveyed the Leadership Studies field in an unpublished paper presented to the 2009 Conference of the Australasian Universities Languages and Literature Association (at the University of Sydney, Australia).

²⁵ Eg. Anne Surma, *Public and Professional Writing: Ethics, Imagination, and Rhetoric*, Palgrave, Basingstoke and New York, 2005.

²⁶ To the consternation of some, the 'industry standard' edition of this poem remains Fr. Klaeber (ed.), *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd. ed., D.C. Heath, Lexington (Mass.), 1950. I use Klaeber's text in this paper, with the exception that the only syntactic punctuations I retain are full stops and question marks (*ie.* to indicate sentence ends) and capitalisation (*ie.* to indicate sentence starts and proper names).

²⁷ A case made cogently by Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*.

²⁸ This is a rather crude simplification of the argument made by Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition*.

²⁹ Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*.

- ³⁰ A concept emphasised by Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Duckworth, London, 1985.
- ³¹ See especially James W. Earl, *Thinking about Beowulf*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1994.
- ³² The Old English letters þ and ð (upper case Þ and Ð) are equivalent to the New English ‘th.’ Old English *sc* is equivalent to New English ‘sh.’ Old English æ (upper case Æ) is usually pronounced as North Americans (and Australians) would pronounce the ‘a’ in ‘glad.’
- ³³ This is the object of a magisterial study in Old English poetics: Fred Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*, University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1985.
- ³⁴ This was famously the object of a complaint by Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, p. lvii, but numerous scholars have seen past his ‘lack of steady advance’ lament. See especially John A. Nist, *The Structure and Texture of Beowulf*, University of Sao Paulo Faculty of Philosophy Sciences and Letters, Sao Paulo, 1959.
- ³⁵ Gillian R. Overing, *Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1990.
- ³⁶ Raymond P. Tripp Jr., ‘Digressive Revaluation(s),’ in Harold Bloom (ed.) *Modern Critical Interpretations – Beowulf*, Chelsea House, New York New Haven Philadelphia, 1987, pp. 63-79.
- ³⁷ Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.
- ³⁸ Elisabeth Liggins, ‘Irony and Understatement in *Beowulf*,’ *Parergon* 29 (1981), 3-7.
- ³⁹ Tom Clark, *A Case for Irony in Beowulf, with particular reference to its epithets*, Verlag Peter Lang, Bern, 2003.
- ⁴⁰ This reading is conventionally attributed to Dorothy Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1951. Whitelock and her successors argue that *Beowulf* must have been written before the sack of the monastery island of Lindisfarne (793 AD), because its sympathies towards the Danes would have been unacceptable in England after that date; also Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*, who argues that it was composed and written in a Danelaw court in 10th Century England.
- ⁴¹ That is notwithstanding the caveat, after Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition*, among others, that *Beowulf* is a highly literate work, which to some extent adopts an affect of traditional orality and oral traditionality – a ‘formulaic aesthetic’ – in order to blur distinctions between it and that tradition.

⁴² A significant portion of this research in the 1990s and subsequently has appeared in the journal *Discourse and Society*, much of it written by discursive psychologists. A recent example, which provides useful references for the literature of the field, is Mark Summers, 'Rhetorically self-sufficient arguments in Western Australian parliamentary debates on Lesbian and Gay Law Reform,' *British Journal of Social Psychology* 46 (2007), 839-858 — especially 841-842.

⁴³ Cf. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*.

⁴⁴ Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, 2nd ed., University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1985.

⁴⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

⁴⁶ *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*.

⁴⁷ For a detailed technical discussion of the relationship between poetic formula and meter in *Beowulf*, see Foley, *The Making of Homeric Verse*.

⁴⁸ An a-verse typically contains two metrical alliterations, whereas a b-verse must contain only one.

⁴⁹ Ewan MacAskill, 'Obama moves quickly to put words into deeds,' *The Guardian Weekly*, 30/1/2009, p. 1. Other characteristic formulas involve a similar dichotomy: the distinction between 'talking the talk' and 'walking the walk;' the distinction between a 'speaker' and a 'decider;' and the distinction between a 'candidate' and (various phrases for) an elected official.

⁵⁰ National Public Radio, 'Transcript of Barack Obama's Victory Speech,' viewed 8/2/2009: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=96624326>.

⁵¹ *Op. cit.*

⁵² For example Obama's much-scrutinised 'Speech on Race' — in distancing himself from the racially bellicose remarks of his pastor, Jeremiah Wright, as published online by *CBS News*: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/03/18/politics/main3947908.shtml> (accessed 18/3/2009).

⁵³ For an example from linguistics, see David Crystal, *DC Blog*; an example from Leadership Studies is Shel Leanne, *Say It like Obama: The Power of Speaking with Purpose and Vision*, McGraw Hill, New York, 2009.

⁵⁴ See the 'Political Theater' blog by Shannon Steen, from the University of California (Berkeley), <http://www.politictheater.blogspot.com/> (accessed 18/3/2009).

⁵⁵ Eg. Katherine Hepworth, 'Yes we can: Barack Obama, graphic design and liberal democratic process,' *Re-public – re-imagining democracy* website, <http://www.re-public.gr/en/?p=352> (accessed 18/3/2009).

⁵⁶ Wil Horton and anonymous, 'An Examination of Obama's Use of Hidden Hypnosis Techniques in His Speeches,' published widely online, including the following Scribd resource: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/10494346/Obamas-Use-of-Hidden-Hypnosis-Techniques-in-His-Speeches> (accessed 18/3/2009).

⁵⁷ National Public Radio, 'Transcript of John McCain's Concession Speech,' 5/11/2008: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=96631784> (accessed 18/3/2009).

⁵⁸ Compare the national apology debates in the Australian and Canadian federal parliaments in 2008: Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates, *House of Representatives Hansard*, No.1 (2008), 42nd Parliament, <http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/reps/dailys/dr120208.pdf> (accessed 18/3/2009), pp. 26-33; Canada House of Commons Debates, *Official Hansard Report*, Vol.142 No.110 2nd Session (11/6/2008), <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=3568890&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=39&Ses=2> (accessed 18/3/2009).

⁵⁹ *DC Blog* 9 November 2008.

⁶⁰ See, eg, Michael Eric Dyson, 'A president-preacher from anaphora to epistrophe,' *Sydney Morning Herald* 19/1/2009, p. 11, who compares the rhetoric of Obama to pastors Frederick Sampson, Jeremiah Wright, and Martin Luther King Jr, as well as to the Muslim leader Malcolm X.

⁶¹ Eg. Stanley Crouch and Reverend Jeremiah Wright Jr, 'Premature Autopsies,' in Wynton Marsalis, *The Majesty of the Blues*, CBS Records, New York 1999, where the syntax and the phrasing of the anecdotes about Ellington's travail are very similar to the stylistics of Obama's descriptions of voter hardship. Note that the same Reverend Jeremiah Wright Jr, also mentioned in the previous footnote, is the principal object of disavowal in Obama's 'Speech on Race,' *op. cit.*

⁶² *DC Blog* 9 November 2008.

⁶³ Note that this comma was present in an online video 'smash' of Obama's Nashua speech (see below), which erroneously included the comma in the transcription. It seems the Obama campaign team then incorporated this punctuation into its own typography before the Victory Speech. See will.i.am, 'WeCan08,' on *YouTube*, posted 2/2/2008: <http://au.youtube.com/watch?v=jjXyqcx-mYY> (accessed 18/3/2009)

⁶⁴ 'Remarks of Senator Barack Obama after the New Hampshire Primary,' 8/1/2008, Nashua, as posted by the *Northwest Progressive Institute Official Blog*: <http://www.nwprogressive.org/weblog/2008/01/barack-obamas-speech-in-new-hampshire.html> (accessed 18/3/2009).

⁶⁵ As we see with will.i.am, 'WeCan08.'

⁶⁶ Peter J. Lucas (ed.), *Exodus*, Methuen's Old English Library, London, 1977, p. 133.

⁶⁷ Eg. George Philip Krapp, *The Junius Manuscript*, Vol. I of Krapp and Dobbie (eds.) *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1931, p. 104.

⁶⁸ Occasionally, Obama couples his trimeters to especially memorable effect. Eg. his 'Speech on Race,' *op. cit.*, in which he reminds the audience that he was born to 'a **bláck fáther** from **Kén**ya // and a **whíte móther** from **Kánsas**.'

⁶⁹ Cf. Charlotte Higgins, 'Foreword,' in Henry Russell (ed.), *The Politics of Hope: the Words of Barack Obama*, New Holland Australia, Sydney, 2009, p. 11.

⁷⁰ Martin Luther King Jr., 'I Have a Dream,' 1963, *American Rhetoric* website, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm> (accessed 18/3/2009).

⁷¹ An illustrative example of how far this extends into popular representation comes from the Obama merchandising phenomenon: my father in law, Barry Batagol, gave me a quartz-powered wristwatch that commemorates Obama's inauguration as President of the USA. With an angle-of-perspective rather reminiscent of the presidential busts at Mt Rushmore, it features a colour photograph of Obama's face in the foreground, while a black-and-white photograph of King's face hovers just behind Obama's left shoulder.

⁷² Martin Luther King Jr., 'I've Been to the Mountaintop,' 1967, *American Rhetoric* website, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkivebeentothemountaintop.htm> (accessed 18/3/2009).

⁷³ If this list of epithets seems arbitrarily histrionic, witness this comparison between Obama and King Canute in the speech Sarah Palin gave to the 2008 Republican Party National Convention, accepting its nomination for the position of vice-president of the USA: 'What does he actually seek to accomplish after he's done turning back the waters and healing the planet?' Sarah Palin, 'Speech to Republican Party National Convention' 3/9/2008, *Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/09/03/sarah-palin-rnc-convention_n_123703.html (accessed 13/12/2009). I am grateful to Kayla Ramlochand for bringing this quote to my attention.

⁷⁴ As if anticipating this point, Burke argues that 'An epithet assigns substance doubly, for in stating the character of the object it at the same time contains an implicit program of action with regard to the object, thus serving as a motive.' *A Grammar of Motives and A Rhetoric of Motives*, p. 57.

⁷⁵ Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2008, p. vii and *passim*. Berlant's account advances upon and modifies Warner's definition of publics as self-organising relations between strangers, the view set out in his essay on 'Publics and Counterpublics,' *op. cit.* (She explicitly discusses Warner's notion of the 'counterpublic' on pp. 7-8, setting it in the context of Nancy Fraser's work.)

⁷⁶ This point is essentially to reiterate a seminal nostrum from the Leadership Studies literature: namely, the eponymous advice in Roger Ailes and Jon Kraushar, *You Are the Message*, Doubleday, New York, 1988.

⁷⁷ Conversation analysis records a similar phenomenon in focus groups that discuss questions of political affiliation and ideology (as many do). See for example the discussion of ‘discursive repertoires’ in focus group responses to progressive racial policies: Martha Augoustinos, Keith Tuffin, and Danielle Every, ‘New racism, meritocracy and individualism: constraining affirmative action in education,’ *Discourse and Society* Vol 16 No 3 (2005), 315-340.

⁷⁸ Witness Hart Seely, *Pieces of Intelligence: The Existential Poetry of Donald H. Rumsfeld*, Free Press, New York, 2003.

⁷⁹ Obama, *The Audacity of Hope*.

⁸⁰ Cf. Russell, *The Politics of Hope*.

⁸¹ Wirthlin and Hall, *The Greatest Communicator*, pp. 35-81.

⁸² *Op. cit.*

⁸³ Nicolas Abraham, *Rhythms – On the Work, Translation, and Psychoanalysis*, trans. Benjamin Thigpen and Nicholas T. Rand, Stanford University Press, Stanford (California), 1995.

⁸⁴ S.H. Butcher (ed. and trans.), *Aristotle’s Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, Dover, New York 1951, p. 35, §IX. Aristotle

⁸⁵ Ian McEwan, *Saturday*, Vintage, London, 2006, p. 164.

⁸⁶ Anne Davies, ‘Obama brings a new dawn, with a dash of presidents past,’ *The Age* (Melbourne), 17/1/2009, p. 15.

⁸⁷ Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, Heidelberg, 1983, pp. 1- 16.

Disrupting Strength, Power and Perfect Bodies: Disability as Narrative Prosthesis in 1990s Australian National Cinema.

By Katie Ellis

The essential Australian is male, working-class, sardonic, laconic, loyal to his mates, unimpressed by rank, an improviser, non-conformist, and so on. These virtues are defined and redefined under the harsh conditions of the bush, workplace, war or sport, in which women, and the feminine qualities, are considered to be beside the point

--Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka describing the "male ensemble" (1988, p. 62)

Australian Cinema is often accused of favoring masculinity as a national identity in popular films at the expense of women's stories. However, this masculine national identity was rewritten throughout the 1990s as films favoured more diversity in their characterisations. When masculine identities were foregrounded they explored the process of becoming a man and problematised the hegemonic masculinity of previous decades, such as the male ensemble hero described above by Dermody and Jacka. Often, disability was utilised within these narratives to confront the cultural and political dimensions of masculinity as a national identity. For example, the image of disability in *Shine*, *Angel Baby*, *Hammers over the Anvil*, *Metal Skin*, *Proof*, *Bootmen*, and *The Sum of Us* prevents male characters from achieving the cultural definition of masculinity established throughout 1970s and 1980s Australian national cinema.

Disability is central to the narratives of these films performing the function of what Mitchell and Snyder (2001, p. 49) describe as a narrative prosthesis. Although women with disability were more frequently seen during this period (Ferrier 2001, p. 65, Ellis 2008, p. 39), a cycle of films self consciously explored the process of becoming a man in Australian society through male characters with a disability. Throughout this paper I draw on Butterss' (2001, p. 79) observation that rather than (re)present Australian masculinity in

the straightforward and exclusionary manner of previous decades, films of the 1990s consciously explore and reject masculinities previously established in Australian national cinema using the image of disability. Throughout this paper I will consider three films in detail – *The Sum of Us*, *Hammers over the Anvil*, and *Proof*, referring to others where necessary, to explore the tension between changing ideas of masculinity in Australian cinema and society and the marginalisation of disability.

Becoming a man – new heroes of Australian Cinema

The masculine Australian national identity is well established and most evident in films produced in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, *Sunday Too Far Away*, *Breaker Morant*, *Gallipoli*, the *Mad Max* films and the *Crocodile Dundee* films. Often these films contain strong political content emphasising an opposition to the British establishment, at other times they simply attempt to present a recognisable image of Australia. Debi Enker (1994, p.218) describes the male ensemble cycle of Australian cinema:

The heroes of Australian cinema are cast from a mould [...] physically strong, rugged, with chiselled features that suggest experience of the world and a manner that warns 'Don't mess with me'

These portraits of Australian males correspond to local and international expectations and reinforce myths (Rayner 2000, p. 95). Due to this reiteration of stereotypes and the exclusion of any alternative, the Australian male portrayed in the male ensemble cycle became the national identity in the lead up to the 1990s. While these cultural representations are recognised as disempowering women by excluding them from Australian national identity (Dermody & Jacka 1988, p. 62, O'Regan 1996, p. 302, Ellis 2008, p. 42) very few men are actually representative of the typical characterisation of the masculine Australian identity (McCauley 1998, p. 209).

A number of Australian films during the 1990s explored an alternative masculinity for Australian men. This narrative trope arose from an era where cultural understandings of masculinity and the male identity were increasingly questioned and redefined (Petersen 1998, p. 19). During the 1990s Australian national cinema took the opportunity to recast the masculine script through recognition that “old unitary notions of masculinity [were] no longer sustainable in a multicultural society” (Butterss 2001, p. 92).

Following calls for greater diversity, Australia's cinematic output began incorporating films that included images of and stories about women, Aboriginal and islander people, multicultural groups and gay men and lesbians during the 1990s. These minority movements critiqued previous masculinist representations to present an image of Australia where different socio-cultural identities complimented each other. The films under discussion in this paper can likewise be placed within this turning point particularly as they reject the male ensemble identity. However, while hegemonic masculinity is being rejected, the male characters still strive to achieve notions of heterosexual masculinity. Narratives centre on the man's role

in the nuclear family, his position as breadwinner, his athleticism and finally ability to protect women. Disability operates within these narratives to problematise male character's ability to achieve masculinity.

As the 1990s can be seen to be a uniquely international period of Australian filmmaking (Duncan et al 2005, p. 153) this tendency can be placed within the context of an international shift in the cinematic construction of masculinity. While the masculine body of the 1980s focused on external qualities of strength and physical power, 1990s cinema turned to emphasise internal qualities that dealt with ethical dilemmas and emotional trauma (Jeffords 2001, p. 344). Phillip Butterss poses a similar argument with respect to the characterisation of masculinity in Australian cinema as it moved into the 1990s. These films explored the process of *becoming* a man rather than projecting an image of *experience* with the world. Drawing on films such as *The Big Steal*, *Death in Brunswick*, *Strictly Ballroom* and *The Heartbreak Kid* Butterss (2001, p. 233) argues that the 1990s saw more variety in the way Australia represented masculinity cinematically. Several Australian films, released during the 1990s interrogated Australian masculinity in the manner identified by Butterss (2001) in male characters with disability. Often disability has worked with other aspects of visual style to symbolise an aspect of character, theme or action.

Disability as Narrative Prosthesis

Several theorists (O'Regan 1996, Verhoeven 1999, Rayner 2000, Ferrier 2001, Gillard & Achimovich 2003, Goggin and Newell 2003, Duncan et al 2005, Ellis 2008) have noticed the prevalence of disability in Australian national cinema during the 1990s and its symbolic value. Diversity was communicated through quirky and eccentric individuals (O'Regan 1995, p. 9); often they had a disability. In a conscious cinematic link made for greater symbolic power Michael Rhymer made his quirky characters in *Angel Baby* schizophrenic (Urban 1995, online).

Duncan et al (2003, p. 154) argue that disability is central to Australian national cinema in organizing power and gender. The pervasiveness of disability in Australian national cinema throughout the 1990s suggests it is a fundamental aspect of contemporary Australian culture (Duncan et al 2005, p. 155). Disability has a narrative significance in Australian cinema by operating as a "figure for broader cultural concerns" (Duncan et al 2005, p. 154).

Throughout this article I will utilize the narrative prosthesis framework established by Mitchell and Snyder (2001, p. 49) and Duncan et al (2005, p. 157) to explore the way disability has been used throughout 1990s Australian national cinema "as a crutch upon which [film] narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytic insight." In the context of Australian masculinity, disability disrupts the usual cultural script of strength, power and perfect bodies.

Paul Darke (1999, online) argues that disability is useful to an analysis of hegemonic masculinity particularly as the presence of disability in film narratives is easily recognized as a loss of masculinity. He

recommends a consideration of the social discourse “of what constitutes masculinity and therefore a man.” Masculinity is a construction that is bound up in the construction of disability. Likewise, Jenny Morris (1997, p. 22) suggests that many films representing disability do so as an exploration of masculinity, “film-makers have used disability as a metaphor for dependency and vulnerability and as a vehicle for exploring such experiences for men.” She goes on: “the social definition of masculinity is inextricably bound up with a celebration of strength, of perfect bodies. At the same time, to be masculine is to be not vulnerable.”

The Sum of Us is primarily about a young gay man and his changing relationship with his father who becomes disabled following a stroke. This key film of the decade highlights a number of character traits of the 1990s Australian male identity as it critiqued the male ensemble. An intertextual reference to the male ensemble cycle is made in this film in order to renegotiate Australian masculine national identity in a 1990s context. Russell Crowe (indicative of a new Australian masculinity) joins with Jack Thompson; a quintessential outback man. As Harry, Thompson reworks his nude clothes scrubbing scene of the shearing shed in *Sunday Too Far Away* to the kitchen complete with an apron and sink full of dishes. The male ensemble features working class masculinity as the marker of Australianness. Gill Valentine (1999, p. 169) links masculinity, class and disability when he argues, for working-class men, their ability to endure physical hardship is crucial to their identity and livelihood. Thus hegemonic masculinity is predicated on the absence of disability. Likewise, Australianness is predicated on hegemonic masculinity. *The Sum of Us* uses disability to question and rework this identity.

In some respects *The Sum of Us* projects a very heterosexual masculine way of life, as Jeff (the gay son) has appropriated much of Harry’s (the positive role model blokey father) masculinity. McCauley (1998, p. 210) argues that heterosexual Harry is the legitimizing force in Jeff’s sexuality:

Jeff just happens to find himself homosexual, despite [his] normal upbringing and positive male role model, and despite meeting certain criteria of Australian masculinity – he’s a working class plumber from Balmain, plays rugby and has atrocious table manners.

Jeff and Harry live together in a very “domestic” existence which puts off potential lovers on both sides. After each suffers romantic disappointment Harry has a stroke and together they find strength in the face of adversity and things begin to look more positive for Jeff. Harry’s disability is the interruptive force that confronts both his and Jeff’s masculinity and challenges the cultural ideas around father and son relationships. Harry’s stroke consolidates the love between father and son, and that love takes many forms. Jeff does not want his whole world to begin and end with being gay, and “even likes women”. Harry’s total dependence on Jeff for his basic survival — including “going to the lav” — offers a new masculinity where internalized masculine dimensions are valuable. Harry’s disability is the legitimizing force in establishing a new form of mateship between heterosexual father and homosexual son.

At different points throughout *The Sum of Us* Harry calls the construction of the film to the audience’s attention through direct address. For example, at one point he claims “The trouble with having a stroke is

the people that treat you like a fuckwit afterwards”. Following this assertion the scene cuts to a close-up on Harry’s face as Jeff wheels him through the supermarket where stylistically he *is* a fuckwit - half-awake perhaps even dribbling saliva. Although lacking physical capabilities Harry drives the narrative as he sees Greg, Jeff’s potential lover, and begins to beep incessantly on the bell Jeff had rigged up to the chair so that Harry could still communicate despite the loss of his language function.

Morris looks to social stereotypes of masculinity when considering the representation of disabled men, which include strength, perfect bodies, not being vulnerable, a celebration of youth, and taking bodily functions for granted. She cites the examples of *My Left Foot* and *Born on the Fourth of July* to illustrate the contention that “dependency is hell for a man”. These films, she argues, rely on stereotypes of heterosexual masculinity (93—7). They are about masculinity, not disability.

Hammers over the Anvil draws on the characterisation of the male ensemble and uses disability to explore a loss of masculinity. Alan, a young boy who has polio, wants to be like East. East is a great horseman who lives alone with his horses, every woman in town wants him but he is happy with his horses (very ‘Australian’) until Grace comes to town. Both Alan and East fall for Grace who is a beautiful aristocratic woman. As East and Grace embark on an illicit affair, Alan promises to keep it a secret and sometimes acts as a go between and covers up for them.

As East becomes too possessive of Grace and too comfortable in his quasi-father- figure role in the trio of himself, Grace (childless), and Alan (motherless), he suffers a serious head injury and the paternal role is taken from him—as is his hegemonic masculinity. This accident works within the narrative to punish East for his aggression in trying to get Grace to leave her husband and run away with him. Grace is likewise punished for her infidelity with a lifetime of caring for East who is totally dependent and will never again be the intensely masculine character we first saw naked, riding his horse in the lake. Alan also gives up his hopes of ever riding a horse too.

In *Proof*, Martin is not portrayed as having lost his masculinity, as East is in *Hammers over the Anvil*. Martin, who was blind from birth, never possessed masculinity. In *Proof* Martin’s inability to trust his mother explains social restrictions he experiences later in life including not being able to form a sexual relationship. When Martin was given a camera for his tenth birthday he thought it would help him see. He takes photos to prove that what people tell him are really there but he has never found anyone he trusts enough to describe the photos to him. His housekeeper Celia wishes he trusted her because she is in love with him. When Martin meets Andy he thinks he can trust him enough to get him to describe his photos but Celia manipulates Andy into lying to Martin.

Martin’s attraction to Celia is hinted at but not entirely explored within the narrative, however, they do engage in a kind of power struggle; Celia moves furniture so that Martin is constantly bumping into things and Martin refuses her sex so that he can pity her. At one point Celia almost succeeds in seducing Martin but he pushes her away telling her that he doesn’t need anyone. The flashbacks portraying Martin’s relationship with his mother are juxtaposed with his present relationships with Andy and Celia locating

the origins of his problems interacting with people to his mother. Martin believes that he embarrassed his mother and that she lied to him about what was in the photos he took. At the film's close Martin has fired Celia, and Andy describes the first photo Martin ever took exactly as his mother did. Throughout the film Martin's mistrust of the people around him have been individualised and the focus has been on his relationship with his mother, who he falsely believed lied to him just because she could.

Director Jocelyn Moorhouse (Murray 1994, p. 130) says of the relationship between Martin and Celia:

I wanted audiences to discover [her smouldering beauty]. Luckily a lot of people do think she's really beautiful and they almost indignantly say, "How dare you! What's she doing as a housekeeper?", as if housekeepers can't be beautiful. It's a good effect because I wanted them to think Martin is stupid for treating her like a monster, because she's not. He turned her into one by his cruelty.

Moorhouse further explains that the only time Martin treats Celia as a human should be treated is when he comments on her breasts as he fires her (Murray 1994, p. 130). This idea that Martin could achieve masculinity by objectifying a women's physical beauty illustrates Darke's (1999, online) contention that masculinity is a construction bound up in the construction of disability. Martin is blind and can not appreciate Celia's physical beauty without touching her however the above quote suggests Moorhouse expects audiences to hold Martin to the same rules that apply to men who are not blind.

Conclusion

Australian films of the 1990s challenged and reworked the masculinist national identity firmly established in previous decades. While this tendency can be attributed to calls within the nation for women centered stories and an overall greater diversity, inclusive of minority groups, it must also be located in international problematisations of masculinity. Australia's hegemonic masculine national identity was problematised by films that explored the process of becoming a man. The image of disability was often utilized as a narrative prosthesis within these narratives to confront the cultural and political dimensions of masculinity as a national identity.

An analysis of the impact of disability on a masculine identity, as it is presented in Australian films of the 1990s, reveals a number of common factors. As a narrative prosthesis, disability prevents male characters achieving hegemonic masculinity and opens a space for other marginalized groups. For example, *The Sum of Us* explores representations of homosexuality coexisting with heterosexual masculinity. The incidence of disability immediately renders Harry dependent (thus emasculated) perhaps making it easier for homosexuality to exist in that household.

Although disability may legitimize male identities previously unavailable in Australian cinema, it is the

impetus for debate rather than a fully developed identity itself. Disability is therefore further marginalized in *Proof*, *The Sum of Us*, *Hammers over the Anvil* and other similar films and by extension Australian national identity.

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Narrating the Palestinian in Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock: A Confession*.

By Saddik M. Gohar

Abstract

Within the framework of contemporary postcolonial theory, the paper critically examines *Operation Shylock : A Confession* (1993) by the Jewish-American writer Philip Roth, in order to express the entanglements of colonial and Orientalist trajectories in the novel. The paper argues that Roth's fiction, like other American novels dealing with the Middle East conflict, is an attempt to silence the Palestinian subaltern or conflate this with a status of cultural decadence and backwardness. The paper also illustrates that Roth's fictional text blends the legacies of the ex-colonized and the ex-colonizer to reconstruct a biased narrative integral to his vision of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Failing to introduce a balanced view of the Palestinian question, Roth emphasizes significant colonizer / colonized constructs engaging cultural dynamics which lead to conflict rather than dialogue between both sides. Instead of deploying a plethora of voices as reflection of the attitudes of a multi-ethnic community, the incidents of the novel are historicized by a narrative mechanism and a hegemonic discourse which confine the colonized Palestinians to the historical ghetto of barbarism and fanaticism replacing the discourse of the real with that of the imaginary in order to make the latter desirable and render history consumable.

Introduction : Jewish American Literature and the Arab/Israeli Conflict

Irving Howe argues that Jewish American literature in general is the result of a confrontation between “an immigrant group and the host culture of America” (Howe 1977:3). Apparently the immigrant experience in America of marginality and alienation emerges as the basic subject of the American Jewish writer in the present time, however, there are many American-Jewish narratives located in an Israeli landscape. This reveals that “the subject of Jewish identity is increasingly being set against an Israeli background” (Solotaroff 1992: XXII). The interest of Jewish and Zionist American writers in Israel drives critics to come

to the conclusion that since America is a multi-ingredient nation rather than a melting pot “one can look forward to a new renaissance of Jewish-American fiction about Israel in the next decade”(Pinsker1993:8x).

Unfortunately in both American and Israeli / Hebrew literature on the question of Palestine, there is a trend which emphasizes “the intolerance and hostility toward Jews of Arabs who refuse to acknowledge any possibility for coexistence” (Coffin 1982: 321). The hostile image of the Arabs/ Palestinians prevalent in Israeli literature is echoed in Jewish American fiction about the Arab / Israeli conflict. In both cases, the Palestinian subaltern is eliminated except as negative values and is seen as synonymous with everything fanatic, degraded and vicious. For example in Roth’s *Operation Shylock : A Confession* , the author creates a Palestinian character, George Ziad or Zee , a friend of the novel’s protagonist , the speaking voice of the author. Ziad is aesthetically articulated to introduce the Palestinian narrative of the Arab-Israeli conflict from a perspective which fits his image in western colonial culture as an anti-Semitic fundamentalist . He attempts to challenge the Israeli mythology of victimization claiming that the Zionists in Israel have manipulated the holocaust propaganda to justify the occupation of the Palestinian territory in Gaza and the West Bank and the annexation of land from neighboring Arab countries. Ziad’s argument that “Israel has drawn the last of its moral credit out of the bank of the dead six millions” is condemned by Roth’s central narrator as false allegations. The author underestimates the Palestinian counter- narrative posited by Ziad by viewing him as a fanatic who degrades the holocaust memory : “Marlboro has the Marlboro man; Israel has its holocaust man” (Roth 1993 : 269), says Ziad .

In “ *Imperialist Nostalgia* ”, Renato Rosaldo states that “in imperialistic narratives, descriptions of character attitudes are fertile sites for the cultivation of ideology.” This process is integral to the narrative discourse of *Operation Shylock : A Confession*, therefore Ziad’s claim that Israel has exploited the holocaust – related guilt of the world community to justify its aggression against the Palestinians is rendered as a maniacal perspective and his vision of the Arab / Israeli conflict is viewed as nothing but “anti- Zionist crab” (289). By identifying Ziad as an anti-Zionist fundamentalist, the protagonist of Roth’s novel exercises his power as a colonizer. In other words, the colonizer uses his power to classify, categorize and represent the colonized Other. By calling the displaced Palestinian a terrorist or a fanatic, the protagonist/ narrator utilizes his strength as a colonizer who is able to name and identify. Since naming and addressing , to use colonial / theoretical terms, is an act of possession performed by the dominant oppressive culture, any name attributed to the colonized Palestinian is a hegemonic act of naming, i.e. erasing the real or original name . It is then a re-naming intended to deprive the native Palestinian from his identity in order to affiliate him or obliterate his identity. In other context, the colonized Palestinian is dealt with as a newborn baby appropriated by the father / colonizer when given his name. This process also aims at stereotyping the victim by placing him at the bottom of the Darwinian hierarchy. On this basis, the credibility of Ziad’s voice is undercut and his counter – narrative is viewed as “a pungent ideological mulch of overstatement and lucidity, of insight and stupidity, of precise historical data and willful historical ignorance. The intoxication of resistance has rendered [Ziad] incapable of even nibbling at the truth, however intelligent he still happened to be” (Roth 1993: 129).

By making the whole tale narrated by a pro-Israeli narrator , the native Palestinian voice is either

marginalized or muted. Further, the dispossessed Palestinian is reduced to an object, a horrible simulacrum of a human being. Due to Roth's narrative strategy which obliterates the identity of Ziad enclosing him into a racist classification, the Palestinian counter-narrative is underestimated. As a strategy of presentation rooted in colonial discourse and racist degeneration, Roth's narrative apparatus places the colonizer at the center of the text marginalizing the colonized because he represents the horrible side of the human being. As a monster, the colonized Palestinian is humiliated by appropriating his land and subverting his history.

In the entire novel, Roth dramatizes only one Palestinian perspective on the Arab- Israeli conflict through the character of George Ziad. By narrowing the Palestinian viewpoint, Roth seeks to silence the Palestinian subaltern restricting the space in which "the colonized can be re-written back into history" (Benita 1987:39). In a novel, shaped by authorial pro- Zionist tendency, the Palestinians exist in, what Edward Said refers to as, "communities of interpretation" ultimately without form until they are reconstructed by the American author. Moreover, the character of Ziad is introduced in a way that fulfills doubtful authorial agenda. For example, Ziad's ostensibly radical perspective on the question of Palestine, according to the author, is undermined by Roth's insinuations which indicate that Ziad may be a Mossad operative or an informant for Israel who plays the role of the Palestinian militant activist. Casting doubts on Ziad's loyalty to the cause of his people, the author attempts to distort history and obscure the hegemonic policies of the Israeli colonization.

Through the slippery and ambiguous character of Ziad, which raises questions about his attitude and identity as an enemy or ally to Israel, Roth replaces what Hayden White calls "the discourse of the real" with "the discourse of the imaginary" (White 1987: 20) in order to make the imaginary desirable and obscure history. In a related context, Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, points out that colonial hegemony is fulfilled in the lands of the colonized not only by military domination but also through the process of writing history from the viewpoint of the colonizer. This process is a basic aspect of colonialism which has a tremendous impact upon the colonized even after national liberation. Moreover, the process of history – making which aims to mute the colonized subaltern is an instrument of colonial hegemony since the colonizer plans not only to dominate a country but also to impose his own history and cultural paradigms.

According to Fanon, colonialism "turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts it, disfigures it and destroys it" (Fanon 1967:169). In this context, the Palestinian native who is supposed to be the signifier turns out to be the signified. It is obvious that the illusory existence of the Palestinians as delineated in Roth's novel is emphasized by the incidents of a narrative which attempts to mystify reality. In addition to distorted characterization, the events of the novel are historicized by a narrative dynamics which emphasizes the Zionist perspective on the Palestinian question. Therefore, the image of the Palestinian as an anti-Semitic activist fits the fantasy of the author and fulfills the horizons of expectations of western readers. Instead of viewing the Palestinian as a fellow human being with all the potential and frailties that condition implies, Roth introduces Ziad as a repulsive activist of a Mephistophelian nature. In his attempt to Orientalize the Palestinian subaltern, Roth portrays Ziad as a fanatic who wants to subjugate Israel through a reign of terror. Dehumanized and demonized, Ziad is anti-Semitic, anti-Jewish and anti Israeli, a representative of a backward race, according to the novel. Attempting to degrade and defame

the Palestinian subaltern by delineating him as an enemy to humanity, Roth's novel not only encourages occupation and colonization but also disseminates pro-Zionist political ideology.

Between History and Myth: The Colonial Discourse of Operation Shylock : A Confession

In his discussion of the relationship between East and West, Edward Said defines Orientalism as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient: "dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism [is] a western style for dominating, restricting and having authority over the Orient" (Said 1978: 3). Located in the discourses of Orientalism and colonialism, Roth's novel aims to distort the identity of the Palestinian people by transforming them into people "without history" (Said 1979:23). On this basis, the novel provides support for the powerful at the expense of the powerless equating between the brutalities of the colonizers and the humble resistance of the colonized, humiliating those who are historically humiliated. Shaped by western monolithic discourse on the Orient, the Palestinian subaltern in Roth's novel, remains the colonized victim of racial representations which "repress the political history of colonialism" (Jan Mohamed 1986:79).

In *Operation Shylock: A Confession*, Roth's representation of the Arab Israeli conflict is marred by a narrative strategy that favors the colonizer and deprives the colonized from entering the text except as a total non-entity or as an embodiment of terror and hatred. On the surface, *Operation Shylock : A Confession* seems to be an attempt to offer a critique of the Zionist master narrative widely accepted in the West about the Arab / Israeli conflict, however, the author fails to provide an alternative to such hegemonic narrative due to a strategy of narration which mutes the colonized Palestinians or removes them out of the text. In other words, Roth's attempt to castigate the Israeli occupation of THE Palestinian territories is thwarted by a narrative dynamics which advocates the principles of orthodox Zionism. Failing to undermine the central premises of Zionism, Roth places Israeli / Zionist characters at the center of the text preventing the colonized Palestinians from introducing their counter-narrative of the conflict in an appropriate manner.

Moreover, the narrative allows Israeli characters to criticize American Jews who reject the Zionist project in the Middle East. By the end of *Operation Shylock: A Confession*, Mr. Smileburger, the Mossad agent, blames the American Jews for their attitudes toward the Arab Israeli conflict:

You are free to indulge your virtue freely. Go to where ever you feel most blissfully un-blamable. That is the delightful luxury of the utterly transformed American Jew. Enjoy it. You are that marvelous, unlikely, most magnificent phenomenon, the truly liberated Jew. The Jew who is not accountable. You are the blessed Jew condemned to nothing, least of all to our historical struggle (Roth 1993:532).

Since the novel is a colonial and Pro-Zionist reconstruction of the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, American critics, commended Roth for his representation of the Palestinian question. For example, Hillel

Halkin points out that the “sheer, almost abstract passion for being Jewish seems to grow stronger in Roth’s work all the time” (Halkin 1994:48). Further, Sanford Pinsker, in a short article, on Roth’s fiction, praises Roth’s skill in depicting the Arab-Israeli conflict and in “wrenching Jewish-American fiction about Israel from the conventional pieties into which they have too often fallen” (Pinsker 1993: 8x). The American novelist, John Updike, reveals an interest in Roth’s sophisticated engagement in the historical struggle in the Middle East. In his discussion of Roth’s fictions on the Middle East conflict, Updike comments: “relentlessly honest, Roth recruits raw nerves, perhaps, because they make the fiercest soldiers in the battle of truth” (Updike 1993: 111). Even, Cynthia Ozick, the militant Zionist writer argues that *Operation Shylock: A Confession* “is totally amazing in language, intellect, plotting, thesis, analysis, reach, daring.” Though disappointed by the incorporation of radical Palestinian arguments in the text, she considers Roth “the boldest American writer alive” (Ozick 1993: 370).

Nevertheless there are critics, like Hayden White, Daniel Lazare and others, who criticized the pro-Israeli/pro-Zionist attitudes integral to American literature about Israel. Lazare castigates the attitude of the American writers who are interested in the Zionist enterprise in Israel because Israeli Zionism resulted into dramatic consequences: “Out of the nationalistic, embattled, ethnically cleansed existence in Israel has come-what? The invasion of Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza strip settlements and the Intifada” (Lazare 1993:42). Further , Hayden White denounces the Israeli brutal policies against the Palestinian people in the West Bank:

The totalitarian, not to say fascist, aspects of Israeli treatment of the Palestinians on the West bank may be attributable primarily to a Zionist ideology that is detestable to anti-Zionist, Jews and non-Jews alike. But who is to say that this ideology is a product of a distorted conception of history in general and of the history of the Jews in the Diaspora specifically? It is, in fact, fully comprehensible as a morally responsible response to the meaningless of a certain history that spectacle of “moral anarchy” that Schiller perceived in world history and specified as a “sublime object.” The Israeli political response to this spectacle is fully consistent with the aspiration to human freedom and dignity that Schiller took to be the necessary consequence of sustained reflection on it (White 1990: 80).

Whereas Haden While attempts to attribute Israeli policies and “moral anarchy” to historical contexts, Roth rejects any historical approximation of the Palestinian question. Instead he made vague indications and hints about the possibility of establishing a double nationality state in Palestine where the Palestinians could be assimilated into the mainstream Israeli society. Due to Roth’s slippery perspective on the question of Palestine and his integrationist vision of the Arab-Israeli conflict, some critics ironically consider *Operation Shylock: A Confession* as anti-Zionist presentation of the political situation in the Middle East. However, a scrutinized reading of the text reveals an undercurrent Zionist agenda pervading the novel particularly the treatment of the relationship between the Palestinian subalterns and the Israeli oppressors and the equation between the colonized (the stone-throwing Palestinians) and the colonizers (the gun-wielding Israeli soldiers) in addition to the holocaust motif and the issue of anti-Semitism. By the end of the novel , the protagonist , who personifies the authorial voice , simultaneously observes from his hotel room Palestinian rock gatherers and armed Israeli soldiers heading toward the West Bank to be involved

in violent confrontations. The equation between the victim and the oppressor aims to obscure reality and distort history by revealing Palestinian resistance as acts of fanaticism and hatred.

Explicitly, the enthusiastic critical reception of the novel in western circles is due to its Orientalist treatment of the crisis in Palestine. The Palestinian subaltern, in *Operation Shylock: A Confession*, is reduced to one mass of Arab terrorism that must be encountered, an image so pervasive that it seems to be “an almost platonic essence inherited in all Palestinians” (Said 1988:52). Even the narrative strategy of the novel is shaped by the author’s biased perspective on the Arab-Israeli conflict, which turns the novel into what Jean- Francoise Lyotard calls a “grand narrative” (qtd. in Gohar 2001: 29). While the Israeli perspective on the question of Palestine in *Operation Shylock: A Confession* is presented by different characters who introduce a variety of viewpoints, the Palestinian vision of the conflict is represented through the character of George Ziad, a marginal character, who is accused of anti-Semitism and fanaticism. In this context, the Palestinians and Arab people are seen only as non-entities which remain voiceless until being reinterpreted and reconstructed by the Zionist author. Paradoxically, the more one reads the text of *Operation Shylock: A Confession*, the more s/he becomes familiar with Arab images as viewed in the West and the less s/he learns about the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

In *Operation Shylock: A Confession* there is no space from where the subaltern subject can speak because his voice is muted by the Zionist author. Apparently, Roth attempts to suppress the voice of the Palestinian subaltern by equating between the stone- throwing Palestinian children and the armed Israeli soldiers ignoring the wide difference between armless / hopeless civilians and armed troops equipped with the most sophisticated arsenal provided by western allies. Deploying a narrative dynamics through which the colonized Palestinian is allowed only to utter militant statements which reveal both hatred and desire for revenge, the author aims to acquit the colonizer from any accusation of racism and brutality. Moreover, the incidents of *Operation Shylock: A Confession* take place in the West Bank where the Israeli moral being is under constant threat, according to the author. A potential threat to the Israeli community in the West Bank comes from Palestinians like George Ziad, a militant Orient who utters anti-Zionist slogans. The author demonstrates that Ziad has committed a fatal mistake when he castigated Israeli politicians who used the holocaust as justification for inflicting pain on the Palestinian and Arab citizens, not only in the West Bank but also in neighboring countries.

In *Operation Shylock: A Confession*, Ziad criticizes what some western historians call “the holocaust industry”:

This is the public-relations campaign cunningly devised by the terrorist Begin: to establish Israeli military expansionism as historically just by joining it to the memory of Jewish victimization; to rationalize – as historical justice, as just retribution, as nothing more than self-defense – the gobbling up of the Occupied Territories and the driving of the Palestinians off their land once again. What justifies seizing every opportunity to extend Israel’s boundaries? Auschwitz. What justifies bombing Beirut civilians? Auschwitz (Roth 1993:132).

There is no doubt that , the ultimate aim of Ziad's speech is not to undermine the holocaust narrative but to argue that past Jewish suffering in Europe at the hands of the Nazi regime does not give warranty for contemporary acts of violence against the Palestinian refugees . Nevertheless, Ziad is described as a Palestinian fundamentalist who abuses the holocaust memory. When Ziad evokes the language of the Shoah / holocaust , he implicitly intends to call attention to the plight and victimization of the Palestinian refugees and the brutalities of the Israeli military in the West Bank . But since Roth's novel is characterized by the predominance of the ideological import of the text's hegemonic/ Zionist master narrative, Ziad's statements are introduced to emphasize his image in the western iconography as an anti-Semitic Orient .

Regardless of Ziad's attitude toward the holocaust which is condemned in Roth's novel , it is noteworthy to argue that many western scholars explore the holocaust issue from a non-Zionist perspective introducing several historical narratives about the significance of that event . Discussing the politics of the historical interpretation of the holocaust, Hayden White argues : “ In fact, its [Zionist interpretations of the Holocaust] truth, as a historical interpretation, consists precisely [in] its effectiveness in justifying a wide range of current Israeli policies that, from the stand point of those who articulate them, are crucial to the security and indeed the very existence of the Jewish people. Whether one supports these policies or condemns them, they are undeniably a product, at least in part, of conception of Jewish history that is conceived to be meaningless to Jews insofar as this history was dominated by agencies, process, and group who encouraged or permitted policies that led to the “final solution” of “the Jewish Question” (White 1990 : 80) . Apparently , Haden White integrates Israeli brutal policies (against the Palestinians) and misreading of the holocaust into historical factors , nevertheless , he condemns the Zionist narrative of the Arab/Israeli conflict expecting the Palestinian to respond to the Zionist project in their own ways : “So far as I can see, the effort of the Palestinian people to mount a politically effective response to Israeli policies entails the production of a similarly effective ideology, complete with an interpretation of their history capable of endowing it with a meaning that it has hitherto lacked (a project to which Edward Said wishes to contribute “ (ibid).

The Distortion of Palestinian History

In *Operation Shylock : A Confession* , Roth utilizes several narrative subtleties which aim to silence the voice of the Palestinian subalterns and re-inscribe negative stereotypes about a colonized and marginalized people. Such stereotypes, according to Paul Brown contribute to a “discursive strategy” which aims to “locate or fix the colonial other in a position of inferiority” (Brown 1985: 58). Reveling in colonial descriptions of the Palestinian (the colonized Orient) where scenes of violence and elaborate accounts of suicide bombers prevail, Roth attempts to reconstruct an imaginary enemy who fits the western colonial concept of inferior races.

This Orientalizing process requires the aesthetic function of stimulating the western reader's fantasy. Thus, Roth's representation of the Middle East conflict is a vivid example of the American invention of the

Palestinian as an Orient. In Roth's fiction, the Palestinian colonized is viewed as violent, cruel and anti-Semitic, a stereotype which is repeated in western literature and culture until it becomes integrated into the popular and collective consciousness of the American people. After being Orientalized and exhibited to the readers, the Palestinian has to conform to the American norms of the Arab: he should be a replica of Satan, an incarnation of evil. Therefore, in *Orientalism*, Edward Said argues that in western literature and culture, the Orient is nothing but "a European invention" (Said 1978:2)

Moreover, American culture mythology is replete with negative Arab images manufactured and disseminated by the American cultural industry which had a great impact on writers dealing with Arab – Israeli conflict like Philip Roth. Edward Said, in **Culture and Imperialism**, points out: "I do not believe that authors are mechanically determined by ideology, class or even economic history but authors are, I also believe, very much in the history of their societies, shaping and shaped by that history and their social experience in different measure" (Said 1993:XXII). Due to the impact of the American cultural mythology about the Arab Orient, the Palestinian appears in Roth's fiction as a marginalized and self-destructive individual who bears no resemblance to the typical Palestinian citizen. Apparently, the distorted image of the Palestinian and the faked historicity of the Arab-Israeli conflict aim to stereotype the colonized Palestinian and obscure the realities of the oppressive colonizers.

There is no doubt that Roth's fiction is explicitly dominated by a hegemonic narrative and the tale is narrated by Zionists and sympathizers with the Israeli colonization of Palestine whereas the native Palestinians are introduced as personification of evil and fanaticism. As a monster, the colonized Palestinian is humiliated by appropriating his land and his history. When Ziad, the Palestinian subaltern, is allowed to speak, his utterances conform to his stereotyped image in western colonial iconographies. In addition to the narrow space given to the Palestinian subaltern in the textual canvas of Roth's novel, the ultimate fictional discourse reveals the existence of racial and ideological demarcations separating between colonized and colonizer. As a reproduction of discourses advocated by colonial powers in the era of imperialism, Roth's narrative reinforces Rudyard Kipling's famous statement: "let the white go to the white and the black to the black" (Kipling 1987:48).

Combined with the technique of one-sided dialogue, Roth's narrative strategy aims to distort history subverting Ziad's allegations about the Israeli brutalization of the Palestinian in the refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza strip. Instead of lamenting the atrocities and violence committed by the Israeli army against the Palestinians, Roth's narrator highlights the humanity of the Israeli army and its civilized treatment of the Palestinian children who are accused of throwing Molotov cocktails on Israeli military vehicles. Further, the narrator speaks in sympathetic tone about an Israeli army officer who tells his family the following statement: "Look, you want to know if I personally beat anyone, I don't. But I had to do an awful lot of maneuvering to avoid it" (Roth 1993:169). As an incarnation of heroic and moral values, the Israeli officer expresses his reluctance to participate in any violent activities against the Palestinians and he despises the political agenda of his government. In order to revise the Israeli history of violence in Palestine, Roth introduces a new image of the Israeli military which does not exist in reality.

In addition to the idealistic representation of the Israeli army lieutenant, Roth provides a vivid description of the Israeli courtroom, a symbol of justice, with its Jewish flags, judges and lawyers where the fate of the Palestinians, accused of using violence against the army, will be determined. The deliberate attempt to ignore the brutalities and atrocities committed against the Palestinian activists in Israeli prisons and detainees camps by viewing the Israeli courtroom as an epitome of justice is part of the colonial discourse of the novel which aims to justify occupation and put the blame on the victim. Throughout his falsified representation of reality, Roth seeks to create a kind of cultural amnesia ignoring the real discourse of violence and replacing it with an alternative discourse which reproduces the Arab-Israeli conflict in a new form to fulfill dubious political purposes.

By delineating the colonized Palestinian as despicable in his character and totally blameworthy for the suffering of the Jewish community in the West Bank, Roth negotiates the possibility of his transfer which subverts the author's early hints about the possibility of assimilating the Palestinians in the mainstream Hebrew state. In his depiction of the Palestinian subaltern, Roth incorporates what Noam Chomsky identifies as "garbage language" (Chomsky 1971:65) which "is not only the voice but also the deed of suppression". As Herbert Marcuse argues in "*An Essay on Liberation*": this language not only defines and condemns "the Enemy", it also creates him, and this creation is but rather as he must be in order to perform his function for the establishment (Marcuse 1969:74). There is no doubt that in different parts of the novel, Roth attempts to degrade the Palestinian subaltern categorizing him as a fanatic in order to justify his displacement. In other words, the destruction of the humanity of the Palestinian Other is achieved in different ways in *Operation Shylock: A Confession* either by muting his voice or by assigning him roles which confirm to his stereotyped image in western culture or by conflating him with a degraded status reflecting his position in the colonial taxonomy of inferior races.

In his analysis of colonial politics, Frantz Fanon points out that the colonial system functions by deploying racial paradigms which widen the gap between colonizer and colonized leading to psychological colonization: "you are [civilized] because you are [colonizer] and you are [colonizer] because you are [colonized]" (1967:40). Fanon also demonstrates that there is a time in which "the colonialist reaches the point of no longer being able to imagine a time accruing without him. His eruption into the history of the colonized is defied, transformed into absolute necessity" (qtd. in Gohar 2001:85). In *Operation Shylock: A Confession*, Roth advocates what Edward Said calls "the moral epistemology of imperialism" (Said 1979:18) where the approved history of colonial nations such as America, South Africa and Israel, starts with what he identifies as "a blotting out of knowledge" of the native people or the making of them "into people without history" (Said 1979:23). Thus, the Palestinian people in Roth's novel, remain the colonized victims of the author's political ideology and cultural representation which aim to banish them from collective memory. By suggesting either the evacuation of historical Palestine of its native inhabitants – the transfer option – or the establishment of one Hebrew state where the native Palestinians will be assimilated into the mainstream Israeli community – the integrationist option – the author aims to deprive the Palestinians of their history. Once the colonized Palestinians are banished from collective memory as a people of cultural heritage, the colonizer's moral and intellectual right to conquest is claimed to be established without question.

Conclusion : Resistance or Terrorism

In his analysis of the concept of terrorism , Robert Fisk draws an analogy between the French occupation of Algeria and the Zionist occupation of Palestine:

The reality is that the Palestinian/Israeli conflict is the last colonial war. The French thought that they were fighting the last battle of this kind. They had long ago conquered Algeria. They set up their farms and settlements in the most beautiful land in North Africa. And when the Algerians demanded independence, they called them “terrorists” and they shot down their demonstrators and they tortured their guerilla enemies and they murdered in “targeted killings” – their antagonists (qtd. in Barlas 2003: 55).

In addition to the cited – above analogy between the French / Israeli colonizers and the Algerian / Palestinian colonized , an application of what Edward said calls “contrapuntal reading” of the text of *Operation Shylock : A Confession* reveals the colonial dimensions of the novel. The contrapuntal approach includes a discourse dynamics disseminated by Said to prevent hostility between East and West by incorporating a counter - discourse mechanism able to expose colonial constructs in western texts (Said 1993:92) .

Obviously , the central narrator in *Operation Shylock : A Confession* ignores the fact that occupation and colonization would naturally lead to resistance and struggle not to terrorism . By viewing the protest of the colonized Palestinians against the inhuman practices of the Zionist colonizer as acts of terror and anti-Semitism , Roth’s fiction justifies the violence of the Israeli army against Palestinian civilians as necessary military activities to protect the Israeli community in a volatile West Bank. In this context , Edward Said argues that challenging Zionism , in the West , means simply that one is either “anti-Semitic or an apologist for Islam and the Arabs” (Said 1979: 25). Therefore , the depiction of the Palestinian resistance as a kind of terrorism is part and parcel of the colonial / Zionist agenda integral to the novel.

In a related context , Roth’s colonial portrayal of Ziad , a representative of the Palestinian community, as a militant fanatic aims to deflect attention from Zionist atrocities committed against the Palestinians or what Frantz Fanon calls “violence in its natural state” (Fanon 1967: 61). In *The Wretched of the Earth* , Fanon argues that the colonizer usually “owes its legitimacy to force and at no time tries to hide this aspect of things” (Fanon 1967: 84). In *Operation Shylock: A Confession* , the radical situation of fanatic Israelis like Merkin and his friends who advocate the policy of transfer which seeks to evacuate the West Bank of the Palestinian population, is mystified whereas Ziad’s defensive perspective is underlined and amplified . To Roth’s central narrator, all massacres committed against the Palestinians do not lend credibility to Ziad’s angry comments on the Arab Israeli conflict.

This situation is reminiscent of Albert Memmi’s famous discussion of the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer. Memmi demonstrates that “all that the colonized has done to emulate the colonizer

has met with disdain from the colonial masters. Everything is mobilized so that the colonized cannot cross the doorsteps, so that he understands and admits that this path is dead (Memmi 1974:125). While the colonizer's violence against the colonized is justified on moral grounds, the self-defense of the colonized is condemned as terrorism, an evidence of his barbaric and primitive nature. By advocating this approach, the colonizer ironically teaches the colonized the importance of using violence as the only means to reach one's ends: "he of whom they (colonizers) have never stopped saying that the only language he understands that of force, decides to give utterance by force. In fact as always, the settler has shown him (the colonized) the way he should take if he is to become free" (Fanon 1969: 84).

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Distant Suffering and Postmodern Subjectivity: the Communal Politics of Pity.

By Yasmin Ibrahim

Abstract:

Television's role in the construction, representation and framing of tragic events forms an important component of our mediated modernity. Mass consumption and public spectacle authenticate an event whilst helping to reconstruct it. The freeze-framing of images, televisual vantage points and seamless narratives are often perceived as flattening event construction into a smooth commentary which is made less conflicting through the lens of the camera and a seemingly authoritative commentary. Televisual representation and the reconstruction of tragic events, nevertheless create communion and a mass politics of pity that unites humanity through images of destruction, death, turmoil and human degradation. The domestication of suffering through information and communication technologies (ICTs) in private and public spaces is a negotiated and contested phenomenon, and one which not only raises the issue of media power but also our subjectivity in postmodernity which is defined through people's interactions with the mediated environment in our everyday lives and the cultural codes which we produce, appropriate and sustain through this interactivity.

Keywords; Postmodern, Suffering, Trauma, Pity, Spectacle, Media Event

Introduction

Narratives of loss and suffering form an important part of the modern media landscape (see Gorney 2005; Oushakine 2006; Debrix 2006), and such narratives are the primary means by which people engage with disasters and tragedies. According to the Centre for Research on Epidemiology of Disasters in Belgium

there has been a marked increase in the number of disasters worldwide with 1,230 disasters registered between 1970-1979, compared to more than 3,000 disasters reported between 2000-2003 (See Vasterman et al. 2005:107). As sociologists and historians have argued the communal consumption and experience of pain and suffering can be fundamentally social (see Cole 2004; Good et al. 1994; Winters 1995) enabling human communion through media narratives. Media narratives of suffering have the potential to both personalize and de-personalize suffering to their audiences and in the process they can re-frame proximity and distance, our sense of connection and disconnection as well as temporality.

Mediated suffering is then a cognitive construct which influences our moral and ethical responses through the media's visual cultures and discursive paradigms where images and narratives work hand in hand to compose and enable global spectatorship. The audience's ability to understand suffering as a phenomenon enacted on a global stage and the media's ability to invite moral gaze and engagement is a recurring phenomenon in postmodernity. Our socialization to 'mediated suffering' denotes our subjectivity to our mediated environment and equally our human condition to be attracted to narratives of human loss and suffering. The media by socializing us as subjects who bear witness, authenticate and respond to mourning confers a state of subjectivity on the postmodern audience where suffering is pervasive and our reactions to it can be mediated both through our personal orientations as well as institutional and media attempts to forge collective mourning.

The act of bearing witness to global events through the broadcasting space has been well documented in media literature (see Dayan & Katz 1992; Scannell 1989). Broadcasting reframes time and space and has the ability to pause accelerated modernity and enable humanity to reconnect and commune through media events. Here the media appropriates a social role to transform tragic events into platforms for global communion. It can equally create spaces for therapeutic recovery both by inviting a moral gaze as well as facilitating national and (perhaps) global conversations on suffering, where these can be unrestrained by geographical barriers. Pantii & Wietten (2005:313) reiterate that the ability to connect with human tragedies is not limited by national borders and that national unity is forged through collective mourning. The news media becomes a platform for this brief national consensus.

By creating spaces for moral engagement mediated grief becomes a device to convene humanity and convey humanitarian discourses. However, our ability to domesticate grief and personalise it in relation to events far and near can vary in intensity. Whilst the mass media can mobilise national and global reactions to grief, its persistent need to feed the public with the politics of pity and invite moral engagement can equally lead to apathy and disengagement where suffering and traumatic narratives become part of the everyday terrain of news creation and consumption. Grief and suffering can become banal when entwined with the everyday and this non-stop consumption of images of suffering can result in 'compassion fatigue' (Hoijer 2004). Tester (2001:13) describes compassion fatigue as a phenomenon in which 'people become so used to the spectacle of dreadful events, misery or suffering that we stop noticing them and are left unmoved.' Tester (1994:107) contends that the media tends to have an anaesthetic effect and can in effect thwart the moral values of solidarity.

Conversely, where events of suffering evoke a mass reaction they become transformative devices both in the project of memory and history and in forming communion with wider humanity. Audiences' ability to domesticate grief and suffering presented through the mass media is dependent on various factors including personal experiences, networks, social and communal ties, sense of loss and belonging to an event, the quest for social justice and reparation for loss, and the degrees of vulnerability an event can evoke within the discourses of a postmodern risk society along with other abstract or concrete personal factors which may mediate the individual human condition. The politics of pity and the ability to create media events do not just illuminate the social role of the media they also periodically highlight the human need for communion. With the disintegration of community and family structures in postmodern societies, the media becomes a social device providing a functional role of connecting disparate and disaggregated societies. More fundamentally, the questions of grief, pain and loss and more specifically the media's power to depict these through its pervasive presence taps into the human psyche where the pull towards the melancholic and the abject reveals our ability to connect with, be attracted to and repelled by traumatic images. When a mediated trauma is able to mobilise strong emotions globally or nationally it may enable various forms of humanitarian reaction at individual, communal, national or global levels. Luc Boltanski, (1999) in his extensive examination of the politics of pity, has created a typology in classifying human engagement with distant suffering where the sentiment of pity can be located through how audiences engage with suffering. Audiences engage with the politics of pity either through the act of denunciation of an event, the degree of empathy directed at the victim, or the aestheticization of suffering.

Our ability to lay claim to trauma and grief represented in the media as communal constructs equally impresses our postmodern subjectivities defined through our interactions (with media as both technology and content) and equally with our engagements and disengagements with the imagined communities the media represents, reflecting both the media's symbolic power to represent and narrate reality and equally the audience's agency to partake in grief and to personalise or gain proximity or distance to events of suffering. This postmodern subjectivity rests on audiences recognising the 'media event' as a historical moment and the cultural codes that construct meaning beyond the immediate event.

The Media Event as Postmodern Ritual

In post-modernity the 'media event' captures the ability of the media to construct events, reframe temporality and to consolidate the construction of memory through its televisual spectacle. Televised tragedies which evoke both individual and communal displays of emotion have been well documented (Zelizer, Pantti & Wietten 2005; Kitch 2000; Walter 1995). In recent years, there has been an increased exposure to images of human suffering among civilian populations through television news. These presentations have become more graphic, challenging the ethical and moral boundaries of taste and decency (see Hoijer 2004; 1996). Menaheim Blondheim & Tamar Liebes (2002: 271) note that 'when major debacles occur, television interrupts its schedule for the live, open-ended 'celebration' of the momentous event, featuring the disaster marathon.' This 'disaster marathon', according to them, is defined by natural disasters,

high-profile accidents such as the failed launch of the *Challenger* space shuttle, or purposive public acts of major violence such as terrorist attacks.

Dayan and Katz's conception of the 'media event' (1992: 196-7) captured television's ability to mark an event or moment in history through the interruption of routine broadcasting. The suspension of usual routines to carve a moment in time where the nation convenes over the televisual space evokes both the power of mass media to create events but equally the conceptualisation of national spaces to mourn and commemorate. The suspension and reconfiguration of temporality through non-stop media broadcasts becomes a device to commit media events to public memory where pausing of routine broadcasts and the live consumption of events constructs the temporal space as a subjective device of the media in constructing history. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Rangers (1983) in *The Invention of Tradition* articulate the function of a 'constructed past' in establishing social cohesion, legitimizing authority and creating cultural frameworks. They argue that 'invented traditions' are crucial to the construction of the nation.

Beyond the broadcasting space, the social function of journalism in delivering bad or catastrophic news is also well researched (Kitch 2003; 2002; Lule 2001; Zelizer 1990). Kristina Riegert and Eva-Karin Olsson (2007: 144) take James Carey's ritual view of communication where the purpose of communication is to maintain society over time, 'representing shared beliefs, understandings and emotions whether in celebration or in mourning.' This culturalist perspective, they argue, emphasises the importance of meaning-making and sees journalism as a platform for remembering, sharing and mourning and the forms of narrative they appropriate are then borrowed from the cultures in which they work. According to Coman (2005) the process of ritualization in journalism provides a means to gain control over the processes of meaning-making.

Television's ability to take part in 'the live broadcasting of history' (Dayan and Katz 1992) produces an experience where private and public moments coalesce into one. Menaheim Blondheim and Tamar Liebes (2002: 272) concur that when 'major disasters occur, television interrupts its schedule for the live, open-ended 'celebration' of the momentous event featuring the disaster marathon.' The pausing of the routine and the switching into live mode creates a convergence of the public and private realms, fostering a collectivity. The thwarting of the boundaries between the public and private is a device which the media leverages on to construct public memory. As Roland Barthes proclaimed, the age of the photography denotes the 'explosion of the private into public' (cf. Helmers 2001: 448).

Blondheim and Liebes (2002:274) point out that there is 'increasing difficulty in distinguishing between television coverage of an event and it becoming part of an event.' The medium's predominance in a public event, they argue, should be situated through electronic journalism's adoption of the live coverage format which positions it in an intermediary role as a storyteller, negotiator and movable stage on which the drama is enacted.

For Dayan and Katz media events provide a social platform to affirm social bonds and to blatantly renew and activate dominant societal values (cf. Pantti & Wietem 2005: 302). These extraordinary events through

the spirit of ‘*communitas*’ work to unite fragmented societies. Riegert and Olsson (2007: 147) in tandem argue that ‘media rituals can be said to function as a way for media organisations, television in this case, to establish authority by playing a key part in society’s healing process.’ They (2007: 145) assert that the media event enables not just the ‘reconstitution of older forms of rituals but new mediated ones gained through the shared experience of watching live in millions of homes across nations and peoples. Mervi Pantti and Jan Wieten (2005: 301) concur that contemporary coverage of any culturally proximate tragedy will now include depictions of public mourning and trauma and in the process they convene ‘unprompted feeling communities’ which are not limited by national borders. The media then provides rituals of participation which in effect become a platform to witness and feel with the rest of imagined humanity.

To Witness is to ‘Partake’

The bias of the visual in the media event plays a dominant role in constructing our postmodern subjectivity. Images have always been problematic devices in conveying or depicting reality both as photographs and as moving images. Images particularly photographs have been the subject of close scrutiny by Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Michael Foucault and Jacques Lacan, amongst others. Barthes positions pictures as a ‘witness to layers of meaning’ (cf. Hudson 2003: 45) where no one meaning hermeneutically seals an image. The image’s crisis of authenticity and its difficulties in representing reality or misconstruing the ‘real’ confers it with a dubious status. Its ability to distort reality and exhort the emotive, places it into a double bind where its relationship to reality and truth is confounded by our obsession to incessantly capture images and exhibit them, inviting a pervasive public gaze. The bias of the visual in our postmodern culture bears the hallmark of this dilemma and equally highlights the complex subjectivity of the postmodern audience where engaging through images and communal consumption validate the politics of pity in different ways. We’re conditioned to transgress boundaries and view private images on public platforms. Our relentless gaze into private spheres vigorously co-opts private realms as moments of public spectacle. Our postmodern subjectivity is insensitive to the transgression of public gaze into private arenas and private lives of the injured, the victimised and marginalised. This insensitivity and the thwarting of boundaries between the public and private along with the mass consumption of trauma as media spectacle define the politics of pity in postmodernity.

The communal spectacle and the communal politics of pity through mass consumption provide valuable insights into the human psyche where the construction of reality becomes validated through mass viewing. The ‘media event’ works to authenticate an event through this mass witnessing. The media, by inviting global viewing, enables mass witnessing which acts as a communal ritual as well as a transformative device in consigning mediated events to public memory. To partake through viewing is equally to bear witness to media events through the screen. This makes audiences a complicit component in producing the media event. The recognition that the event is watched simultaneously by the rest of ‘imagined’ humanity becomes an implicit cultural code in constructing and relating to an event and in tandem ascribing it social or political significance. This postmodern subjectivity of audiences is dialectical; the media can implicitly

exert its cultural codes and equally there is agency to negotiate the power of the media by domesticating an event or de-personalising it, both through our interactions with technology as well as our engagements with the content that accrues through these platforms.

The collective watching and bearing witness through technology has significance in authenticating an event. Mass viewing coupled with the pausing of broadcasting schedules through live events reframes temporality whilst constructing a mediated memory. When the act of bearing witness through live broadcast creates a historic moment through the public consumption of trauma, this act of mass consumption elicits people's personal memory in constructing a public one. In this sense, the act of bearing witness through mass media creates a cultural code where audiences are socialised into the politics of pity with the reframing of the temporal dimension, the disruption of broadcasting routines, the validation of an event through mass gaze and embedding of personal memory with a public and mediated one. In tandem with this Helmers (2001) asserts that popular memory is mediated by electronic technology where the emergence of the public occurs when an event or a sequence of events coalesce. The process of interrupting broadcast schedules to bring live events acts as a validating device for impressing the significance of the event. The disruption of routine and re-direction to the event are important in the act of authentication.

John Durham Peters (2001:707) describes witnessing as an intricately tangled practice which 'raises the questions of truth and experience, presence and absence, death and pain, seeing and saying.' For Peters the phenomenon of bearing witness re-opens and raises 'fundamental questions of communication' itself. Peters rightly points out that while witnessing is a cultural, moral, ethical and legal construct, it is clearly under-theorised in media studies.

Both John Peters (2001: 708) and Michael Humphrey (2000: 10) write about witnessing and testimony as a legal construct with a long history of establishing facts in trials. Humphrey situates the notion of testimony as truth in news gathering, psychological therapy and entertainment. Peters additionally locates the notion of witnessing in theology where the concept of a witness as a martyr developed in early Christianity. In recent decades there has been a proliferation of literature where witnesses record their experiences as survivors of traumatic events such as World War II. Peters argues that 'witnessing' is an extraordinary moral and cultural force as it fundamentally anchors the act of witnessing to life and death from the theological perspective.

Humphrey postulates that giving testimony of one's experiences can be manifested in different forms – speech, literature, poetry, drama, art, music, photography, etc. - but nevertheless the more dominant cultural form tends to be narrative or storytelling. Humphrey, in citing Milan Kundera, reiterates that narrative comes out of experience and also shapes experience and what is generated as narrative is as much a product of forgetting as remembering. In drawing on Engels' notion of memory, Humphrey points out that memory, especially spoken memories, can be constructed as a conversation (2000:11). In situating the concept within media, John Ellis (2000: 32) reiterates witnessing can be in some ways responsible for the events which you bear testimony to. He argues that television presents a particular way of witnessing as a domestic act. Similarly, for Tobias Ebbrecht (2007: 223) the 'event' has become a key term in our

contemporary culture where historical moments can become current events as they are commemorated through the media space and hence these mediatised rituals play a role of emphasizing remembrance.

This act of bearing witness through the television screen evokes Raymond Williams' mobile privatization where distant acts and events can be consumed within the domain of one's home. These private moments of consuming a global tragedy signify both the need to connect with far and distant humanity whilst marking these spaces out as events witnessed through the screen. Helmers (2001:450) contends that the mass media 'provides citizens with common stories, shared cultural memory and mandatory rituals creating temporal (yet temporary) public sphere(s) that conjoins humanity through the act of public consumption.' For Helmers (2001: 450) 'media texts provide a certain flow of cultural material from producers to audiences who in turn use them in their life world settings to construct a meaningful world and to maintain a common cultural framework.'

The important role of the media in our everyday life, especially its ability to represent the wider world and reality, means that it appropriates a symbolic power and a liminal space where it is positioned between our private realm of consumption and the public realm of moral engagements. Its ability to invite spectacle and gaze and equally to enable mass consumption of suffering and trauma imposes a subjectivity where the act of mass consumption and the invitation to bear witness creates a moral economy of validating an event through personal witnessing. This invitation to bear testimony construct the audience as crucial to the politics of pity and the construction of public and media memory. Often this subjectivity of the audience to a media event or the 'disaster marathon' is underplayed in media studies. The invitation to bear witness binds audiences into a moral economy of validating and constructing the media event where mass viewing is a vital component of creating it in the first place.

Mass consumption of suffering, bearing witness, our moral gaze and the politics of pity all reaffirm a postmodern subjectivity where our engagements with our mediated environment is both about subjugation, where the media exploits the human psyche and its pull towards pity, abjection and suffering, and equally about our ability to domesticate or dismiss the media's invitation to partake in suffering. The subjectivity of the human condition is defined through our appropriation of the mediated environment into our everyday lives and our degrees of dislocation in our immediate physical societies. Here the media and particularly new media provide new platforms to experience communion and connection where these provide opportunities to construct private meaning to public events.

Beyond witnessing, new media technologies enable new ways to engage with media events, from the creation of online content to the posting of pictures and videos of events along with the possibility of viewing events decontextualised from media narratives in video portal sites such as Youtube. The liveness that denotes Dayan and Katz's (1992) notion of a media event is re-negotiated through new media technologies which enable audiences to view footage on demand and to extend and augment television news consumption through other multimedia platforms.

As Jan Roscoe (2004: 363) points out, as 'interactive media opportunities have arisen, content is now being

produced, delivered and consumed in new ways and content can be delivered across various platforms, utilising television, the internet, mobile phones and digital and interactive screen services.’ Roscoe argues that instead of our viewing being controlled through the flow of schedules, which Raymond Williams envisaged, it is now clustered around events, and through technologies such as personal video recorders, DVDs, and subscription television services. Additionally, new media platforms such as websites and blogs function as memorials and as performance where they provide spaces to partake in the event (Helmets 2001).

Like placing flower bouquets and notes at accident sites and places of commemoration of tragic events, new media spaces enable audiences to participate discursively with events and to watch and read events beyond the ‘liveness’ of the media event on television. Video platforms enable audiences to view video images and footages disembedded from the media narrative. This decontextualization of events from live broadcasts and seamless narratives re-negotiates the media event as both a collective and fragmented experience in postmodernity and in the age of convergence. Secondly, new media spaces enable the creation of content by audiences. These engagements broaden event creation and in the process become therapeutic sites for recovery and individual and communal meaning making.

The collective commemoration of grief and trauma enables the emergence of collective memory. Beyond the creation of collective memories, rituals are also performative (Schefflin 1985; Tambiah 1977). In stressing the significance of rituals for the act of remembering and collective memory, Joseph Roach (1996: xi) articulates that the social processes of memory and forgetting may be manifested in various performance acts ‘from stage plays to sacred rites, from carnivals to the invisible rituals of everyday life.’

Pain and Memory

Postmodern subjectivity is built through socialisation into media rituals and the human condition to relate to pain and suffering where these play an important part in constructing memory. In bearing testimony to tragic and mediated events, pain and the ability to relate to suffering become an integral component in mediated rituals. Pain and suffering become tools to conjoin private and public memory. Jennifer Cole (2004:88) argues that the ability of ritual to assuage pain lies in its ability to draw pain into the process of producing people’s memories. Memory then becomes a mechanism that links individual bodies with wider narratives and commits people to a particular narrative of rooting it within their subjective sense of themselves. Blondheim and Liebes (2005) assert that the relationship between audience and television becomes significant during historic moments as the media appropriates the role as a memory institution. Jay Winter’s (1995) *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* explores the various dimensions in which the process of grieving manifests forms and rituals to express and assuage collective loss and suffering. Collective commemoration is both a ritual and a device for healing and remembrance.

Jennifer Cole (2004: 87), whilst exploring the ‘question of how ritual can heal community pain or trauma’,

argues that ritual's ability to relieve pain is conjoined to the process of reconstructing memory.' Cole points out that the experience of pain and suffering can be fundamentally social. This social nature of pain is yielded through the interfacing of the social world with individual subjectivities. Cole is of the view that social pain is 'historically constituted and expressed' leading to an 'archive of historical memories' structured around social pain. In citing social theorists such as Emile Durkheim and Friedrich Nietzsche, she points out that memory requires pain and indeed other sensory and visceral perceptions such that pain pre-dates visual images and languages (Cole 2004:99).

In a similar vein Birgitta Hoijer links the view of tragedies and crises on media platforms to the creation of global compassion. Hoijer (2004: 19) describes the sentiment of compassion as a sentiment commonly exploited in media and politics. She points out that this is evident with the integration of trauma and suffering as mainstream narratives with the 'CNN effect' where rolling news focuses on conflicts and disasters and their impact on the innocent without reprieve. Hoijer, (2004) in citing Sznajder, locates public compassion with the ideas of Enlightenment and humanitarian movements that emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries where it was manifested in a zeal to abolish slavery, child labour and other forms of social injustices that prevailed in society. The media draws on the moral gaze in enabling a collective engagement. The moral gaze thus captures another form of subjectivity created by mediated suffering where the ability to experience pain is also equally mediated by the need to respond morally and to impose judgement through our cultural paradigms and value systems.

Martin Bell (1998: 169) describes the focus on human suffering in conflict, war and strife as the 'journalism of attachment'. This journalism of attachment, according to Bell, emphasises people as opposed to weapons and strategies, depicting a change in the reporting of conflicts, wars and humanitarian crises. Bell argues that the journalism of attachment, with the focus on human interface with conflict, works to remove distance and neutrality. The journalism of attachment is then rooted in depicting pain and suffering and drawing on the audiences' compassion as opposed to apathy.

Hoijer (2004: 514) contends that 'global compassion is situated at the intersection between politics, humanitarian organizations, the media and the audience/citizens.' Through extensive media coverage, images of distant suffering have become part of ordinary citizens' perceptions of conflicts and crises. Television, with its reach and visual impact, may therefore play a key role in the fostering of a collective global compassion. For Hoijer (2004: 520) the compassion that the audience expresses is often directly related to the documentary pictures it views on television. Thus individual pain and collective memory along with the ritual depiction of human suffering by the media enacts cultural codes which audiences are able to identify. Our ability to personalise and de-personalise mediated suffering then is determined by our individual psyche. Suffering has mass appeal but it is equally mediated by the sense of the personal and by individual orientations. Our ability to partake or disengage from mediated suffering reveals the politics of pity where the agency of the audience interplays with various media conventions which constantly pull us into a pervasive and moral space of pain and suffering,

Conclusion

It is the argument in this paper that distant suffering and the mediated politics of pity create a postmodern subjectivity where the media event is about socialising audiences into media rituals through certain technical devices. These include the suspension of temporality and a re-configuration of spatiality, the ability to narrate and represent reality and its persuasive potential to invite audiences to bear witness to the images of suffering with the rest of humanity. Steve Anderson (2001: 21) describes television as ‘an ideal facilitator of cultural memory with its ritualistic, event-style coverage and capacity for endless repetition.’ This postmodern subjectivity narrates both the power of the media as well as the complexities in engaging with events of distant suffering. The emphasis on a visual culture and its relevance in creating global compassion along with its relationship to pain and memory are crucial elements of our postmodern subjectivity. This is constructed through our socialisation into media rituals which leverage on our human condition and psyche to relate to pain and suffering. A pervasive image economy of suffering in accelerated modernity can equally de-sensitise people’s relationship to pain where people can renegotiate and domesticate suffering through their interactions with technology and content. Media events and the rituals enacted through the media are significant memory devices where the suspension of time and routines are employed to commit media events to public memory. Here the collective watching seeks to validate an event as nationally or globally significant where the act of mass viewing transforms audiences into witnesses. Postmodern subjectivity is about this complicity in the media’s ability to represent reality. This subjectivity enables mediated suffering to be both a pervasive narrative in our media-saturated world and equally one that could be domesticated by individuals and societies. This postmodern subjectivity is intrinsically dialectical in its orientation where the ‘media event’ and the attendant suffering could alter our psyche and consciousness locating them as ‘transformative devices’ in constructing history and public memory, whilst enabling us to connect and disconnect to the strange and familiar in proximate and distant places.

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Law and the State: a Philosophical Evaluation

By Chiedozie Okoro

Abstract

This essay examines the aims and functions of law in the state. It investigates the ontological basis of law, the role of law in the polity, and suggests some ideas about law which if applied to the existing paradigm of law will make law humanistic instead of positivistic. As it pertains to the objectives and functions of law in the state, reference shall be made to schools of thought in jurisprudence such as the natural law theory, legal positivism, legal realism, sociological jurisprudentialism and ancestral law. The purpose will be to show how law has varied from epoch to epoch and from society to society. On the whole, law has evolved through four principal eras which include ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary. Law in the ancient period was metaphysical, moralistic and cultural. In the medieval period, law was teleological, theological and theocratic. And in the modern and contemporary periods, law assumed both constitutional and secular dimensions. The paper also makes distinction between philosophy of law and jurisprudence and this is done with a view to showing that law is not a sole priority of lawyers and judges, but a concern for intelligentsias who wish to express their views about how best law could be used to achieve social cohesion in the state.

Introduction

It is generally assumed that man is a socio-political animal, that man and society are mutually inextricable, and that no one can lead the life of the island (like the lonely Robinson Crusoe the ship-wrecked man trapped on an island). Such a world would simply be boring and meaningless. From the moment necessity endeared man to live beyond subsistence and evolve society, the questions have ever re-echoed: What is law? What is the role of law in the state? What are the rights and obligations of the citizens in the state? These rights and obligations vary from the intellectual, political, economic, judicial, to the freedom of expression, property ownership, equity and justice. However, the obligations and rights of the citizenry are actualized or negated according to the nature of law within a particular state.

The state is a personified abstraction. It often signifies the laws of the federation or a republic. It is in this

sense that the state is said to have a geographical expression. A nation nonetheless refers to a people and the way they live (i.e. by their norms and customs). A nation state therefore, will include the people and the laws of the land by which the people organize their affairs. It is in this sense that we speak of a polity and the principle of democracy. As man and the state are inseparable, so are law and the state inseparable. Akin Ibidapo-Obe makes this point when he states that “law and society are inextricably linked because law is the foundation upon which social organization is built”(Ibidapo-Obe, 1992: 3). This implies that law intermingles with other social institutions and also with other academic disciplines within a polity. It is in this sense that Akin Ibidapo-Obe further states that:

Law is the fountain head that nurtures, or is nurtured by other elements of social organization such as politics, economics, sociology, psychology and religion.... Kings and Princes, Chiefs and Priests, Bishops and Mullahs, Proletariat and Soldier and, indeed, any person or group of persons who hold(s) the reigns of power or governance over a group of people do(es) so on the basis of law. A lawfully authorized government rules by law in the same way as usurpers to power must resort to some form of law to gain legitimacy and control (p. 1).

G. Hay seems to be in agreement with the above assertion of Ibidapo-Obe when he states that the “command of the public force is entrusted to the judges in certain cases” (Hay, 1898-99: col. 195). A similar view is also espoused by Oliver. W. Holmes and J. C. Gray. Gray for instance, says that “every society or organized body of men must have a judge or judges to determine disputes.... The more civilized the society becomes, the more do the functions of a judge come to be exercised apart from other functions”(Gray, 1892-93: cols. 23-24). The foregoing assertion of Gray about law seems to suggest that law will best actualize its essence in a democratic society. It is against this line of thought that he further states that:

The law or the laws of a society are the rules in accordance with which the courts of that society determines cases and which therefore, are rules by which members of that society are to govern themselves; and the circumstance which distinguishes these rules from other rules for conduct, and which makes them “the law”, is the fact that the courts do act upon them. It is not that they are more likely to be obeyed than other rules(col.. 24).

Reiterating the above submission of Gray, Hay goes ahead to state that “de facto, the orders come from the courts, from the judicial, not from the executive departments” (col. 195). By implication, the judiciary is the overseer and regulator of law in a democratic society and for this reason it (the judiciary) must ensure that the law of the land is just in the eyes of the public. Once the public perceive that governance operates on the rule of law, the government of the land becomes easily acceptable. Hay then submits as follows:

The law, therefore, may be described as substantially those rules which are used by the courts in determining when and to what extent the public force shall be used against individuals in time of peace (*Ibid*).

The assertions of Hay and Gray buttress the point that the efficacy of law in any polity is best realized in

the law courts through the judges. These views of Hay and Gray represent the position of the American Sociological Jurisprudentialists. There are of course other perspectives to law all of which aim at proffering ideas about what should be the nature, structure and function of law in the state. Needless to say, the delineation of the perspectives to law in relation to the nature, structure and function of law in the state happens to be of concern to philosophy of law and jurisprudence.

But what really is the difference between philosophy of law and jurisprudence? We can regard the former as the searchlight for elucidating the aims, functions and the relationship between law and jurisprudence. Philosophy is the logic behind law, while jurisprudence is the lubricant of law. Through law, jurisprudence and philosophy intermingle, but the three are different in perspectives and functions. Philosophy of law belongs in the discipline of philosophy and its aims and functions include to critically evaluate such ontological questions as: Why does the state or law exist? What are the functions and the aims of law in the state? What is the purpose of jurisprudence and how could its concepts and theories be thoroughly clarified to meet its set objectives? Jurisprudence on the other hand belongs in the discipline of law and deals with the content of the law, that is, the definition of theories and concepts of law. “The jurist considers the structure or function of law, the philosopher its underlying principles and causes. The former’s interest is on the content of the law, the later on the spirit or being of the law” (Berolzheimer, 1964, 3). Philosophy through ethics bequeaths to law the task of ensuring that the dream of humans to attain the universal pedestal of a well rounded life guided by reason (in every society) is accomplished. Ethics as a normative study describes and prescribes yardsticks by which human conduct can be adjudged as good or bad, wrong or right, just or unjust. At the level of meta-ethics, theories in and the language of ethics are scrutinized. But this goal of ethics to pursue the ideal life is not accomplishable without law. Law then becomes that efficacious way of bringing into reality the lofty dream of the ethical man to live in an organized society where there are balance and cohesion achievable through rules and regulations. The onus now falls on philosophy of law and on jurisprudence to marshal out ways by which the ideals of ethics can be accomplished through law.

In theory, jurisprudence looks universal (as it pertains to the analysis of concepts), but in practice, it seems limited by the interpretations of law within a polity. Since jurisprudence is man’s thoughts about himself and about the society in which he lives, it means that jurisprudence is connected to other fields of knowledge such as the social sciences, the sciences and the humanities. “All these sources aggregate to form the philosophical and political valuations from which a legal theory is built up. Historically, it is the genealogy of ideas, it is an eclectic discipline which encapsulates the idea of human cultural existence, the protagonists of it...include the lawyers, churchmen, historians, anthropologists and so on (Ibidapo-Obe, 4). Both philosophy of law and jurisprudence are however, parasitic to other disciplines all of which combine to form the ideological orientation behind law. Consequently, Ibidapo-Obe submits that: “Law takes its colour from ideas, from philosophy, or ideology. It is the philosophy, the theory or ideology upon which law is based that constitutes the province of jurisprudence”(p. 3).

The Ontological Basis of Law

More fundamental than the existence of law, are the reason(s) for which law exists. The factor(s) which necessitate the evolution of law and the purpose for which law exists is called the “ontological basis of law”. At the core of the evolution and existence of law are basic issues such as “the nature of man,” “man and the state,” and “the purposes for which man and the state exist.”

In *The Idea of Law* Dennis Lloyd enunciates the Semitic and Caucasian accounts of ‘human nature fundamental to man’s relationship with nature and his society. Whether from the religious or secular point of view Semitic/Caucasian conception of man and society is that which stresses the negative nature of man and society. From the religious perspective, man is seen as a fallen angel, a being of vice who has to be saved by the intervention of God. From the secular point of view, philosophers such as Rousseau see man as an innocent being corrupted by society. Some other philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes see man as a lawless being that needs to be reformed by the draconian laws of the Leviathan. Thus, from the Western perspective, man is conceived as being either evil by nature or that society corrupts his innocent nature. It is thus for the sake of social harmony that the need arose for the evolution of penal laws to curtail and restrain the excesses of men.

In the African tradition, man and the state are conceived as symbiotically coexisting such that man discovers his creative purpose in nature as he explores the potentials of nature to improve his lot in his social setting. The purpose of man from this perspective is therefore cosmological and holistic in the sense that man and the cosmos are inseparably interlinked. The African conception of man and society is tripological in the sense that the “cosmic order” is replicated in the “social order”, the “social order” is replicated in the “self order” and vice versa. This way, “all forces become strengthened, the individual is seen in the light of the whole, in the same way as meaning, significance and value are seen in the light of the whole, all of which depend on the art of integration” (Anyanwu, 1981: 371). This explains the reason why the African penal laws and the conception of retribution consist of the processes of reconciliation and compromise.

On the contrary, traditional Western conception of man and the state is metaphysical and theocratic. The universe is seen as the handwork of the creative genius (God) who then appointed man the caretaker of his creation. By 15th century A.D., Baconian empiricism and Cartesian rationalism initiated a major change in the Western conception of legal science in the same way as the Kant’s categorical imperative (discoverable by human reason) changed western conception of human nature. The consequence of this revolution is that a lacuna was created between the private (subjective) and the public (objective) conceptions of man that in turn influenced the Western conception of law as it pertains to property ownership. Now, beginning with social contract theorists such as Thomas Hobbes and legal positivists such as Jeremy Bentham and some other philosophers such as Hegel, absolute theories of law evolved which removed the emphasis of law from obligations to rights and separated law entirely from morality.

The result of this revolution is that both the cosmological and theocratic conceptions of man and the state were radicalized thereby increasing the need for the “rigours of a punitive system of law” (Lloyd, 1987:

14). It is in this sense that Dennis Lloyd states as follows:

The attempt to regard law as a natural necessity directed to restraining, in the only way possible, the evil instincts of man gave way to a new view of law as a means to rationalizing and directing the social side of man's nature (p. 18).

The necessity for punitive measures of law brings to mind concepts such as power, authority, sanction, force or coercion. If indeed human nature is evil, it follows that man needs laws (in the form of sanctions) to reform his evil nature so that harmony and tranquility can be achieved in the society. To achieve this, the custodians of law in a state must learn the skill of balancing the dichotomy between obligations and rights. Obligations as duties and rights as depicting individual liberty have their bases in the philosophical foundations of determinism and indeterminism. The fundamental issue here borders on the fact whether within a socio-political context, man is free or determined in the performance of his actions. On this question alone, if opinions of the citizenry of a polity are sought, views would run riot.

Usually, legal injunctions serve the double role of imposing obligations as well as granting rights to the members of the state. It is this sense that Dworkin says that law confers, reforms and restrains. It is also in this sense that Jeremy Bentham states that:

Rights and obligations, though distinct and opposite in their nature, are simultaneous in their origin and inseparable in their existence ... the law cannot grant a benefit to one without imposing, at the same time, some burden upon another, or in other words, it is not possible to create a right in favour of one, except by creating a corresponding obligation imposed on another. How confer upon me the right of property on a piece of land? By imposing upon others not to touch the produce. How confer upon me a right of command? By imposing upon a district, or a group of persons, the obligation to obey me (1957: 57).

Bentham defines rights and obligations thus:

Rights are in themselves advantages, benefits, for he who enjoys them whereas obligations on the contrary, are duties, charges onerous to him who ought to fulfill them (*Ibid.*).

Bentham therefore asserts that rights are good, while obligations are evil. He then goes ahead to advise that in the granting of rights cognition should be taken of the fact that the right conferred to do good also includes the right to do harm or evil. He also cautions that the legislator ought never to impose a burden except for the purpose of conferring a benefit of a clearly greater value. Perhaps, it is in agreement with this Bentham's line of thought that H. L. A. Hart submits as follows:

Primary rules imposes obligations and duties, Secondary rules confer powers and rights which facilitate the execution of a will (1977, col. 152).

Indeed, law and legal theories exist for the purpose of drawing up ways of ameliorating the divide between rights and obligations.

In *Democracy and Natural Law* Robert L. Calhoun explores what he calls “the nature and behaviour of man as a political animal” (1960: col. 40) in a democratic society. Calhoun sees man and his world as dynamic forces that continuously undergo the processes of change. For him, the understanding of human nature should provide a solid background for the proper functioning of law in the state. He defines man as follows:

- (i) a body and spirit in the evolution of creation and intentions
- (ii) A rational being that affects his environment positively and negatively and is in turn affected by his environment
- (iii) A sentient being that holds emotionally to his desires
- (iv) An anthropological being that builds tools
- (v) A cultural being that creates norms and customs for social harmony and religious orderliness
- (vi) A homo-politicus who creates ideologies, theories and devices laws for state organization
- (vii) A homo-theoreticus or intellectual being who seeks knowledge and acquires the know-how in order to discover and invent scientific and technological edifices (*Ibid.*).

To achieve his aims and aspirations, man has no option but to live in the society. It is for this purpose that the laws of the state confer rights and obligations to the citizens. But these rights and obligations serve as “limitation on the one hand and freedom on the other” (p. 43) in the sense that the rights and obligations so-called are regulated by sanctions. It is in this light that Calhoun sees the democratic society as the best form of state which can help man actualize his authentic self. Democracy, he says, is an “operating system and regulative idea’ in the sense that the ‘initiation and control’ needed for coercion or sanctions are embodied in the people which grants the room for ‘plurality of initiative’” (p. 33). Contrary to the classical school of thought which views authority in terms of coercion, prestige and emotional persuasions, Calhoun says that authority comes from a root word which original meaning is intended to enhance the one that is controlled (i.e. people of the state). to illustrate, the word *Augere* means to make greater, while *Auctor* refers to one who exercises that sort of productive, beneficent and stimulating control. *Auctoritas*, so understood, is meant to prompt into fuller life the person over whom authority is being exercised. Consequently, Calhoun submits that:

In existing democratic societies the rules for public behaviour and for political control are

established and modified in the light of open discussions and by decision that seeks to reflect *majority will* with concern alike for the common good and for voluntary assent (p. 35).

Here, “majority will” must be distinguished from the “general will” of Rousseau. Rousseau’s general will is the submission of one’s civil initiative and control to the conferred authority of the “civil ruler”, who now wills for the people by his own initiative and control and determines the rights and obligations of the citizenry. Majority will on the other hand, is the collective participation of the people’s “plurality of initiative” in decision and policy making and dissemination. It is on this ground that Calhoun disagrees with A. P. d’Entreves’ assertion that Rousseau’s theory of “General will” marks the hallmark of democracy.

Law and the Structure of the State

Fundamental to the existence and sustenance of the state are factors such as legitimacy, stability, equity and justice. The efficient co-ordination of these factors within a state ensures the attainment of harmony and tranquility necessary for the progress and development of the state. Explaining how the state came into existence Plato says that:

A state arises out of the needs of mankind. No one is self-sufficing, But all of us have many wants and many persons have needs to supply them, one takes a helper for one purpose and another for another; and when the helpers and partners are gathered together in one habitation the body of inhabitants is termed a state (1935, 95).

On how the state came into existence Plato writes

The true creator of a state is necessity, which is the mother of our invention. The first and the greatest necessity is food, the second is dwelling, and the third is clothing (p.96).

Human needs in the state are numerous and most of the time, the way human beings aspire to achieve their various needs creates serious conflicts in the society. It is in the solemn resolution of such conflicts that we know a just system of law. The truth is that a just system of law should afford the citizens of the state equal opportunity to excel in whatever trade they aspire to or engage in. Consequently, it is expedient that the implementation of the stipulations of law, the custodians of law should take into reckoning the fact that a just system of law is one which takes into consideration the limitations of man. Having noted this they (custodians of law within a polity) should endeavour to device ways of adequately ameliorating human excesses in the society without causing undue injury to the violator of law.

The issue of a just system of law further raises the question of the purpose and goal of law in the state. In whose interest is the law made? The state, the citizenry, or the leadership? Is law made to protect the weak or to serve the interest of the strong? Is it that right is might or that might is right? On what ground

have the citizens the right to disagree with certain laws of the land? These and many other questions are necessary in the evaluation of the functions of law in the state in the sense that legitimacy can be usurped and imposed upon the people. To ensure that everyone is equal before the law, certain mystique (system of norms) have been created around law with a view to enhancing the efficacy of law. They include the following:

- (i) Law is regarded as a social institution in which we sometimes speak of law in the abstract sense. Expressions as “the majesty of law”, “the justice of law” “equality of all before the law”, “the rule of law”, “Law, the common man’s hope” and so on are used to characterize law in the social context.
- (ii) There are “laws” or the “rules” in which process law comes into existence as expressed by its contents and the range of application.
- (iii) There is law as a peculiar source of certain rights, duties, powers and other relations among people. In this sense, law confers, regulates and restrains. It is in this latter sense that we say someone should be held responsible for damage on grounds of negligence, or that the law provides that a certain person has the right to leave his property to whoever the person so pleases. It is also in this third sense of law that we say that the ignorance of law is no excuse to flout the law, in which case, no man may profit from his own wrong doing.

Doubt, however, remains as to whether law cannot be perverted to profit the wrong doer or if law cannot sometimes be prejudiced as to legislate unfavourable conditions that will affect the citizens of the state adversely? There is no question as to the fact that may err, but whatever the law states or stipulates at a time, “that is the law” and ignorance of the law is no excuse to flout it. For law in whichever circumstance is more *de facto* than *de jure*.

The above submission notwithstanding, the point still remains that it will be injurious, if not damaging, for the citizens of the state (particularly, one which is a democracy) to perceive the law of the land as being coercive. To avoid such ugly situation, Leo Strauss enunciates the view that in order for man to attain his highest statute, he must live in the best kind of society most conducive to him. This best kind of society which inspires man to pursue after excellence, according to Leo Strauss, is called the *politeia* (1964: 135). Let’s hear from Strauss on this matter.

As a civil society, the *politeia* depicts the government of men as opposed to the mere administration of state affairs, it is the factual distribution of power within a community than what the constitutional law stipulates in regards to political power. However, the *politeia* as a legal phenomenon exists in a constitutional form (pp. 135-36).

The theory of *politeia* enunciated by Leo Strauss calls to mind Plato’s “Ideal Polity”, Marx’s “Communist

State”, Augustine’s “City of God”, African “Communalism” and the Islamic “Uma” all of which sound utopian.

Utopian as the issue of an ideal state of affairs may sound, the fact remains that the engineering and re-engineering of the state through law to attain balance and cohesion is not possible without the notion of the ideal state. Crucial to the existence of the state therefore, is the issue of legitimacy. By what process and in what manner was the leadership installed? Is it through a democratic process? Or is the leadership a group of usurpers who imposed their will upon the people? How would a regime react to individual discretion concerning state duties and citizen morality? These questions are central to the issue of legitimacy and for that matter the nature of law in the state. They are questions that are also of interest to schools of thought in philosophy of law and in jurisprudence.

Defending the Natural Law theory, Socrates identified “law and nature, and the just with the legal” (p. 106). His central concern is about how man can live a good or just life in the society. For Plato, the question of legitimacy follows from the issue of justice and justice is when reason governs the lower emotions in the same way as the philosopher King is supposed to be the ideal leader over the soldiers and artisans. Only then could justice be said to be obtainable in the society. Aristotle distinguished between “Natural Justice and Legal Justice”. The first is a derivation from Natural Law and is universal in status, while the second is derived from the constitution of the state and is determined by the laws of the state. It is perhaps from this justice point of view that Aristotle justifies the institution of slavery. For the Sophists, The Natural Law is universal and all men are equal before the law. Any human law that contradicts Natural Law is illegitimate and unjust. The Stoics on their own part, see legitimacy and justice as derivations from *Logos* otherwise known the universal principle of reason.

According to d’Entreves, Natural justice for the Romans was based on the knowledge of the “know-how” (i.e. technical). They saw law as a matter of social engineering in which legitimacy and justice were seen as obtainable from within the confines of the state following the laws of nature. Thus, they developed legal principles which the Roman jurists and magistrates saw as empirical principles of reason and justice rather than as deductions from universal reason. They developed three levels of idea of Natural Law as follows:

- (i) “*ius gentium*” as the embodiment of laws and usages found among peoples and representing good sense.
- (ii) “*ius naturale*” as the exercised creative function through the *ius gentium*.
- (iii) “*ius civil*” as the practical law of the state.

In the medieval era, legitimacy, justice and law were seen from the theological perspective or what d’Entreves calls the “ontological” approach to law. Thus, Thomas Aquinas, in his theory of Natural Law, espoused the view that should a person hold a secret that will set a polity into crises, such a person should withhold his findings no matter how important or factual such findings are. It does not matter if the regime

is despotic. What Aquinas seems to be emphasizing is that the King is an embodiment of God and only God can so oust him. Similar kind of legal philosophy obtained in medieval Islam where propagation of the “divine rights of Kings” loomed large. The spiritual took control of the temporal. For Kings and Sultans to gain legitimacy, they had to seek the anointing of the Church or the Mosque. Justice, of course, was at the mercy of the despots. Two philosophers, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) and Nicholo Machiavelli (1469- 1537), however held opposing views to the common belief of this period. Ibn Khaldun relayed the sociological flux (rise and fall) of the regimes of the Maghreb. He exposed the avarice of the regimes, their greed for naked power and their imposition of their will on the citizenry under the guise of divine justice. De-emphasizing the issue of divine justice, Ibn Khaldun goes ahead to describe the means by which leaders of medieval Islam imposed their will upon the people. According to him, two principles, *Asabiya* and *Mulk* are central to the organization of any polity. In his book *Kitab al Ibar* (Universal History), Ibn Khaldun explains that *asabiya* is the principle of collective discipline that a group or groups use for the obtainment of dominion or power (*mulk*). Whereas the *Malik* (King) relies on *asabiya* for support, *mulk* allows him the expression of his authority and power. In other words, “power is the basis of the state and the necessary instrument of that restraining authority without which man cannot exist” (Rosenthal, 1958: 85). Machiavelli on his part, enunciated the psychological and moral behaviour of the ruler and the ruled. His aim was “to set objective laws from historical facts, and these laws are meant to direct and guide the ruler who wishes to perform efficiently in his political objectives” (Bah, 1989: 10). He shows how the principalities of Italy rallied for state power and exerted naked authority on their citizens. Since the Prince enthroned himself by means of conspiracy, he was pessimistic about the nature of men. Since men are evil by nature, the Prince is to combine the craftiness of the fox and the aggression of the lion in order to manipulate the selected men and the mass-men. His watchword was to legitimize his authority over the people, and in doing this, “he judges by results, looks to the end in order to justify his means” (p. 13).

Epicurus Lucretius, in his poem entitled *On The Nature Of Things*, had developed the State of Nature Theory. For him, “man had to evolve society in order to overcome the intimidating forces of nature and the fear and menace of wild beasts” (Leo Strauss, 111- 112). Following the State of Nature Theory, the Social Contract Theorists shifted the emphasis of law and justice from obligations to natural rights. Their major task was to de- emphasize the divine rights of Kings that stressed obligation over rights. In place of this Social Contract Theorists propagated legislation by parliament that stressed natural rights over obligations. In opposition to this view of Social Contract Theorists however, stood the Hegelian conception of law which strips the citizens of their rights. Hegel in his *Philosophy of Right* portrays the state as the manifestation of the Absolute Spirit. He goes ahead to say that the will of the Absolute Spirit is the will of the state which is embodied in the personality of the leader. The result is that the Kings of the Reformation, wielded absolute powers, to the extent that the: “Religion of the King was the religion of the state (*cuis regio, enes religio*) or the boast of Louis XIV, the King of France. The state? I am the state. The King becomes the embodiment of the sovereignty of the state” (Ajayi, 1992: 14).

The advent of legal positivism gave law a totally new perspective. Law was removed from its rationalistic and idealistic bases to the empirical, the basis of which is the natural sciences. Bentham, the founder of the principle of utilitarianism and the theory of legal positivism sought to make law scientific like

the Newtonian science. He hoped that his *hedonic calculus* would do for law the magic that *Newtonian Calculus* did for physics and science. We can therefore see that the theory of legal positivism was influenced by radical events that took place in modern Europe which include the following:

- (i) The emphasis on natural rights by the Social Contract Theorists.
- (ii) Thomas Hobbes' definition of law as "the command of the sovereign".
- (iii) The American and French revolutions of 1779 and 1879 which stressed the civil rights of the citizenry in the concepts "Freedom, Liberty and Enfranchisement".
- (iv) Hegel's philosophy of right and August Comte's positivism and;
- (v) David Hume's assertion that the value statements cannot be derived from the statements of facts, that is, there is no connection between the "isness" and the "oughtness" of statements.

Little wonder then, legal positivism enunciates the imperative theory of law which separates morality from law. And it is based on this imperative theory of law, that Bentham says that law whether good or bad necessarily involves a "mischief". As David Lyons puts it, "imperativism recognizes only two types of law, command and prohibitions, by which case, a law is both restrictive and permissive based on the fact that a law confers and subordinates both rights and obligations" (1973: 110). What this assertion amounts to is that whatever legal system is in operation and however iniquitous it (such legal system) may appear, there is an unconditional obligation to obey it. This notion of law, to say the least, is problematic in the sense that the impression is created that obedience to the law, no matter how unjust, means that the law is acceptable to the people.

Legal positivism seems to be "value neutral" in that it removes "conscience" from law. It is perhaps for this reason that totalitarian regimes such as those of Nazi Germany and Hitler, Fascist Italy and Benito Mussolini, Communist Soviet Union and Stalin, became the norm of contemporary Europe. These regimes combine despotic measures such as - intimidation, indoctrination, demagoguery, propaganda and the destruction of the opposing parties; all of which are means of coercion, to force their wills upon the people. Thus, given the provisions of legal positivism, the atrocities of military and despotic regimes as well as the obnoxious rule of the colonial masters in Africa are all proper. In this sense, the annulment of the June 12 elections of 1993 in Nigeria is right and both the interim government of Shonekan and the despotic regime of Abacha are legitimate. As such, when the Civil Rights activists such as Gani Fawehinmi say that Abacha's government is illegal, they are on the wrong unless they speak from the Natural Law viewpoint. And it is only within this confine that the appeal of Modhood Abiola (the winner of the June 12 elections) against the annulment of elections holds ground. The point we make here will be clearer if we attempt to summarize the stipulations of legal positivism which are as follows:

- (i) Imperatively, law is the command of the sovereign backed by sanctions.
- (ii) Analyticity sees law as an all-inclusive system that requires nothing extra-judicial to it. Here the truth about law and its development are sought within the confines of law.
- (iii) Positivism separates law from morality and imposes law over morality, that is, what the law says is that which is moral. Here, the authenticity in law is the “is” and not the “ought”.
- (iv) Kelsen’s pure theory of law posits “norm” (the normative theory of law) as the basis of law and the limit within which command is permitted or authorized. Yet this normative theory of law remains on the realm of imperativism because only the legal norm (as opposed to the moral norm) carries with it, the penalty of sanctions and the force of coercion. We note here that Kelsen’s attempt to dress legal positivism in a new cloth fails because law still remains the command of the sovereign, since the norm itself is defined by the sovereign (whatever form of regime it is).

In all, the doctrine of legal positivism is out to achieve stability, peace, unity and security within the polity, but its basis for this is amorphous in that it assumes that the ideal thing about law is coercion and sanction. This implies that justice is the will of the strong.

In *The Ontological Structure of Law*, Arthur Kaufman (1963) tries to marry the idealistic and positivistic perspectives to law. He says that both perspectives represent sectarian and monistic viewpoints about law. He argues that the fundamental question about law concerns “what the general constituent elements of law really are” (col. 83), which in turn derives from the broader question “what are the constituent elements of being” (*Ibid.*)? These fundamental questions when combined, says Kaufman, constitute the basis for “justice and certainty’ as well as ‘law and power’ which technically has been designated ‘the ontological structure of law’” (*Ibid.*). Kaufman goes further to say that both idealism and positivism have missed the point about law. According to him:

Whereas positivism is hinged on the existential, seeks for certainty and sees the validity of the norm in terms of its effectiveness; idealistic notion of law is hinged on the essential and sees law only from the angle of justice, substantive content and material validity. Positivism seeks to refute and free law from the absolute values of idealism, idealism on the other hand challenges positivism to show that laws are not possible without values” (*Ibid.*).

The result is that law has been rendered esoteric and sterile and it is for this reason that Kaufman advocates that the “one-sided monistic conception of law must give way to a dualistic one, or more exactly, to a plural conception of law” (*Ibid.*)

The above view of Kaufman seems to be reiterated by American Sociological Jurisprudentialists who

maintain that the legislation of law should be based on Natural Law, while its enforcement should take a positivistic perspective. For instance, Joseph O'Meara holds the view that "law is a process of decision making rather than the agglomeration of rules, it is a process in which the judge performs not a mechanical but a creative function" (1960: col. 103). According to him, in this whole process of decision making the role of natural law is "to call in question the moral authority of rule when it exceeds the limit of reason" (col. 84). John C. Gray on the other hand, classifies law into "commands given by legislative organs of the state, whose judicial organ is the court and precedents" (1892-93: col. 28) by which the court rules its judgments. In legislating law, "Parliament, Congress, Cortes and Assembly" (col. 29) debate the law which is to be passed as a bill. In this process, morality and reason play very important role in the legislation of law. However, it is through "jurisprudence, the science of actual or positive law" (col. 27) that the decisions of the legislature are actualized through the law court. Here, the importance of jurisprudence is that "it comprises much besides the commands of the sovereign" (col. 26).

But in implementing the law, what parameters should the judge look to? Gray, O'Meara, Hand, Cardozo and Pound reply that in administering the law, the judge depends on "the customs or standard of the community, the mores of the time, the ideals of the age, statutes and precedents or appeal to predecessors. In the administration of the law or passing of judgment, the judge is often divided along the paths of popular will, what the law stipulates, the customs of the land and his own individual will. The question is: in this dilemma, which of the paths should the judge resort to? The American Sociological Jurisprudentialists' reply is that the judge should resort to precedents. It follows then that American Sociological Jurisprudentialists' conception of law is a new name for legal positivism, because the parameters of its operation are positivistic. But there is no doubt that when positive law oversteps its bounds; it is called to order by using the paradigm of natural law.

The Ideal Role of Law in the Polity

There are two realms in law – the *Lege ferenda* (law as it is or the isness of law) and the *Lege leta* (law as it ought to be or the oughtness of law). The concepts of equity, fairness and justice, always seem to fluctuate between these two realms of law, that is, facts and values. This division between the isness and the oughtness of law largely derives from David Hume's assertion that statements of facts cannot be derived from statements of values. Lon Fuller however, espouses the view that in the analysis of, and especially, in the practice of law, facts (what is) and value (what ought to be) are two regions that must merge and become inseparable. He further says that in law, values are to facts what John Dewey calls the "end-in-view" (1958: col. 106). Joseph P. Witherspoon supports Fuller's view when he (Witherspoon) explains Fuller's view thus, "in the field of purposive human activity about law, value and being are not two different things, but two aspects of integral reality', in which case a statute or a decision 'is not a segment of being, but like the anecdote, a process of becoming'" (1958: col. 106). Witherspoon believes that Fuller's main concern is to "show the best way for the judge and the lawyer, the law teacher and the law student, that it would amount to a sheer waist of time to spend his working day making sharp distinctions between

the law that is and the law that ought to be”(col. 107). For Witherspoon therefore, the idea about the duality of law promotes mutual understanding and allows for the thriving of an Intellectual Community. And by the expression Intellectual Community, Witherspoon has in mind a civil society governed by a civil leader who gains power through the electoral process. Meaning therefore, that Witherspoon’s Intellectual Community is similar to, if not the same as, Robert Calhoun’s Democratic Community.

Law is a terminal point where decisions and policies come into action in any community. For this reason, it is expected that law should be just in order that the society may be just. In this wise, the way the executive, legislature and judiciary guide and guard law to serve the interest of the community matters a lot. This helps to facilitate the confidence of the citizenry in the law of the land. If we agree that law can be manipulated to serve the selfish interests of the ruler, class, caste or group of persons, then we have to agree that the law could be made an ass for accomplishing selfish ends. Beside conferring and restraining, how does the law reform a criminal or prisoner and re-integrate such individual into the general community? This is very essential because a law that is not balanced is biased and has the propensity to promote violence. In this wise, Abraham Lincoln’s assertion that- if law is law, need I a force man to coerce me? Becomes a fundamental truism. It means that law should help the citizens actualize their rights through the stipulations of the constitution of the land. It is perhaps for this reason that Fuller lists Seven Moral Conditions for the validity of law.

- (i) That law must be general
- (ii) That law must not be retroactive
- (iii) That law must be clear
- (iv) That law must not involve contradiction
- (v) That law must not command what is impossible
- (vi) That law must be adequately promulgated
- (vii) That law must be a congruence between official actions and the declared rule.

Fuller’s criteria for a just law is an evaluation of the history of law from ancient to contemporary times. In whichever way we view it, draconian laws manifest in every epoch. No matter how we try to make law perfect, the fact remains that the resurgence of draconian laws will always challenge us to think of loftier ways of making law more humanistic. Hence, law does not choose on its own to be draconian, rather, men and women of draconian nature enact draconian laws. That law may always be just therefore, we need to check the excesses of men. This is the crux of the matter.

A.P. d’ Entreves in his work entitled: “Deontological theory of law” looks at possible ways by which

law can be made to serve the interest of the people. He is of the view that authority and reason are two different angles from which law can be evaluated. The extent to which justice is obtainable in the state is determined by the degree to which the leaders of that state have been able to harness law to meet up with the aspirations of everyone. This takes us to the question of how much reason is involved in politics and policy making? Besides, in history, the dissemination of justice has largely followed Thracymacus' line of thinking that- law is in the interest of the strong therefore might is right. It is also in this light that Calhoun and Dworkin agree that in the interpretation and application of law, plurality of initiative and discretion should be used. In *The Province Of Jurisprudence Determined*, Dworkin says that the *modus operandi* of law is based on Judicial Discretion or Discretion in General. He distinguishes between Procedural Discretion and Substantive Discretion. The former deals with legislation and the latter with the judicial process. However, it is important to note that "the judiciary (as a matter of fact) cannot, as the legislature may, avoid coercion as a measure no matter how it tries to operate within the confines of the constitution" (Caplan, 1977: col. 119-120). The intention of Dworkin is to refute the assertion of the legal positivists that law is the command of the sovereign backed by sanction. In spite of this, all of Dworkin efforts amount to mere antics because in the end, the limit of reason, discretion or initiative in politics cannot be determined. In this wise, natural law theory still remains the ideal basis of law. As the Sophists say, under a tyrannical rule, people resort to natural law. This can be seen in the case of Antigone who flouted the law of the land that no female can bury her death. She was able to do this on the basis of natural law. It is also on same basis that the case of "Riggs vs. Palmer in which the legatee who murdered his testator was disallowed by the court to enjoy the benefits of the 'will' made by the testator" (O'Meara, col. 90). Based on the fact that natural law stands as the last hope of the oppressed, Britz Berolzheimer states that natural law is the "embodiment of the evolution of justice – the study of the conception of justice in order to ascertain its effects" (1964, xxxiv).

By and large, to realize the ideal role of law may entail an ideal society which is utopian. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that law has an ideal role to play in the polity. How best this can be actualized is a task for the philosophy of law, jurisprudence and the protagonists of law.

Conclusion

It is unimaginable to think of a society without law because even gangsters and lawless states have their own laws. Once the rule of law is stipulated, individuals or groups have no option but to comply. The only ground they might refuse to comply by the law is if they perceive the law to be unjust or if the coercive force of the law loses its esteem. Given therefore, that law could be perverted to serve the selfish intents of despots, it follows that law must not only be effective, but must be well promulgated to serve the interest of all.

Various countries of the world interpret and practice law according to their own understanding. France operates a professorial system of law, America combines the sociological and legal realist perspectives of

law, while Nigeria like Britain operates the common law system. But whereas these other nations interpret law from the spectacles of their social-cultural milieu, Nigeria remains truncated between British-Christian law, Arab-Islamic (Sharia) law and the Customary or Traditional system of law. The result of this confused approach to law is the lack of respect for the rule of law and for the constitution of the land, all of which stem from the lack of a common basis for the promulgation and interpretation of law.

To say the least, Nigeria is an African country and as an African country it has no choice in the matter but to look back to her culture for the interpretation of law. Generally, the African traditional legal system is based on African cosmology. African cosmology evaluates the universe from a cyclical point of view and within this cyclical triad operates the tripod. The cycle and the tripod form the bases upon which ancient Africans organized the totality of the societal existence, ranging from law to politics, economics, social relations, education and so on. For instance, there is the cosmic order which replicates itself in the social order, the social order which replicates itself in the self order and vice versa. In the same vein, society consists of the past, present and the future, while man is made up of spirit, soul and body. In law and in legal dispute, a crime committed is to be resolved among three bodies which are; the community, the victim and the criminal. And since the watchword for settling legal disputes is to reconcile the contending parties by reaching a compromise, there was room for victim compensation. Victim remedy and victim compensation in contemporary legal terms is known as *victimology*, a concept that has been erroneously conceived by contemporary legal experts as novel. We dare say that victimology may be a new legal term and practice to Semites and Caucasians whose traditional legal system is largely monistic or at best dualistic. Victimology is definitely not a new concept for Africans among whom such an idea has been an ancient practice. The point then is that contemporary Africans have a lot to garner from their traditional concepts of law, in which is enshrined the principle of victimology, which in turn finds anchor on the cyclical and tripological order of the universe and the society. It is by so doing that Africa can hope to evolve a legal system, a system of jurisprudence as well as a philosophy of law that are akin to the African way of life. Needless to say, the interpretation of law from the African perspective will immensely redress the imbalance and lack of social cohesion that bemoan contemporary African countries.

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Politics of Desire in Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun*

By Isam Shihada

In Ahdaf Soueif's *The Eye of the Sun*,¹ the protagonist Asya's emotional journey sheds light upon many sensitive and complicated issues, such as desire, sexuality, love and mutual understanding, all of which constitute the basis for a healthy relationship and a solid viable marriage. Furthermore, this article focuses on serious questions posed by Asya's story. Do married Arab women have the right to speak out about sexual needs? Can marriage based only on love ensure happiness? Should or can the married woman feel only for her husband even if she feels lonely and sexually unsatisfied or should she suffer in silence to uphold a socially sanctioned marriage? The patriarchal Egyptian society from where Asya comes, holds certain views concerning marriage, fidelity, infidelity, love and feelings rooted in economic, legal, and political structures, as well as social and cultural institutions that oppress women through the assertion of male power, dominance and hierarchy. In other words, Asya's journey moves through the complex process of unfolding desires, sexual, social, economic, and political and how this is shaped by the character herself and all that surrounds her.

In The Eye of the Sun examines the politics of Asya's quest to combine love and desire with the entanglement of patriarchal domesticity, family and religion. Within this context, Suad Joseph defines desire as the broad range of experiences of wanting, erotic and non erotic (Joseph 2005). In this study, we would like to use the broader term of desire which covers the erotic and non erotic since desire *In the Eye of the Sun* always "exists in a context of politics, history and geography all of which are intermeshed." (Massad 1999:74)

For Suad Joseph, the patriarchal organization of familial culture means the privileging of the assertions of desire by males and elders and a sense of responsibility by females and juniors to assimilate and act upon the assertions of desire by males and elders (Joseph 2005). For example, Asya's desire to marry Saif Madi is met with her father's objection, who insists that she should not marry until she finishes college. "For these grave things it is best to wait" (Soueif 1992: 146).² Her decision to marry Saif at the age of eighteen is also challenged by her mother, Lateefa Mursi, who is supposed to have more faith in her daughter's decisions rather than playing a conformist role.

But you can't make such an important decision just like that. You can't determine the rest of your life suddenly one night when you are not yet eighteen. And I felt suddenly and for the first

time in my life that I was wiser and stronger than she was, and I kissed her and said, 'Don't worry, Mummy. I know what I am doing.' (108)

It is worthy to note that women in many parts of the Middle East continue to be staunch supporters of traditions and social relations that constrain and limit women's lives (Kandiyoti 1988).³ The most critical role of the mother is to uphold the patriarchal image of women. Since it is the mother's explicit role to bring up her daughters according to the values and standards of society, she herself must not adopt any constructively critical attitudes toward those standards. In other words, women are not encouraged to think independently. Parents rather decide for them what "they will eat, when they will eat, what they will wear, how they can plan" (Rubenberg 2001:82) depriving them from the right to decide and choose for themselves.

Moreover, Asya's quest to combine both desire and love is resisted by her future husband, Saif, who refuses to consummate their sexual desires before marriage despite Asya's insistent requests.

*Please, Saif, I want you so-'
I want you too, Princess, but-
"No. Please. Please I want you inside me-
One day I'll come inside you-
No. Not one day, Saif. Now. Please. You want me. I know you do. And I want you so much.
And it's right, I know it's right-'
No, it isn't.'
She sat back. 'Why? Why isn't it?'"
'Because we are not married.'* (190).

Interestingly enough, the moment their passionate love receives patriarchal social sanction, it has stopped to be the organizing principle of their relationship. That is seen through the failure of sexual consummation on the wedding night as narrated through the conscience of Saif.

I braced myself and gave two strong shoves, and I felt her tremble all over, and she started pushing with her heels against the bed to try and unhook herself, and she was whispering frantically that she couldn't bear it and she couldn't breathe and could I please stop just for a moment for one moment - and I lifted myself off and let her go and she rolled over on her side away from me and curled up into a little ball and pulled the sheet over herself and lay there trembling. I lit a cigarette and lay on my back smoking and after a bit she uncurled herself and came to lie against my side and I knew that she was crying so I stroked her hair and she said she was sorry oh she was so sorry. And after a bit, with her face against my arm, she asked do you want to - do you think we - I just really did not know - and I said hush, it doesn't matter, it does not have to be tonight. (258)

This scene reflects both the fear and the psychological pressure Asya undergoes, taking into account that

Asya as an Arab woman has been taught nothing about sexuality since it is a taboo subject not allowed to be discussed. In this regard, Simone De Beauvoir argues that the wedding night changes the erotic act “into a test that both parties fear their inability to meet, each being too worried by his or her own problems to be able to think generously of the other. This gives the occasion a formidable air of solemnity.” (443)⁴. To add further, the subject of the patriarchal concepts of sexuality takes us to Asya’s memories of her childhood and the restrictions imposed on her by her patriarchal father who dictates how she should act, move, and dress. For instance, one can observe Asya’s father’s furious reaction when he sees her dancing and shaking her head in front of the mirror.

Daddy would freak out if I just shook my head in front of the mirror. Remember the day he saw me tossing my hair around when I was ten and I had to go the same day and have it cut? And I had to wear it short for seven years after that until I went to university? And how he came home one day and heard me practicing the *zaghrouda* and almost sacked Dada Zeina on the spot? (351)⁵

This scene highlights the patriarchal views towards women’s sexuality, seen as an extension which is to be controlled and kept under surveillance, since women are seen as a menace to the social order and that they may bring shame to the family.

However, for Asya, the failure to consummate the relationship functions as “an indefinite detriment of the combining of love and desire” (Massad 1999 :76). In other words, the unconsummated relationship signals Asya’s journey toward loneliness, toward questioning the validity of marriage, toward wanting and desire out of wedlock which has been aggravated by the indifferent attitude of her husband, Saif, who travels all the time leaving her for long periods without at least caring about her emotional and sexual needs in spite of her pleading. This is presented in the scene when Saif calls Asya to tell her, “I am leaving Damascus tomorrow” (341). He calls her and hangs up the phone before Asya can finish her sentence and express her terrible loneliness. “Oh, Saif, it’s *horrid*. I can’t begin- Saif? Hello? Hello? Oh-.” (341)

Asya’s feelings of loneliness acutely intensify when they are together after long periods of separation and loneliness, shivering under a thin blanket in a small room waiting for her husband to finish his reading. “She would be patient while he read, and she would count her blessings, for here he is with her. No longer alone.” (392). She waits. Saif throws the magazine to the floor, switches off the light and whispers “Good night, Princess.” (392). An indifferent behavior which makes Asya, out of loneliness, want to touch his back with her finger tips and say,

Could you? Please? Turn round and hold me?’ ‘Oh, sweetie, sweetie. Go to sleep.’ ‘Please? Just for a minute?’ And he would turn round, and big and solid and sweet-smelling, would hold her close for maybe five minutes, then he’d ask lightly, ‘Is that enough? Can I go to sleep now?’ And patting her hip or arm or whatever was nearest he would murmur, ‘Good night, Princess,’ and he would turn over, and in minutes he would be a sleep. And she would lie awake and hold down the loneliness that threatened to turn into a full –blown panic. (392)

Here, Souief sheds the light upon the psychological pain and feelings of despair and loneliness felt by Asya in a marriage which is supposed to liquidate such feelings and assure an emotional and sexual satisfaction.⁶ To add more, we observe the psychological confusion and pain Asya feels to the extent that she starts questioning whether Saif loves her or not. “Now she watches him. I know you love me. But you don’t want me. You did once, but you don’t any more. But stop. Stop, she tells herself. Be grateful. You *are* grateful. Grateful that he loves you enough to come and live here with you. Think what it was like just four months ago and be grateful.” (392-3) She goes to question further why Saif stops loving her, why he should be here with her, why nothing really happens when he is really here but to be repulsed by him many times.

But to be repulsed, turned away so many times – but that is what he thinks *you* did to *him*- at first. But she *wants* to want him. She badly wants to want him. She wants him to *make* her want him; make her want him like she used to. But he won’t. He will have nothing to do with it at all. So what’s the answer, then –*what?* Wait. There *will* be an answer, of course there will. Just wait. One thing at a time. (393)

Here, we find the psychologically tormented Asya waits to find an answer to her question. Asya’s word “Wait” poses tangible questions for every woman. Is marriage a trap which is hard for women to extricate themselves from? Do feelings die once they are licensed and socially sanctioned by a patriarchal society? In other words, Asya finds herself in a frustrating situation where she feels that she has painfully been trapped. Within this context, De Beauvoir argues that the husband respects his wife too much to take an interest in his wife’s psychological well being that “would be to recognize in her a secret autonomy that could prove disturbing, dangerous; does she really find pleasure in the marriage bed? Does she truly love her husband? Is she actually happy to obey him? He prefers not to ask; to him these questions even seem shocking.” (473) . These questions indicate the unspoken sufferings of many married women like Asya.

In addition to Asya’s suffering is her unexpected pregnancy “You are pregnant. You’re a married woman and you are pregnant. Yes, but we’ve hardly - I mean nothing much has really – I mean it can’t possibly be” (261). Asya’s reaction reflects her desire not to have a child now since things are not going well with Saif as they hardly sleep with each other and, at the same time, she doesn’t want to accumulate her problems by living on pretence that she is the happily perfect wife when she is not. That is clearly highlighted through her sober consciousness. “It is *fraudulent*. And the worst sham of all is how they pretend they’re normal people with nothing at all odd about their marriage. Not how they pretend to the world- that is necessary- but how they pretend to each other. This is the worst bit. He is living this lie and forcing her to live it too. *That’s* what he is doing – continually.” (444)

Accordingly, the struggle between what the patriarchal societies expect of women to do and what women want continues. For instance, Asya’s desire not to have a child has been challenged by the patriarchal culture surrounding her which glorifies the role of the married woman as a mother.⁷ That is observed in the conversation between Tante Soraya and Dada Sayyida and Asya,

‘You’ve always been clever and sweet,’ Tante Soraya said, ‘and now you will give us a

beautiful clever sweet little girl just like you and she will be the first grand child in the family just as you were the first child.’ Asya had shrugged. Asya had known there was no more to be said. Dada Sayyida filled the little silence. “Children are the ornament of life,” truly it was said. Dada Sayyida had seven children, two of them blind. Tante Sorya glanced at Asya’s face ‘Smooth it out now and stop frowning. This is the greatest gift God can give a human being, and you receive it like this?’ (267)

However, Asya’s resistance not to be complacent or silent about her painful, distressing situation has been manifested in facing her husband with the reality of their stalemate marriage. An attitude which informs arguably of Asya’s feminist consciousness of her needs. “I think if we made sure that when we are together we’re really really together. That we’d –do things, and- talk, and stuff- you know, we should be all right, really.’ ‘Of course we will be all right.’ Because it would be such a shame....” (397-8)

In spite of facing him, Saif takes Asya’s feelings and the painful situation she lives in for granted. He is ignorant of her dreams, nostalgic yearnings and the emotional climate in which she passes her days. “Man fails to realize that his wife is no character from some pious and conventional treatise, but a real individual of flesh and blood; he takes for granted her fidelity to the strict regimen she assumes, not taking into account that she has temptations to vanquish, that she may yield to them.” (Beauvoir : 473) . Here, we may say that Saif is a symbol of the patriarchal man who just thinks of himself and his work and what ever progress he has is just a blessing for his wife. That is seen through his continuous and cold behavior in bed which has left its deep impact on Asya’s inner psyche “When he switches off the light, she turns back to the view outside. She knows that if she goes to bed nothing will happen.” (409). Hence, she wouldn’t wait for him anymore in despair to be touched or loved and “whisper to him to hold her, ‘just for a moment.’ She will never do that again.” (409)

Resisting her own painful situation, Asya has stopped blaming herself for the frigidity in their relationship. “*She* isn’t the reason they are not sleeping together anymore. Not any more. She can’t be blamed for that anymore. She’s done everything she could possibly do to show that she wants to- wanted to – and she’s stopped because he doesn’t want to know.” (420). But Saif’s arrogant and cold behavior towards Asya drives her to speak out about her real deep suffering without fear asserting her own desire and resilience not to accept her painful situation. “But you don’t care. You don’t care about me one bit as long as I don’t bug you. I could drop dead or take a lover or anything and you wouldn’t care.” (424) but he provokingly assures her that will never happen. She retorts back “And that is something else you know, is it? Why *should* you assume you know everything about me? Everything about how I will react on anything? Particularly given the –given that it is not something we have ever talked about-’.” (424) All feelings of hopelessness and despair has led Asya to think of the meaning of both her married life and the real purpose behind waiting itself, to live on hope that something might happen. In other words, it is a moment of truth or revelation to her manifested in one question: “All of life reduced to this?” (352). She waits for attention, emotional care, love and a husband who respects and communicates with her.

A husband who turns his back on her every night, who speaks of looking forward to the day when, in the courtesy of advancing years, they will address each other as 'Asya Hanim' and 'Saif Bey' and take gentle strolls round the garden of the house he will build for them in the desert- and wait to die. And what about life? What about all the years that still has to pass? Emptiness. And then age, and then the only end of age. How will she bear it? What can she do? She cannot claim coercion. No one forced her to do anything. She chose. She chose English Literature, she chose Saif Madi, she chose the north of England. (353).

We can observe that something substantial is missing in Asya's married life. She questions what is the meaning of living in pain and suffering. Undoubtedly, her thoughts shed the light upon the unspoken sufferings of many women who suffer within the confines of marriage and accept their painful destiny silently.

Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* stands as an example where desire is taught and practiced in the context of intimate patriarchal relationships. Religion also serves as a critical component of women's identity as well as providing highly significant legitimating for the subordination, oppression and positioning of women. (Hale 1997). For instance, Soueif takes us deeper into Asya's psychological struggle as a lonely married woman. She wonders whether it is fair to desire and think of another man other than her husband. Within this context, Nawal el Saadawi argues that Islam made marriage the only institution within which sexual intercourse could be morally practiced between men and women. "Sexual relations, if practiced outside this framework, were immediately transformed into an act of sin and corruption." (1980: 139)⁸. Asya's tormented soul is revealed when she imagines another man in her bathroom and struggles to dismiss these thoughts. "In the candle-lit bathroom she talks to the face she sees in the mirror; the face whose eyes have grown bigger and darker, whose lips have grown fuller and softer, whose whole aspect is more flushed and curved and smooth than she has seen it for a long, long time. She says 'Why?' and she says, 'It is not fair,' and she whispers, 'Stop it, oh, stop it.'" (390). A struggle between recognizing her own desire and how the patriarchal society and its oppressive culture, symbolized by her mother and relatives, shape for her the concept of desire and sexuality. "All your life they tell you – that a woman's sexuality is responsive, a woman's sexuality is tied up with her emotions. Her mother says she has never thought of any man that way except her father. Dada Zeina claims she had never desired any man but her husband – and then only because he had taught her." (390)

For Rubenberg, women attain honor primarily through passive conformity and dishonor falls exclusively on women. The discourse of honor functions to reinforce and reproduce the hierarchical structure of the family, while the dialectic between the individual and society functions quasi-automatically to maintain the institutions of the social order. Society has a variety of means from gossip (*namima*) to honor killing to enforce the honor code. (Rubenberg 2001)⁹ Asya's words portray the inner psychological struggle between her own authentic desire as an individual and the patriarchal concepts of desire which dictate how a married woman should desire, feel, and think.

To elaborate further, it brings to the surface the concept of sexuality¹⁰ and desire¹¹ in the Middle East where desire is organized in a patriarchal family culture that values the family above the person. Joseph

states that “desire often became invested as a property of relationships rather than singularly the property of a person in a society in which the most important asset of ownership was not one’s self but one’s web of relationships.” (2005: 79). In this regard, both girls and boys are explicitly taught to put the interests of the family before the interests of the individual. Most girls “are discouraged from having independent opinions or expressing ideas that contradict parents’ admonitions.” (Rubenberg 2001:79-80)

However, in an act of resistance of her painful situation, we find Asya think of Mario, one of Saif’s friends, which indicates her quest to look for desire out of wedlock which she lacks miserably in her own marriage. “Look at her: in Italy she is friends with Umberto but desires some unknown man with a broken nose who is handling a blonde in a corner – even while she is in love, in *love*, with Saif ; and tonight, to want to press up against Mario, to want his hand to slide down from her waist-oh.”(391). After thinking of more than one man other than her husband, she has met Gerald Stone, an English man, with whom she has a complicated affair. An affair which has a sweet taste at the beginning but ends in frustration due to the absence of genuine love. Here, one may take a closer look at Asya’s inner feelings after sleeping with Gerald. When she wakes up, she surprises herself of how well she has felt all night without any single feeling of guilt, confusion and fear. “expecting to wake up to the cold finger on the heart; to the weight of the rock of doom settling on her chest: guilt, fear- confusion would surely coalesce into one mass that would settle inside her and prevent her from even breathing – but there is nothing: she surprises herself by how well and how peacefully she has slept.” (550). One may argue that Asya’s inner feelings may reflect not only a sexual satisfaction which she has never experienced before with Saif but also a defiance of what is traditionally expected of a married woman. For a woman to be moral that means “she must incarnate a being of superhuman qualities: the” virtuous woman” of Proverbs, the “perfect mother,” the honest woman” ...Let her think, dream, sleep, desire, breathe without permission and she betrays the masculine ideal.” (Beauvoir 474)¹²

It is also important to contend that Asya’s experience with Gerald, though sexually liberating, has helped her discover that those feelings of desire only can’t make her so happy without love. Therefore, she has come finally to face the bitter truth which is to choose between a hopeless love with Saif or unsatisfying relationship with Gerald, an inner struggle which has left its heavy toll on her physical and mental health. “I just want this to stop. I am so tired, and there is not a single night when we go to sleep before four, and I am just exhausted, and I don’t want this to be happening here any more.” (560)

Asya’s courage and stark honesty by being always true to her pulse and inner feelings in her constant resistance of the patriarchal society’s suffocating culture is also manifested when she has confessed to her mother about her own affair with Gerald Stone. When her mother, Lateefa Mursi, asks her if she doesn’t feel worse or guilty sleeping with this man, Asya surprises her by saying that it is her business and something which is private that belongs to her only. Besides that, she doesn’t feel guilty since Saif doesn’t care about her in this way anymore. “No. I don’t It’s as if sleeping with him is – private- it’s *my* business... ‘What do you mean it’s *your* business? Isn’t it a matter of concern to your husband if you sleep with another man?’ But Saif doesn’t care about me in that way – any more.” (568)

Here, this reply represents Asya's resistance to the patriarchal culture imbibed by her mother's teachings based on hypocrisy and pretence. In other words, a lie which is called marriage, as in Asya's case, cannot be accepted silently to please society, at the expense of her own identity and individuality. Asya seeks to assert her own identity which the patriarchal society always tries to blur and takes it for granted by searching for self actualization through practice rather than theory having the agency and will to fulfill her needs without being afraid of how she will be viewed by society.

Asya's life was tangibly beset by appalling patriarchal limitations which she has to resist continually. For example, with her husband Saif, we notice a long sequence of choked sexual impulses followed by a merciless torture and humiliating interrogation of Asya when he finds out about Gerald. '-You actually suggested -you suggested-' Asya is silent. "You asked him to fuck you?" "You asked him to fuck you?" Saif, all I meant was- "You asked him?" Saif- "Just answer me straight: you invited him to fuck you? "It was not like that-" Just answer yes or no.' (page 666). Ironically enough, we find Saif expects from Asya to be a traditional, silent, obedient wife "I expected my wife to be loyal. I expected my wife to have some sense of honor. I expected."(623) but, at the same time, he is not ready or willing to give her the emotional companionship she needs. "This is not fair,' cries Asya. For years I begged you- I begged you - to make it happen-and you wouldn't." (623). In other words, he traps Asya in a painful situation where he can "neither be with her as a husband nor let her go as woman." (Said 2001: 409)

Instead, he batters and shames her in a humiliating manner poignantly shown when Asya's mother sees her battered daughter' face. "He did this to you?" she says. 'He did *this* to you?'... The bruise has faded to a sort of olive green shading off into yellow along the borders; the eye itself is almost completely open again with only one red splotch radiating out from the inner corner." (667) . Asya's impasse and pathetic situation resolves when she decides to free herself from both Saif who "is no longer her friend or any part of her life." (775) and Gerald for whom she makes it clear that she cannot live like this anymore "Gerald. I am not going with anyone. I don't want to go with anyone. I want to go on my own." (717).

One may say that certain values of escape are open to women but in practice they are not available to all.¹³ Asya's story sheds the light upon the unspoken sufferings of married women who are silenced out of fear of divorce or the social stigma of the patriarchal society, in particular, the Arab societies, patriarchal societies which victimize women through blurring their identities and the necessity to fight against the patriarchy and its suppressive culture like Asya. Asya conveys a message to all women that self actualization is more important than living on pretence to please the patriarchal society at the expense of one's own identity.

To conclude, one comes to understand that in spite of her failed marriage with Saif and a disastrous affair with Gerald, Asya has eventually attained her own individuality and self- actualization of one's self, a woman who is able to draw her own destiny and move forward to serve her community positively without the suffocating restraints of a frustrating and hopeless marriage. Asya eventually completes her doctorate and then returns to Egypt, not only to teach English literature at the American university in Cairo, but to work in a program offering help to the Egyptian village women. A step is courageously taken by her in spite of the domestic pressures in a patriarchal Arab society where marriage is seen as a fundamental

foundation of society and where divorced or separated woman are looked upon with little respect.¹⁴ In other words, a price Asya has to pay to assert her own identity rather than suffer in silence even if it implies facing the menaces and aggression of society since for a woman to regain her self respect is much more worthwhile than pleasing the male dominated society.¹⁵

Notes

¹ Ahdaf Soueif's honesty in exploring the sexuality of the Arab woman, a topic which has been rarely handled before with too much frankness, has led to the banning of her novel in many Arab countries. Please see Mehrez, Samia. "The Hybrid Literary Text: Arab Creative." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*. 20 (2000): 168-185. Edward Said has called Soueif as one of the most extraordinary chroniclers of sexual politics now writing. Please see Said, Edward. *Times Literary Supplement*. 3 (December, 1999) 7. Within this context too, Hanan Al Shaykh's *The Story of Zahra* is also banned in several Arab countries for exploring taboo topics. Evelyne Accad says that *The Story of Zahra*'s "explicit sexual descriptions, its exploration of taboo subjects such as family cruelty and women's sexuality and its relation to the war, caused such a scandal that the book was banned in several Arab countries." (1990: 44-5). Please see Accad, Evelyne. *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East*. New York: New York University Press, 1990.

² Suad Joseph defines patriarchy in the Arab context as the prioritizing of the rights within kinship values which are usually supported by religion. (Joseph 1993, 1994). She goes further to argue that patriarchy is powerful in the Arab world because age-kinship values and relationships are crucial socially, economically, politically, ideologically and psychologically. Please see Joseph, Suad. "Connectivity and patriarchy among urban working class families in Lebanon." *Ethos*. (1993):21-24. Please see Joseph, Suad. "Brother/sister relationships: connectivity, love and power in the reproduction of Arab patriarchy." *American Ethnologist*. (1994):50-73. For Cheryl Rubenberg, familial patriarchy, with its rigid aged and gendered hierarchies, its discourse of honor and shame, its relations of domination and subordination, and its myriad punishments, controls women's bodies, minds and behaviors and their entire lives. Please see Rubenberg, A. Cheryl. *Palestinian women: Patriarchy and resistance in the West bank*. USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2001. Please see Tucker, E. Judith. "The Arab family in history." Otherness" and the study of the family." in Judith E. Tucker (ed). *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993. Tong, Rosemarie. *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988.

³ All references will be henceforth taken from Soueif, Ahdaf. *In the Eye of the Sun*. UK: Bloomsbury, 1992.

⁴ Cheryl Rubenberg argues that "it is women who teach girls the rightness or the truth of their traditionally defined roles, responsibilities, relations, and restrictions. Mothers provide their daughters with things that are *haram*, *eib*, and *mamnoua*." (2001:79). Please see Rubenberg, A. Cheryl. *Palestinian women*:

Patriarchy and resistance in the West bank. USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2001. Furthermore, Hisham Sharabi argues that the problems in the Arab political order (for example, the absence of personal freedom, democracy, pluralism, and civil societies) are a consequence of, among other factors, the hierarchical relations that originate in the family. Please see Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. Kandiyoti, Deniz. "Bargaining with Patriarchy." *Gender and Society*. 2. (1988): 274-90.

⁵ Arab women are not taught about their bodies and their sexual life. Regardless of age, women enter marriage in complete ignorance of such fundamental issues. Hence, "making love" in the sense of mutually satisfying pleasurable part of married is rare. (Rubenberg 2001). Please see Rubenberg. A. Cheryl. *Palestinian women: Patriarchy and resistance in the West bank*. USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2001. For further information, please see Joseph, Suad. "Study of Middle Eastern Women" *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 18(1986): 501- 48. Ahmed, Leila. "Arab Culture and Writing Women's Bodies." *Feminist Issues*. 9. (1989): 41-55. Hatem, Mervat. "The Politics of Sexuality and Gender in Segregated Patriarchal Systems: The Case of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Egypt." *Feminist Studies*. 12. (1986) :251-74.

⁶ Zaghrouda: Ululation - along joy- cry uttered by women on happy occasions. Please see Soueif, Ahdaf. *In the Eye of the Sun*. UK: Bloomsbury, 1992.

⁷ Simone De Beauvoir argues that the tragedy of marriage that it not only fails to assure woman "the promised happiness...but it mutilates her; it dooms her to repetition and routine. (1989: 487). Please see De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. USA: Vantage: Books Edition, 1989. Please see Tucker. E. Judith. "The Arab family in history." Otherness" and the study of the family." in Judith E. Tucker (ed). *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.

⁸ Concerning Asya's sudden pregnancy, Beauvoir argues that many women become mothers and grandmothers without ever having experienced the orgasm or even any sex excitement at all. (Beauvoir 1989.) Please see De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. USA: Vantage: Books Edition, 1989. Inhorn C. Macia. *Infertility and Patriarchy: The Cultural Politics of Gender and Family Life in Egypt*. Philadelphia. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.

⁹ According to Nawal El Saadawi, woman was therefore considered by the Arabs as "a menace to man and society, and the only way to avoid the harm she could do was to isolate her in the home, where she could have no contact with either one or the other." (1980:136) Please see El Saadawi, Nawal *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980. Within this context, Rubenberg argues that gossip is the primary process by which society enforces the honor code on the individual. What women fear most is being talked about ...a girl's prospects are entirely dependent upon her reputation, the mere hint of dishonor can ruin a girl's life. (2001). Please see Rubenberg . A. Cheryl. *Palestinian women: Patriarchy and resistance in the West bank*. USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2001. You can also see Sandra, Hale. *Gender Politics in Islam: Islamism, Socialism, and the State*.

Boulder: West view Press, 1997. Please see Badran, Margot. *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of the Modern Egypt*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995. Bouhdiba, Adelwahab. *Sexuality in Islam*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985. Majid, Anouar. "The Politics of Feminism in Islam." *Signs* 23:2 (Winter, 1998): 321-361.

¹⁰ El Saadawi says that there are certain moral standards for females and others for males, and the whole society is permeated by such double moral standards. At the root of this anomalous situation lies the fact that "sexual experience in the life of a man is a source of pride and a symbol of virility; where as sexual experience in the life of women is a source of shame and a symbol of degradation." (1980:31). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980. Please see Jowkar, Frouz "Honor and Shame: A Feminist View from Within." *Feminist Issues*. 6: (1986): 45-65. Cann, Arnie, Mangum, Jessica and Wells, Marissa." Distress in Response to Relationship Infidelity: The Roles of Gender and Attitudes about Relationships." *The Journal of Sex Research*. 38:3 (Aug, 2001):185-190. Treas, Judith and Giesen, Deirdre. "Sexual Infidelity among Married and Cohabiting Americans." *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 62:1 (Feb, 2000): 48-60.

¹¹ For Suad Joesph, in the West, we experience the individuating process while in the Arab world, identity is experienced as "relational connectivity". Kinship relations give rise to identity through relationality and connectivity within the family group. Connectivity involves "relationships in which a person's personal boundaries are relatively fluid so that the individual understands her" self" to be constituted by" significant others"." (1999 :12). Please see Joseph, Suad. "Introduction: Theories and Dynamics of Gender, Self and Identity in Arab Families." In Suad Joesph (ed) *Intimate selving in Arab Families: Gender, Sel f, and Identity*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999. Barakat, Halim. "The Arab Family and the Challenge of Social Transformation." In *Women and the Family in the Middle East: New Voices of challenge*. (ed). Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985. Butler, Judith. "Desire." In Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. (eds). *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. 369-386. Brooks, Geraldine. *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women*. New York: Anchor, 1995.

¹² Concerning morality, El Saadawi argues that moral values are in fact the product of social systems or, more precisely, of the social system imposed by the ruling class with the aim of serving certain economic and political interests, and ensuring that the situation from which that class draws benefit and power is maintained. (1980). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980. Please see Badran, Margot. *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of the Modern Egypt*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995.

¹³ Patriarchy mandates that females be denied the possibility of an independent life experience outside the family confines. The more confined a woman can be kept, the less exposure she has, and the less she is able to think for herself, the less likely she is to challenge her husband's authority and decisions. (Rubenberg 2001). Please see Rubenberg, A. Cheryl. *Palestinian women: Patriarchy and resistance in the West bank*. USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2001. Kandiyoti, Deniz. "Bargaining with Patriarchy." *Gender and*

Society. 2. (1988): 274-90.

¹⁴ For De Beauvoir, In the country, especially, the chains of marriage are heavy, and the wife must somehow accommodate herself to a situation from which she cannot escape. Some, full of importance, become tyrannical and shrewdish matrons; some become complaisant, masochistic victims and slaves of their families. (1989). She argues further that the celibate woman is to be explained and defined with “reference to marriage, whether she is frustrated, rebellious, or even indifferent in regard to that institution.” (1989 :425). Please see De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. USA: Vantage: Books Edition, 1989. For El Saadawi, the great majority of Arab women ...are still “terrorized by the mere word ‘divorce’ which means hunger, no home, and the unrelenting remarks of those around them.” (1980:205). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980.

¹⁵ “For girls, marriage is the only means of integration in the community, and if they remain unwanted, they are, socially viewed, so much wastage. This is why mothers have always eagerly sought to arrange marriages for them.” (Beauvoir 1989 :427). Please see De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. USA: Vantage: Books Edition, 1989.

¹⁶ For El Saadawi, freedom has a price, a price which a free woman pays out of her tranquility. A woman always pays a heavy price, in any case, even if she chooses to submit. She pays it out of her health, her happiness, her personality and her future. Therefore, since a price she has to pay, why not the price of freedom than that of slavery? I believe that the price paid in slavery even if accompanied by some security, and the peace of mind that comes from acceptance, is much higher than the price paid for freedom, even if it includes the menaces and aggression of society. (Saadawi 1980) . Please see El Saadawi, Nawal *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata . London: Zed Books, 1980.

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La La Land: Excerpts

By Michael Angelo Tata

Beautiful Person #5: Lost Souls of Santa Monica Boulevard

“I know you!” “You do?”
“You’re from Australia!”
“You must have me confused
with an evil twin.” “You
sure you’re not Australian?”
“No—are you? “Nah—never
been there. What about you?”

Actually, though her country
of origin remains indeterminate,
her daily position never varies:
the sidewalk in front of Pet Luv.
Sitting with a partner in crime
even more bedraggled than she,
my new Aussie-lover begs for
change each sun-drenched day,
Crystal Waters’ “Gypsy Woman”
come to life in the form of a
white Rasta girl sired by wallabies.
To break up time’s anaesthetizing
monotony, which otherwise might
remain an undifferentiated field
of absolute insipidness, she lifts
her bony butt-cheeks from the
trottoir and stumbles over
to Starbucks, where a fresh
crop of ’roid-raging gym
bunnies and calculating carb-
counters and peppy out-of-towners
awaits her mendicant wiles.

Between 747s, Lady

180, in from Queens, sips
an iced Chai while relating
the latest shenanigans of the
Sunset Hills Vicodin set.
Liquid opium dumpster-
diving, ethics attorneys
conducting synchronized
swimming sessions in a pool
filled with Stoli Razberi—
all this, plus the latest and
greatest from the Mafia Princess
hotline: “Pop! Pop! I’m goin’
to the Top! Outa my way!”

Would that I were from Sydney;
that I rode to town on a Tasmanian
Devil; that Danii Minogue and
I raced marsupials for giggles
as we ridiculed Kylie for her
pluck; that an endogamous line
of sociopaths traceable back
to an unbalanced Anglo-Saxon
familial cluster constituted
my genetic legacy; that I rose
from the limpid waves of
Manly Beach resplendent
in a Ben Sherman Speedo
and wafted into the arms
of Russell Crowe: regardless
of these burning desires, no
twists or turns of the subjunctive
can link me up with the version
of me seized upon by the
dishwater-blonde, dollar-
grubbing, geographically
confounded hippie chick
interrupting our *tête-à-tête*
to inquire as to the veracity
of my national origin.

One George Washington,

one transmission of a Bic flame,
 and one refusal later, and she's
 through, allowing us to return
 to heavy Twin Star mode with
 only occasional lunar outbursts
 to distract us from enjoying our
 supreme epistemological object,
 gossip. Red-tagged mini-manses
 that could go at a moment's notice,
 collapsed Virgin Megastores
 wiped out by a simple afternoon
 cloudburst, rhinoplasties and
 Dudley Do-Right chin implants
 with less than ideal results—
 our pace quickens to match
 the increased flow of circulation
 we experience, as scandal and
 heat and black tea rile us up.

Would that I were a mafia princess
 carrying a 700-lb. Vuitton, that I
 rode my house down a heaving
 mountain of mud like a surfer
 vying for a magazine cover,
 that I surfed the society page
 on an involuted kangaroo
 pouch, that my family tree
 were studded with criminals.

While I muse, a new *petit*
four sprouts legs and
 saunters on by. “OMFG!
 That's the one I met at
 the grocery store when
 I bought you all that
 Godiva yesterday after
 my date with Pigpen.”

“Yes, baby, it's Isis.
 Bam! You was snapping
 up all the Chocolate Rasp-

berry Truffle like it was
going out of style.”

All I notice is a silver belt,
icy and frigid, fashion’s
answer to bands of frozen
water vapor and crushed
asteroid circling Neptune
in minty splendor, my eyes
disconnected from their
sockets and joining the
mass orbit of rogue particles
on a mindless mission
of autopiloted vertigo.

BP #11: Monica Lewinsky by the Warhols

MOCA: sad version of a Warhol retrospective makes it to downtown Los Angeles, where stepping over Heroin/Eats-Her-Own-Vomit Lady gains me access to Fauve soup cans and jazzy Jackies, all arranged by color scheme into Pop pockets. Aware that art is never what's on the walls, I am robbed of even the most minimal fantasy that any quantum of aesthetic splendor can be stored within the arid confines of a quadrilateral.

“Oh my God—Michael! It's Monica!” My West Coast Mother is floored, a reaction I don't often see. “Monica from *Loisaida*? I wonder if she's still running that dungeon. You know, she would charge this one Rabbi \$500 an hour to get dressed up like Boy George and be verbally abused. Once he tried to stiff her, and boy did she let him have it...” “What? Never mind—I'm talking about Monica Lewinsky! She just went into that room over there with someone who looked like her mother.” “No way! Was she carrying one of those handbags she's been designing?” “I don't know—but maybe you can ask her for one. Hurry—there she goes. Say something fast! You're good in this situations.”

Big Mac is brimming with

excitement. Normally, she
 can't care less about celebrity.
 She'll say hello to Kate Winslet
 at a party with the same tones
 she'd use at the dry cleaners,
 but for some reason, the sex star
 of the Clinton White House lights
 her fire, and how can I ever refuse
 her this pleasure? Urged onward
 by an enthusiasm and urgency I
 have never before heard in
 her voice, I am obligated to
 perform the very Warholian
 work of ignoring the labor
 of curators, conservationists and
 creative directors, instead using
 the museum as an occasion
 to try my luck at initiating an
 alien encounter. It's better
 than Angie Dickinson using
 the Met as sex club in *Dressed
 to Kill*, and for me, there's no
 danger of contracting syphilis.
 Off I go, hellbent at supplementing
 recent readings about the history
 of Madame du Barry with a more
 contemporary account of what
 it takes to seduce heads of
 state and other potentates.

I think of the influence Bill
 had on the porn industry,
 remembering one called
The Oval Orifice and featuring
 one hell of a blowjob scene,
 at least according to the
 box, displayed prominently
 in the window of a sleazy
 sex shop on Christopher
 Street which, in the conservative
 aftermath of 9/11, became a

wholesome, legitimate video rental boutique competing with Blockbuster by emphasizing “the human touch.” No—I won’t mention that. Sneaking into a room of giant day-glo flowers recalling the best 60s trip, I search and search for a hairdo sculpted into a helmet.

Bingo! Her massive coif is still massive in real life, although she is so much thinner than when she appears on the cover of *Star Magazine* above a headline screaming something about fat cells in revolt. Not starstruck in the least—Stephen Hawking might make me stutter, but not a horny intern—I adjust my shirt, on which enterprising heirs of Franco Moschino have stamped a giant stalk of celery, the words “7 Calories,” and an arrow indicating that the greens house the calories, to make it cling in all the right places. Waiting for the smallest pause to perforate the conversation flowering between Monica and a slightly older woman in a pink Chanel business suit, I sense a momentary break in vibration and pounce. Big Mac’s happiness depends upon the success of this encounter, so I have to think fast and turn on the charm to levels just below unctuous.

“Monica—Hi! So wonderful to see you here. Are you a big fan of Warhol? Oh—allow me to introduce myself.”

It takes no time at all for the three of us to be talking with the amicability of old friends. The woman is her aunt; she heralds from Pasadena, and, yes, Warhol is one of Monica’s favorite artists.

Now I can allow things to get a bit racier. “You know, Monica, I don’t care what all those horrible people in the press say about what happened between you and Bill. I would have given him head, too.

You did the right thing.”

Appreciating my candor, she shakes her head in agreement and thanks me for my honesty, giving a schoolgirl giggle of the sort the former president has most certainly heard at the most indelicate of times.

“You’re right. Thank you.

But, you know,” her voice drops ever so slightly, “I should never have kept that awful dress. What was I thinking?”

Now Monica’s aunt is laughing, too, using a curious turn at the edge of her lip to indicate that she, too, had advised Monica to ditch the protein-coated garment, and was never able to understand why the afters of a sexual affair would be

preserved. “Perhaps they’ll
use it on her mannequin at
Madame Tussaud’s one day.”

A faint corona of orange from
the petal of 60s fauna lights
up Monica’s hair from behind,
giving her a supernatural glow.
The conversation continues to
blossom, but, my work done,
it is time to share the fruits
of my labor with Mac Grande.
Politely excusing myself
through reference to an
imminent lunch engagement,
I bid my new friends *adieu*
just before there is time to
solidify our friendship, which
was never really my goal.
“Goodbye! So lovely to
meet you. See you at the
wax museum in a few!”

BP #13: Prince Mustafa Is Recalled to Riyadh

Delilah is frantic. “Mustafa is gone. His family ordered him to return to Saudi Arabia. Nobody knows what happened. I think they figured it all out and weren’t exactly overjoyed to discover they had been duped for such a long time. I feel just awful. He’s gone, gone for good.”

How strange and terrible— Prince Mustafa has vanished, spirited away without a word. Subsequent phone calls reveal new dimensions: had a last-minute estate sale, left his gleaming white Audi in someone’s driveway in The Hills, had been hospitalized recently after a mysterious collapse not to be confused with Epstein-Barr or asthma. Thinking back even further to a recent jaunt to South Beach, I realize what his parents have only now discovered, and know for sure that Delilah’s right, I will never see him again.

Sitting at the Starbucks on Ocean Drive, Miami, just after an November evening post-Thanksgiving shopping spree, we sipped steaming Peppermint Mochas by foaming waves taken directly from a Donna Summer anthem as we discussed what we hadn’t bought and hadn’t eaten.

“A/X? Paco never lets me shop there. Everything I buy, he throws away. He says it’s worse than Wal-Mart.” “Isn’t that where they sell walls?” “OK, Paris!” Mustafa blew a smoke ring in the eye of an orotund moon suspended by puppet wire above palm trees shaking their leaves to an imperceivable rhythm. “Listen. I think I am in trouble. I don’t know what to do. I am undone.”

Hearing serious tones issue forth from standing waves in his vocal cords struck me as out of character, and then and there I knew that something had gone horribly awry in his personal life, a zone I normally avoided. As he spoke, I entered and exited consciousness intermittently, anchored to reality only by the joint benevolence of mint and caffeine and dark chocolate. His words seemed so critical, so unlike anything else he had ever communicated. Inhaling just enough of his cigarette fumes to be convinced that I was the one smoking, I absorbed the gravity of Mustafa’s tale as it took shape.

Apparently, the past four years of his life, a constant production of parties, photo ops and decadence, had been funded by devoted parents who believed the money they sent each month was being used to earn an advanced degree in some branch of the Humanities at UCLA. Now that the duration of his

degree had come to an end,
they had been proactive and
contacted the school themselves
to inquire as to when graduation
ceremonies would be held. For
once, Mustafa was faced with
telling them the truth: he had
squandered a fortune everywhere
but school, and there was no
way of preventing them from
coming to Los Angeles. Loving
parents that they were, they
had even made airplane and
hotel reservations in advance,
anxious to watch their precious
son march down an aisle in a
Medieval cleric's gown to
the hopeful notes of "Pomp
and Circumstance," curious as to
who would deliver the commencement
speech, who would receive an
honorary degree that year, which
of these fellow comrades had been
his friend during his stay in a desert
on the other side of the world.

Instantly, Prince Mustafa's life
in all its intricacy unraveled.
We sat, savored, exhaled, looking
at each other with the full comprehension
that two separate parallelograms of
force would pull us away from
one another, incorporating us
into narratives which would
no longer touch, tales set
loose on conveyor belts
of pulsing parallel lines.

Later that night, somewhere in
that glorious and spooky time
when morning and evening blur

into a temporal mish-mosh,
a knock came on my hotel
door, alerting me to an
impending urgency. A sexy
Caribbean man in only his
underwear stood there sheepishly.
“Sorry to bother you. Mustafa ran
out of lube. Do you have any extra?”
“Sure—they gave me some in
my goodie bag. One sec.” And
with the departure of Mustafa’s
new friend came the last trace
of the Prince that I would ever
collect. Within two weeks we
would return to our separate
corners of the City of Angels,
he would relay the shocking
details of his expenditures to
his family, and the present
would close around his
presence, sending him sling-
shotting away toward a
luxury condominium on
the Persian Gulf. Weekends
of sensual extravagance would
fast become oases of family
time, and, sadly, there would
no longer be a need for post-
midnight packets of lubricant
placed in the hot and sweaty
palm of a beautiful stranger.
In Riyadh, Mustafa would return
to the princely splendor he had
tried to exchange for the tawdry
mists of an unabashed hedonist.

“You know, I could always forget
about their money and work at
Blockbuster.” “Mustafa, you
can’t afford to live in Westwood
working at Blockbuster.” “Don’t

worry—I can live on \$60,000.
Nothing is more important than
my sexual and personal freedom.”
“Ummm, try living on six dollars
an hour. That’s what they pay.”
“Oh, Liza. Who the hell are
they gonna make me marry?”

Africa, Buddies, Diamonds, Politics, and Gold: A Comparison of the Films *Blood Diamond* (2006) and *Gold!* (1974)

By Richard Voeltz

Hollywood has rediscovered Africa again in such recent films as *Beyond Borders* (2003), *Tears of the Sun* (2003), *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), *The Constant Gardener* (2005), *The Last King of Scotland* (2006), and *Blood Diamond* (2006). All of them portray Africa as the most violent, scary, and apocalyptic hell on earth, teeming with tribal rivalries, unimaginable atrocities, genocide, murderous dictators, poverty, disease, corrupt governments, and children transformed into brutal, stoned killers. ¹ *Blood Diamond* is an adventure story set in Sierra Leone during the civil wars of the 1990s and it surpasses the other films in portraying gut-wrenching violence and sadism, yet it also sets out to give a history lesson on child soldiers, conflict diamonds, and the complicity of the diamond monopoly in helping to create these horrors that still plague Africa, or as film reviewer William Arnold wrote, it is a “multicaret message movie.”ⁱⁱ *Gold!* (1974) a film made thirty-two years earlier, deals with another commodity that has transfixed humanity since it was first brought out of the earth, and along with diamonds, a crucial part of the mineral revolution that transformed the history of South Africa. This action-adventure thriller set in the greed-ridden and dangerous world of South African gold mining also features a story of capitalist villainy. An international syndicate plots to flood a gold mine in South Africa thus forcing up the price of the precious commodity on the world gold markets. Glitter, greed, adventure, action, violence, evil international cartels, love-interests, black-white buddies, and South African filming locations mark both films. They are also well intentioned about showing how Africa’s mineral resources are exploited and used for the benefit of the developed world. *Blood Diamond* uses a little guilt trip political message, while *Gold!* ignores the grim realities of mine life and glosses over the white-black relationships in apartheid South Africa.

Peter Hunt’s *Gold!* was the first of Roger Moore’s trio of South African films, along with *Shout at the Devil* (1976) and *The Wild Geese* (1978). It’s very much a film of its time, the mid-seventies— where

the villains are easy to spot—they wash their hands, don't smoke and aren't any good in the sack, i.e., Bradford Dillman as Manfred Steyner (also recognizable as “Dirty Harry's” priggish boss in *The Enforcer*, 1976). While the good guys—Roger Moore as mining engineer Rod Slater—aren't afraid of getting dirty or sleeping with the boss's wife, Susanna York as Terry Steyner. John Gielgud does a turn as Farrell, head of the syndicate that wants to corner the gold market. Ray Milland plays Harry Hirschfield, the mine owner. About this part, Milland said, “I added up my films the other day, and they've got to be nearly 200, I've done six in the past 20 months. This (*Gold!*) is the kind of part I like, a good easy role without too much hard work in it. A little character to it. I'm not after any more Oscars, hell no!”ⁱⁱⁱ *Gold!* is a Michael Klinger production, with Peter Hunt as director, and the screenplay by Stanley Price and Wilbur Smith (from his novel *Goldmine*). Along with Moore and Hunt the credits are littered with many of the regular James Bond team most of whom would go through the same flooding the mine routine again in *A View to a Kill* (1985). The hiking up the price of gold premise is also borrowed from *Goldfinger* (1964), although a tad more credible than setting off a nuclear bomb in Fort Knox. Moore took the role of Rod Slater after his first James Bond film, hoping the part would cement his credentials as an action star. One interesting piece of trivia involves Roger Moore's initial reluctance to accept the part, owing to the character being a cigarette smoker (he had recently stopped smoking cigarettes and switched to Monte Cristo cigars). As it was necessary for Rod Slater's character to smoke cigarettes rather than cigars, Moore's objection was over ruled, though his smoking scenes were reduced to a bare minimum.^{iv} In the fall of 1973 Roger Moore, accompanied by his wife Luisa and their three children flew to Johannesburg to begin location filming. The actors and technicians were luxuriously quartered at the President Hotel in the city, and from there traveled to locations in the surrounding area. Moore along with director Peter Hunt and other members of the cast and crew actually filmed deep down in the stifling heat of a gold mine in Buffelfontein. Hunt recalls: “We had to drop down two miles which was horrendous. It was great to start with, and I got tremendously enthusiastic about the mine, but after ten days down there it got very claustrophobic.”^v For the climax of the film it was necessary to flood the mine, and initially it was the intention of the company to film the scenes at the South African location. A mock-up of a section of the mine was built above ground but it proved impossible to contain the water, and it was decided to film the sequence at Pinewood Studios in London. This was not the only problem which arose during the production of *Gold!* Technicians union, ACTT, in England wanted the film banned in Britain because they felt it was wrong for a British crew to work in a country that supported apartheid. The union suggested that a mine in Wales could easily double for the mine in South Africa, but the cast and crew supported Michael Klinger, who would not give up location shooting in South Africa, despite the banning threat. Roger Moore and other members of the cast and crew stated quite clearly that their filming in South Africa was in no way intended to show support of apartheid, which they abhorred, but this was in the interests of making the film as realistic as possible.^{vi}

The film begins with a tunnel collapse at the Sonderditch mine, in a scene that establishes the courage of Slater and his chief miner, “Big King” (actor Simon Sabela), and the bond of trust between them. This is contrasted with the contempt other white managers hold for black miners. It is soon revealed that the collapse is no accident but part of a plan by a London based criminal syndicate, which includes the mine owner's son-in-law, Manfred Steyner, to destroy the mine so that the syndicate members can profit from share-trading. This will be accomplished by drilling through a deep underground wall or dyke which is

all that prevents an adjacent reservoir of water from flooding the mine. The mine's general manager, an accomplice in the plot, is killed in the tunnel collapse. Steyner interviews Slater, who is the underground manager, for the post of General Manager, although the owner Hirshfield wants an older, senior man. At this point Slater first meets Steyner's wife Terry and is attracted to her, but she shows little interest. However, Steyner arranges for them to meet again, in the hope that Terry will influence her father in Slater's favor. The plan works, Slater becomes general manager and he and Terry are off on a love affair. Slater, unaware of any plot, agrees to carry out the drilling but is cautious enough to plant a safety charge that will block the tunnel in case of a water leak. Steyner knows that Slater is having an affair with his wife, but allows it to continue because it will keep Slater away from the mine, so that the safety charge can be disabled without his knowledge. While Slater and Terry are holidaying together at a Safari Camp, the final breach is made in the underground dyke and the mine begins to flood, trapping a thousand workers. Slater hears of the disaster on the radio, and Terry flies him back directly to the mine. There is a final dramatic scene in which Slater and Big King descend the mine, amidst the rising flood waters, to repair the safety charge. They succeed, but only because Big King sacrifices his own life to detonate the charge, letting Slater escape. Meanwhile as Steyner watches the mine from a bluff, his driver, acting on orders from the syndicate should anything go wrong, murders him with his own Rolls-Royce. Of course this leaves Slater in a position to not only get the girl but perhaps the gold mine also.

Big King is the only black miner to have a name, John Nkulu, and with the exceptions of a soccer game and black miners getting a medical exam, they are completely anonymous. At one point Slater is asked why they –African miners--would want to work in a mine, and he responds by saying “They do it for the same reason we do—for the money.” And that is about it for any sense of social justice. Clearly this is a white domain with scenes of country clubs, Rolls Royces, and posh Safari clubs, and a beautiful African landscape that Slater and Terry fly over to the accompaniment of an Academy Award nominated song, *Where My Love Takes Me*. (*Blood Diamond* also has an “Out of Africa” flight near the end, reminiscent of *Cry Freedom* (1987)). Peter Davis has observed that what we have here “...is a classic Faithful Servant situation”: The two men have acted like buddies to save the mine, Slater supplying the brain, Nkulu the brawn. But tradition demands the sacrifice of the faithful servant, for this enhances the stature of the white hero. The Faithful Servant thinks highly enough of the hero to save his life at the cost of his own. And not only does the white hero not have to share glory with a black man, but the black man's deeds accrue to him, as the sole survivor—it is reported over the loudspeaker that ‘Slater has saved the mine.’ As a bonus, Slater gets the girl, an option never open to the Faithful Servant. ^{vii}

Although a successful and well received box office hit, the avoidance of apartheid puts the film in the general Hollywood category of ignoring the subject altogether in the nineteen seventies.

Movie critic William Arnold has written that, “Edward Zwick is one of the few Hollywood directors of the past two decades whose name has come to stand not just for quality, but for a specific kind of movie: an ambitious, issue-oriented, historical epic, (*Glory*, *Courage Under Fire*, *The Last Samurai*.) *Blood Diamond* is very much in this tradition.”^{viii} Few directors give as many interviews as Edward Zwick does about his films and their meanings and messages. About *Blood Diamond* Zwick said, “To me, this movie

is about what is valuable. To one person, it might be a stone; to someone else, a story in a magazine; to another, it is a child. The juxtaposition of one man obsessed with finding a valuable diamond with another man risking his life to find his son is the beating heart of this film.”^x Zwick became fascinated with so-called “Conflict Diamonds”; stones that are smuggled out of countries at war and used to support that war, by paying for more arms, increasing the death toll and furthering the destruction of the region. They may be a small percentage of the world’s sales, but, nonetheless, in an industry worth billions of dollars, even a small percentage is worth many millions and can buy innumerable small arms. The country of Sierra Leone has been particularly plagued by these “blood diamonds”^x. In the late 1990s, people from NGOs such as Global Witness, Partnership Africa-Canada and Amnesty International gave them that name in order to help bring the crisis into the public consciousness. Zwick had only a passing knowledge of the term and its meaning when Producer Paula Weinstein first sent him the script. “I had heard the phrase, but I didn’t fully understand its implications,” he offers. “The more I learned, the more fascinated and horrified I became, and the more I realized this was a story that needed to be told.”^{xi} Weinstein developed the screenplay with screenwriter Charles Leavitt and executive producer Len Amato. South African producer Gillian Gorfil had initiated the project with C. Gaby Mitchell, who shares credit with Leavitt. When they came on board Zwick and producer Marshall Herskovitz continued to develop the story with Weinstein. Zwick believes in entertainment as rhetoric. “It has been my belief that political awareness can be raised as much by entertainment as by rhetoric,” asserts Zwick. “There is no reason why challenging themes and engaging stories have to be mutually exclusive—in fact, each can fuel the other. As a filmmaker, I want to entertain people first and foremost. If out of that comes a greater awareness and understanding of a time or a circumstance, then the hope is that change can happen. Obviously, a single piece of work can’t change the world, but what you try to do is add your voice to the chorus.” Working on the script, the filmmakers found that they themselves gained a better awareness of the issues at hand. Zwick notes, “It seems that almost every time a valuable natural resource is discovered in the world—whether it be diamonds, rubber, gold, oil, whatever—often what results is a tragedy for the country in which they are found. Making matters worse, the resulting riches from these resources rarely benefit the people of the country from which they come.” Producer Gillian Gorfil stresses that, while shedding light on the issue of blood diamonds, this movie is not intended to cast a shadow over the entire diamond industry. “It is important to me that this film is not anti- diamond. The issue is blood diamonds, which have very specific origins.”^{xii}

Zwick and screenwriter Charles Leavitt then mount fiction upon fact via three central characters on their own personal quests who become enmeshed with smuggling and civil war in Sierra Leone. It all comes together in what Steve Crum describes as “a complex, riveting, and disturbing way. The film suffers only in pacing; it seems longer than it is.”^{xiii} Danny Archer, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, is an ex-mercenary from Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) turned diamond smuggler. “There was something really authentic about the story,” says DiCaprio. Before shooting began, DiCaprio spent a month in South Africa meeting former mercenaries, undergoing military training and learning the local accent. Although he talked with several ex-merc and diamond experts, it was a military advisor on the film, a “Rhodesian” named Duff Gifford, who captivated him. “He’s really the man who brought me to the understanding of what this culture was like, what it was like to fight in these wars, the painful things that he’d seen, the love he has for Africa and the bitterness he has as well,” says DiCaprio. And he learned something else. “They drink a hell of a lot of

beer and Jagermeister,” says the star, no wimp in the party department himself. “That was their hard-core drink of choice: flaming Jagermeister shots, which I can’t hang with.”^{xiv} This part along with his role in *The Departed* (2006) established his tough guy credentials moving him beyond the pretty boy image from *Titanic* (1997). Archer, adopting an attitude that he is in this for himself, uses charm and muscle to get his way. His dream is to find a golf ball sized diamond which will allow him to get off the African continent. Djimon Hounsou plays Solomon Vandy, a Mende fisherman whose village is attacked by the forces of the RUF—Revolutionary United Front who resort to hacking off the limbs of innocent victims—“long sleeve or short sleeve.” He is taken to work in the diamond fields as a virtual slave. His wife and daughters end up in a refugee camp, while his young son Dia becomes a murderous child soldier of the RUF. Each child, after appropriate indoctrination, chooses a new name such as the “Master of Disaster.”

Commanders in the RUF have names such as “Captain Poison”, “Rambo” or “Major Zero”. Tupac rap music from boom boxes provide the musical accompaniment. Vandy finds a very large diamond, known as a pink, which he buries just as government forces attack the diamond camp. Archer, in prison for smuggling, hears of the diamond and wants to get it himself, so he arranges for Vandy to be released. Archer wants the diamond, Solomon wants to find his family, regain his son, and then locate the buried diamond. Into this mix appears American journalist Maddy Bowen (Jennifer Connelly), a Christine Amanpour clone who wants the story of who is behind the diamond smuggling from Archer. The three team up in quest for the diamond, Solomon’s family, and his kidnaped son.

Zwick told the story of soldiers led by a white officer during the Civil War in *Glory* (1989), and later focused on a white American leading Japanese Warriors in *The Last Samurai* (2003). Now he looks at the recent history of Sierra Leone in which he offers up the black and white acting team of DiCaprio and Hounsou in an homage to *The Defiant Ones* (1958) with Sidney Poitier and Tony Curtis or *The Wilby Conspiracy* (1975) with the team of Poitier again and Michael Caine. But in *Blood Diamond* handcuffs are not involved, rather international political issues are revealed by two men being bound together by the pursuit of a diamond that offers one of them a ticket to freedom. (Ironically diamonds are also the object of desire in the chase-buddy film *The Wilby Conspiracy*.) On the journey to recover the diamond, Zwick sees Solomon and Archer as inexorably divide by lines of race and class that have existed for generations, “They are both African men, but their histories are very dissimilar,” he says. “Yet they have a mutual connection to this continent as their home. In many ways, it is a shared identity that supersedes their backgrounds. It is the common ground on which they ultimately recognize each other’s humanity in an inhumane situation.” Nevertheless, Marshall Herskovitz counters, “There is an understandable motivation for these two men to work together, but they have conflicting objectives that keep them in opposition. This is not in any way a buddy movie: Archer and Solomon have very different ways of looking at the world, and we did not want to compromise on that.”^{xv} Zwick in his DVD edition voice over reinforces this notion, by commenting on a scene where Archer calls Solomon a “Kaffir”, which we knew was coming, leading to a fight, that he “did not want to make this a buddy movie.”^{xvi}

“What really impressed me about Ed,” Leonardo DiCaprio remarks, “was that he wanted to make an entertaining adventure film, but mixed in were some complex, highly charged political statements. That’s what

really got me excited about this film.”^{xvii} Unfortunately you can’t have it both ways. Carol Cling writes, “But Edward Zwick keeps trying to make socially conscious movies where stuff blows up real good.”^{xviii} Jeremy Fox is even more scathing:

I’m sick of white folks....It’s not just that we command an unseemly portion of the world’s resources, exploiting hundreds of millions of non-white folks and causing horrendous environmental damage in the process and then patting ourselves on the back for paying the merest lip service to righting our wrongs. It’s that when we make movies about the atrocities committed for our benefit and with our tacit consent, we insist upon setting up one of our own as the hero. It’s really pretty sick....The latest outbreak of this particular affliction is *Blood Diamond*, a film that’s ostensibly about the murder, mutilation, forced labor, kidnapping, and brainwashing of black Africans but whose creators insist that what’s really important is whether the roguish white guy gets it on with the hot white chick. This, of course, is a gross oversimplification, but then so is the movie. For every minute spent genuinely considering the devastating legacy of Western imperialism, five are spent watching the twinkles in their pretty eyes.^{xix}

Blood Diamond has the genre baggage and plays homage to a host of Hollywood films, from *The Defiant Ones* (1958), to *Casablanca* (1942), and *the Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948), yet it spouts history lessons and political correctness. When Archer meets Bowen (Jennifer Connelly) their conversation is a rapid history of recent African and American history—“TIA This is Africa,” says Archer meaning nothing comes out as planned in Africa, snide comments about CNN, American guilt, and “Blow job Gate”, and the fact that Americans now refer to Rhodesia as Zimbabwe. Solomon is meant to be symbolic of African people, yet he speaks as if he stepped out of the pages of National Geographic. And through the redemption of Archer at the end of the film there seems to be a conscious attempt to rehabilitate those who fought for the Apartheid regime as Danny did in Angola. Many reviewers noted the unequal weight given to the two male characters. Just as in *Gold!* thirty two years earlier, the old assertion appears that whites have more emotional investment and ownership of Africa than blacks. When Archer goes to Cape Town to meet his former mercenary commander, whom he later kills over the diamond, he is told that the soil of Africa is red because of the fighting over it, and that he will never leave Africa. At the end of the film Archer dying, on the satellite phone to Maddy, bleeds into the soil, saying that he is exactly where is supposed to be, his true home Africa.

The same symbolic resonance is not given to African blood in the soil. Indeed Solomon dons suit and tie, and with Maddy’s help becomes a poster boy for conflict diamonds with the international diamond cartel, and presumably buys a flat in London. Also Archer tells Maddy that his parents were brutally murdered during the war for African liberation in Rhodesia, perhaps explaining his nasty disposition exhibited in the early parts of the film. At one point, Vandy wonders about whether his country would have been better off if whites still ruled. Not a very sophisticated way of looking at the decades of colonial rule in Africa. While being shrill and emotional about his family he is never allowed to express the pain and suffering of his country with the *gravitas* that seems important here. In *The Four Feathers* (2002) Hounsou plays the faithful servant to the late Heath Ledger character. Here he is again subordinate to DiCaprio. Beth

Accomando has written perceptively, if not the first to say so, that:

Films from Africa, made by African filmmakers are few and of those few only a rare one ever makes it to American theatre screens. All of the films we've recently seen of Africa— *Blood Diamond*, *Catch a Fire*, *The Constant Gardener*, *Biko*, *The Last King of Scotland*, *Tears of the Sun*—are all very western in terms of their narrative structure. Films from Africa by such directors as Sembene Ousmane or Djibril Diop Mambety have a very different storytelling quality to them that stems from an oral story telling tradition. It would be nice to see more films from a genuinely African perspective make it to American theaters.^{xx}

Nice, but not very likely as African films have a short distribution period and end up in limited distribution by California Newsreel to academic and specialized ethnic audiences. Also remember the apartheid , primitive “Bushman” fantasy *The Gods Must be Crazy* (1989) was the largest grossing South African film of all time and had an almost cult following in the United States, Europe, and Asia.

While intense, *Blood Diamond* also contains elements that are unrealistic if not downright silly. First of all, the lead characters seem bullet proof. And then there is the scene where Maddy disarms the Kamajor, a warrior sect of the Mende tribe, characterized by animist beliefs and superstition, by posing for photographs with them...”She reminds me of my wife,” remarks one of the fighters. Yet the film should not be dismissed completely, for it does expose American audiences to issues that get lost among the breaking stories treatment by Fox and CNN News and it definitely got the attention of De Beers, the largest diamond mining and selling company in the world.^{xxi} (Interestingly the film was filmed in South Africa and Mozambique, as the conditions in Sierra Leone were simply too primitive for a modern film company) Beth Accomando may just have pegged it right when she wrote, Zwick “...just nicked the surface of a much bigger and more complex issue. In the end, Zwick’s film feels like another attempt at alleviating white guilt.”^{xxii} The film suffers from a similar fate that befall Shakhur Kapur’s remake of *The Four Feathers*(2002). Kapur attempted to accomplish two fundamentally different things: a rousing war epic and adventure story that stirs our spirits with an old fashioned sense of romantic self- sacrifice and the rites of manhood, while at the same time critiquing the evils of colonialism of the very British imperialists who are the films heroes. The result is not a revisionist treatment but rather a skilled update of the same imperialist swashbuckler that clings to the standard British agenda. Adventure will always trump message, and if not, the danger is being accused of delivering a boring history lecture. Hollywood may have more of a social conscience that it did in the nineteen seventies but *Blood Diamond* remains true to the old fashioned formula of white- black friendship (with the white guy dying this time, but with redemption for his past sins and greed, for the sake of the solid family values represented by Solomon). Then there is the rough, tough, handsome, charismatic white Rhodesian “soldier of fortune” in love (sort of) with beautiful white American news correspondent, all set against an exotic and foreign backdrop of a menacing Africa filled with scary black dudes in sunglasses and Tupac t-shirts. In shamelessly attempting to establish a rather stodgy Roger Moore’s action-adventure credentials for his future James Bond films, *Gold!* at best glosses over, when not ignoring altogether, the racism and exploitation of South Africa in the nineteen seventies, but Zwick wants to deliver a message about the dirty business of “conflict diamond” and “child soldiers”,

but his film is too simplistic and naive to function as an effective political commentary. For all its earnestness it remains trapped in the “things are not important until white people take notice of it” perspective it shares with *Gold!* As an action/adventure film it works. Viewers might get a topping of conscience with their popcorn but as is so often the case with Hollywood the African side of the story gets slighted. And in general the topical-message-movie genre may be in big trouble. Audiences can spot the clichés: “...the selfish heroes who wake up and learn how to care, the cover-ups that tilt into violence, the last-act triumph over the system”,^{xxiii} all so obvious in *Blood Diamond*. Owen Gleiberman predicts the final nail driven into the topical-message-movie genre: “It boils down to this: We now live in a reality-based media culture that bombards us with advocacy . Book-length exposes. Cable news, Talk radio. The 24/7 information stream that is the Internet.”^{xxiv} Any scandal or crises gets dissected by pundits from every angle *ad nauseum*. But when Hollywood decides to make a movie about something “urgent” it falls back upon “tidy liberal homilies served up in melodramatic form...giving us a hero with a newly awakened conscience, a romance to make us ‘care’.”^{xxv} When it does that a movie becomes a lie itself. It is telling the audience that these things are as important as the “urgent message” itself. While paying some homage to *Casablanca (1942)*, *Blood Diamond* neglects to learn the lesson that the problems of two people “don’t amount to a hill of beans.”^{xxvi} But Edward Zwick remains convinced that entertainment and ideas are not mutually exclusive: “I’m more interested in those who know nothing about the subject than in preaching to the choir. How much more interesting to present a set of images to 19 year olds who have never given a thought to any of this?”^{xxvii} Rebecca Winters Keegen writing in *Time* argues that it is indeed hard to quantify the real impact of a film. But there are in fact small changes wrought by recent movies, including *Blood Diamond* where the diamond industry launched a p.r blitz to educate consumers about conflict-free diamonds, but actually stone sales were unaffected. “Movies make advocates out of supporters,” she writes, “They change the world not in wide swaths of multiplexes but one popcorn bucket at a time.”^{xxviii} Zwick’s avowed demythologizing of Hollywood’s complicity with diamonds , or arguing that “Not all American girls want a storybook wedding!” (a line from Maddy Bowen) , seems a rather filmsy and trivial basis for a meaningful political diatribe. *Gold!* serves up straight popcorn, but the popcorn with conscience films such as *Blood Diamond* may very well be in jeopardy in a society saturated with endless “hot-button” topics that all demand “urgent” action, until something more urgent comes along.

Notes

ⁱ Films such as *Tsotsi (2005)* and *Catch a Fire (2006)* also represent this fascination with Africa but because of the uniqueness of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa these and other films made in the post-apartheid era constitute their own sub-genre and warrant a separate study. Clint Eastwood’s recent *Invictus (2009)* straddles two genres: the apartheid film and the sports film.

ⁱⁱ William Arnold, “‘Blood Diamond’ is a multicaret message movie”, December 2, 2006 at <http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/movies/295110.diamon08q.html>, 12/23/2007.

- iii James Robert Parrish and Don E. Stanke, *The Debonairs*, New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House Publishers, 1975, 280.
- iv “Gold”, <http://imdb.com/title/ttoo71566/>, 3, 12/12/2007.
- v. Roy Moseley, *Roger Moore, A Biography*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1985, 212.
- vi *Ibid.*, 212-213.
- vii Peter Davis, *In Darkest Hollywood*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1996, 71.
- viii Arnold
- ix “Interview: Blood Diamond Ed Zwick, <http://www.emmanuellevy.com/printpage.php?articleID=3801>, 11/30/2007
- x Greg Campbell, *Blood Diamonds*, New York: Basic Books, 2004.
- xi *Zwick Interview*
- xii *Ibid.*
- xiii Steve Crum, “Blood Diamond Movie Review”, <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/blooddiamond/articles/1561376?1php>, 12/13/2007.
- xiv Simon Robinson, “Hollywood Plays Rough With Diamonds”, *Time*, November 27, 2006, p. 66.
- xv *Blood Diamond*, <http://www.cinemareview.com/production.asp?prodid=3774>
- xvi *Blood Diamond, DVD, Commentary by Director Edward Zwick, Warner Bros. 2007.*
- xvii *Blood Diamond*, <http://www.cinemareview.com/production.asp?prodid/=3777>, p. 2 of 8
- xviii Carol Cling, “Blood Diamond”, *Las Vegas Review Journal*, 12/08/06 <http://reviewjournalprintthis-clickability.compt?action=cpt&title=reviewjournal.com>, 12/13/2007
- xix Jeremy Fox, *Blood Diamond*, <http://.paiiba.com/blood-diamond.htm>, 12/13/2007
- xx Beth Accomando, *Blood Diamond*, December 9, 2006, <http://www.kpbs.org/blogs/movies/2006/12/09blood-diamond/>, 12/13/07

^{xxi} See Janine Roberts, *Glitter and Greed, The Secret World of the Diamond Cartel*, New York: The Disinformation Company, Ltd., 2003, 2007

^{xxii} *Ibid.*

^{xxiii} Owen Gleiberman, "Fighting the Power", *Entertainment Weekly*, November 17, 2006, p.77.

^{xxiv} *Ibid.*

^{xxv} *Ibid.*

^{xxvi} *Ibid.*

^{xxvii} *Ibid.*

^{xxviii} Rebecca Winters Keegan, "Can A Film Change The World?", *Time*, March 27, 2008, pp. 60, 61.

Reading Traumatized Bodies of Text: Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School* and Selah Saterstrom's *The Pink Institution*

By Carolyn Zaikowski

Introduction: "The obscenity of the very project of understanding"

Psychologists and literary theorists have used countless terms and phrases to attempt an articulation of the collapse of normal, linear understanding that ensues during and after traumatic events. Trauma scholar Cathy Caruth calls the narration of trauma an "impossible saying" (9). Literary theorist Shoshana Felman, in an exploration of Camus' *The Fall*, writes that traumatic events provoke a "disintegration of narrative" (171); and in her essay "Education and Crisis" she claims that traumatic events are those which happen "in excess of our frames of reference" (16). Theorist Maurice Blanchot states: "The disaster... is what escapes the very possibility of experience—it is the limit of writing. This must be repeated: the disaster de-scribes" (7). Claude Lanzmann, creator of the landmark Holocaust film *Shoah*, calls the task of representing trauma "the obscenity of the very project of understanding" (205). It has become clear that one of the hallmarks of psychological trauma is its inability to be contained within conventional linguistic and narrative structures. Trauma takes place precisely when our ordinary narrative abilities fail us—when an event not only goes beyond, but actually destroys, our schematic understandings of the world, disabling our ability to create and trust the stories, categories, and time-space delineations necessary for normal functioning. To experience trauma is to experience a world in which annihilation of the body and self is, potentially, always immanent; a world in which the body and self are always, potentially, unsafe; a world that is ultimately incomprehensible.

This essay will explore traumatic symptoms as a useful frame for interpreting certain texts. To begin, we will look at how the complex manifestations of psychological trauma effect the physiological body, in the form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). We will then explore how PTSD relates to language,

narrative, and, ultimately, textual behavior, as demonstrated in two texts: Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School* and Selah Saterstrom's *The Pink Institution*. To conclude, we will discuss the relevance of literature as a space for witnessing trauma.

De-scribing the body: post-traumatic stress disorder

PTSD can be defined, broadly, as a collection of chronic physiological and psychological symptoms that occur in response to the firsthand experience, or direct secondary witnessing, of an unexpected event that threatens the integrity or existence of the body, and elicits extreme terror and helplessness (American Psychiatric Association 424). The characteristics of PTSD can be split into three major categories: hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction.

Hyperarousal, the first category of symptoms, is marked by such traits as nightmares, insomnia, generalized anxiety, psychosomatic complaints, explosive anger, irritability, heightened startle reflex, and hypervigilance. Traumatic symptoms in this category can be understood as a chronic engagement of the nervous system. The body that displays these symptoms is, in a sense, constantly on the lookout for danger in both sleeping and waking states, with a near inability to turn off physiological and psychological reactions the normal body has in a state of emergency. As trauma scholar Judith Herman explains, "Traumatic events appear to recondition the human nervous system." (36)

The second category of symptoms, *intrusion*, is distinguished by flashbacks, nightmares, repetition compulsion, and other modes of reliving the trauma. These intrusive modes are generally literal; traumatic nightmares, for instance, are not dominated by symbols and imaginative development like ordinary dreams. Instead, they replay the traumatic events exactly as they took place, accompanied by the overwhelming sense that the event is actually recurring. Such nightmares can even occur in stages of sleep that do not normally involve dreaming. Similarly, flashbacks can seem like waking dreams, overtaking the body and mind by replaying past events in the present as though they are actually happening (39). During repetition compulsion, traumatized individuals may actually reenact the trauma in attempts to master and control it, give it meaning, or expel it from the mind. Combat veterans may return home to become fire fighters or police officers; survivors of childhood abuse may marry abusers as adults; rape survivors may engage in unnecessarily risky behaviors—all in an attempt to gain assurance that they can survive, as well as master the extremities that, during the trauma, they had no control over. In regards to this phenomenon, Glenn Schiraldi writes: "Repeating the trauma gives an oddly comforting feeling of predictability, familiarity, and control" (30-31). In this vein, survivors might also develop everyday patterns of thought and behavior that are obsessive and repetitive.

When an individual cannot fight or flee during a state of emergency, consciousness is altered instead; normal defenses "freeze" or shut down. The third category of traumatic symptoms, *constriction*, is marked by this paralysis. Perceptions, emotions, and physical sensations can become partially or completely numbed;

various states of trance and hallucination might occur; the individual may experience both voluntary and involuntary suppression of thoughts and emotions. The mind and body may dissociate from one another, such that many survivors report watching themselves from afar during the event, or experiencing the trauma as a dream or something that is otherwise not really happening. They may additionally experience a sense of altered or frozen time (Herman 42-27). The most extreme states of dissociation can manifest as dissociative identity disorder, a mental orientation experienced generally by survivors of extreme, long-term, sadistic physical and/or sexual abuse that occurred in childhood, before the full formation of identity and personality. Those with dissociative identity disorder have at least two distinctly formed, alternating identities, each of which tends to express and contain different aspects of the trauma. Unable to logically, emotionally, or physically comprehend the magnitude of the events, the individual with dissociative identity disorder, in a sense, splits into different pieces, each acting as a container. These identities, once called multiple personalities, are now generally thought of as disintegrated aspects of a single personality. (22-23 Schiraldi)

All three categories are marked by disturbances in the ordinary processing of memory and time. Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart explain that the “memory system [is] the central organizing apparatus of the mind, which categorizes and integrates all aspects of experience and automatically integrates them into ever-enlarging and flexible meaning schemes” (159). Normal memory also has a social function, as it acts to relay and receive information about the world. It serves to create shared meaning systems that are used to coordinate the mind, for the purposes of skillfully navigating life, society, and relationships. Normal memory uses the higher-level functions of language to create integrated, linear sequences. Without it, we would lack the ability to construct associations between emotions, thoughts, perceptions, time, space, and other aspects of experience that build the classifications and narratives necessary for everyday functioning. Traumatic memories, on the other hand, are isolated, disintegrated, inflexible, and addressed to no one (163). “Traumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemas, and be transformed into narrative language” (176). Normal mental constructs and schemas cannot contain or account for the enormity and incomprehensibility of traumatic experience; trauma explodes existing structures of meaning. The capacity for integration of emotions, sense perceptions, thoughts, and behavior is shattered, creating a unique class of traumatic memory marked by fragmentation, dissociation, intrusion, timelessness, and extraordinary sensory and emotional arousal. As Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub write:

The traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of “normal” reality, such as causality, sequence, place, and time. The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after. This absence of categories that define it lends it to a quality of “otherness”, a salience, a timelessness and a ubiquity that puts it outside the range of associatively linked experiences, outside the range of comprehension, of recounting and of mastery. Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect. (69)

Traumatic memories remain stuck in the time and place of their occurrence, the body and mind having been overwhelmed, unable to integrate the events into the normal flow of narrative, linear, long-term memory. The traumatized body remains trapped in the traumatic moments as if time has stopped, henceforth performing the dialectic dance between constriction, intrusion, and hyperarousal. It does not live and function in the present, but in constant relivings of the past and terror for the future (Herman 37). Furthermore, such memories tend to exist in the parts of the brain that are pre-verbal and pre-cognitive, dominated by emotional, visual, and sensory information, disconnected from the higher-order functions of association, organization, and language. Consequently, the trauma cannot be integrated, the individual cannot move towards healing, without somehow bringing the trauma's fragmented unspeakableness into that higher-order realm of language and cohesive narrative. "A sudden and passively endured trauma is relived repeatedly, until a person learns to remember simultaneously the affect and cognition associated with the trauma through access to language" (van der Kolk and Ducey 271).

Thus, we return to the literary project of how to navigate language when we are attempting to articulate not only the unsayable, but its very unsayableness—when we are inscribing, on the space and time of the page's body, events which transcend and shatter normal containers of space and time, events which are defined by their very "de-scribing" of the body. We confront the quandary of how to witness the unwitnessable through language, and where to begin this difficult yet crucial project. One place to begin, I propose, is to meet trauma where it is at, accepting and attending to it, in all of its chaotic stuck-ness.

There are many texts that can arguably be read for this kind of complex meeting and mirroring of trauma—texts which, when recognized for the *bodies* of language that they are, behave as though they are currently being, or have been, traumatized. Such texts are "speaking and listening from the site of the trauma" (Caruth 11), enacting a dynamic and contradictory narrative from the very places of narrative's defeat. The forms that such texts embody reflect the manifestations of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder, such that they could themselves be referred to as *traumatized texts* or *traumatized narratives*. Though these texts, like all cultural production, have information to offer in many realms of study and must be read in a myriad of ways, the framework of PTSD can serve as an entrance to the particular, complicated nature of traumatic representation. One can pose questions such as: What does a text look like when it displays the symptoms of a traumatized body, or the many disturbances of memory so prominent in traumatic stress? What does it look like when a body of text has a "chronically engaged nervous system" that vacillates between painful states of intrusion, repetition, fragmentation, dissociated identities, numbness, timelessness, disorientation, lack of reference, and explosions of meaning? We will now ask such questions of two novels: Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School* and Selah Saterstrom's *The Pink Institution*. In their various modes of linguistic and syntactic constriction, hyperarousal, and intrusion, these bodies of narrative go beyond a traditionally coherent telling of events, by using their physical existence as texts to mirror and enact the unspeakable experience of traumatized bodies in the world. In the words of groundbreaking trauma researcher Robert Lifton, "The insight begins with the shattering of prior forms. Because forms have to be shattered for there to be new insight. In that sense, it is a shattering of form but it is also a new dimension of experience" (134). In a necessary, yet necessarily incomplete, gesture, *Blood and Guts in High School* and *The Pink Institution* are unique and multi-dimensional textual bodies, constructed

with the shattered skins, limbs, and juices of language, in a potential step towards a new understanding of experiences—in a potential step towards witnessing.

The shattering of form: Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*

In order to make such a language, a language game which resists ordinary language, through the lens of ordinary language or language whose tendency is to generate syntax or to make meanings proliferate, I must use an indirect route. (Acker, "Against Ordinary Language" 147)

The fragmentation, non-linearity, and narrative variation in Kathy Acker's novel, *Blood and Guts in High School*¹, are striking. The textual behavior dynamically parallels the experiences of the main character, Janey Smith—a young girl who is a victim of various sexual abuses, including life-long incest by her father, then being sold into a sex slavery ring until, ridden with venereal disease and cancer, she dies at age fourteen. As Carla Harryman argues, Acker's writing is "a material extension of the body analogous to language" (37). Gabrielle Dane, similarly, writes that *BGHS* is a "narrative enacting its content, an evocation of the splintered psyche of an abused little girl" (242). Dane goes on to state: "I suggest that Acker utilizes this schizophrenic array of styles and modes of discourse in order both to enact the permeable boundaries of a sexually abused child and to try to express that for which no ready words exist" (243). Instead of looking at Acker's language and array of styles as schizophrenic, we might view them as enactments of a *traumatic* mode of discourse. Acker's novel, in its form and language, is replete with manifestations of hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction that define the traumatic experience. The following passage, for example, can be viewed as remarkably hyperaroused:

President Carter is the pillar of American society. He's almost fifty-three years old. WORN OUT by DECAying practices, he looks like a SKELETON. He's HAIRY as a RAT, flat-backed, his ASS looks like TWO DIRTY RAGS FLAPPING OVER A PISS- STAINED WALL. Because he gets whipped so much the SKIN of his ASS is DEAD and you can KNEAD and SLICE it. He will never FEEL a thing. President Carter's centre is an enormous HOLE. This HOLE'S DIAMETER, COLOUR, and ODOUR resemble a NEW YORK CITY SUBWAY TOILET that hasn't been CLEANED for THREE weeks (119).

This passage, in fact, marks the beginning of a nine-page long section of hyperaroused narrative. This section is consumed by manic, agitated dialogue between a disembodied chorus of voices, which can neither stop speaking, nor stop interrupting one another. The use of capital letters is scattered throughout, sometimes completely dominating the dialogue. Though the content in these pages reflects intense anger, it is this use of capitalization which stamps the anger, so characteristic of traumatic hyperarousal, upon the physical body of the page. The capitals embody traumatic agitation—they literally enact the arousal of text. Similarly, though the segments of speech are delineated by some quotation marks and paragraph breaks, they display relatively few sentence breaks, and little traditional punctuation:

‘I was wandering around the streets with cancer.

‘I didn’t have any money or know anybody. Although I didn’t feel like a bum, I was hanging out at the Bowery with leftover humans.

‘One night I wandered into a rock-n-roll club named CBGB’s. The lights went boomp boomp boomp the drum went boomp boomp boomp the floor went boomp boomp boomp... then there was these worms of bodies, white, covered by second-hand stinking guttered-up rags and knife-torn leather bands, moving sideways HORIZONTAL wriggling like worms who never made it to the snake evolution stage, we only reproduce, we say, if you cut us apart with a knife, the slimy saxophone and the singer who’s too burned out to stick a banana in his cock flows away all was gooky amorphous ambiguous nauseous undefined spystory no reality existed so why bother to do anything? BOOM BOOM was reality, slimy slimy BOOM BOOM slimy slimy (120-121).

It is unclear who these voices belong to— they may represent dissociated parts of Janey, or a dialogue between Janey and her current lover, Jean Genet; at one point, the speech turns into a biting first-person critique of society, ostensibly issued by writer Erica Jong. All of these characteristics make for a text whose heart is beating quickly, whose frantic and outraged mind does not know where or how to focus—there is simply too much for it to attend to. This section of text, of which the above are just brief examples, is so overridden with sexuality, violence, and identity crises that it cannot be present for any kind of coherent, shared narrative with external reality. Though Janey is apparently in Tangier with Jean Genet at this time in her life, having been liberated from sex slavery and having discovered that she has cancer, we hear nothing of these objective facts of the story for nine pages.

In addition to hyperaroused text, *BGHS* also displays myriad characteristics of traumatic intrusion. Perhaps the most striking example of this is the array of disturbing illustrations and disruptions of narrative that happen throughout the first two sections of the novel. Crudely drawn visuals of penises and sexual acts abruptly interrupt the flow of the text, sometimes right in the middle of a sentence. A drawing of a vagina intrudes into the text with the caption, “My cunt red ugh” (19). A drawing of disembodied male genitals being touched by disembodied female hands bears the caption, “YOU ARE THE BLACK ANNOUNCERS OF MY DEATH” (24); and later, a drawing of a rope-bound female body is labeled *ODE TO A GRECIAN URN* (63). Such images are sudden and unpredictable flashes, akin to the highly visual and literal, yet highly fragmented, flashbacks and nightmares experienced by survivors of trauma. They literally, as in trauma itself, cut through any semblance of cohesive, language-based narrative. These illustrations, in some sense, express the unspeakableness of Janey’s experience; they reach far beyond what words could relay (Dane 244). Intrusive images are also prominent in portraying Janey’s apparently turbulent dream life, as pages of dense, intricate dream maps interrupt her story.

The voices and narrative streams themselves repeatedly intrude upon one other, reflecting the unpredictable shifts of perception and cognition that mark PTSD. For instance, as Janey is locked in the slave

trader's room to learn how to be a whore, the narrative suddenly cuts to an in-depth book report that Janey has written about her hero, Hester Prynne of *The Scarlet Letter*. The book report is itself interrupted by a twenty-three page handwritten assemblage entitled *The Persian Poems*, in which Janey is teaching herself Arabic, after which the narrative returns again to the book report.

Various forms of repetition compulsion indicate yet another manifestation of traumatic intrusion in *BGHS*. From pages twenty-one through twenty-five, for instance, the story portrays an uncanny sequence of exchanges between Janey and her incestuous father, each exchange a slightly different version of the others, all of which begin with the same two sentences: "A few hours later they woke up together and decided they would spend the whole day together since it was their last day. Janey would meet Johnny at the hotel where he worked when he got off from work." Throughout the section, these two sentences are repeated six times.

Through various modes of fragmentation, dissociation, and lack of reference, the marks of traumatic constriction also fuel the text. Indeed, one of Acker's main methods of writing was the Burroughs-inspired cut-up technique, wherein text itself was cut and placed elsewhere in the body of writing, often arbitrarily. This technique brings the dance of destruction and creation right into the very DNA of Acker's work (Robinson 3). The cut-up method, prominent throughout *BGHS*, reflects not only the dissociation and confusion of identity; it also highlights the disruption of linear time and narrative so prominent in the minds of trauma survivors.

The dissociation of Janey's body, identity, and memory is widespread throughout the story. The narration continually jumps between first, second, and third person point-of-view, as if Janey's body and self are floating in and out of various states of its own consciousness. Sometimes, Janey's identity and voice become sufficiently fused—or confused—with other characters like Hester Prynne or Erica Jong, as though she is filtering herself into dissociated identities. The narrative regularly cuts in and out of different tenses, implying the disruption and complication of normal, linear time and memory. It passes through descriptive sentences and paragraphs which entirely lack pronouns, creating the illusion of objectivity and the erasure of self so reminiscent of PTSD. This passage, for example, cuts in with its constricted language, just after a dialogue between Janey and her father that is replete with references to abuse:

Uxmal: Mayan ruins, huge temples, all the buildings are *huge*, scary, on high. Low land in centre. Everything very far apart. Makes forget personal characteristics. Wind blows long grass who! whoot! Jungle, not Amazonian swamp, but thick, thick green leafage so beautiful surrounds. Hear everything. (13)

Additionally, there are several passages of dialogue written in screenplay or script form, interspersed with third-person parenthetical commentary. This act of narrative distancing reflects the flat, dissociative experiences of a body that is forced to defend against overwhelming events by shutting down; a body whose only survival is to convince itself that it is removed from reality. In the very first pages, we are introduced, in this manner, to ten-year old Janey and her father:

Janey: I'm not crazy. (*Realizing he's madly in love with the other woman.*) I don't mean to act like this. (*Realizing more and more how madly in love he is. Blurts it out.*) For the last month you've been spending every moment with her. That's why you've stopped eating meals with me. That's why you haven't been helping me the way you usually do when I'm sick. You're madly in love with her, aren't you?

Father (*ignorant of this huge mess*): We just slept together for the first time tonight.

Janey: You told me you were just friends like me and Peter (*Janey's stuffed lamb*) and you weren't going to sleep together. It's not like my sleeping around with all these art studs: when you sleep with your best friend, it's really, really heavy. (7-9)

The content in this passage reflects the worst of physical and psychological abuses, yet the form allows for a frightening level of objectivity, such that it is possible to read the dialogue and forget—or at least, incompletely register—that Janey is a ten-year old victim of incest. There is distance created not only between the reader and the narrative, but between the narrative and itself, between Janey and herself. Janey's story becomes removed from space and time by way of the script, as if she is watching herself—or the reader is witnessing her—perform her life from afar. Just before the final section of the novel, the story even more explicitly takes on the form of a script, complete with settings, scenes, and stage directions. While an abusive Jean Genet drags Janey across the sands of Egypt to her eventual death, this “play” represents, perhaps, her last traumatic constriction, her immanent confrontation with the annihilation of death:

Scene 5

Janey's still in gaol. She doesn't know whether it's day or night because she can't see anything.

She's blind.

She used to fantasize that when she went blind, a wonderful man would come along, take pity on her, and rescue her. Now she knows that nothing like that is going to happen.

Janey (*thinking quietly to herself, not spoken aloud*): Everything that is this world stinks. Even if something good would come along now like love, or money which causes love, I would laugh in its face. No I wouldn't. I just absolutely know right now and for ever love's not going to come along, so I might as well die. I don't want to commit suicide anymore, like I used to; I want to go through death. How can I go through death?

(*Aloud*) Hey death!

(*Death doesn't answer.*)

Janey: Goddamn you answer me even if I'm a woman!

Death: What do you want, you lousy brat? (134)

Following this, the last section of the book brings the reader right to the site of traumatic annihilation—and also, potentially, to the site of healing or liberation. In this last section, entitled “The World”, Janey’s body disappears from the textual body; her voice is apparently gone; there is no more reference to the carnival of names, places, and themes the reader has come to know. Yet the text continues for twenty-five pages, overtaken by an unnamed, omnipresent voice. The voice narrates a creation-like myth that is otherwise dominated by illustrations. For the first time in the novel, the pages are marked by considerable amounts of white, empty space—it is easy to get the impression that the text is breathing for the first time. The illustrations do not read as traumatic intrusions of violence and sex, such as those at the beginning; instead, they are simple, archetypal scenes of animals, plants, shapes, maps, rivers, and people, interspersed with sparse, poetic language. It is unclear who or what this voice represents—perhaps a god-like power, or Janey’s consciousness just before or after death—but Janey, as we know her, is no longer present, having been replaced by something much more vast and universal. She has literally, in the body of the text, been erased or transcended. As Karen Brennan writes, “Within this pictorial, highly pastiched space, this voice, which has been figuratively silenced, speaks eloquently” (266). Suddenly, the narrative is lucid and simple, relaying myth-like stories of creation and destruction.

The novel has succeeded in representing the total de-scription of Janey’s body, while simultaneously enacting the inscription—the witnessing— of Janey’s body upon a solid object, a book. The ending “instructs us to change our paradigms, to imagine the world differently” (Brennan 268), as the last line of the novel jumps from this creation-myth and unexpectedly invokes Janey one more time: “Soon many other Janey’s were born and these Janey’s covered the earth” (165). It is as though we are being assured that Janey Smith—and what she represents as a fictional character— will continue to haunt us until we witness and heal her legacy.

Erasure and presence: Selah Saterstrom’s *The Pink Institution*

After atrocities, forms emerge, often called avant-garde forms. Looking at avant-garde as a literal translation, these forms may be “forward looking” but they feel more to me like present moment witness. How does one speak after a violence that literally reconfigures the cellular structure of things, that, in its erasure, records the shadow of what is no longer present? Out of necessity forms arise to speak a language that must also speak these losses and transfigurations. (Saterstrom, *Tarpaulin* 22)

Selah Saterstrom’s *The Pink Institution*², set in the southern United States, relays a multi-generational portrait of one family as they struggle through poverty, addiction, suicide, and abuse. It is another traumatized

body of text, a narrative embodiment of the complicated dance between intrusion, constriction, and hyperarousal. But while Acker's *BGHS* reads as a dense, harried labyrinth of language and signs that move in all directions, invoking a veritable narrative explosion, Saterstrom's novel is filled with white space, non-text; the imprints of traumatic erasure mark the pages like a ghost, silent and unknowable, yet inescapably present. White space defines the textual body, the book, of *TPI* just as much as its tangible language and images do. If Acker's novel is a traumatic explosion of narrative, Saterstrom's is an implosion, a traumatic sinking and rising of narrative that is spilling and leaking, treading water at the threshold of being known.

TPI's white space can be read as an enactment of constriction that is threaded throughout the whole text, rendering the words and images themselves an intrusive force—pieces of narrative that are trying to gel at the surface. The first chapter of *TPI* contains the most prominent white spaces, with sentences and paragraphs repeatedly lodged with gaps. The following passage, containing the only words on page twelve, is representative of the form in chapter one:

Micajah was the law she lived in
the town he lived in
the country. Children lived between versions
suggest the couple adored one another
others that they detested.

As the chapter proceeds, the gaps, though still prominent, tend to lessen; periodically, there are paragraphs or lines without gaps; and, at one point, the text drops into quick, vertical poem-like lines. These passages and gaps work together to create what feels like a series of fragmented, truncated memories. They mirror the familial and historical amnesia, the vacillation of constrictive and intrusive disturbances of memory, experienced by the family at the center of the story. The silence—whether willed silence, or involuntary, subconscious silence—surrounding this family's trauma is embedded on the page. The literal slowing-down of narrative time that results from the gaps, enact the disturbances in time and space that mark traumatic occurrences.

The second chapter, entitled "I can never recover my object", is comprised of lists of "objects", each described in short blocks of prose. The descriptions, however, do not necessarily pertain to objects, but to *events* which have been objectified—events turned into static symbols, or cut off into alienated memories. In the first list, "Childhood Objects", we read a description of the object called "There":

Azalea sent Aza to Toomsata to see if Willie was there. Aza walked into the house. She asked Dunbar if her father was there. Dunbar said, "He's in the bed, you jealous little bitch." On several occasions the children watched Dunbar masturbate their drunk father while their mother, also drunk, slobbered on herself sitting in the corner. (52)

Though the prominent gaps, in the first chapter, between words and lines have subsided, the narrative continues to behave like a series of dissociated memories. Though noteworthy or traumatic in content, they

remain objective and descriptive, lacking emotional and metaphorical language. In this way, the blocks of prose function as literal, highly visual representations, reminiscent of the intrusive drawings in Acker's novel; reminiscent, also, of the flashbacks, dreams, and nightmares experienced by survivors.

At the end of the second chapter, the first person narrator is, literally, born: "Faryn begot Abella, Ginger begot Mary, Trulie begot Alea, and Aza begot me" (78). After all of the amnesia, distortion of time, and objective, dissociated scenes in the first two chapters, there is now an "I" who is struggling to become a subject through the fragmented, incomplete telling of family and social history. This "I" was, perhaps, always there; perhaps it was not—in any case, it remained silent and unseen until now. The text enacts and bows to this birth of subjectivity through the brief third chapter, called "Birth Interim", whereafter the narrative consciously flows through the new subject via a first-person point of view. This point-of-view shift—the dawn of the conscious awareness of the subject—is significant in terms of the traumatized body, which is so often debilitated by its confusions of identity and its sense of existential annihilation. The text, as a body, from here on out, has at least the beginnings of a sense of its own solid existence and identity.

However, by the fourth chapter, though we now have a first-person subject and her voice, she remains general, lacking a name and face. Though we have the start of a more linear narrative, the blocks of descriptive text getting longer and more dotted with personal impressions, the text still performs abrupt moments of hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction. As in Acker's novel, the point-of-view at times flips back to third person; sometimes the identity of the narrator and the identities of those she writes about become confused. For example, in two consecutive sections of chapter four—both suggestively entitled "Repetition"—the narrator is first relaying a memory of her grandfather:

When he repeated himself I thought it was because he was trying to reinforce the stories because he would say over and over the most important thing was to know one's history. Sometimes I thought he had a bad memory. He told every story, no matter how many times I had heard it, like I was hearing it for the first time. (92)

The second "Repetition" jumps to a third person account of a girl riding in a car with her drunken mother, who almost drives them into a ditch: "Her mother's car is a Beetle-bug color of insect wings. In the back of the Beetle bug is a rounded space carpeted with beige fuzz... If she wants, she can kneel back there but she likes it in the front" (95). Coming on the heels of a first-person narration with the same title, this section, just as so many sections in *BGHS* and so many flashbacks and out-of-body dissociations experienced by survivors of trauma, reads as if the first narrator is suddenly outside of herself, watching the events of her life from an anesthetized distance. The two voices seem to represent the same individual, yet they act as separate and fluid identities.

There are notable moments of breakdown in the fourth chapter wherein sentences once again become constricted and incomplete, or hyperaroused: "'don't touch it'; backyard apple tree groundshades the thrown and wasted doll; we walk on wood floors; the parental bedspread is patterned paisley mold purring" (110).

Here, the text seems to enact an anxious purging of dissociated flashes and timeless memories; it is a flow of highly sensory images without periods or capitalization to denote any beginnings or endings. It comes out of white space, then goes back into white space. Alternating sequences of past and present tense also play a role in the fourth chapter, again marking a distorted, non-linear “stuckness” in the narrative’s sense of time, such as on pages 114-116, when the narrator weaves in and out of past-tense memories of food-related events, and present-tense events of eating.

A noteworthy event that continues to occur throughout the first section of *TPI* is the insertion of several “tableaux”. The tableaux all bear the caption “The Confederate Ball Program Guide, 1938”, and include text that is literally broken by the phrase “text smears”: “The following tableaux tell the true story of a young man [text smear] The reverence with which the [text smear]...” (5). The text smears, and their surrounding text, not only refer to the vast traumas of the civil war—often by referring to their omission—but serve to literally inscribe silence, blurriness, and incomprehension on the physical page. Furthermore, the tableaux, which function more like pieces of visual art as opposed to literature, are another player in the incomplete composite of events that this novel is attempting to witness and narrate. Similarly, an insertion—perhaps an intrusion—of dreamlike, foggy pictures occurs throughout the whole novel. There is a headless man holding a goat’s horns; a blurry child and woman in front of a house; the faded figure of someone dressed as a devil; and, on the very last page, an antique-looking portrait of an anonymous little girl. These photographs, fuzzy and lacking context, again enact the dance between the seeable and unseeable, the known and unknown.

The ending of chapter four tells of the suicide attempt and miraculous recovery of the narrator’s mother. It is followed by chapter five, the conclusion: a brief set of utterances that bear striking similarities to the ending of *BGHS*. It starts with an entirely blank white page. This page may represent a constrictive numbing or amnesia, but it reads more like a breath—a calm expanse that does not portray the same quality of the rapid, staccato gaps and breaks in the first chapter. The following page is mostly blank, as well, save for one paragraph describing some kind of malleable “It”. This “It” points to something vast and universal that cannot be pinned down, an entity that bears the quality of the omnipresent narrator at the end of *BGHS*: “It was bodies, what made bodies, and what bodies made. It was illegal separation. It was back-flipping in a five-star padded room. It was the Confederate Memorial Bandstand. It was the sound of birds pecking glass. You could see it if you held it open. You could drink it. It was pink.” (133)

The narrative then turns to a brief fragment entitled “Scene” and a set of sentences that read like a poem. The page is speckled with sparse language and white spaces; the violence of the rest of the novel is behind us, and the voice is suddenly contemplative and lucid as in the ending of *BGHS*. “Scene”, as well, is reminiscent of the dissociated scripts in Acker’s novel, and the section, much like the one in Acker’s ending, potentially liberates through its vastness. The final lines of *TPI* answer their own question: “Do you think she was losing her breath or catching it? I think she was catching it” (134). The reader is left with the feeling of an open-ended narrative that, while still incomplete and traumatized, is finally above water.

In these ways, *TPI* typifies, as well as allows the reader to enter, the process of “present moment

witnessing.” This constant play between erasure and presence defines *TPI*, creates the conditions for a narrative body that is never final, always struggling to be born. Sometimes it succeeds in its own birth; at other times, it falls back into impenetrability. Once alienated from comprehensible and shared narrative, through witnessing, the trauma gains its first step towards integration, towards embodiment. This is the necessary nature of the relationship between trauma and witnessing.

Addressable Others: How literature can engender witnessing

All bodies are verbs; they do not just contain, but *are*, living, active, dynamic inscriptions and de-scriptions of narrative. In this sense, all bodies are texts and all texts are bodies. They exist only in relation to context, condition, association, and relationship. When these contexts, conditions, associations, and relationships come face-to-face with death and annihilation; when they are completely shattered and overwhelmed; when they are pushed past the limits of language and understanding; when they become completely alienated from the sign systems that furnish life’s spiritual and psychological tolerability, then bodies cease to exist on a very real level. They are no longer able to be inscribed into the shared reality which keeps us functioning and integrated.

As psychologists and theorists have articulated the difficulties inherent in representing trauma, they have also articulated the fact that witnessing is at the core of healing from trauma. To witness—whether it is to witness oneself or another—is to willingly and compassionately orient our consciousness towards the very thing that cannot be understood. Witnessing is an act of exchanging the alienation of trauma with the connection of relationship. Witnessing means being willing to be present with the unknowable and assist it, whenever possible, to be born as fact; and, when it cannot be born, one must acknowledge and accept its unknowable qualities. In this manner, traumatized bodies, through witnessing, have the potential to heal. So long as an other body is willing to be a witness, then even in its incomprehensibility, trauma can leave marks of evidence upon time-space. In *TPI* and *BGHS*, the initial body of the witness takes the form of a book. These book-bodies then point to, and help birth the existences of, characters and events. Finally, even though *TPI* and *BGHS* are works of fiction, they incontrovertibly resemble and reflect—whether or not their authors were acting in a conscious political manner—the politics, cultures, oppressions, and experiences of individual bodies in the real world. Literary production cannot happen in a social or cultural bubble. Another way to say this, is that a book of fiction can act as a witness, and in doing so, it can allow its readers to become witnesses—both to the fictional characters, and to the realities those characters represent in the world beyond the book. This is how witnessing begets witnessing, how traumatized bodies can help one another re- integrate, re-embodiment, and re-inscribe their narratives.

The process of healing, and creating trauma narratives, cannot exist without a reader/witness. This kind of narration is a co-creative process, dependent upon both the telling and the receiving. The witness assists in discovering the narrative by acting as a reflective surface, an *other* body, upon which the incomprehensible events of the trauma re-establish their place in space-time; upon which the alienated, dissociated trauma

comes to re-create itself as a validated and “real” presence (Laub 57). If the reader is willing to be present with traumatized texts—to meet them where they are at and to accept their internal, often mysterious, logic—he or she can become a witness. There is a special kind of “listening” required of the reader/witness of such texts—a willingness to sit with, and accept as legitimate, the ambiguity, disconnectedness, and incomprehensibility of the traumatic symptoms these texts hold and enact; a willingness to let go of, for the duration of the text, the myth of completeness and comprehensible time-space that is borne out in more traditional narratives. As Laub writes, the refusal of this witnessing, the insistence that the trauma remain unseen and unknown, is the final blow to trauma survivors: “The absence of an empathetic listener, or more radically, the absence of an *addressable other*, an other who can hear the anguish of one’s memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story” (68). The lack of a witness—a reader or listener—undoes the very potential for healing at every level.

Conclusion: “The tremors of a deep cultural shift”³

I would identify that “narrative” as a collection of images that have intersected and conjoined through time in such a way that it feels right—inexhaustible, non-negotiable...Where there are things and conditions, there is narrative. (Saterstrom, *Tarpaulin* 20)

TEACH ME A NEW LANGAUGE, DIMWIT. A LANGUAGE THAT MEANS SOMETHING TO ME. (Acker, *BGHS* 96)

Critical and literary theory are replete with proponents of psychological frameworks, namely hysteria and schizophrenia, as a frame for giving voice to trauma, the unspeakable, and the general complications of understanding and reference that are central to our (post)modern psyche. However, as Elaine Showalter argues in her essay “On Hysterical Narrative”, the use of the hysteria model might be inherently problematic, with its roots in misogyny and psychoanalysis, and its potential to re-pathologize and romanticize victims of violence. The use of the schizophrenic model, most prominently explored by Deleuze and Guattari, is intriguing as a metaphor, but too often undefined and misunderstood by those who theorize about its applications to language and narrative. It risks glorifying a set of symptoms that many experience as torturous, debilitating, life-threatening conditions; and it is generally, like hysteria, considered a pathology.

But the framework of post-traumatic stress disorder is unique in its understanding of psychological symptoms, the dynamics of trauma, and the mechanisms of witnessing. The main causes of PTSD are acknowledged as external to the survivor. The symptoms and behaviors experienced by survivors are not thought of as de-contextualized, inherent personality traits or incurable biological flaws. An acknowledgement of PTSD encourages the survivor to see that she or he is precisely *not* crazy, but having a normal internal reaction to an extraordinary set of external circumstances. PTSD requires an analysis that recognizes, at least, interpersonal power dynamics, and at best, the violence ingrained in our socio-cultural

paradigms. Not only does trauma take place in a social context, but healing from trauma does, too. Speaking to this, Judith Herman writes:

To hold traumatic reality in consciousness requires a social context that affirms and protects the victim and that joins victim and witness in a common alliance. For the individual victim, this social context is created by relationships with friends, lovers, and family. For the larger society, the social context is created by political movements that give voice to the disempowered. (9)

PTSD is one of the only accepted psychiatric models that recognizes the personal and political implications of power and violence, in addition to connecting violence with language and narrative. Therefore, literary applications of PTSD have immense potential to engender personal empowerment and healing, as well as cultural and social movement.

Yet the project of writing about trauma turns out to be difficult and riddled with paradoxes; many legitimate questions have been raised in regards to it. Perhaps the most prominent of those questions is: If trauma is precisely that which explodes our schemas of understanding, that which is inherently unspeakable, then is the act of writing about trauma inherently a degradation and betrayal of the trauma? As theorist Theodore Adorno famously stated, “To write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric.”⁴ But perhaps another question, just as relevant, is: What do we risk by *not* writing about trauma? I argue that we risk a great deal. The task of writing trauma is politically and culturally indispensable, even in its incompleteness. It is that very incompleteness which must be written and witnessed, in order for healing to begin. To write the collapse of understanding, to attempt to write from the very place of annihilation while accepting the inevitable gaps and shortages, is both an act of witnessing in itself, as well as an entrance—an invitation—for readers to become witnesses. In a sense, we must first understand that we will never “understand” trauma, at least not in the manner the mind usually understands things; and then we must be determined to write about it anyways. Felman states in “Education and Crisis”: “By its very innovative definition, poetry will henceforth speak *beyond its means*, to testify—precociously—to the ill-understood effects and to the impact of an accident whose origin cannot precisely be located but whose repercussions, in their very uncontrollable and unanticipated nature, still continue to evolve even in the very process of testimony” (30). Invoking the Holocaust survivor and poet Paul Celan, she goes on to state that, in order to heal from trauma, language must first “pass through its own answerlessness” (53).

We live in a social body filled with individual bodies, which together manifest an endless matrix of narratives. In this body, there is rape, incest, abuse, addiction, mental illness, and poverty. There is sex trafficking, imperialism, racism, sexism, constant large-scale war and threat of war, factory farms, genocide, ecocide, and the destructive forces of global capitalism. In it, the damage and annihilation of bodies takes place at a larger and more unfathomable level than it ever has. In other words, this is a chronically traumatized—and traumatizing—society, and the magnitude of its trauma is a relatively new development in history. We need narrative forms that can accommodate this reality. We need to represent the unrepresentable in a thorough and complicated manner that does as much justice to it as possible. Furthermore,

we need styles of interpreting and reading that can accommodate this reality. Traumatic sites are not linear sites, are not simple sites, are perhaps not even comprehensible sites. But in order to explore them, to enter them, to even get a foot into them, we must act as reader-witnesses. Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School* and Selah Saterstrom's *The Pink Institution* are just two examples of many books that, if examined through an informed lens of PTSD, might offer us invaluable information about language, society, and healing. Though more traditional literary forms serve a crucial purpose in the witnessing and integration of trauma⁵, we also need language and syntax which, like *BGHS* and *TPI*, take that first step of meeting traumatic shattering where it is at—and readers who can do the same. We need both the text and the reader-witness to attend to the traumatized space; to hold it with a tolerance for ambiguity and confusion; to maintain the heartbeat of patient, compassionate witnessing that will make real the possibility of healing, integration, and ultimately, a new world. This is a politically and culturally indispensable concern of literature.

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Notes

¹ For the remainder of this essay, *Blood and Guts in High School* will be referred to as *BGHS*.

² For the remainder of this essay, *The Pink Institution* will be referred to as *TPI*.

³ Wollen, 2

⁴ I include Adorno's controversial statement here because it has been the center of much discussion around literature and trauma. However, an extended discussion about it is beyond the means of this paper, and it is important to note that he is often misquoted and misunderstood. The original quote, which read, "The critique of culture is confronted with the last stage in the dialectic of culture and barbarism: to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today", was published in 1955 in an essay called "An Essay on Cultural Criticism and Society", in *Prisms* (Marcuse and van Gelder). Later on in his career, in *Negative Dialectics*, he retracted the original quote and gave a more nuanced, in-depth explanation which included the statement, "Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems". (362)

⁵ Paul Celan, Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, Charles Reznikoff, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and Albert Camus are just a few of the countless novelists and poets from the last century whose works, now generally recognized for their bravery of content as opposed to their innovation of form, has played an invaluable role in the cultural witnessing and integration of trauma.

Jacques Prévert's Queer Acts of Speech, or, an Apologia for a Postmodern Curriculum.

By Alistair Rolls

In the dull and boring moments of classroom life, shifting fields of discourse becomes necessary: the familiar must become strange, queer.¹

The aim of this article is to draw an analogy between the debate around the contemporary notion of a queer curriculum and a Parisian poet of the mid-twentieth century, on whom the very term would have been entirely lost. If there is an analogy to be drawn between the two, it is, I shall argue, because this political, pedagogical position and this self-referential poetics are both predicated on the maintenance of radical difference within, against and as part of the homogenizing arena of the status quo. This is a difficult balancing act, all the more so since we are arguably in a moment that can be labelled 'post-queer' even though there are still a number of pressures applied to make us, citizens and institutions, return to 'traditional values'.² In the specific context of university teaching in the Arts, and the free thinking that is central to it, a queering of the curriculum can appear at once vital, unnecessary, outmoded and radical. For the purposes of this article, the need for a queer curriculum to play a role in the mainstream of our education system is as present in Australia today as it was in France in 1945. I hope therefore to use this seemingly slender link to reaffirm a contemporary apologia for a queering of curriculum and also a curricularizing of queer, which will lead us to weigh up the relative loss of political edge entailed by a desexualizing, or perhaps 'desexualitizing',³ of the term against the educational gains to be made by integrating queer theory into the educational mainstream. By looking afresh at a 'traditional' mainstay of the French classroom, I wish both to rediscover its potential for generating radical new meaning and to argue for the universal applicability of a queer aesthetic. This desexualitizing of the term 'queer' will then, I hope, be productively counterbalanced by a sexualized reading of Jacques Prévert's poems, derived not from a model of sexuality—heteronormative or otherwise—but, instead, from a deconstructionist erotics of reading. As such, my use of the term here is drawn from the specific context of the queering of the curriculum, and the queerness that I seek to underscore in Prévert's poetry extends from his characteristic questioning of the nuts and bolts of everyday life, from gender politics at their most basic level to the experience of the

classroom and the value of education itself. With this in mind, I shall begin with a review of the recent return to political life of the term ‘traditional’ as it pertains to my own specific situation as an educator in a university in regional Australia.

Apologizing for the Postmodern

Speaking on Australian television, the Deputy Prime Minister and Federal Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, recently made the following apology: “[And] I’m sorry that under that Howard Liberal Government you were subject to that post-modern curriculum”.⁴ One might be forgiven for thinking that the Howard government had shaken off its right-wing traditionalism in the area of education and that the previous Prime Minister had, in fact, been a supporter of postmodernism. But, of course, as the following lines from Melbourne’s *The Age* newspaper suggest, nothing could have been further from the truth: “A fortnight ago [in 2006], Prime Minister John Howard attacked the study of English literature in Australia, based on postmodern ideology, as ‘rubbish’.”⁵ And neither is it the case that Gillard’s comments reflect a recent decision by the Australian Labor Party to display even less sympathy to postmodernism than its predecessors in government; indeed, this article from *The Age* was not focused on the then federal government but on remarks made in 2005 by the ALP’s State Education Minister in Queensland, Rod Welford, who had caused something of a stir when referring to a high-school student’s ‘feminist’ reading of the classic fairy tale, *Rapunzel*, as ‘mumbo-jumbo’:

In 2005 Queensland Education Minister Rod Welford vowed to get rid of ‘postmodern mumbo-jumbo’ in year 12 English after seeing sample student responses, including a ‘feminist’ analysis of the fairytale *Rapunzel*, in which the student argued that *Rapunzel* was in fact a name for a vegetable also known as corn salad, and thus reinforced the notion of woman as a vegetable and being enslaved to routines such as cooking.⁶

These comments serve to define the very antithesis of what I wish to call here a ‘queer curriculum’; or rather, they seek to attack a curriculum because it is considered postmodern. Welford is attacking this student’s work not on the basis of its feminist slant but because it eschews the resurging popularity of ‘traditional’ essentialism and grand narratives. For critics like Marla Morris, Welford is operating as an ‘antiqueer curriculum worker’, that is to say a non-digressive pedagogue who “sees herself or himself as a dispenser of facts and students as receptors of knowledge [and who] views curriculum as a set of methods or procedures”.⁷

The first point to make about this dogmatic reaction to student initiative is that its mission is paradoxically similar in intent to most of the academic work on the queer curriculum: that is to say that it is in fact working *against* tradition. Morris, for example, seeks to combat pedagogues whose apparent aim is to perpetuate the discourse of the status quo; and whilst this is how then State Education Minister Welford would certainly see his position—and it was at the time a position widely supported in Australian high

schools—it had clearly not been the dominant paradigm in university English departments for some decades. Indeed, the advent of poststructuralism in the late 1960s had long left Rapunzel and her compatriots in the hands of their readers.⁸ In the new millennium, poststructuralism and ‘traditional English’, while synonymous at the tertiary level,⁹ were now apparently opposed in high schools.

The second point to make is that this conservative position in relation to education has been espoused by both sides of politics. While Welford was voicing the position of the ruling State Labor Government in Queensland, the Liberal Prime Minister was pushing the same line federally. According to Xavier Duff, writing in 2007, “[a]s we all well know, John Howard is not happy with the teaching of Australian history in our schools and has called for a return to traditional history, taught by dates with a proper narrative that reflects our proud past rather than the abstract random thoughts of the jaded post-modernist lefties who currently write and teach our history.”¹⁰ Whilst we might wish to dwell longer on the perversity of Howard’s position,¹¹ which calls for a grand narrative to be *forged*—with all the distance and belatedness of remembrance and the objectivity of reconstruction crucial, as we shall see later, to verse poetry as well as history¹²—and not simply *returned to*, what emerges is a common political discourse, where uncertain times call for (the same) tough words. As Mark d’Arbon and Jean Harkins hypothesize with particular emphasis on government policy and the language of education, policy writing is something of “a genre or canon”.¹³ In this way, we might suggest that postmodernism has finally lived up to both left- and right-wing governments’ expectations and become meaningless. Or rather, it is now a much clearer signifier: it stands for ‘bad education’. Accordingly, its use in policy has become *de rigueur*, a position always to be shunned.

One may question whether this discourse has only ever been political, a storm in a tea-cup. For, while post-structuralism has been the mainstay of textual analysis since the aftermath of May ‘68, there is little sign that high-school students have been extensively ‘deconstructed’. Certainly, they do not enter Australian universities as ‘jaded postmodern lefties’, and their encounters with the theories of Roland Barthes et al. still prove thought-provoking and often revelatory. The voice of political conservatism would appear to be raised against a radical discourse that has itself remained primarily political. We might consider William Pinar’s introduction to *Queer Theory in Education*, in which, in 1998, he recalls describing how as far back as 1981 he had argued “that for curriculum to escape reproduction it needed to be degenerate”.¹⁴ Clearly, if the voice of queer, in the deconstructionist sense, has been subdued in recent years it is not because non-essentialist constructions of identity ever became mainstream. Subdued but perhaps not unheard, however: for, what is the current Australian Labor government’s ‘Education Revolution’ if not a push for an antiqueer curriculum, or perhaps one that is even less queer than the last? Thus, when in 2009 the Deputy Prime Minister and, *inter alia*, Minister for Education apologizes on national television for the postmodern curriculum forced on students by the previous Liberal government, it seems clear that it is time for the author to die again.

French Poetry in the Classroom

In this paper Morris's, and, as we shall see, Susanne Luhmann's, notion of a queer curriculum will be broached via a queer reading of some very traditional French poetry: Jacques Prévert's *Paroles*. And by 'queer reading' here we mean both a queering of the poems (a deconstruction and writerly production of textual identity) and a discovery of their queerness (an assumption that there is something inherently, 'essentially' non-traditional about the poems). There is certainly something paradoxical about an anthology of poetry that critics often consider a form of anti-poetry but which has at the same time become almost synonymous with French poetry in Anglo-Saxon secondary education. Few students who have studied French at school for more than a few years will not be familiar with the opening lines of "Déjeuner du matin", for example:

Il a mis le café	[He put the coffee
Dans la tasse	In the cup
Il a mis le lait	He put the milk
Dans la tasse de café	In the cup of coffee
Il a mis le sucre	He put the sugar
Dans le café au lait	In the <i>café au lait</i>] ¹⁵

If this is the most famous of Prévert's *Paroles* it is perhaps because it is the simplest example of the most banal of daily gestures becoming *transfigured*, to use his translator's description, and overvalued.¹⁶ To be made poetry, this is one way that "the familiar", in the words of our epigraph, may "become strange, queer". Perhaps the hope is that this "shifting [in] fields of discourse", via the powerful allegory of the students' own despair as they read French poetry, will transfigure "the dull and boring moments of classroom life" just as beauty emerges from the poems' monotonous listing of mundanity. Whatever the reason, so popular has *Paroles* been in the classroom that academic monographs, such as Peter Low's *Poems for the Classroom*,¹⁷ have been written for this express purpose. In other words, Prévert has finally coincided, if not with himself, then at least with the everyday context against which he railed, sometime gently, sometimes violently, but constantly: the great apologist for radical thinking has been integrated into the syllabus. French academics, too, have used broad brushstrokes to characterize him. In two books, both simply entitled *Jacques Prévert*, Marc Andry and Andrée Bergens each delimit his 'undefinability' in essentialist terms, thereby defining away his existentialist, and surrealistic, eschewing of such categorizations.

Describing Prévert's poetry as a paean to Paris, Andry considers its success to lie in the way its derealizing effects shock the reader into "descending more deeply into herself".¹⁸ This idea that unusual poetic structures force a reader to dig deep into inner resources is, of course, perverse (poetic shock causes a rethinking of self along with text—that is its power). I say 'of course' because I am so used to the idea that a text is always already (re-)created at the interface of the words on the page and the reader. For my undergraduate French students this concept is much more difficult to grasp. For them meaning is something to be discovered, beneath the surface meaning of the words, something hidden deep inside the poem. But

inside the poem, not themselves. Presumably, the poem's meaning will be added to them, once they have found that meaning and absorbed it. This is why students often find Prévert harder to read, less obviously pleasurable, than the nineteenth-century classics: because, paradoxically, he is too easy to read whereas the latter have so much more perceived complexity beneath which to hide their deeper meaning.

Children's author Paul Jennings, in a recent interview for the Australian *Sunday Telegraph* magazine, notes that "[g]etting kids to love stories is really important; it's how you learn who you are".¹⁹ What is nice about this quotation is the use of the second-person pronoun 'you', which is rather ambiguous. While it appears to suggest that reading stories helps kids find their identity, it may also imply that this identity is found in the act of writing stories to be read by children. If this remains essentialist discourse, it does at least suggest some interesting slippage between reader and writer, which enables us to reread Bergens's remarks about the anarchism of *Paroles*: "[But] Prévert is essentially a poet whose sole aim is to express what he feels, i.e. his joy or his indignation at the spectacle before his eyes. This allows him to give free rein to his non-conformism and natural irreverence."²⁰ By tying in so neatly with the idea of the shock felt by Prévert's reader, these comments allow us to reconsider the poem that will be our principal case study here, "Le Cancre" ["The Dunce"]:

He says no with his head
 but he says yes with his heart
 he says yes to what he loves
 he says no to the teacher
 he stands
 he is questioned
 and all the problems are posed
 sudden laughter seizes him
 and he erases all
 the words and figures
 names and dates
 sentences and snares
 and despite the teacher's threats
 to the jeers of infant prodigies
 with chalk of every colour
 on the blackboard of misfortune
 he draws the face of happiness.²¹

Here, the story of a child giving free rein to his 'non-conformism and natural irreverence' is located on middle-ground: this is a children's story told by a poet for a reader, and the space is the juncture between the poet's aim (so often considered the gauge of the poem's essence or 'meaning') and the reader's deep journey into self. But in fact, none of this happens at any great depth; instead, everything must be taken at face-value in Prévert's poems. All the action of "The Dunce" takes place on the surface of the blackboard, which necessarily provides the "words and figures" that we read through the eyes of the student. The

poem's 'essential aim' can be taken quite simply as a *becoming*, an aspiration towards an abstract value, 'poetry', on the part of an existent textual body; and "the face of happiness" is an ambiguous surface, reflecting a rainbow vision shared by reader and author alike.²² The final lines marry the concrete terms 'blackboard' and 'face' with the abstract concepts 'misfortune' and 'happiness', a paradoxical juxtaposition that seems to articulate the failure of the poem to coincide with its own poetic identity (of which it is the sole vehicle).

Identity and Textuality

From this perspective, Prévert's poems stage, and are predicated on, a kind of surface tension; the pleasure of the text, in this case as for Roland Barthes, is located in the tension created by opposing forces at the surface where the work is read. There is on the one hand the pleasurable activity of reading a meaning that is offered transparently by the work (Barthes's *plaisir*, which describes the consumption of literature, the 'readerly' text²³) and on the other the blissful act of submitting one's own meaning (via the construction of words that will be interpreted by others) to the act of 'being read' (Barthes's concept of *jouissance*). This interaction between the reader and text functions as an erotics, or a sexualization, of the poem, whose status as 'queer text' is predicated on a construction of identity in a specific, but non-gendered, reading context. In a poem like "The Dunce", therefore, the text offers itself to the reader reflexively, as text; it tells of its own words and structures, importing into itself the meanings associated with the abstract concept that is poetry. If Prévert's poems have an essential meaning, it is an identity assumed and worn vicariously. And this otherness, the virtual meaning hinted at beyond the surface, is simultaneously opposed to the actualization of reading that is encouraged on that surface. In this way, both the authorial act and the act of reading, when conjoined in the creation of the writerly text,²⁴ share both the erasing phase and the deployment of the rainbow vision. This is re-/de-construction, the poetics of an identity that is always already to be reconfigured from a fixed point of departure (the words on the page but also the reader, who throughout continuous metamorphosis remains identifiably 'the same person').

The impossibility of self-coincidence that is crucial to this type of poetics intersects clearly with queer theories of identity as developed by thinkers like Judith Butler.²⁵ Both, too, recall existential modes of being. This is perhaps unsurprising in the case of the poems comprising *Paroles*, which were produced during the brief heyday of French Existentialism when left-bank intellectualism was, more than at any other time, in the air and very much in fashion.²⁶ It is certainly the case that an understanding of the most basic tenets of Sartrean ontology can help us today to unpackage queer theory. For Annamarie Jagose, in an extension of David Halperin's contestation that "there is nothing in particular to which [queer] necessarily refers", the "fundamental indeterminacy" of queer is predicated on an essential lack, i.e. a lack of essence.²⁷ For an existentialist, there is nothing negative about such fundamental nothingness; indeed, the Sartrean concept of negation depends on a similar surface tension to that seen to be at work in "The Dunce": the human cogito is linked both to its body and its situation via an infinitesimal gap that ensures freedom while obliging the subject to assume her role in the world.²⁸ Our engagement with the world,

the way in which we can seek to define our own identity (the desire, ultimately, is to forge an essence for oneself) is effected across this nihilating strip that simultaneously links us to and separates us from the world, on the one hand, and from ‘who we think we are’, on the other. This is how we offer ourselves to the world as poem; this is our identity as rainbow vision.

Since in existentialist terms we are forced continuously to create ourselves anew and in the evolving context(s) in which we find ourselves, we cannot say who we are. In the same vein, we cannot say what a queer identity *is*. Poetry, on the other hand, is an abstract value; it does not *exist*, unless we follow Plato’s model of an otherworldly existence. Unlike poetry and like existentialist phenomenology, queer identity *is not* to the extent that it *is in situation*. It *is* always in individual contexts. For, if Jagose goes to great lengths to defend Butler from misreadings, it is because there has been a strong tendency to confuse acts or performances such as drag (which we might consider reflexive examples or instances of meta-performance) with a more fundamental performativity, which we cannot help but express by the simple, contingent fact of our existence.²⁹ Queer, then, by its very existence, opposes, and operates a resistance to, essence and the hegemony of essentializing discourses. By seeking here to read a specific instance of French poetry against the grain we wish to harness the trans- or re-valORIZING power of queer to undo the not inconsiderable weight of literary tradition. As such, the queerification of poetry is an existential act, a case not of being but of *doing* queer.

There are obvious drawbacks in stressing the overlap between queer and poststructuralism, not least of which is the tendency to reduce queer to a form of reading praxis.³⁰ To group queer alongside other more or less postmodern theories is also potentially to divorce it from the politics of everyday life. For his part, Max Kirsch is disturbed by this apparent disconnection between the real world and the academic perspective of, in particular, the liberal arts degree. He blames the perpetuation of an elitist idea of university education on “the present conservatism in the culture at large”.³¹ We should argue in the same vein that if the liberal arts have any relevance it is precisely because of their perceived irrelevance: the critical engagement invoked in poststructuralist textual analyses in fact gets to the very ‘essence’ of what it means to exist in the (real) world.³² And it is by realigning academic and real-world concerns that Morris, for her part, wishes to unrest the curriculum. For Morris, queer’s project can be reduced to a process of making strange, “a queer sensibility or queer aesthetic”, which she feels has been largely erased in academic discourse and which has everything to do with “the reception and reading of a text”.³³

Morris’s argument is that text, by its very nature as opposing the completed (and closeted) literary work, must be *made to mean*; not “inherently queer” a text, any text, “may be read [...] queerly”.³⁴ And by reading a text queerly (which is to say, in the mode of reading discussed above, in a ‘writerly’ fashion), conscious of the active production of meaning at stake in the reading process, one necessarily creates oneself: the reading consciousness is projected out of the body onto the textual stage and meaning is created at this interface—of words and consciousness. As Morris puts it, “reading constructs the reader as well as the text.” And this irrespective of the work being read, for it is the queerness of the reading that produces the “text’s radical political potential”.³⁵ In this way, despite Morris’s own—and ostensibly opposite—concern that the text not be reduced to a political function, there is clearly a way in which deconstructive

negotiation of text and queer theorizing of identity have a common aim, and this aim is at the very core of human being-in-the-world and is, therefore, necessarily political.

Towards a Re-/De-Generation of the Curriculum

Prévert's "The Dunce" lends itself to a queer-curriculum project in two ways: in addition to demanding that its meaning be read into it at surface level, the poem also deals directly, in terms of its content, with matters of pedagogy. Indeed, Susanne Luhmann's description of the traditional pedagogue seems almost to offer a synopsis:

Better known than the term *pedagogy*, the *pedagogue* connotes, rather unflatteringly, the pedantic and dogmatic schoolteacher. *Queer*, used homophobically, is meant to shame people as strange and to position them as unintelligible within the discursive framework of heteronormative gender dichotomies and binary sexualities.³⁶

In the poem the discrimination is not based on the student's sexual orientation but on his rejection of the markedly anti-queer discursive framework within which the lesson is locked, and which the pedagogy serves to perpetuate and reinforce. As Luhmann suggests, queer, like Prévert's student, "contests authority and hopes to resist ideological appropriation".³⁷ A queer pedagogy must then have as its mission statement the deconstruction of the "very notion of a unified human subject" and, by extension, that of the essentially meaningful text. "[F]luid, permanently shifting, and unintelligible", the emotional response offered in "The Dunce" offers the very parody of essentialism and its queering that Luhmann is calling for.³⁸

The poem stages a curriculum that recalls John Howard's 'traditional history, taught by dates with a proper narrative'. Knowledge and the idea that something can be known are transformed into a process of normalization; and the student becomes the victim of the French canon, politically biased interpretation and, ultimately, poetry itself and the perception of poems as bodies of received knowledge.³⁹ For Luhmann, as for Butler, the subversiveness of queer pedagogy "lies in the very moment of unintelligibility, or in the absence of knowledge".⁴⁰ This is a pedagogy predicated on a fundamental shift away from the (renewed reactionary focus on the) traditional towards an examination of the ways in which knowledge is produced "in the interaction between teacher/text and student"; the shift is, therefore, "from what (and how) the author writes or the teacher teaches, to what the student understands, or what the reader reads".⁴¹ Clearly, student-centred learning and reader-response theories have much in common, and both are staged in this poem.

Poetry and its Other

The queer reading of “The Dunce” that we are offering here is hardly a queering at all insofar as the text seems to wear its queerness quite transparently. We should, however, like to re-emphasize that Prévert’s is a sentiment dating from 1945, which serves to put narrow histories of poststructuralism and/or that brief period that Calvin Thomas has referred to as “the queer moment” into perspective.⁴² Should we assume that Prévert’s poetry was a radical new anti-poetry at that time of violent historical upheaval?⁴³ His translator, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, defends the quality of the poetry while suggesting that, far from being subversive, it is now and perhaps always was too simplistic to be taken seriously: “And finally he is put down by today’s poets and critics for committing the cardinal crime of too much clarity in a world whose very Absurdity [...] Absurdly cries for an expression of that Absurdity in all its arts.”⁴⁴ When one thinks of works of criticism of French poetry such as Malcolm Bowie’s famous *Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult* (1978) one is reminded that a poem worthy of analysis is traditionally considered to be one invested with a complex meaning (or, as my students recently put it, ‘hidden treasure’) that only scholarly examination can comprehend. What tends to get lost in such discussions is the fact that Prévert’s poems, in their description of the mundane, offer a mirror of the world’s absurdity. This reflection displaces and inverses the location of complexity: no longer is it inside the poem but outside, in its virtualization as reading. Or rather, the poem and its own virtualized other are both present in the reflexive staging of poetry that Prévert offers. Like existentialism’s being-for-itself or a queer identity, reflexive poetry is always both itself (the poem in its immutable, immediately recognizable sequence of words) and other (the meaning that it inspires, the face it offers to the world). In this way, the following description is applicable to “The Dunce”:

[Thus] queer theory and pedagogy, in difference to a repressive hypothesis of sexuality and power, suggest that the construction of the norm actually requires and depends on its abject other to become intelligible. The norm and its negated other are implicated and mutually constitutive of each other.⁴⁵

In the first four lines Prévert chiasmatically opposes two poems (one of ‘yes’, the other of ‘no’); the reader is thus able to follow the two sides of the same poem. The rational aspect (the ‘no’ poem) is the poetic work being studied in class while the emotional aspect (the ‘yes’ poem) is what the poem means to the student. The poem that we ‘real’ readers encounter is made up of both; it is made up, quite literally, of “words and figures / names and dates” as well as “chalk of every colour” and the “face of happiness”. As I hope to have demonstrated, this is not (as is the case for “Déjeuner du matin” [“Breakfast”], for example⁴⁶) a reflexive staging of how to write a poem but of how to perform a writerly text, which depends on an interaction between (dead) work and (living) reading. The reading is, therefore, a negation of the poem in the sense common to queer and existentialism: the one cannot exist without (implicitly, necessarily and always already) referencing the other.

This plurality of the poetic text is implicit in the title of the anthology from which “The Dunce” and the other poems mentioned here are drawn: *Paroles*. Ferlinghetti’s suggestion that *paroles* refers to the

‘passwords’ spoken by members of resistance groups during the Occupation of the Second World War is an interesting historical contextualization of the poems,⁴⁷ and it is perhaps not entirely at odds with a more linguistically focused interpretation. In Saussurian linguistics *la parole* denotes the existential speech act, and as such it opposes *la langue*, which is the virtual system that enables individual actualizations of language. As such, Prévert’s is an anthology not of poetry but of poems, that is to say everyday words brought under tension by the constant juxtaposition (in the text) with and expectation (on the part of the reader) of the abstract concept of poetry. For, when words are put on a page in a certain way, an appeal is made to poetry; and when words prosaically belie this identity they can only do so partially. In other words, a poem is always both poetic ideal and real words.

Readerly and Writerly Selves

I hope that I have to some extent countered the perverse reader, or politician, who might ask why, if it is either so difficult to understand or meaningless to the point of confounding understanding, why one would read postmodern French poetry at all. One answer is that it aligns itself so well with Luhmann’s model of a queer curriculum, according to which “learning becomes a process of risking the self”.⁴⁸ And again to pick up Kirsch’s idea, these ideas only appear radical to the extent that the real world outside academia has sought to impose its relevance. The idea that students might seek to become educated by embracing newness rather than confirming or consolidating their sense of self has only recently taken on this radical aspect.

Lauren Smith reflects on the political and pedagogical implications of staging the self in her study of expressivist narratives in first-year creative writing courses. She notes, for example, the longstanding practice of placing form very much over content:

Criticism of the use of personal writing, especially in expressivist classrooms, focuses on the construction of the student-subject as an isolated and apolitical being. [...] Susan Miller argues, for example, that the emphasis on self-reflexivity in expressivist composition theory takes part in a history of composition practices that sought to separate the academic, intellectual work from profane or utilitarian concerns...⁴⁹

The problem with expressivist teaching as discussed here is akin to that of investing a work of literature with one transparent ‘meaning’. If its aim is to unfetter the subject, then it implies the articulation of an essential identity; if its aim is to study this articulation, or the production, of personal identity, then it embraces the self-reflexivity outlined by Miller in the above quote from Smith, but it must also investigate a more textual kind of reflexivity, in which case the writer would remain conscious of the constructs used in the composition process and of the image of self being produced, that is to say that the writer would remain *self-conscious*. Otherwise, Smith seems right in her appraisal that

[t]he difference between the drag queen and a writer who more unself- consciously takes up a particular identity is not so much of content as of style. [...] The camp artist, however, wears his mask as a mask while the author of the coming-out narrative treats the mask as if it were the truth. The camp artist, in other words, stages the self as a production, as a construction; and this self-consciousness undermines the construction/production as natural.⁵⁰

We should argue that in the poems mentioned here, and perhaps more obviously in “Breakfast” than in “The Dunce”, it is precisely a case of a celebration of textual masquerade. The poetic form chosen for these works—they look like verse rather than prose poems, even if they are highly prosaic in content and lexical choices—frames the text within the context of an overarching meaning, an essential or abstract identity. The words that make up the poem, however, tend to eschew, and break from, this abstraction, forcing the reader to consider the mundane words in the specific context of their occurrence in the poem. The poem, therefore, is simultaneously, read from outside and inside an objective, poetic frame of reference. It is precisely the disconnection between inherent (readerly) and de-/re-constructed (writerly) meaning that is reflexively and self-reflexively staged in Prévert’s poems. The effect is for the reader to become aware of the plurality of her own identity, the impossibility of her ever coinciding with others’ understanding of her.⁵¹

The identity or ‘I’ of the poem, the reading subject and the read subject (in the case of those poems written by a first-person narrator) is expressed as a desire to be remade. To this extent, the poem stages the same voice as the ‘I’ that suddenly reveals itself at the very end of Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*, and which cannot speak its name aloud. This is the desire of a text that disingenuously claims not to have access to public space and which needs the reader to remake its identity: “If I were able I’d say it. Say make me, remake me. You are free to do it and I am free to let you because look, look. Look where your hands are. Now.”⁵² To use Judith Still and Michael Worton’s terms, this is the voice of a text protesting its love of the reader as the extension and affirmation of its textuality, where the latter is “a process, a dynamics” activated on that surface between the work and the reader.⁵³ The nature of textuality is such that the public and private realms are fused: while the production of textuality is an intimate and erotic experience between reader and text, its projection beyond the page is necessarily a ‘making public’ on the part of the text. In this way, the very denial of the ability to speak aloud is a deliberate act of seduction—deliberate in the sense of inherent to the text. The novel’s “textness”, then, is inextricably linked to its textuality: the one depends on and shapes the other.⁵⁴ As such, the text’s individual shape—that by which a reader can immediately distinguish it from all others—is its means of intentionality, of projecting beyond itself onto the world beyond. This potential for otherness, accessed and operated by specific instances of reading but always already there nonetheless, is crucial to Barthes’s understanding of text and its fundamental intertextuality. As Barbara Johnson so eloquently describes, “a text’s difference is not its uniqueness, its special identity. It is the text’s way of differing *from itself*”.⁵⁵

This confusion of essential and existential elements has also been associated with the work of Jacques Prévert. As Vittorio Sereni has noted, for example, “‘Je suis comme je suis’—we are incessantly told in Prévert’s poetry, which is offered to us in the form of an abundant and rainbow-coloured collection of

characteristic recordings that individual readers will choose according to their own mood or whim.”⁵⁶ There is something perverse about Prévert’s use of the expression “I am what I am”: while clearly he is difficult to pin down from our perspective as readers, his own turn of phrase suggests as much a jocular reference to existentialism as a sincere belief in essential identity. That is to say that he is alluding to Sartre’s maxim that one is not what one is and is what one is not. So, as Sereni implies, the most clear-cut expression of one’s essence is via the objective gaze of the ‘Other’, or here the reader. Only this other can interpret us ‘as we really are’. Or, as Sereni puts it, Prévert owes his plurality to Barthes’s model of textual difference, and the reader, in a bid to understand the poet (and, we assume, the poem) and to give him clear definition, ultimately displays a desire to see him (or it) as “different from what he is”.⁵⁷

This permanent disconnection from self that continuously (re)creates the identity of both text and reader is also a source of pleasure. This is the pleasurable side of postmodernism: it is only ‘Meaning’ and ‘Identity’ that are dissolved; meaning and identity are continuously being created in infinite multiplicity.⁵⁸ Indeed, were it not for this pleasurable side to the dissolution of identity, Sereni would be right to question why Prévert’s poetry, which pushes reflexivity and poetic self-destruction to the limit of readability, should resonate so powerfully, and so consistently over time, with readers.⁵⁹ In terms of the identity politics implicit in our discussion of pedagogy, there is clearly a fine line to be drawn between the essentialist practice of expressivist writings of the self and an engaged reading praxis (in which case the text becomes a world that can only be understood by a reader conscious of her own place in it).⁶⁰

Prévert’s world is both a public and private space, one in which one’s personal conception of self merges with an objective reception of that self. From the perspective of reading this poetry as queer acts speech, it is important that there not be a smooth synthesis of ‘I’ and ‘non-I’, for such a smooth, unproblematic dissolution of self into otherness would take the radicality out of queer as surely as it would take the engagement and shock-factor out of reading poetry. Reflexivity provides the surface that always acts equally as mirror and border, a doorway maintaining access to otherness and distance from it (both situatedness and autonomy of the self). In her study of Prévert’s use of the first person, Danièle Gasiglia-Laster proposes a plural understanding of the singular pronoun, according to which “‘I’ can become everything [and] everything can become ‘I’, because each being contains a part of the universe”.⁶¹ Accordingly, Prévert’s rainbow vision is an intertextual one, or a celebration of textuality, where I equals poem equals Paris equals other equals self. In even the most obviously autobiographical text, the I that the author imposes on the text is at the same time an invitation to the reader to enter into the other’s body, to incarnate the text.⁶² The erotics of textuality, therefore, whether it is considered to be desexualized (a challenge to read pronouns as textual props rather than ‘people’) or necessarily sexualized (where we are always present to the world, and thus the text, as sexual subjects), is always relevant. The importance of reading in the construction of a postmodern identity ensures that Prévert’s poetry covers the ABCs of Morris’s curricularization of queerness:

- (a) Queerness as a subject position digresses from normalized, rigid identities that adhere to the sex = gender paradigm;
- (b) Queerness as a politic challenges the status quo, does not simply tolerate it, and does not stand for assimilation into the mainstream;
- (c) Queerness as

an aesthetic or sensibility reads and interprets texts [...] as potentially politically radical.⁶³

Conclusion

What are the dangers of making this most iconic of modern French poets a model of non-canonical poetics? To turn something so popular and extensively read into a model of radicality is a bit like having queer championed by a celebration of a heteronormative model of sexuality. Thus, while a queer lens can be productive from the perspective of poetry analysis, there is a way in which its appropriation for the purposes of a traditional academic exercise might be considered a domestication of queer's political edge. As has been seen, Pinar is all too aware of this danger. Allaying such fears is also at the heart of Calvin Thomas's work on queer theory in the context of heterosexuality. In his introduction to *Straight with a Twist*, he notes how "[t]he very fact that some straights have begun to write about queer theory or perhaps even produce theory that itself somehow lays claim to queerness [...] might be taken as a sign that the queer moment has passed."⁶⁴ Indeed, when Thomas explicitly positions his own work against the sense of loss expressed in Butler's description of the "institutional domestication of queer thinking", it is in part because a normalizing process has already led to "its sad finish".⁶⁵

From a purely pedagogical perspective we should hope that queer's place is no longer on the margins, to be proposed as a radical counter-curriculum, but in the body of the curriculum itself, where its canonization can serve to ensure that grand narratives are always already scrutinized and made meaningful by engaged minds. This is a curriculum where meaning is to be put in and otherness is always an extension of self. By returning to 'traditional' French poetry and teasing out its queer potential I hope to have demonstrated that queer extends both before and after a queer moment. For, the poetry of Jacques Prévert was already locating the radical in the domestic, and thus simultaneously radicalizing the latter just as he was domesticating the former, at the end of the Second World War. This was very much Liberation as well as liberating poetry; it was a championing of non-normativity and pro-diversity, and a challenging of dominant institutional power structures.

The tendency to broaden the idea of queerness, beyond the realm of sexual politics, is perhaps then both an admission that something of the power and newness of Thomas's queer moment is passed but that, at the same time, there is a need for queerness to be put back on the agenda, so that it can inform academic disciplinarity and for its newness to be rekindled across faculties and departments. In conclusion we can say that as early as 1945 Jacques Prévert was calling for a radical shake up of French education. The stance he was taking was a queer one indeed; it was against everything essential, traditional and dogmatic. In short, Prévert was putting forward a case for a postmodern curriculum—and for that, he was making no apologies.

Notes

¹ Marla Morris, “Unresting the Curriculum: Queer Projects, Queer Imaginings” in William F. Pinar (ed), *Queer Theory in Education* (Mahway, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998), pp. 275-86 (p. 284).

² One prominent thinker in the field of Queer studies who senses that, in the political context of everyday life at least, the post-queer moment has arrived is the University of Illinois’ Professor Larry Schehr.

³ I should like to thank Professor Murray Pratt of Nottingham Trent University whose advice helped me to work through this analogy and who suggested the term ‘desexualitizing’ here.

⁴ This comment was made by Gillard on Thursday 6 August 2009 when she was appearing as part of a panel on the ABC’s Q&A programme. For a full transcription see the following website: <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/qanda/txt/s2641523.htm> (accessed 19 August 2009).

⁵ <http://www.theage.com.au/news/education-news/thick-lit/2006/04/29/1146198357150.html> (accessed 19 August 2009).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Morris (1998), p. 284.

⁸ The battle between the reader and the writer for the arbitration of textual meaning was won quite effectively when Roland Barthes announced the death of the author in 1968. Since that time innovative critical reading has been the bedrock of Anglo-Saxon university literature teaching either in conjunction with or in the absence of biographical considerations of the author of the text under study. It should be noted in passing that the French educational system has offered a curious, and ‘traditionalist’, resistance to the deconstructionist praxes that were inspired by its own theorists.

⁹ The theories of Roland Barthes were described by Professor Keith Reader of the University of Glasgow as being “the air that we breathe” at the Australian Society for French Studies annual conference held at the University of Queensland 15-17 July 2009.

¹⁰ These comments are taken from Australia’s e-journal of social and political debate, *On Line Opinion*; they date from 23 November 2007. <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=6680> (accessed 19 August 2009).

¹¹ Professor Henry Reynolds, amongst others, considers Howard’s contempt for academic attempts to ‘rewrite’ traditional historical narratives to be a direct result of his government’s involvement in a number of “controversial issues”. See Reynolds’s article “The Public Role of History” <http://www.nla.gov.au/>

[events/history/papers/Henry_Reynolds.html](#) (accessed 24 February 2010). In light of this, it is interesting to note the allegations that the Howard government's interest in the traditional grand-narrative teaching of history even extended to a push for greater government intervention in portrayals of Australian history on the Internet. See, for example, the following online article <http://www.zdnet.com.au/news/software/soa/John-Howard-s-team-revise-history-on-Wikipedia/0,130061733,339281468,00.htm> (accessed 24 February 2010).

¹² For an excellent analysis of the concept of belatedness and critical reading praxes, see Ross Chambers, *Loiterature* (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

¹³ Mark d'Arbon and Jean Harkins, "Hidden Meanings: Towards an Appropriate Language of Education", seminar paper given at the University of Newcastle, 3 September 2009.

¹⁴ William F. Pinar, "Introduction" in Pinar (1998), pp. 1-47 (p. 2).

¹⁵ For the parallel French text and translation of the complete poem, see Jacques Prévert, *Selections from 'Paroles'*, translated by Lawrence Ferlinghetti (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965—Penguin Modern European Poets), p. 56-7.

¹⁶ Ferlinghetti notes the way that Prévert "enumerates the ordinary world with a '*mouvement transfigurateur*'" (Prévert, 1965, p. 11).

¹⁷ Peter Low, *Poems for the Classroom: Jacques Prévert* (Canterbury: University of Canterbury, Department of French, 1978).

¹⁸ My translation: "Lorsqu'un poème provoque chez le lecteur un choc, le jetant dans l'irréalité ou le contraignant à descendre plus profondément en lui-même, c'est la réussite poétique." Marc Andry, *Jacques Prévert* (Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 1994), p. 182.

¹⁹ Interview with Paul Jennings conducted by Jane Hutchinson, the Australian *Sunday Telegraph* magazine, 6 September 2009, p. 17.

²⁰ Andrée Bergens, *Jacques Prévert* (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1969), p. 6 (again, unless otherwise indicated, the translations here are my own).

²¹ "The Dunce" in Prévert (1965), p. 27.

²² The turn of phrase 'rainbow vision' is adapted from a reference to the deployment of Prévert's poetic artistry ("*l'arc en ciel Prévert*") that adorns the back-cover of a special issue of *Europe—Revue littéraire mensuelle* dedicated to his poetry (number 748-49, August-September 1991).

²³ See Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* and *S/Z*, both translated by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975; and Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, respectively).

²⁴ For Barthes, the meaning of all literature is located in the active interpretation of the work conducted by a quasi-infinite number of readers (the writerly text).

²⁵ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

²⁶ *Paroles* first appeared in France in 1945 (Paris: Le Point du Jour) before subsequently being added to and taken up by the famous publishing house Gallimard in 1949.

²⁷ Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory* (Melbourne: University of Melbourne Press, 1996), p. 96.

²⁸ Sartre's phenomenological ontology is fully, and voluminously, ideated in *Being and Nothingness* (first published in French as *L'Être et le néant* by Gallimard, 1943). In this work, as in Sartre's fiction, ontology is often articulated in a highly sexualized way, which is also often heteronormative and arguably misogynistic. It should not be forgotten, however, that sex is used allegorically, as the most basic arena for human relationships. In the case of Existentialism's tendency to sexualize and Queer's resistance to desexualization, sex is not the whole story.

²⁹ See especially Jagose (1996), pp. 83-93, for a discussion of performativity and identity.

³⁰ Pinar, for example, is certainly cognizant of the political problems inherent in postmodern "conceptions of identity", including the loss of "a degree of consensus and mobilization". These concerns notwithstanding, he concedes that, in addition to being "more sophisticated", they can be considered "more 'true' than previous essentialized ones" (1998, p. 7).

³¹ Max H. Kirsch, *Queer Theory and Social Change* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 30.

³² See Alistair Rolls and Marie-Laure Vuaille-Barcan, "How Relevant is Relevance? Weighing the Relative Value of Relevance against Disciplinary Integrity in the Teaching of French in Australian Universities", *The International Journal of Learning*, 15.7, 2008, 55-62.

³³ Morris (1998), p. 276.

³⁴ Morris (1998), p. 276.

³⁵ Morris (1998), p. 277.

³⁶ Susanne Luhmann, "Queering/Querying Pedagogy? Or, Pedagogy Is a Pretty Queer Thing", in Pinar

(1998), pp.141-55 (p. 142). The italicization is the author's own.

³⁷ Luhmann (1998), p. 146.

³⁸ Luhmann (1998), p. 146.

³⁹ In Luhmann's words, "knowable subjects are merely another form of subjection to normalization" (1998, p. 146). The French republican system is famously enamoured with standardization (from metric measurement through to rigorously controlled national curricula), which is known as *la normalisation*.

⁴⁰ Luhmann (1998), p. 146.

⁴¹ Luhmann (1998), p. 148.

⁴² Calvin Thomas "Introduction: Identification, Appropriation, Proliferation", in Thomas (2000), pp. 1-7 (p. 1)

⁴³ This paper is already too thinly spread across theories and schools to justify a discussion of Charles Baudelaire's Parisian prose poetry of the mid-nineteenth century, but there are significant parallels to be drawn not only between the critique of poetry offered by these two poets but also between the two periods of change that arguably inspired, or at least acted as a backdrop to, their work (the wholesale Haussmanization of Paris, and its Occupation by and Liberation from the Nazis, respectively).

⁴⁴ Prévert (1965), p. 11.

⁴⁵ Luhmann (1998), p. 151.

⁴⁶ In "Breakfast" it is the deployment in poetry of the words coffee and milk that generates the synthesized result: milky coffee. I should argue that Ferlinghetti's decision to use the French term *café au lait*, while an attempt to illustrate the transfiguring power of Prévert's language, in fact occludes the way in which *café* and *lait* are brought together, in the French original, as simple linguistic building blocks to drive the poem. Beauty does not need to morph out of the mundane because it is already present to it, albeit as an aspiration, as potential.

⁴⁷ Prévert (1965), p. 9.

⁴⁸ Luhmann (1998), p. 151.

⁴⁹ Lauren Smith, "Staging the Self: Queer Theory in the Composition Classroom", in Calvin Thomas (ed), *Straight with a Twist: Queer Theory and the Subject of Heterosexuality* (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), pp. 68-84 (p. 69).

⁵⁰ Smith (2000), p. 76.

⁵¹ In Sartrean terms, we might call this a nauseating experience: the poem reveals itself as sticky in order to recall the fundamental viscosity of the human being for- itself, caught forever between the hardness of a fixed identity and the fluidity of intentional consciousness.

⁵² Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (New York: Signet, 1992), p. 265.

⁵³ Judith Still and Michael Worton (eds), *Textuality and Sexuality: Reading Theories and Practices* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1993). This quote is taken from page 4 of Still and Worton's extensive introduction (pp. 1-68).

⁵⁴ For a description of textuality *versus* textness, see Still and Worton (1992), pp. 2-7. Indeed, I should agree with Still and Worton that models of sexuality and textuality overlap sufficiently for us to be able to posit that for all identities, including the apparently desexualized voice of the text, "[t]he construction of the self as subject is, today, a construction as sexed and sexual subject" (p. 6).

⁵⁵ Johnson, Barbara. "The Critical Difference" in Diana Knight (ed), *Critical Essays on Roland Barthes* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 2000), pp. 174-82 (p. 175).

⁵⁶ Vittorio Sereni, "La Vocation de la joie", *Europe — Revue littéraire mensuelle*, 748-749 (1991), 13-18 (13). (The term 'rainbow-coloured' is not used innocently; it is my spin on the French *bigarrée*, which has overtones of 'garishness' in addition to the multiplicity of colour.)

⁵⁷ Sereni (1991), p. 16.

⁵⁸ As we have already suggested, Barthes's essay, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975, translated by Richard Miller), suggests that pleasure itself—the pleasure of the title—is both itself and its other, i.e. *le plaisir* (or pleasure) of the passive experience of reading transparently meaningful text and *la jouissance* (or bliss), from the perspective of the work, of actively ceding responsibility for the construction of meaning.

⁵⁹ See Sereni (1991), p. 17.

⁶⁰ Gasiglia-Laster points out that Prévert's own criticism of narcissism, which can only lead to a "deformed image of oneself", must always be balanced against the illusion that the world can be reduced into and reproduced in text, which itself leads to a "hypertrophying of the ego". See Danièle Gasiglia-Laster, "Les 'Je' de Prévert", *Europe. Revue littéraire mensuelle*, 748-749 (1991), 56-65 (56).

⁶¹ Gasiglia-Laster (1991), p. 57.

⁶² See Gasiglia-Laster (1991), p. 58.

⁶³ Morris (1998), p. 277.

⁶⁴ Thomas (2000), p. 1.

⁶⁵ Butler quoted in Thomas (2000), p. 1.

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