

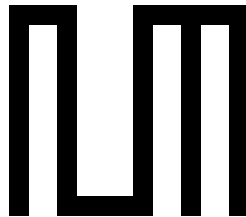
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“The nubian sculptor”: Ralph Ellison and the politics of the word

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ENSAYOS / *ESSAYS*

**“THE GRINGOS PERFECTED IT IN VIETNAM”:
TORTURE AND THE AMERICAN ADVISER IN
CLARIBEL ALEGRÍA’S “FAMILY ALBUM” AND
CARLOS MARTÍNEZ MORENO’S *EL INFIERNO***

Brady Harrison

In *Barred: Women, Writing, and Political Detention* (1992), Barbara Harlow writes that torture

involves a systematic assault and depredation on the physical integrity of the individual and implies as well an unrelenting attack on the subject’s political engagement, her or his theoretical and interventionist capabilities. Torture, according to [Amnesty International’s *Torture in the Eighties* (1984)], means “isolation,” the sense of the absolute control of the interrogator, degradation, and ultimately “breaking down under extreme pressure and severe pain, whether the confession signed or information given is true or false.” (255)

In Claribel Alegría’s “Family Album” (1982; trans. 1990) and Carlos Martínez Moreno’s *El Infierno* (1981; trans. 1988), works of short fiction that foreground the role of the American “adviser” in torture and violence in Central and South America in the latter half of the twentieth century, we see this unrelenting attack on the body, language, human rights, and even the life of dissidents, guerillas, revolutionaries, and anyone else unlucky enough to be abducted by the security forces and death squads of—in the case of Alegría and Martínez Moreno respectively—Nicaragua and Uruguay.

These writers show, often in visceral, even clinical detail, not only how torture works against its victims, but also against its practitioners. Torture, under the direction of what Martínez Moreno dubs the American “Grand Inquisitor,” serves not only to discipline dissenters, but also to discipline the client regime: the extreme, if often dispassionate violence of the American adviser assures the local elites that the U.S. will do whatever is necessary to protect its hemispheric and global interests. Torture implies a threat against the ruling classes: if we are willing to train your agents to interrogate and destroy others, imagine what we are willing to do to you. The authors take us

into the Dantesque reaches of the American *imperium*, and the very compression of the short story form, in both Alegría and Martínez Moreno, works to create a sense of claustrophobia and constriction: like Poe, they drop us into nightmare worlds where fear, agony, and death tighten around both characters and readers. But where Poe gives us gothic dungeons and subterranean desires, Alegría and Martínez Moreno give us state-sponsored death, underwritten and orchestrated by the American adviser. These stories remind us that the current energies of globalization bear the scars of a sometimes brutal and bloody past; they remind us, as well, that events at Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, Afghanistan, and elsewhere during the Bush administration's war on terror are not anomalies or the aberrant acts of a few perverse soldiers or especially brutal interrogators, but rather part of a much longer history of U.S. disregard for the Geneva Convention and its prohibitions against abuse.¹

To illustrate the assertion that torture works to discipline both its victims and its agents, we can consider, for a moment, an image from *Nicaragua: June 1978-July 1979* (1981), Susan Meiselas' book of photographs about the Sandinista revolution.² In plate 14, the trunk of a tortured and decimated body lies on a patch of blood-stained grass and weeds. The hands and forearms lie nearby and the torso has been hacked away so that only the spine sticks out from what appears to be an intact, albeit bloated waist and legs. The head is nowhere present; it may or may not lie outside the frame. A caption tells us that this place is "Cuesta del Plomo," the hill of lead: "[a] hillside outside of Managua, a well known site of many assassinations carried out by the National Guard. People searched here daily for missing persons." An enemy of the Somozas—a campesino, a teacher, a political organizer, a person in the wrong place at the wrong time—was abducted, tortured, and murdered by a death

¹ As Marguerite Feitlowitz writes in *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (1998), the United States has acknowledged its direct and indirect participation in torture in Latin America: "In September 1996, the Pentagon itself finally admitted that [students at the U.S. Army School of the Americas, located at Fort Benning, Georgia] were taught torture, murder, sabotage, bribery, blackmail, and extortion for the achievement of political aims; that hypnosis and truth serum were recommended for use in interrogations; and that the parents of captives be arrested as an inducement for the prisoners to talk" (9). Numerous other scholars, relief workers, and organizations such as School of the Americas Watch, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International have also thoroughly documented the role of the American adviser and graduates of the School of the Americas in repression and violence.

² My thanks, once more, to Joey Slaughter in particular for discussing Meiselas' work with me. I am indebted to his insights and pioneering work on human rights, torture, and literature.

squad, and his or her body dumped on a hillside of body parts. The remains, we can suppose, have been left not only to intimidate those looking for the missing, but also to jeer at the bereaved: not only can we destroy your brother, friend, or ally—and not only can we do the same to you—but we can also assure you that he or she died horribly and without dignity. The body serves as a vicious warning, but it also exceeds this purpose. By the late 1970s, the act of hacking up a victim and strewing his or her body parts about would not tell a Nicaraguan anything he or she did not already know; as a means of instilling terror in a citizenry in revolt, the particular viciousness of this murder seems pointless, if nevertheless revolting.

The sheer bizarre labor involved in cutting away a torso to leave just the spine seems to exceed meaning or purpose unless one considers it not as an act against dissenters, but rather as an act against the perpetrators of the crime. In the first instance, such an act serves to discipline the lower reaches of the state's repressive forces. The troops on the ground must learn to follow orders, no matter how bloody or cruel, and as numerous activists, reporters, human rights workers, eyewitnesses, and participants have documented, many soldiers in Central and South America were taken at young ages from remote villages, barrios, refugee camps, and orphanages, and were made, as part of their "training," to kill dogs, chickens, and other small animals with their bare hands and teeth.³ This training serves both to discipline and dehumanize the soldiers; it not only makes them submissive to authority and inculcates them into the apparatus of repression and torture, but it also makes them capable of ever greater atrocities, such as taking the time necessary to cut away all but the spine of the victim's upper body, or, as Carolyn Forché writes in one of her well-known poems about El Salvador, "Because One Is Always Forgotten" (1982), to cut away the faces of murdered civilians and hang them on the branches of trees: "A boy soldier in the bone-hot sun works his knife/ to peel the face from a dead man/ and hang it

³ For more on the "training" of young recruits, see, for example, Noam Chomsky's *What Uncle Sam Really Wants* (Berkeley: Odonian Press, 1992) or Craig Pyes reporting for the New York Times on the rise of the death squads in Honduras and elsewhere in Central America. As Kate Millett recounts in *The Politics of Cruelty* (1994), torture in Latin American countries "had a budget and staff, training procedure, study and teaching methods, was regarded as a science. There are classes, classrooms, visual aids, technical terms, and apparatus: slide photographs of torture are followed with practical demonstrations on prisoners" (246). According to Millett, "One student prisoner was even used as a subject before an audience of military cadets at a preparatory school" (247). This "science" was introduced to Latin America by such experts as "the American police instructor Dan Mitrione" (247).

from the branch of a tree/ flowering with such faces” (28). The messages seem clear enough: you are one of us and you do not ever want to be one of them; there is no going back; you will do as you are told or one day you might be on the other end of the knife.

The murder on Cuesta del Plomo—most likely the work of a death squad—also indicates that if torture and murder serve to discipline forces on the ground, they also serve to discipline the upper reaches of the state’s repressive structure. The Nicaraguan (and Uruguayan) death squads drew their members not only from the lower reaches of the army and internal security forces, but also from the officer classes—which in turn drew their members from the upper classes—and they were intimately connected with the ruling elites. Acting upon the orders of the military and political hierarchies—and its members often trained in interrogation and counter-insurgency measures at the School of the Americas or in the field under the direction of American advisers⁴—the death squads’ willing participation in torture and massacres likewise worked to discipline their behavior: they owed their allegiance and their lives to the state. An instance of torture and murder like that on the hill of lead not only serves to terrorize the opposition, but also to remind its perpetrators that such a fate awaits them if they break ranks or the regime collapses. The murderers belong to the state, and the excess of the act bespeaks a desperation on the part of the death squads and their leaders: with the fall of the Somozas increasingly possible, the security forces had to work that much harder at maintaining control over its agents. If Meiselas’ photograph suggests that torture, as a means of discipline, sends its vicious repercussions both up and down hierarchies of power, we can see the same forces at work in Alegría’s short fiction. Even as Alegría, a Nicaraguan and Salvadoran writer and activist, documents torture and abuse, she identifies the grim man behind the curtain: somewhere in grisly prison cells and inhuman dungeons, pulling the levers of discipline, lurks the American adviser and, by extension, the daunting power of the United States.

In “Family Album,” the central metaphor of “the hood” and the compression of the short story form work together to create, at times, an atmosphere of constriction and claustrophobia. As part of the sometimes lyrical, sometimes magical, sometimes darkly comic no-

⁴ For a list of graduates from the School of the Americas, see the School of Americas Watch home page. The site lists some of the most “notorious” graduates (by country) and details many of their crimes. The site also contains copies of the some of the infamous School of the Americas training manuals in interrogation. See: <http://www.soaw.org>.

vella about Ximena, the narrator, and her memories of her family, her countries (Nicaragua and El Salvador), and the intertwining histories of Central American oligarchs and rebels, *Alegría* weaves in the story of Armando, a Sandinista guerilla and Ximena's cousin, as he endures interrogation and torture at the hands of the security forces and their American adviser. As he tells Ximena, a journalist and expatriate living in Paris, about his capture and imprisonment, we can feel the hood tightening around his neck and face and around the necks and faces of the other prisoners. More, we can almost imagine it suffocating *us*; as in Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) or "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846) or any of his other tales of entombment and entrapment, we feel the walls closing in. We experience—at least in some measure—the dread of confinement and an agonizing death at the hands of another. In the seemingly genially-titled "Family Album," we feel the viciousness and power of the American adviser as he attempts to discipline both rebels and repressors. In her complex novella replete with ghosts, rotting rooms for the dead, and stories within stories, *Alegría* represents torture as a means not only to stifle the rights of its victims and their ability—literally—to speak, but also as a means for the U.S. to threaten the ruling elites.

Prompted into action by the August, 1978, Sandinista raid on the Nicaraguan National Palace, Armando reappears at Ximena's flat, once more disrupting her placid existence; desperate to rejoin the struggle against the Somozas, he pleads for funds to enable his return to Nicaragua. To win her sympathy and support, he tells her about the instruments of torture: "Rubber truncheons, electric prods, the hood" (102). As he explains to Ximena, the hood is

a very economical method. They sit you down and tie your arms and legs to the chair. Then they put a plastic bag over your head and tie it tightly around your neck, with a thong. It's a form of slow martyrdom, gradual suffocation. Every time you breathe out, the bag inflates, and when you breathe in it sticks to your face. Soon you begin to want to thrash around and start lashing out in desperation. (102)

Alegría presents us with the ultimate in suffocation: a plastic bag over the head. The victim, trapped within his or her skull, cannot see properly, cannot speak, cannot breathe, cannot move, cannot defend either their lives or ideals. The victim has become subject to the absolute control of the interrogator, has been stripped of everything but a terrible gasping for life. As Armando tells Ximena (and the reader), "you can have no idea of what it was like. The psychological tension, the demoralization, the ways they have of driving you mad. After a week of torture, you're a piece of shit. And then they inject you with drugs, and you've no memory of anything you've said" (103). The

torturer wears his captive down, undertakes a prolonged physical, emotional, and psychological assault, and in the end, Armando, to his dismay, cannot be sure if he disclosed any vital information or named any of his comrades.

The grand inquisitor—to borrow an image from *El Infierno*—of these rituals of degradation is the American adviser. As Armando explains, the adviser instructed his students to abandon “the submarine”: “They used to use the submarine, until they decided it was too mucky. The floors got slippery from all the vomit and water. It was the Texan bastard who taught them the hood technique. The gringos perfected it in Vietnam. If you throw up inside it, there’s nothing to clean up beyond what’s left stuck in your hair” (102). The Texan—here the ugliest of Americans—has perfected his craft during the long, brutal, losing war in Southeast Asia, and now brings his expertise and anger to Central America. A nightmare figure of cruelty and despotism, he oversees the slow martyrdom of the captured Sandinistas. His presence, however, serves a purpose far beyond the interrogation of a few prisoners.

Torture, Alegría suggests, constitutes one element in a general and diverse program of U.S. discipline over its client regimes. In the wake of military defeat in Southeast Asia, the U.S. had—in an effort to re-establish its authority and prestige—refocused its energies with a vengeance on one of the first sites of U.S. imperial adventurism: its Central American backyard. As part of its efforts to reassert its power, the U.S. has sent its most ruthless—and deadly serious—Vietnam “spooks” to instruct the local elites in torture *and* in their obligations to American strategic interests. The adviser may know how to torture someone without making a mess, but his very presence communicates an equally violent message: we are not fooling around here; we may have taken our lumps in Vietnam, but we will not permit revolutionary movements to thrive this close to home; we will not allow threats to our economic and strategic interests in the region. His presence makes clear the American bottom line: we will do whatever is necessary to maintain power.

But this time, as Armando argues, neither torture nor the landing of U.S. marines will be sufficient to stop the Sandinistas and their populist uprising:

the first step is to rid ourselves of the Somoza clan, and if the gringos then want to send in the Marines, let them try. They’ll find the world has changed since 1912 [when U.S. forces began a sixteen year occupation of Nicaragua], particularly if you take Cuba and Vietnam into account. If they want to occupy the country, not only will the entire Nicaraguan people join the FSLN, but so will the rest of Latin America:

around 250 million people will have to decide whether they want a free continent or whether they want to carry on under orders from the White House and the Pentagon. (84)

However utopian, Alegría offers a vision of hope; Armando returns to Nicaragua to once more take up arms against the Somozas, and Ximena agrees to become a representative of the Sandinistas in Europe. The hood, however terrible, will not succeed in silencing the forces of liberation. Torture and the U.S.' allied weapons of discipline will not, she asserts, always reign in Latin America. If Alegría quietly investigates torture as a means of political discipline, Martínez Moreno much more overtly dissects the *raison d'être* of the American adviser.

In *El Infierno*, a prize-winning series of interwoven, often claustrophobic and haunting stories that draw upon a variety of documentary sources including prisoners' affidavits and accounts of kidnappings, torture, and murder, Martínez Moreno, an Uruguayan activist, lawyer, and writer, makes even more explicit than Alegría how torture and the presence of the American adviser serves to discipline the local elites.⁵ Based—like Constantin Costa-Gavras' film, *State of Siege* (1972)—upon the infamous career, abduction, and murder of Dan Mitrione, the head of the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Public Safety in Uruguay in the late 1960s, *El Infierno* presents the American adviser as a murderous automaton whose clinical approach to torture shocks even the hardened and experienced police and military officers taking his "class" on interrogation techniques.⁶ His seemingly scientific detachment unnerves his students: the adviser represents a level of cruelty and authority they have never seen, and his cold ferocity serves as a warning to the agents of this client regime. A nation, his presence suggests, that possesses such knowledge and that deploys such men will stop at nothing to enforce its will.

From the complex mix of stories, dramatic monologues, and play-like chapters that make up Martínez Moreno's inferno—we could compare *El Infierno* to other hybrid, multi-plotted works of Latin American political fiction and historiography such as Sergio Ramirez's *To Bury Our Fathers* (1977; trans. 1984) or Eduardo Galeano's epic *Memory of Fire* trilogy (1982-86; trans. 1985-88)⁷—we will focus in

⁵ In 1987, *El Infierno* was awarded the Uruguayan Ministry of Culture award; Martínez Moreno had died in exile the year before.

⁶ For more on Mitrione's career, see A.J. Langguth's *Hidden Terrors* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

⁷ We could also consider *El Infierno* as a *novel*, and compare it to such novel/short

particular on the first of four chapters about the Mitrione character, “The Adviser and His Beggars’ Opera.” Here, we are introduced to the adviser and his techniques of torture and discipline, and we can revise one of Mitrione’s most infamous maxims— “The precise pain, in the precise place, in the precise amount, for the desired effect” (qtd. Blum 200) —to understand the unnamed American’s deeper purpose: the precise threat, in the precise place, in the precise amount, for the desired *political* effect.

Whether by design on his part or on the part of his superiors (who can judge the effect he will have on the Uruguayans) the adviser unsettles, through his mechanical demeanor and detailed knowledge of torture, even his most willing and brutal students. In his coldly demonic way, he establishes authority over them. Like Mitrione, he has built a soundproof room in a basement “in which to explore the far reaches of death” (6) —this chapter almost out-Poes Poe in its creation of an atmosphere of dread and entrapment—and once class begins, he launches “into his lesson without the slightest concern for any exchange of ideas with [his students]” (7). Having arranged for the abduction of four “beachcombers,” he demonstrates the techniques of torture and speaks to the officers as if they were children: “Have you understood clearly what I’ve been saying?” (15). The narrator continues: “Nobody has ever spoken to them like this before. It is all very clear, but at the same time they are stunned” (15). More vicious because more methodical and more consumed by what the narrator later calls “the pedagogy of sadism” (123), the adviser takes total control of both his victims and students:

Some of his audience are taken aback by his approach; others give in, fascinated as though gripped by a mysterious power. They have neither the imagination, the candour, nor sufficient faith to know whether they have ever come across the devil, but they dimly realise that were they to do so, he would appear to them in similar guise. Something in

story collections as Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), Alice Munro’s *The Beggar Maid* (1978) or Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* (1990). More importantly, we need to consider how, as Harlow argues, works that seek to document political upheaval, revolution, and torture constitute “a new literary genre” (*Barred* 255) that mix together stories, monologues, newspaper articles, affidavits, testimonials, government proclamations, and more. In *The Politics of Cruelty* (1994), Kate Millett calls this new hybrid form the “literature of witness”:

The French, who have a word for this kind of writing, call it *témoignage*, the literature of witness; the one who has been there, seen it, knows. It crosses genres, can be autobiography, reportage, even narrative fiction. But its basis is factual, fact passionately lived and put into writing by a moral imperative rooted like a flower amid carnage with an imperishable optimism, a hope that those who hear will care, will even take action. (15)

the atmosphere in the basement suggests that this might lead them into a perversity they would never have dared approach alone.⁸ (17)

Martínez Moreno casts the adviser as the devil, as a monstrous figure like Tomás de Torquemada, the original Spanish grand inquisitor; he casts him as a being of greater power and cruelty than mere savage mortals: however dimly, the men realize the threat against them and against their nation. The American—this time from “Richmond, Indiana” rather than Texas—represents a ferocious authority, and his techniques, while they destroy the beachcombers, also cow the killers and make them fearful. Torture, in *El Infierno*, achieves its many political ends. Or, at least it almost does.

Martínez Moreno, like Alegría, will not let the American have the last word; on the contrary, the adviser will be left, in his last moments, with nothing to say. In the final tale concerning the torturer, “The Adviser (III),” the guerillas kidnap the American, and the government, perhaps anxious to push back against the U.S. threat, embodied in the form of the adviser, refuses to release political prisoners in exchange for his freedom. The narrator, stepping away from the action of the kidnapping, wonders what the American thinks about his certain fate: “When will he have realized, deep down inside, that he has been left totally alone? When will he admit to himself that he is abandoned and dead, dead more than alive?” (72). Like those he has tortured, he must know that death awaits, knows that “nothing is his own any more, his life, his work condemn him. Christ, abandoned on the cross, could appeal to God. *He* can appeal only to Reasons of State, somewhat less attractive. Even less so if, when you go into details, those Reasons of State could have dirty implications, or not very elegant, at least” (73). For reasons of state, the adviser has been sent to intimidate all sides, but just as he has silenced others, his entrapment forces him into complete silence; he can offer no defense, no explanation that would justify his practices. Ultimately,

⁸ According to Julio César Cooper, an Uruguayan Army officer who, until 1972, carried out acts of torture until he refused to participate further, the Uruguayan torturers soon enough began to indulge in torture for torture’s sake. In a 1979 interview with Amnesty International, Cooper explains the “devolution” of torture in his country:

In my own case (and I would consider it typical of the general attitude of an officer at the time) torture was regarded as a means to an end. The objective was to obtain a confession from the detainee, purely and simply. The authorities constantly enjoined on us the need to obtain confessions in order to save the lives of military personnel who might be in danger of attack by revolutionary groups [...]. However, subsequently the idea began to lose its force and changed into the application of torture for its own sake, as part of a routine, and also as an act of vengeance against the detainee. (Qtd. Stover and Nightengale 7)

the guerillas act against him as he has acted against others: “The fat man dies, yet who would mention the cause for which he is dying? Its ugliness is reflected in his payment. Be glad that at the moment of truth, the moment of pity, that ugliness is turned to silence” (73). If not a victory for the oppressed—or the oppressors—the death of the adviser at least signals that the vicious, the discipliners do not always win, will not always triumph over the freedoms, ideals, and languages of others. Not always.

If Alegría and Martínez Moreno tell us that torture works to discipline not only dissidents, but the client regime as well, their tales of the American grand inquisitor remind us—if we needed reminding—that the U.S. has advisers throughout the world and that the degradations uncovered at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere as part of the war on terror are not by any means isolated or aberrant events. White House Counsel to the President Alberto Gonzales’ now-infamous January 22, 2002 memo—where he argues that “the Geneva Convention III on the Treatment of Prisoners of War (GPW) does not apply to the conflict with al Qaeda” (MSN) —does not signal, as some have argued, a radical break with American policy on torture. To the contrary, and as Alegría and Martínez Moreno dramatize, torture has been a weapon underwriting “Reasons of State” since at least the 1960s. From there, one could easily reach back, say, to the war in the Philippines following the Spanish-American War for documented cases of abuse and murder.⁹ From the bridges of Luzon, one could no doubt reach deeper into American history for still other instances of state-sponsored abuse. At the very least, “Family Album” and *El Infierno* remind us that the rise of the American *imperium* has been a long and sometimes savage process.

Notes

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⁹ See, among many other possible works, Philip Foner’s *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972) and Daniel Schirmer’s *Republic or Empire: American Resistance to the Philippine War* (Cambridge, Mass: Schenkman, 1972) for accounts of the “very drastic” measures undertaken by U.S. forces in the suppression of Filipino resistance.

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FILOSOFAR CON PLATÓN EL DIÁLOGO COMO EXPERIENCIA HERMENÉUTICA

Liliana Judith Guzmán

*“Dejo a los varios porvenires (no a todos)
mi jardín de senderos que se bifurcan.”*

Jorge L. Borges

*“Revitalizar y mantener viva la cultura del diálogo,
la cultura de la conversación:
creo que éste es el gran mensaje de Platón.”*

Hans-Georg Gadamer

I

Este trabajo tiene varios motivos de distinta índole. Entre ellos, hago explícito el motivo epistemológico que ha sido de inspiración a mis búsquedas en la *filosofía hermenéutica* acerca de la *experiencia del arte*. Tal motivo se remonta a muchos años atrás en que, recibiendo un ejemplar de la obra teatral *Galileo Galilei* de Berthold Brecht para tratar de adaptar escénicamente el texto para una clase de Filosofía en mi universidad de origen, me encontré estudiando un bello libro de Paul Feyerabend en el que señalaba al arte (específicamente, al cine, pero trabajando también con otra obra teatral de Brecht) como una tarea más filosófica que la filosofía, o más estimuladora para el pensamiento que la misma filosofía. Desde aquella lectura estética del anarquismo epistemológico, sigo dando vueltas a la pregunta del autor y hoy la asumo como mía: *¿por qué no Platón?* (Feyerabend). Sobre esta pregunta trazo aquí los senderos señalados por Hans-Georg Gadamer sobre el diálogo platónico.

II

Experiencias formativas en senderos hacia Platón

En el *corpus* de la filosofía hermenéutica de Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), los estudios platónicos constituyen un camino pleno de vitalidad, pasión y paradigma teórico en el sentido griego del término. Porque Gadamer no encuentra en Platón un marco llamado “teoría de las Ideas” sin más, sino una *filosofía poética* con “dirección de búsqueda”. En sus propias palabras, “la teoría de las Ideas de Platón no es ciertamente una teoría en el sentido moderno de la palabra, sino un *avanzar más allá*; y en este sentido, se entiende realmente como un *andar hacia el ser*” (Reale). Considero oportuno destacar esta relación vital de Gadamer tanto con Platón como con el concepto mismo de *teoría*, por tratarse su hermenéutica de una filosofía de búsqueda de la *comprensión* de la *situación hermenéutica* mediante la cual somos alcanzados por un *querer-decir*, tal es el camino del diálogo.

Respecto del diálogo platónico, las búsquedas de Gadamer comenzaron en su temprana juventud. Y ello a partir de una experiencia de niño lector: su primera lectura platónica fue en clase de griego en sus años de aprendizaje en el Instituto del Espíritu Santo, en Breslau. Experiencia que luego retornará a él cuando también su hija asista a la escuela y tenga por tarea de griego leer a Platón. Y experiencia de lectura de Platón a la que Gadamer dedicará sus primeros pasos en las investigaciones de doctorado, tratando de hallar la hermenéutica de la *palabra poética*, y luego en posteriores trabajos bajo dirección de distintos maestros (Natorp, Friedländer, Heidegger).

Así, en el conjunto de su obra, encontramos estos estudios platónicos específicos: en 1922, su examen de doctorado con la Tesis *Das Wesen der lust nach den platonischen dialoguen* (bajo dirección de Paul Natorp); luego, en 1929, su habilitación académica en Filosofía (con Martin Heidegger), con el Trabajo *Interpretation des platonischen Philebos*, pub. en 1931 en versión revisada como *Platos Dialektische Ethik*. En 1934, abrió camino en el estudio de la filosofía y poesía en Platón con una Conferencia en Marburgo llamada *Plato und die dichter*; luego realizó otros estudios platónicos, entre cuyos títulos destacan *Idee und wirklichkeit in Platos “Timaios”*, entre otros. Todo el tomo 7 de *Gessammelte Werke* está dedicado a Platón (*Platon in dialog*, 1991). De la misma manera que muchos de sus cursos y conferencias sobre filosofía platónica están publicados en distintos espacios académicos, especialmente en universidades americanas e institutos de investigaciones de Italia.

Los primeros dos trabajos (tesis doctoral y de habilitación académica) fueron realizados en el tránsito de Gadamer como el de un joven buscando espacio académico y con formación en filología clásica, en tanto frecuentaba reuniones y seminarios de hermeneutas y confrontaba con los representantes más destacados del momento (entre otros, con W. Jaeger) de la hermenéutica y la fenomenología. Así también, a una década de los años 30, que como profesor la dedicó a los estudios sobre Hegel, le sucedió una década (los 40) en la que Gadamer se dedicó al estudio del pensar en los poetas. Entre tanto, los estudios de sus seminarios y conferencias se dirigían a la constitución de su obra principal, *Verdad y Método*, que fue construyendo a partir del trabajo ininterrumpido en su docencia universitaria sobre la antigüedad griega.

Platón en Gadamer

¿Por qué Gadamer dedica grandes capítulos de su vida a Platón? Fundamentalmente, por lo que él mismo considera como las siguientes tres razones:

- a) porque considera que la filosofía griega, más allá de atravesarnos como tradición, podría tener hoy plena *actualidad*;
- b) porque la obra de Platón es una *filosofía poética* que ha marcado profundamente sus búsquedas vitales;
- c) porque, en su filosofía hermenéutica, el *diálogo platónico* es el modelo vivo de la *interpretación* y de la *experiencia del filosofar*.

En lo que sigue, desarrollaré estos puntos, aunque no sin alterar el orden planteado.

1. Experiencia de lectura platónica

Gadamer ha hecho de su camino filosófico un entramado de búsqueda y conocimiento entre los clásicos y a través de los prismas filológico y fenomenológico. O al revés: ha hecho de su vida misma un camino filosófico de búsqueda por otra verdad en las sendas hermenéuticas recibidas de sus maestros y las suyas propias. Él mismo declara que, en su vida y filosofía, tal búsqueda existencial lleva el nombre de Platón.¹ Así, por ejemplo, Platón es en Gadamer no sólo

¹ Véase, de Gadamer su *Autopresentación* (1977) en *Verdad y método II*, Salamanca: Sígueme, 2004. Y veánse entrevistas realizadas por otros autores de estudios platónicos, entre ellos, el de Giovanni Reale, ya citado.

una experiencia lectora siempre nueva, es también la experiencia poética abierta por la lectura de Stefan George, sus primeras sendas recorridas en el neokantismo y sus primeras indagaciones sobre el placer en *Ética a Nicómaco*. En Gadamer, Aristóteles (como los poetas) es la puerta de ingreso a Platón. Así fue como, por ejemplo, tras sus primeros trabajos platónicos de los años 20, le sucedieron otros no menos valiosos en los años 30, pero publicados mucho tiempo después (entre ellos, *El estado como educador en Platón*, en 1942, *Platón y los poetas*, en 1943). Ambos con un tema en común: la educación del Estado y los poetas, pero ambos debiendo necesariamente ser preservados del totalitarismo alemán en ese momento histórico.

Pero fundamentalmente en Gadamer, Platón es una *experiencia de memoria y tiempo*. La experiencia filosófica de leer a Platón es “conocimiento de lo conocido”, tal como enseña *Fedón* (*Verdad y Método* 393). El filosofar es una experiencia de *palabra, pensamiento y conciencia de historia efectual*, pero que sólo es posible en un encuentro entre un yo y tú, un lector y un texto, en un *círculo hermenéutico* que, como en *Fedón*, es un camino de recuerdo de lo sabido y de conciencia de no saber, es una *experiencia de finitud*.

Entonces, asumo con Gadamer que hoy “la tarea es filosofar con Platón, no criticar a Platón” (*Verdad y Método II* 395). Y esto especialmente porque, como él mismo plantea, la relevancia filosófica de la imaginación poética de Platón es un camino de armonía entre *ergon* y *logos*, como “discursos guía”. Eso hace posible la dialéctica platónica como *arte de pensar*, es decir, como “el arte de indagar el significado de lo que se piensa y se dice” (397). La *experiencia de leer a Platón* es una *experiencia poética-filosófica* donde la elección de Gadamer es esencialmente vital, pero de necesidad hermenéutica: y ello porque la poesía es un modo del lenguaje, y con él, *otro modo del pensar*, pues “hay que aprender a leer a Platón en sentido mimético [...] reconducir con precisión los enunciados conceptuales que aparecen en el diálogo a la realidad dialogal de la que derivan. Ahí radica la ‘armonía dórica’ de acción y discurso, de *ergon* y *logos* de la que se habla en Platón, y no sólo con palabras. Esa armonía es la verdadera ley vital de los diálogos socráticos. Es el *saber del no saber*” (396).

2. Actualidad de la tradición griega

En una conferencia pronunciada en sus años de vejez, Gadamer medita el problema de nuestra pertenencia a la tradición desde el horizonte del lenguaje, y desde las posibilidades de la filosofía como ejercicio de *pensar a través del lenguaje*. Así es que afirma

la necesidad de pensar filosóficamente, hoy, dando actualidad a la filosofía griega (*Acotaciones hermenéuticas*). Para tal afirmación, Gadamer toma como punto de partida un principio clave de su filosofía hermenéutica: la *tradición*. Estamos sostenidos por la tradición, y en este sostén, en este atravesamiento, la filosofía griega nos da elementos para pensar hoy nuestra *experiencia e historia efectual*. Tales elementos son:

1. *la relación entre palabra y concepto*: pertenecemos tanto a nuestro lenguaje como a nuestros conceptos, esto es, no somos nosotros quienes elegimos los conceptos sino ellos los que nos han elegido. Y las palabras son un camino abierto entre la lengua viva y su uso filosófico. Esta cercanía entre *palabra y concepto* nos posibilita una comprensión viva de la palabra en su dimensión pedagógica y filosófica. Esta cercanía nos enseña, y nos da a pensar, nos hace padecer una experiencia de extrañamiento por la cual nos pensamos.
2. *la inquietud*: el pensamiento griego es actual no desde las concepciones modernas de teoría, verdad y método sino desde la propia *inquietud* que el pensar nos dona con cada pregunta planteada, de eso va su actualidad, de darnos la apertura en la experiencia para la *inquietud* que, precisamente, hace posible pensarnos.
3. *la pregunta por el ser*: la actualidad de la filosofía griega lo es tal en tanto mantiene abierta la “pregunta por el ser”. Y de ello, Platón es su mejor paradigma: su pensamiento no es una mera elaboración de la teoría de las Ideas, sino una “dirección de búsqueda”, un movimiento en un camino recorrido con la pregunta por el ser. Y esto porque Platón abre camino hacia el mundo de los *lógoi*: pertenecemos a un mundo interpretado, de esta interpretación va la tarea del filosofar, para mantener abiertas nuestras maneras de ver (contemplar) y comprender el mundo, y nuestro ser en él.
4. *el pensamiento griego pone en relación ética y política*. Esta relación es abarcada de modo vital en Platón y en Aristóteles, en un modo de pensar donde lo bello, la amistad y la felicidad son puestos bajo los signos de un preguntar inacabado sobre la vida ética y políticas de los hombres, y cuyas formas son fruto de su experiencia existencial y su conciencia histórica.

3. El pensar dialéctico en Platón

Como actividad del pensar, Platón para Gadamer es un universo de *pensamiento y poesía*. Considero preciso volver a hacer este señalamiento porque en la comprensión del *diálogo platónico* como de una *situación hermenéutica*, la imagen, la metáfora y la palabra poética son la piedra angular de la obra en la que *algo se piensa*. En su obra fundamental, y en términos generales (a través de sus publicaciones aisladas o conferencias dictadas), Gadamer caracteriza la *dialéctica platónica* bajo estas notas que yo especificaría en los siguientes ítems:

- a) Pone en escena el *pensar*, en la conversación, mediante el juego dialéctico de *palabra y concepto* (*Verdad y Método II*).
- b) Es un modo de ejercicio de saber práctico, cierta *phronesis*; y esto es la prudencia como tarea hermenéutica (293).
- c) Habilita otro modo de comprensión de la teoría: *theoría* es en Platón un modo de mirar, y más aún, de participar, de “estar en la cosa”. En el diálogo que indaga sobre el ser de las cosas, el hombre *participa del develamiento de la verdad* como espectador activo en una celebración trágica. Hace una presencia de lo que le alcanza y en lo que participa, asiste a lo que es (*Verdad y Método I* 169). El pensar, en el diálogo, tiene algo de la *experiencia del arte*, que se actualiza en el juego mismo de su acontecer celebrativo y temporal.
- d) Pone en juego *otro modo de ser de la verdad*, muy diferente del modo científico moderno, que excede todo uso retórico y sofisticado de la misma, incluso su movimiento mismo de afirmación y refutación.
- e) Los temas platónicos se comprenden cuando se gana el *horizonte del preguntar*, esto es, cuando dan a pensar otras respuestas posibles. Así, un diálogo platónico va más allá de lo que en él se dice, nos hace participar de la *lógica abierta* de su pregunta.
- f) Se compone de un doble arte simultáneo: *habla y sentido*. Como *habla*, el diálogo hace aparecer de un modo singular de “habla extrañada” (bajo el signo de lo que se pregunta) y como *sentido*, inaugura una dirección singular bajo la perspectiva de lo que se pregunta.
- g) Es un trabajo del pensamiento, según el supuesto platónico fundamental del pensamiento como *diálogo interior del alma consigo misma*. Este trabajo dialógico del pensamiento, y su

experiencia lingüística, es “un diálogo que es un constante trascenderse, una reflexión sobre sí mismo y los propios juicios y opiniones, en actitud de duda y objeción [...] es nuestra experiencia lingüística la inserción en este diálogo interno con nosotros mismos, que es a la vez el diálogo anticipado con otros, la entrada de otros en diálogo con nosotros, la que abre y ordena el mundo en todos los ámbitos de la experiencia” (*Verdad y Metodo I y II*).

- h) Es el fluir de un pensar que da a la palabra el carácter de *discurso*, “expresa la unidad de una referencia a través de la integración de una multiplicidad de palabras”, unidad desarrollada como estructura dialéctica del *logos* (*Verdad y Metodo I* 512).
- i) Es el *fluir del pensar de la tradición* como en la bella metáfora filosófica de *Fedro: agua pura y fresca* (*Fedro* 245). “La imagen que guía esta metáfora es el agua pura y fresca manando desde una inescrutable profundidad [...] una fuente siempre sigue manando agua fresca, y lo mismo ocurre con las verdaderas fuentes espirituales de la tradición. Su estudio merece siempre la pena, porque siempre pueden proporcionar algo distinto de lo que hasta ahora se ha tomado de ellas” (*Verdad y Metodo I* 595).
- j) La dialéctica platónica se constituye de la *estructura dialogal del lenguaje*: la estructura monologal de la conciencia científica no alcanza, como tampoco los meros recursos filosóficos, a posibilitar que el pensar nos afecte y nos alcance en su verdadero acontecer transformador.
- k) La dialéctica en Platón se compone de discursos o *logoi* que son “alimentos del alma”, como se nos enseña en *Protágoras*: “Pero si no, procura, mi buen amigo, no arriesgar ni poner en peligro lo más preciado, pues mucho mayor riesgo se corre en la compra de enseñanzas que en la de alimentos. Porque quien compra comida o bebida al traficante o al comerciante puede transportar esto en otros recipientes y, depositándolo en casa, antes de proceder a beberlo o comerlo, puede llamar a un entendido para pedirle consejo sobre lo que es comestible o potable y lo que no, y en qué cantidad y cuándo; de modo que no se corre gran riesgo en la compra. Pero las enseñanzas no se pueden transportar en otro recipiente, sino que, una vez pagado su precio, necesariamente, el que adquiere una enseñanza marcha ya, llevándola en su propia alma, dañado o beneficiado” (*Protágoras* 314).

- l) Acontece el pensamiento, dialécticamente, como ese ir y venir entre reposo y movimiento, que va de la identidad a la diversidad (del Uno al Dos) (*Verdad y Método II* 89) tal aparece en *Fedón* y *Timeo*, como devenir de la forma del uno a la diada, del *eidos* a la multiplicidad (*Fedón* 10).
- m) El diálogo platónico pone en *situación hermenéutica* el problema del *lenguaje*: todo entendimiento es un problema lingüístico y su éxito o fracaso se produce a través de la lingüisticidad (*Verdad y Método II* 181);
- n) Es un modo de saber que, partiendo de un no saber, contradice dialécticamente el saber matemático (para negarlo y/o afirmarlo), el saber de la opinión, el saber como mera alternativa argumental y el saber de lo ya sabido (*Carta VII* 343);
- o) En el diálogo platónico no hay refutación por contraargumentación sino proceso de *comprensión* y *acuerdo*. Así se plantea en *Carta VII^f*: “*porque no se refuta el alma del hablante*” (*Verdad y Método II* 246).
- p) Es la dialéctica platónica una superación de la dialéctica como *tecné* y de la retórica de los transmisores del saber, los sofistas (297).

III

El diálogo platónico como experiencia hermenéutica

En uno de los capítulos fundamentales de su obra principal, Gadamer aborda el análisis de la conciencia de la historia efectiva”, entendiéndolo por *historia efectiva* la posibilidad de pensarnos en el marco dialéctico de nuestro horizonte histórico. Para ello, Gadamer plantea los límites de la filosofía de la reflexión, que nos son dados por la alteridad del tú y de la historia que vivimos y del pasado de nuestra cultura, y elabora (o da a leer de otro modo) el concepto de *experiencia*, y con él, el concepto de *experiencia hermenéutica*. Y esto, precisamente, porque la conciencia de la *historia efectiva* tiene la estructura de la *experiencia*.

¿Qué es, en este paradigma, la *experiencia*? La *experiencia* es constitutiva de la historicidad humana. La *experiencia* como *erfahrung* es cierto conocimiento del mundo y de sí mismo que, en tanto saber, se produce en el través de lo vivido, transitado, y pensado para sí. La *experiencia* es el saber de otra conciencia de sí, y es ese padecimiento de y en el tiempo a través del cual el pensar abre un espacio dialéctico de apertura y conciencia de finitud. La *experien-*

cia es posibilidad de acceso a un conocimiento como medio, como autorreferencia y como historia efectual.

En esta acepción del concepto de *experiencia*, la *experiencia hermenéutica*, a su vez, es la posibilidad de *pensarnos como tiempo y finitud*, pero en la comprensión de nuestra *tradición y lenguaje*. La *experiencia hermenéutica* es conciencia histórica que nos da que pensar en el reconocimiento de la alteridad del otro y del pasado. Pero la *experiencia hermenéutica*, como la *experiencia* en sí, no es posible sin un verdadero estado de *apertura*. La alteridad del tú y de la historia sólo son tal en tanto puedan oírse. Comprender la alteridad, dice Gadamer, es *dejarse hablar* por lo otro. No alcanza con el reconocimiento de lo otro sino que, más aún, para que haya *experiencia hermenéutica*, es preciso oír lo que con la alteridad se nos da a pensar, se pone en movimiento por la *palabra en diálogo* como un *querer-decir*.

En este horizonte es que aparece la *experiencia hermenéutica* del diálogo platónico. En efecto, el juego de posibilidades de la *conciencia de la historia efectual* mediante la *experiencia*, es descrito por Gadamer bajo un signo estrictamente filosófico: la *pregunta*. Para ello, Gadamer analiza la estructura hermenéutica de la pregunta en el diálogo platónico, y describe la lógica de *pregunta-respuesta* como movimiento propio de la *experiencia hermenéutica*.

El horizonte hermenéutico de la pregunta

La experiencia hermenéutica del diálogo platónico es abordado por Gadamer en un doble análisis, de los que aquí nos detendremos sobre todo en el primero. Ellos son: a) *la pregunta* como origen de la situación hermenéutica del diálogo platónico, y b) *la lógica de pregunta-respuesta* como elemento hermenéutico del método dialéctico para la verdad acerca de lo que se busca saber.

En primer lugar, la pregunta tiene “la estructura lógica de la *apertura* que caracteriza a la *conciencia hermenéutica*” (*Verdad y Método I* 439). Tal es la opción al “así o de otro modo” y tal es el comienzo del diálogo platónico con la *docta ignorantia* socrática. Pero a fines de precisar su trabajo interpretativo, ¿qué caracteriza a la pregunta? En Gadamer, la pregunta es un signo que reúne, según mi lectura, estas características:

- a) La pregunta tiene un *sentido* o dirección, una orientación o perspectiva. La pregunta hace una grieta en el ser de algo al preguntar sobre ese ser, ahora quebrado por el *logos*. Así, para develar un saber de un no saber, Platón busca indagar un conocimiento y discurso sobre el ser de algo, con la

pregunta al comienzo de ese nuevo discurso que es el diálogo, ese camino de verdad.

- b) La pregunta *abre*. El saber de la pregunta va más de preguntar que de responder. Dice Gadamer: “el sentido del preguntar consiste precisamente en dejar al descubierto la cuestionabilidad de lo que se pregunta” (*Verdad y Método I* 440). La apertura de la pregunta se dirige hacia el modo de ser de algo, produce un quiebro en un saber de algo mediante una suspensión de lo sabido. Así vemos que sucede en *Protágoras*: “yo me he encontrado en combate de argumentos con muchos adversarios ya, y si hubiera hecho lo que tú me pides: dialogar como me pedía mi interlocutor de ese modo, no hubiera parecido superior a ninguno ni el nombre de Protágoras habría destacado entre los griegos” (*Protágoras* 335).
- c) *La pregunta no se plantea en el vacío*, sino en un *horizonte* de condiciones, presupuestos y límites que demarcan el sentido de lo preguntado hacia la indeterminación desde el supuesto de otras determinaciones. El horizonte de la pregunta es lo que, de un modo u otro, da a la pregunta *sentido y dirección*, se plantea en un *horizonte hermenéutico*.
- d) La pregunta *tiene relación esencial con el saber*. Dice Gadamer que “la decisión de una pregunta es el camino hacia el saber” (*Verdad y Método I* 442). Hay una conexión interna entre conocimiento y pregunta que define, en Platón, el ser de la dialéctica: allí se pregunta algo sobre el ser de algo, y para buscar un saber sobre eso que se pregunta. Tal aparece en *Parménides*: “hombre plenamente dotado sería el capaz de comprender que hay un género de cada cosa y un ser en sí y por sí, pero aún más admirable sería aquel que, habiendo descubierto y examinado suficientemente y con cuidado todas estas cosas, fuera capaz de instruir a otro” (*Parménides* 135). El diálogo, entonces, es un camino de apertura y de ingreso en lo que no se sabe, es un camino dialéctico de ir y venir entre positividad y negatividad. Cito a Gadamer: “sólo puede poseer algún saber el que tiene preguntas, pero las preguntas comprenden siempre la oposición del sí y del no, del así y de otro modo. Sólo porque el saber es dialéctico en este sentido abarcante puede haber una ‘dialéctica’ que tome explícitamente como objeto la oposición del sí y del no” (*Verdad y Método I* 442-443).
- e) La pregunta *quiebra los límites del método*: la pregunta hace

de la dialéctica un juego que supera el esquema pregunta-refutación-indagación-conclusión. La pregunta abre camino en su método específico y contingente, tal es el propio preguntar, pero en un trabajo de quiebre y sospecha de todo método. No sólo porque, en la dialéctica platónica, no hay método según la concepción científica moderna sino también porque el *método singular de la pregunta* crea los supuestos desde donde se pregunta, y los crea desde ese no saber desde que inaugura la pregunta, por eso es que “todo preguntar y todo querer saber presupone un saber que no se sabe, pero de manera tal que es un determinado no saber el que conduce a una determinada pregunta”.

- f) La pregunta tiene su origen en la *ocurrencia*. La ocurrencia es la inquietud primera respecto de algo ya sabido. Así como también la ocurrencia de la pregunta aparece irrumpiendo en el plano extendido de la opinión. La ocurrencia, a su vez, tiene su propio horizonte: sus condiciones y sentido, y como tal, no es mero arbitrio de quien pregunta sino de cómo aparece en la inquietud acerca de algo.
- g) La pregunta, como emergente de la ocurrencia, es *un padecer*. El padecer de la pregunta es propio de la condición de aprendizaje de la *experiencia*. No pregunta quien cree en sus seguridades y certezas sino quien es movido a preguntar en el quiebre mismo de sus saberes, en la irrupción de una ruptura con la opinión y con lo que se cree saber.
- h) Como *arte del pensar*, la pregunta (y la dialéctica como arte de la pregunta) no es una *tecné* ni su posibilidad de transmisión, tampoco es una refutación *per se* de la opinión y los supuestos, ni tampoco es el arte de la argumentación. Como *arte del pensar*, la pregunta es un juego múltiple de sentido abierto, y un juego abierto a la palabra del otro, y a la palabra como transformación del modo de ser de aquello sobre lo que se pregunta. Por eso dice Gadamer que “el arte del preguntar es el arte de seguir preguntando, y esto significa que es el *arte de pensar*. Se llama dialéctica porque es el arte de llevar una auténtica conversación” (*Verdad y Método I* 444).
- i) El *arte de la pregunta* como *pensar dialéctico* acontece en un movimiento no de argumentación en paralelo sino de *pregunta-respuesta*. Bajo un tema que convoca, la conversación toma un curso que va de preguntar y responder provisionalmente a eso que se pregunta. Tales preguntas y respuestas

hacen de la conversación un *ensayo sobre algo*. Por eso el preguntar es un *arte del ensayo* (445), donde la pregunta no se somete a un discurso dominante sino que *abre sentido* bajo *preguntas-respuestas* tentativas sobre la cosa puesta al descubierto. Por eso la dialéctica no es un mero arte de argumentar sino de *pensar*, de un pensar capaz de reforzar lo dicho desde la cosa misma. De eso consta la “verdadera fuerza” de la dialéctica.

- j) La pregunta como *arte dialéctica* cuya verdad afirma un saber sobre algo, es espacio de apertura a un diálogo que se estructura con *lenguaje y conceptos*. La dialéctica es un “mirar juntos en la unidad de una intención” para formar conceptos elaborados sobre lo que se opinaba sobre algo (446). Lo preguntado hace presente un extrañamiento por el que se conoce (o reconoce) algo sobre algo. Este entrar en diálogo con algo (un texto, un tú) es una tarea hermenéutica que fluye en el *presente vivo del diálogo*. En Platón, el diálogo (con inicio en la pregunta) asume una forma literaria que devela *lenguaje y concepto* al movimiento originario del extrañamiento y la experiencia de la conversación. Así, es posible la experiencia con lo que sale al encuentro, tal como ocurre en *Filebo*: “*resulta, pues, que la potencia del bien se nos ha refugiado en la naturaleza de lo bello*” (*Filebo* 64).

En segundo lugar, tenemos el método no metódico al uso científico de la *lógica de pregunta-respuesta*. En el trazo de estas características de la dialéctica platónica fundada en la *pregunta* como *experiencia hermenéutica*, se ve aparecer el método —siempre único y diferente por cada vez— de la *lógica de pregunta-respuesta*. Así, es posible comprender el “horizonte hermenéutico” reconocido como *horizonte del preguntar* y como lo que determina la dirección de un texto, en este caso, de un diálogo platónico. Este *horizonte hermenéutico* es comprendido cuando se conoce la lógica de su pregunta. La comprensión de una pregunta y su respuesta es lo que Gadamer llama la “anticipación de la totalidad” (*Verdad y Método I* 448). Esta pregunta a reconstruir comprendiéndola, esta *lógica pregunta-respuesta*, concierne al texto mismo. Quien interpreta a Platón leyendo un diálogo no reconstruye a Platón sino al sentido mismo del texto y la perspectiva que abre con su pregunta. Por ello es que la comprensión de los textos es un auténtico acontecer que interroga nuestro saber desde ese saber allí interrogado.

A su vez, la *lógica pregunta-respuesta* posee una doble situación, la de ambos *horizontes de comprensión*: por un lado, el del texto (y su pasado) y por otro, el de quien dialoga (en el presente) con ese

texto. Esto confirma la condición histórica de la pregunta, que como tal no se pregunta en y para sí misma, sino para su tiempo y, ahora, en el tiempo y lenguaje de quienes la comprenden. Por ello es que las respuestas a preguntas de diálogos platónicos son *comprendidas* desde nuestro *horizonte de comprensión*. Según Gadamer, “la estrecha relación que aparece entre preguntar y comprender es la que da a la *experiencia hermenéutica* su verdadera dimensión [...] este poner en suspenso es la verdadera esencia originaria del preguntar [...] *comprender la cuestionabilidad de algo es en realidad siempre preguntar*” (*Verdad y Método I* 453). *Ganar el horizonte de la pregunta* es, entonces, *comprender bajo determinadas condiciones históricas*, y es *comprender la pregunta preguntándola*. A esto Gadamer le llama “fusión de horizontes”. Tal fusión hace posible dos hechos de la *experiencia hermenéutica*:

- a) el comprender mismo, que sucede como “rendimiento genuino del lenguaje”
- b) la latencia de respuestas a la pregunta que se busca comprender, en tanto verdad de la *historia efectual*.

Esa *fusión de horizontes* como *experiencia hermenéutica* hace, entonces, posible la *conciencia efectual* de nosotros mismos en el través del tiempo y lenguaje, y en la acepción de nuestro modo de *ser-en-diálogo*. En esta experiencia lingüística de *ser-en-diálogo*, lo que nos encuentra es *algo que se hace presente*, y que nos pone en camino de encuentro con otra verdad por la vía del *acuerdo*, es un camino de “transformación hacia lo común” (*Verdad y Método I* 458), hacia un lugar donde ya no se sigue siendo quien se es, sino que se ha sido afectado por el presente de ese *querer-decir* que nos interroga desde la lógica singular del texto que se comprende. De eso consiste, en efecto, que las preguntas de los diálogos platónicos sean una *verdadera experiencia hermenéutica*.

horizontes hermenéuticos en diálogos platónicos

Trazado el horizonte de la *pregunta* como *experiencia hermenéutica*, y de la *lógica pregunta-respuesta* como elemento constitutivo de la misma, veamos al menos esquemáticamente qué *horizontes* encuentra Gadamer en el diálogo platónico como *experiencia hermenéutica de comprensión y transformación*. Esquemáticamente, algunos de los *horizontes hermenéuticos estudiados* por Gadamer en los diálogos platónicos serían lo que a continuación se presenta en el siguiente cuadro, sólo a título meramente enunciativo por recorte de pertinencia, espacio y extensión (*Dialogue and Dialectic*):

Diálogo	Temas	Pregunta	Afirmaciones provisorias
<i>Lysis</i>	<i>Armonía entre logos y ergon</i>	<i>¿Qué es la amistad, y qué podemos saber acerca de ella?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>La amistad es uno de los modos del amor;</i> - <i>Por los poetas, sabemos que la amistad es posible según se conozca lo bueno;</i> - <i>Es la presencia (parusia) de una idea perfecta de amistad, como relación humana;</i> - <i>La amistad no tiene muerte ni fin;</i> - <i>La amistad es comienzo de la oikúmene.</i>
<i>Fedón</i>	<i>La inmortalidad del alma</i>	<p><i>¿Qué es la muerte, qué poder tiene sobre el alma?</i></p> <p><i>¿Qué puede saber nuestra alma después de la muerte?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>El alma nos preexiste (95-107a);</i> - <i>Conocer es recordar (anamnésis, 72e –también Fedro 249-250, y Menón 80-86);</i> - <i>Todo lo que vive nace de lo muerto, por regeneración;</i> - <i>Conocimiento y realidad son, en esencia, de procedencia del número, por ser éste esencia del ser y del mundo, aunque no del orden de nuestra existencia;</i> - <i>El alma es una armonía (87d);</i> - <i>Es preciso vivir cuidando las virtudes del alma (115a).</i>
<i>República</i>	<p><i>Los poetas</i></p> <p><i>El estado educador</i></p>	<p><i>¿Qué modo de saber es el del poeta?, y ¿qué origen tiene el saber poético?</i></p> <p><i>¿Qué modo de conocimiento nos hará un Estado justo?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>El saber del poeta es fruto del entusiasmo, por tanto es pedagógicamente poco convincente a la ciudad;</i> - <i>El Estado ideal está gobernado por el logos filosófico, no por el poético, pero esto es una utopía filosófica más plausible de hacer realidad en sí mismo que en la ciudad;</i> - <i>La crítica de Platón a los poetas se hace en nombre de la moral, no del arte poética ni del pensar poético que él mismo representa;</i> - <i>Precisa una reformulación de la paideia, ni sofística ni antigua, sino para el hombre político del nuevo Estado;</i> - <i>La crítica a los poetas es al arte como mimésis;</i> - <i>El modo de ser del hombre político es la prudencia, y el conocimiento de sí, no la poesía;</i> - <i>La justicia es la virtud educadora de la vida política del hombre;</i> - <i>El pensamiento filosófico sobre la educación ideal no es posible sin una experiencia de la visión del uno como ser verdadero.</i>

IV

Hacia las preguntas de senderos bifurcados

En los estudios platónicos de Gadamer, son abordados otros temas con más énfasis y extensión (tales como su análisis del *Filebo*, *Timeo*, la misma *República*, *Teeteto*, *Sofista*, *Parménides*). En ellos, Gadamer no sólo realiza una interpretación hermenéutica de los mismos diálogos como *situaciones hermenéuticas* sino que los da a leer en el horizonte de su filosofía: como *diálogos con las preguntas abiertas para seguir filosofando, y para seguir filosofando en el logos de la la palabra poética*. Porque las preguntas de Platón abren camino desde la palabra poética, y así Gadamer nos lo da a leer: “Platón con sus preguntas *abre el camino*. Y justamente en esto consiste la verdad de la filosofía [...] Pero el contenido de una imagen poética no puede agotarse mediante una experiencia conceptual, y por lo mismo, la respuesta mediante una imagen queda siempre abierta. La grandeza de Platón consiste precisamente en esto: *sus grandes preguntas*, así como sus respuestas, son definitivas justamente porque *permanecen abiertas*” (Reale 854/VI).

Estos numerosos trabajos de Gadamer son imposibles de abordar aquí, ni siquiera esquemáticamente, por lo obvio del destino de este texto, que ha pretendido ser una síntesis para exposición de un tema particular de la filosofía. Queda entonces abierta la invitación a la fiesta de Gadamer: de hacer una *experiencia de lectura hermenéutica con los diálogos platónicos*, una *experiencia hermenéutica* para dar oídos a otras verdades, a otras preguntas, y para transitar con Platón y su *logos poético-filosófico* el laberinto de sus arquetipos y diadas interrogadas, pues quizás hoy las suyas puedan ser nuestras preguntas, porque Platón —como Borges— nos ha dejado en herencia a este porvenir que somos, un *logos* entramado en preguntas que nos llaman a hacer de su filosofía una *experiencia filosófica*, un *jardín de senderos bifurcados* que, ni más ni menos, es una tentación al pensar, para pensarlos y pensarnos, transitándolos.

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SUSPICIONS, SECRETS, AND THE AMERICAN PSYCHE: MELVILLE'S *THE CONFIDENCE-MAN* AND POST-9/11 PARANOIA

Diana Curtis

Within hours of the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11th 2001, public opinion polls showed that Americans overwhelmingly favored a swift and forceful retaliation (Schmitt and Shanker 15). By September 14th, when Colin Powell told America: "The enemy is hidden. The enemy is, very often, right here within our own country" (Purdum 16), Middle-Eastern and Asian residents had already become victims of public wrath (Goodstein and Neiburh 14). President Bush told the country: "No one should be singled out for unfair treatment or unkind words because of their ethnic background or religious faith" ("Statement" 4), yet by the end of October more than a thousand people of mostly Middle-Eastern descent had been detained, and by December even more were being held with no idea of whether or not they might eventually be charged. Few Americans objected, and as many commentators have noted, the suspicion with which Muslims were treated was reminiscent of the way Communists were looked upon during the McCarthy witch hunts of the 1950s. At that time too, thousands of alleged sympathizers were investigated, and roughly six million lives were disrupted although there were very few prosecutions (Miller and Nowak 14, 26).

Four and a half years on from 9/11 we have invested billions in the chase for Osama bin Laden, who remains at large. We have caught Saddam Hussein—who had nothing to do with 9/11—and we're currently occupying an Iraq that every day moves closer to civil war. More than 2,000 U.S. soldiers have been killed since the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom and more than 17,000 have been injured. We don't count the Iraqi dead, but a UN Report carried out by the *Lancet* in 2004 estimated they numbered around 100,000 (Boseley). Many more deaths have occurred since then. Relatively few people in the United States seem overly concerned. Perhaps, as Indian-born Arundhati Roy points out, we believe that:

[d]eath is a small price for people to pay for the privilege of sampling . . . [d]emocracy . . . [P]erhaps chinks, negroes, dinks, gooks, and wogs don't really qualify as real people. Perhaps [their] deaths don't qualify as real deaths. [Their] histories don't qualify as history. They never have. (3)

Herman Melville would have agreed—and would have grieved—with Arundhati Roy. Melville's whaling trips—necessitated by his father's early death, which left the formerly privileged family virtually penniless—allowed him to spend time between voyages in the primitive communities of the Marquesas and the Sandwich Islands (now Hawaii), where he witnessed and enjoyed the native lifestyles. The experience broadened his mind, so much so that he later admitted: "Until I was twenty-five, I had no development at all. From my twenty-fifth year I date my life" (*Correspondence* 193). After returning home aboard a U.S. frigate, Melville began to write.

Many of his books draw attention to the disparity between the way in which we regard acts of violence carried out on our behalf, and those that are perpetrated against us. In his first book, *Typee*, the narrator comments on the way in which the atrocities we commit are:

seldom proclaimed at home. . . . Sometimes vague accounts of such things reach our firesides, and we coolly censure them as wrong, impolitic, needlessly severe . . . [But how] different is our tone when we [are attacked]; how we sympathize for the unhappy victims, and with what horror do we regard the diabolical heathens, who, after all, have but avenged the unprovoked injuries which they have received. We breathe nothing but vengeance, and equip armed vessels to traverse thousands of miles of ocean in order to . . . burn, slaughter, and destroy . . . [and we] call upon all Christendom to applaud their courage and their justice. (26-27)

Many reviewers objected to such comments. The *Christian Parlor Magazine* accused Melville of "palpable ignorance" and "flagrant outrages against civilization" (Higgins and Parker 57). And when the revised American edition appeared some five months later, several didactic passages had been removed—at times completely reversing Melville's intended effect. In his next book, *Omoo*, Melville opted for satire in an attempt to convey the same ideas less offensively. His naïve American narrator visits native cultures, witnesses and records multiple acts of oppression, and manages to remain blissfully ignorant of his own contribution to it. The book was well received, probably because few readers understood its ironies, for as Jonathan Swift pointed out in "The Battle of the Books," "satire is a sort of glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own."

In *Moby-Dick*, Melville depicts native exploitation through the

ship's harpooners, whose dangerous work supports the rest of the crew, and as the *Pequod* sinks in the final scene, Tashtego, the faithful American Indian, is still loyally attempting to nail Captain Ahab's doomed flag to the mast. Melville had by this time discovered the Indian history of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, where he lived on a farm he'd renamed "Arrowhead" after the Indian relics he found there. He'd also begun to think more about his grandfather, Colonel Peter Gansevoort, the illustrious hero of Fort Stanwix, site of the infamous treaties that took so much land away from Indians. In *Pierre*, the Colonel is represented by General Pierre Glendinning, whose grandson Pierre is Melville's protagonist—and also his antithesis because unlike Melville, Pierre is afraid to examine his origins and prefers to leave the reputations of his ancestors intact, electing instead to glorify the dead, which has dire consequences for the living. Melville presents Pierre as the personification of America, doomed by its unwillingness to confront the reality of its history.

In *Israel Potter*, his next book, Melville expands this theme as he satirizes other folk heroes, depicting Ethan Allen as an imposter who pretends to be a "braggart barbarian" (150), and John Paul Jones as equally disingenuous since he presents himself as a gentleman but behind the façade is "unprincipled, reckless, [and] predatory" (120). Melville likens Jones to America, but, as others have noted, he meant no compliment. The book's reception, though, is troubling and suggests, as Benzanson notes, a deep denial on the part of the reading public, for it "won praise for its masculine style . . . and alleged patriotism" (Melville, *Israel Potter* 216), while the ironic sections on Ethan Allen, who is described by one blind critic as "the true guide and unimpeachable man and American" (72) proved to be particularly popular and were reprinted at least twice (202).

In *The Confidence-Man*, Melville consolidates the foregoing themes and predicts the consequences. The book is set aboard a Mississippi riverboat ironically named the *Fidèle*, which means "the faithful." The book is a microcosm of America, and most critics agree that its heart lies in chapters 25-28, which tell the story of Colonel John Moredock, a renowned Indian-killer who—like General Pierre Glendinning and John Paul Jones—is "civilized in externals but a savage at heart" (Melville, *Israel Potter* 120).

After his family is massacred by Indians, Moredock seeks revenge and eventually tracks down the killers, but in the process he becomes more duplicitous than his foe, and develops a liking for the hunt—in fact, we're told that he "never let pass an opportunity of quenching an Indian" (134). Described as a "true patriot," Moredock is "admired

and loved” (134) by his community and is even invited to run as governor but declines because the responsibilities might interfere with his hunting expeditions. Instead, he becomes a folk hero.

Melville borrowed Moredock’s story from James Hall’s *Sketches of History, Life, and Manners, in the West*, but he made significant changes, removing “Hall’s references to the initial aggressions of the whites,” as Foster notes in her introduction to the Hendricks House edition (lxvii). In Melville’s version of Moredock’s story, the Indians appear to be the villains of the piece. But as Joyce Adler pointed out in 1972, Melville’s version is told by Charlie Noble, who claims to have heard Hall tell Moredock’s story so many times that he can relate it “almost word for word.” Since the omission of all the initial acts of white aggression originate with Hall but are repeated by Noble, Melville depicts both men as unconsciously racist. They perceive Moredock as a good person at heart, heroic, and engaged in an honorable activity, rather than as a man who has developed a taste for killing human beings. In their view, as Adler points out, “Indian killing by [Moredock] is the killing of a wild animal [while] the killing of whites by Indians is [looked upon as] fratricide” (428).

Since Melville’s text refers to Hall as the judge, a pillar of society, he represents what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the “signifying regime” (114-148)—the social apparatus that informs our ideas. But the judge’s “truth” is selective; he does not tell all of Moredock’s story, and as Adler points out, by naming Moredock’s action “vengeance [while] ignoring the real origins of the conflict,” Judge Hall allows his audience “to hide from the knowledge of what is being done in its name” (Adler 438).

When President Bush addressed the nation on September 11, 2001, he recalled “pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge structures collapsing,” and he added that they “have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger” [emphasis mine] (“Statement” par. 2). He did not, as Susan Sontag pointed out, suggest that “this was . . . an attack on the world’s self-proclaimed superpower, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and action” (Sontag 32). Like Judge Hall, whose omissions created a false history and aroused his listeners’ sympathy and admiration for Moredock, the President’s omission presented a false account of U.S. foreign policy, and within hours “[p]eople of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent . . . [had become] the targets of harassment and violence by civilians” (Goodstein and Niebuhr par. 1).

Similar omissions preceded the invasion of Iraq, supposedly to

find Saddam Hussein's mythical weapons of mass destruction. "Nuke 'em all," fearful Alabama students yelled as they rallied in support of the invasion, oblivious to the fact that the greatest weapon of mass destruction had been created and used (not just once) by the United States, or that the tragic deaths of almost three thousand people on 9/11 constituted only a tiny percentage of the 200,000 who were killed and injured in the equally swift attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Did these students not know that British and American planes had bombed Iraq on a regular basis throughout the ten years since the first Gulf War, or that the government had acknowledged half a million Iraqi children probably died as a result? Perhaps not, because the President mentioned none of this, and as U.S. Supreme Court justice Louis D. Brandeis once pointed out: "Our government is the potent, the omnipresent teacher. For good or ill, it teaches the whole people by its example" (1). And since the U.S. government, as Arundhati Roy points out, "displayed in no uncertain terms the range and extent of its capability for paranoid aggression" (12), it is hardly surprising that it found so much support.

The Confidence-Man describes John Moredock as representative of "the class to which he belonged" (124), which as Adler suggests means that Melville's "Indian-killer is *openly* what the civilization is *in disguise*" (Adler 440), but he "acts in far-off places so the rest of society can keep its hands clean" (426); thus: "[i]n accordance with the spirit of this whole masquerade, the judge, the society's spokesman, can then proceed to conceal, not the actions of the Indian killer but their nature—the original cause of Indian-killing" (441). In terms of the present war in Iraq, as James Carroll points out, the evasion of truth allows us to "cloak ourselves in cold indifference to the unnecessary suffering of others—even when we cause it. We don't look at any of this directly because the consequent guilt would violate our sense of ourselves as nice people" (Carroll 1). So the Iraqi dead are not counted and pass virtually unnoticed, while the infamous Abu Graib and Guantanamo Bay—where hundreds of prisoners, including boys aged between 13 and 15, have been denied "what most democracies consider a fundamental human right: a fair trial" (Mitchell)—are barely mentioned in the United States though they receive full press coverage abroad. As Melville noted in *Typee*: "These things are seldom proclaimed at home" (26).

The Confidence-Man marked the end of Melville's career as a writer; once it was finished, he fell into a deep depression, embarked on a lengthy sea trip, and returned to work as a customs inspector for the remainder of his life. The book offers no hope for change, for the status quo is maintained by representatives of the law, like the judge,

who regard Indians as savages, and savage Americans as heroes. And since the United States still regards itself as the city on the hill, destined to shine its beacon for the rest of the world to follow, how can it not regard itself as superior to the rest of the world's relative "savagery"?

"Indian-hating still exists," Melville warned through Charlie Noble in *The Confidence-Man*, "and no doubt will continue to exist, so long as Indians do" (124). Most of the North-American Indians were extirpated during Melville's time, but have we—like the Puritans, who saw themselves as God's people creating order in a satanic landscape—simply shifted our focus from the North American Indian to other brown-skinned people, using the dubious benefits of our electronic age to more rapidly disseminate misinformation and to incite fear? As the *Arab News* pointed out on the third anniversary of 9/11, "millions of people across the world who knew nothing about Islam before Sept 11 now wholly associate it with killing and hate, and fear and hate in return" ("Arab" 2).

Have we now entered phase two of Indian extirpation? Are we those passengers on Melville's *Fidèle*, "[m]asquerading as civilization, [but living] the law of the jungle" (Adler 440), revering those who kill on our behalf so that we can keep our hands clean? Are we still the society that forced Melville's despairing retreat to the Customs' House, ever moving in circles as we reenact a violent history that we still can't bring ourselves to acknowledge? *The Confidence-Man* closes with the hitherto ambiguous: "Something further may follow this Masquerade," but given the reality of our history and our present circumstances, the ambiguity disappears as more and more it seems likely that we are the sad fulfillment of Melville's eerily accurate prophecy.

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“INTO SOME DIRTY HOLE ALONE”¹: THE EARL OF ROCHESTER PERVERTS MILTON

Nancy Rosenfeld

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to *pervert*—in its earliest known appearance, dating from 1374—indicates “turning aside from the right course.” During the short lifetime of John Wilmot, second earl of Rochester (1647-80), the word was already in use as a noun, and commonly meant “one who has been perverted; one who has forsaken a doctrine or system regarded as true for one esteemed false; an apostate.”² Having been raised by his mother, Anne St. John, the pious³ daughter of a prominent Wiltshire Puritan family,⁴ Rochester would have been familiar with this meaning. Would

¹ From “A Ramble in St. James’s Parke,” p. 68, line 162. Citations of Rochester’s poems are from *The Poems of John Wilmot Earl of Rochester*, Keith Walker, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), unless otherwise indicated. Citations are by page and line number/s.

² The OED’s earliest reference to *pervert* as “one who suffers from a perversion of the sexual instinct” is from 1897.

³ In his discussion of the background of Rochester’s *Satyr Against Reason and Mankind* Dustin H. Griffin suggests that as a child Rochester had been “force-fed” on the writings of Puritan divine Richard Sibbes by his “pious Puritan mother, and carried with him a distasteful memory” of such writings (195). Yet according to Pinto, Rochester’s first tutor, Francis Giffard, “an enthusiastic loyalist,” had been hired by the boy’s mother after being ejected by the Puritans from a Wiltshire living (4). Lacking specific biographical information, it might be well to avoid overemphasizing Puritan leanings on the part of Anne St. John.

⁴ It is not known for sure whether Rochester ever met his father, since the latter was employed in various diplomatic missions on the Continent during his son’s boyhood. Scholars have discussed the possible effects of this lack of paternal contact from the stance of modern theories of child psychology. Pinto suggests possible effects of Henry Wilmot’s putative visit to his family at Ditchley, Oxfordshire, when John was eight years old: “It needs no strong effort of imagination to conceive the emotional disturbance that such an encounter would have produced in a sensitive, delicate child of eight. An historical novelist might give a moving picture of the only meeting of the

he have been amused by a claim that in his life and writings he may be said to respond to and pervert *Paradise Lost*, John Milton's great didactic project?

Readers of Rochester's poetry are often offended to the point of anger by explicit references to human excreta, menstrual blood, seminal fluid, as well as to the processes which produce these materials. This is often the case even for the twenty-first-century reader, who is expected to be inured to the explicit depiction of bodily sights, sounds and smells. "But still, but still" —in the words of R.T. Jones— "there is a kind of gratuitous indecency that contributes nothing to truth, and involves the reader, by the very act of reading and by the honest attempt to follow the argument in good faith, in a transient complicity that leaves him soiled and resentful" (444); and Simon Dentith finds paradoxical the almost stubborn refusal of readers to allow themselves to be shocked by Rochester's frank obscenity (97). It is only fair, however, to recall that Rochester, who unlike his elder contemporary John Milton did not claim to have a didactic purpose in his writings, would have assumed a severely limited readership for his erotic and scatological verse. Yet Rochester's decision to deny his verse public exposure may be seen not merely as "face saving," or if one may be allowed to use the more explicit term (which Rochester would surely have appreciated), "ass covering," but as a perversion of Milton's engagement with the dominant sense pertaining to the didactic endeavour: hearing and its converse—speaking.

This essay is an examination of Rochester as pervert. His frank bisexuality, his sexual promiscuity, his open depiction of the sights and smells of the human body's secretions and excretions, may be said to respond to and pervert *Paradise Lost*, Milton's great narrative-didactic project, in which various characters—Satan, Adam, Eve, Raphael, Michael—narrate and listen to the story of humankind's downfall and future redemption. Despite the ease with which John Wilmot, an Oxford undergraduate at the time of Charles II's assumption of the throne, adopted the cultural patterns of the Restoration period, the Interregnum and Puritan culture to which *Paradise Lost* may be said to pertain must have left their mark on such a liminal personality as Rochester.

fat, jovial cavalier in disguise with the bright-eyed, intelligent little boy who was to inherit the title" (3) a mere three years later. David M. Vieth claims that "John Wilmot's relationship with a father he saw rarely, if ever, may partly explain his later distrust of father-figures like Charles II, whose true greatness as king he seems not to have understood" (xix).

As Marianne Thormahlen suggests, Rochester was familiar with *Paradise Lost* (81);⁵ and Dustin H. Griffin also believes that the poet had read *Paradise Lost* (215). Indeed, in a letter to Rochester his close friend Henry Savile writes of his own “venereall pains,” which forced him to subsist on “dry mutton & dyett drinke” (June 2, 1678; 201). During this period Rochester was himself lying ill at his country home in Adderbury. The two friends, to whom we might apply Raphael’s description of the rebel host—“Purest at first, now gross by sinning grown” (6.661)—commiserate with each other by post as to the rigors of the then-current treatment for venereal disease, which involved the ingesting of mercury. After joking about the “chains of quicksilver” and the “loathsome banks of a dead lake of diet-drink,” Rochester suggests that Savile “should break the horrid silence and speak” (July 1678; 202). The latter, needless to say, recalls the opening scene of *Paradise Lost*, in which Satan and his associates lie in “adamantine chains” (1.48), “vanquished, rolling in the fiery gulf” (1.52), until Satan breaks the “horrid silence” (1.83) and addresses his nearest mate Beelzebub.

For Rochester anger was a primal emotion, and the primary device for the expression of anger was open depiction of the human body and its various products. Given the methods by which his work was circulated, the poet must have known that he had only limited control over the constitution of his readership. At the same time, he would have expected his writings to reach a small, perhaps even chosen body of readers. Vis-à-vis his readership Rochester might have willingly pleaded guilty to a charge of perverting the doctrine of predestination by his own “election” of his destined readers. It might not, therefore, be perverse to suggest that this selection of readers constituted his revision of Milton’s “fit audience though few.”

As only, orphaned son of a prominent supporter of Charles II, John Wilmot rejoiced at the restoration of the monarchy while interrogating the court hierarchy to which he belonged in his *oeuvre* as a whole. In his *Satyr against Reason and Mankind*, *Tunbridge Wells* and *A Ramble in St. James’s Park*, in the Speaker of his poems, in his own life, and in the Restoration rake character as embodied on the stage in *Dorimant*,⁶ Rochester may be seen as a perversion of the

⁵ Thormahlen also notes that Rochester was apparently familiar with Dryden’s *The State of Innocence and the Fall of Man*, a rhymed operatic play based on *Paradise Lost*. The latter was not staged, but hundreds of printed copies were circulated during 1675-6 (318).

⁶ See Nancy Rosenfeld, “*The Man of Mode: The Mode of Man*,” *Mc Neese Review*, 2004, 20-40.

creation of the greatest poet of the period. Scholars, however, would do well to beware of committing themselves to overly-rigid definitions of historical periods, and as Harold Love has warned, this is especially true for the seventeenth century:

Those Renaissance specialists who concern themselves with Caroline authors further define themselves as studying the end of a process of development which reached its highest point with Shakespeare, while Restoration scholars see themselves as occupied with the beginning of a process which is to reach fruition in Pope and the eighteenth-century novelists. [...] Differences in interest and professional approach become hypostatized into a belief that there was a sharp and decisive break in the development of English culture in 1660—a year which, in actuality, saw a massive attempt to obliterate all political change that had taken place since 1641. (8)

The earliest poem ascribed with any degree of certainty to Rochester is “Virtue’s triumphant shrine!”; the latter first appeared in a volume of poetry published at Oxford on May 29, 1660 in honor of Charles II’s return to the throne. The final lines of this offering remind Charles that the writer is the son of one who had died while in the king’s service:

Great Sir, approve
My manly wishes, and more vigorous love;
In whom a cold respect were treason to
A Father’s ashes, greater than to you;
Whose one ambition ’tis for to be known
By daring Loyalty Your WILMOT’s Son. (3;13-18)

Although John Wilmot came of age after Charles II’s return to the throne, he can usefully be viewed as a liminal figure, both spanning and blurring the border between the Civil War and Restoration periods. Indeed, Ronald Paulson has termed Rochester “the difficult transitional figure, in some ways the father of the Augustan mode of satire, in others still an Elizabethan in the tradition of the melancholy satyr-satirist of Jonson and Marston” (104). Perhaps viewing his life and work as a perversion of the great epic of the interim period can fulfill the scholar’s need for creating order out of confusion.

Since the onset of the early modern period in the West, as noted by Stephen J. Greenblatt:

the archetypal rules, the earliest and most systematic to which the child is exposed and in which he is trained, are those governing the definition and control of wastes. The behavior manuals of the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries return again and again to codes elaborated for the management of the body’s products: urine, feces, mucus, saliva, and wind. Proper control of each of these products, along with the acquisition of the prevailing table manners and modes of speech, mark the entrance into civility, an entrance that distinguishes not only

the child from the adult, but the members of a privileged group from the vulgar, the upper classes from the lower, the courtly from the rustic, the civilized from the savage. (60-1)

An examination of Rochester's use of imagery based on the bodily processes of reproduction and digestion, and the anger expressed by the poet and fostered in his readers by such use, can shed light on a hidden fear of writing, a sense that the narrative endeavour itself is suspect, that it may contain elements of the satanic which can also be found in the Miltonic narrator's invocations of his muse in books 1, 3, 7 and 9 of *Paradise Lost*.

Milton had, of course, a stated didactic aim in writing his great epics, and despite his disclaimer—“still govern thou my song,/ Urania, and fit audience find, tho' few” (*Paradise Lost* 7.30-1)⁷—surely hoped that his works would be widely circulated and discussed. Yet the very act of speaking could lead the speaker, willy-nilly, into evil ways. William Kolbrener describes the “slippery slope”:

Just as Milton argues for the sufficiency *and* insufficiency of reason in *Areopagitica*; just as he simultaneously articulates providentialist *and* republican discourses in *The Readie and Easie Way*; so Milton in *De Doctrina* [. . .] simultaneously advocates the God of Will *and* Reason. This strategy permits the positing of a God who is at once present and absent to his creation, at once constrained and beyond constraint. [...] The coincident monism and dualism of Miltonic cosmology will therefore have specific consequences for theodicy: just as God is simultaneously present and absent to his creation, so 'God's ways' are simultaneously implicit within, though always in part inaccessible to, the language of poetry—even the inspired poetry of *Paradise Lost*. (137)

Milton's theodicy, in other words, may only be fit for distribution to a limited audience precisely because couched in the language of poetry.

Rochester, on the other hand, partook of a distribution culture predictive of postmodern methods of transmission, i.e. those currently developing via the Internet. The latter technology may be said to pervert previous conventions: publication is possible without the intermediary, the “jury” of editors and publishers who choose works worthy of being distributed, while culling out the supposedly unworthy. Simultaneously, the published text itself is not permanent: unlike a printed text, which can only be changed when a new edition is issued, reader and author alike can make changes in the original text at will. Paul Hammond has called attention to the scholar's difficulties

⁷ Citations of Milton's epic are to *Paradise Lost*, Alastair Fowler, ed. (London: Longman, 1991). Citations are by book and line number/s.

in definitive attribution of authorship resulting from seventeenth-century manuscript transmission of poems and other writings.⁸ Such transmission, whether necessitated by subversive political content or explicit sexuality, also had serious ramifications for the reception and interpretation of the text: “In this network of poems which pass from hand to hand in the coffee houses,” as Hammond notes, “there is a loss of authorially-sanctioned meaning, which is replaced by a network of meanings generated by readers and scribes: hence multiple political significations became possible, and yet every interpretation is elusive, deniable” (41). According to Rochester editor Keith Walker, the poet himself apparently authorized the publication of only three poems (from among his *juvenilia*); he usually distributed his work by giving copies to friends (xii, xvi). Rochester could not have known that after his death his poems, and many which he did not write but which were attributed to him in an attempt to cash in on the cachet of his name, would be published and circulated, often in pirated texts and inexactly-rendered copies.

John Milton devoted precious years to the antimonarchical cause; his questioning of the legitimacy of the monarch was general, related more to faults in the system rather than in the man. Although Rochester is not commonly categorized as a “political poet,” he composed a number of verses which bitterly lampoon the monarch. His attacks on Charles II, his beloved patron, were aimed at the king’s personal faults, and may thus be seen as a perversion of Milton’s broader anti-monarchy stance. The publication of such attacks as *Dialogue* (“When to the King I bid good Morrow”); *Impromptu on Charles II* (“God bless our good and gracious King”); *A Satyr on Charles II* (“I th’ Isle of Britaine long since famous growne”) would not have been acceptable to any political regime which had censorship in its power. So explosively bitter is the *Satyr on Charles II* that Rochester prudently fled from court after he had inadvertently allowed a copy of it to reach the king.⁹ In a sarcastic comparison of the warlike Louis XIV of France and the peace-loving Charles II, the latter stands accused of formulat-

⁸ David M. Vieth’s *Attribution in Restoration Poetry: A Study of Rochester’s Poems of 1680* details the grave difficulties involved in constructing a reliable Rochester canon.

⁹ See Vieth’s note in his edition of the *Complete Poems* for details of this affair (60). Given the shameless exuberance of the poem’s depictions of the royal member, which is both “the swaucyest,” the “proudest, peremptoriest Prick alive” (74; 18,19) and simultaneously the “dull, graceless Ballocks” (74; 27) of a man of declining years, the king’s willingness to forgive Rochester for writing this lampoon indicates a high degree of affection for his young protégé.

ing his policy of peace, desirable in itself, according to the dictates of his paramours: “His Scepter and his Prick are of a Length,/ And she may sway the one who plays with th’other” (74;11-12). His Majesty restlessly “roalles about from Whore to Whore/ A merry Monarch, scandalous and poor” (74;14-15). Should “merry” seem to indicate a lusty, potent ruler, however, the poem’s third stanza bemoans the “Paynes itt Cost the poor, laborious Nelly [Nell Gywn, the king’s mistress],/ Whilst shee imployes, hands, fingers, mouth, and thighs/ E’re she can raise the Member she enjoys” (74-75; 29-31).

The mouth, as Rochester suggests in the above, or more specifically the tongue, is an organ of sexual stimulation. It is also a primary organ of speech, whose use in speaking may be evil: His Majesty may be led to make important political decisions by the tongue of a woman. The very act of speaking, in other words, may itself be evil. As a peer and member of the House of Lords, Rochester had the opportunity to be involved in the politics of the time; and he seems, according to Vivian de Sola Pinto, to have been fairly regular in his attendance at the House during extended periods of residence in London (165). In his discussion of Rochester’s *Very Heroicall Epistle in Answer to Ephelia*, Duane Coltharp suggests that the poem’s exotic images of an Oriental court “register some of the pressing anxieties of seventeenth-century constitutional debate: anxieties concerning the power of tyrants, despots, or absolute monarchs to violate subjects’ rights and to dominate their very bodies” (36); yet Rochester’s criticism remains aimed at the individual king. The “happy sultan” of the poem reigns “Secure in Solid Sloth” and feels “the joys of Love, without the paine” (113; 41-42). This and more:

Noe lowd reproach, nor fond unwelcome sound
Of Womens Tongues, thy sacred Eare dares wound;
If any doe, a nimble Mute strait tyes,
The True-Love-Knot, and stops her foolish cryes. (114; 49-52)

Unlike the English king who allows himself to be henpecked by his outspoken mistresses, the Oriental monarch employs tongueless servants to silence the tongues of the women, of those whose reproaches might be unwelcome. Death is accomplished by strangulation; the image of the silenced tongue lolling outside the mouth is evoked. According to Coltharp: “Conveying a hyperbolic, parodic image of the absolute monarch, Rochester thus satirizes the absolute self: the self that would expunge the world of all its pain, struggle, and otherness, that would deny its own positionality within the dense networks of bodies and wills that Rochester’s poetry so often acknowledges” (37).

As Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clement aver, “the desire to see—but ultimately all desire—is the sign, the first sign, of the devil” (10). When speaking and writing openly of the human body without recourse to euphemism, the artist enables the reader to see what should be hidden, to envision the organs of reproduction of the species (male and female genital organs; women’s breasts) or maintenance of the individual body (organs of ingestion, digestion and excretion). William Kerrigan argues that “There is no work of art in our language, perhaps not in any language, that creates a more ample mythology of the mouth [as does *Paradise Lost*] —the Satanic mouth that first whispers rebellion in the ear of Beelzebub, the mouth of the serpent entered by Satan and inspired with speech, the mouth of the Muse who brings the poem nightly to Milton’s ear, the mouth of the poet-singer, the mouths that take both spiritual matter and forbidden fruit into the human body” (118). Although the tongue is used in speaking and tasting as well as in sexual stimulation, it is not surprising that its sexual function has accumulated a plethora of euphemisms. Indeed, a legion of euphemisms and taboos adhere to discussion and depiction of those parts of the human body used in the sex act and in digestion. The Puritans, U. Milo Kaufmann notes, gave high priority to the sense of hearing (233), and by extension to the spoken word/ Word itself: “[I]mages deriving from an aural approach to a ‘speaking’ Word can function to gird narrative with the imperious authority of revelation. [...] Revelation in word rather than spectacle or event enjoyed the determinacy and rationality as well as the intimacy of personal address so desired by the Puritan” (240, 249). Yet a clear line had to be drawn between the validity of the act of listening and that of speaking. Every believer could hear, but not all were empowered to speak.

Milton was aware of possible dangers inherent in the narrative act, and his late start as a writer of epic may be the result not only of his preoccupation with political activity during the 1650s, but of a sense that the narrative endeavour itself contains the potential for evil. The Invocations at the beginning of books 1, 3, 7 and 9 of *Paradise Lost*, in which the poet appeals for help, not to his God, but rather to a “celestial patroness” (9.21), have as their source the epic convention; but they can also be understood as Milton’s engagement with the frightening possibility that the desire to speak and write comes from an evil source. Should this be the case, an appeal to a female guide rather than the male-gendered Deity may be less blasphemous.

In her discussion of the Invocations, Anne Davidson Ferry explicates the Miltonic narrator’s use of birds, which both sing and fly, as metaphor for a human narrator who tells/ sings of his striving for redemption while at the same time sensing his fallen state:

Because a bird is a creature—mortal and limited—and because its song can have moral meaning only if that meaning is endowed from a source outside itself, the bird can be a metaphor, (a part as we shall see of an elaborate pattern of metaphors) for the speaker as fallen man, whose song must be inspired by the “heav’nly Muse.” (25)

The bird’s flight—its ability to aim for the heavens while of necessity returning to earth—, also figures the human’s journey between heaven and earth. In the Invocation to book 1 the narrator appeals to the muse who “from the first/ Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread/ Dove-like sat’st brooding on the vast abyss/ And madest it pregnant” (1.19-22). The muse who is to be the source of the poet’s enlightenment, thus enabling him to “justify the ways of God to men,” apparently hails from the primeval ooze, from the chaos which preceded the creation of an orderly universe. This muse is envisioned as a dove, a quiet bird not known for the beauties of its song. In Milton’s rendition it is also androgynous, both male and female, impregnating and nesting; it has laid its eggs and is now brooding on primordial material, in an explicit image of reproductive processes with which Rochester would have been comfortable.

Bird imagery is repeated in the Invocation at the beginning of book 3; the narrator again recalls that the muse, this time addressed as “holy Light,” had existed during the pre-creation chaos: “Before the sun,/ Before the heavens thou wert, and at the voice/ Of God, as with a mantle didst invest/ The rising world of waters dark and deep” (3.8-11). This time the muse is not a dove, but rather a song-bird, “the wakeful bird” in its nest which “Sings darkling, and in shadiest covert hid/ Tunes her nocturnal note” (3.38-40). The act of narration again finds its inspiration in a dark, hidden, even chaotic stage of existence which predates heavenly attempts at imposition of order. Lucifer, son of the morning, bearer of light, had previously heard the voice of God and then descended to a dark, chaotic underworld where he created a city. On hearing the voice of God, the muse— “holy Light” —also descended to the dark chaos in order to take part in the process of creation.

The Miltonic narrator’s endeavour, however, bears satanic potential: the poet’s journey to heaven can end in a fall into error; he may fall victim to loss, to confusion which he has brought upon himself by presuming to leave his earthly nest and venture uninvited up to heaven. Rochester, too, recalls the fragility of man’s place in “Sab: Lost”:

Shee yeilds, she yeilds, Pale Envy said Amen
The first of woemen to the Last of men.
Just soe those frailer beings Angells fell

Ther's noe mid way (it seemes) twix't heav'n and hell,
Was it your end in making her, to show
Things must bee rais'd soe high to fall soe low? (26; 1-6)

For Rochester women are, perhaps ironically, stronger than angels; yet both angels and women will ultimately fall. If, as Rochester claims, there is no midway between heaven and hell, where is the place of the human? Milton accepted the biblical narrative, according to which the earth was created to provide a home for humans, in which the latter and their non-human animal companions would exist in symbiosis. Rochester, however, appears to deny the existence of this home with a cavalier wave of his pen.

In his explication of the Invocations of *Paradise Lost* Noam Flinker has shown how the “mythic allusions to the four blind ancients [Thamyris, Maeonides, Tiresias and Phineus: 3.35-36] help to establish a psychological struggle within the narrator that is best understood as the wise shaping of the unconscious or *Fansie* by his artistic ‘reason’ which recognizes the importance of sexuality and wishes to govern or mold this ‘Wild work’ (5.112) into an acceptable artistic experience” (96). In the person of the Speaker of his poems, on the other hand, Rochester may be said to reveal what should be hidden, to give voice to sexuality, without wishing to replicate the Miltonic narrator’s experiment whose aim was, in Flinker’s words, “lay[ing] bare the traditional mythic sources that link sexuality and poetic endeavour to recreate the sublimative process for the narrator” (97).

The Rochesterian narrator refrains from sublimating, and in so doing may cast doubt on the *bona fides* of the Miltonic narrator’s plea to his muse for aid in carrying forward what he hopes will be a successful sublimative artistic experience. Rochester’s Speaker did not find it necessary to govern or mold the raw material, the “wild work” of his sexuality, into an acceptable artistic experience since, according to Geoffrey Hughes, Rochester was not subject to the same sociolinguistic constraints as was Milton. In his social history of what is termed “offensive language” Hughes argues that language such as that employed in *A Ramble in St. James’s Parke* could not have been used in public during the lifetime of Shakespeare, nor, for that matter, between 1700 and 1900: “Rochester’s is a world seen from crotch level, a world stripped of pretence to leave the sole dominating force that of frantic sexual energy.” This frantic sexual energy, moreover, is the energy, not so much of a human as of an animal. In referring to one of the female denizens of St. James’s Park as a “prowd Bitch” who leads about the “Amorous Rout” of “humble Currs” (83-84) (terms recalling Milton’s “savage clamour” of the “wild rout” [7.32-37]) the poet gives vent to “contemptuous animal insult” (140).

In its vibrant orality, Milton's political prose is a rich source of Hughes's "contemptuous animal insult," whether *animal* refers to the nonhuman creature or to the human body in all its physicality. Insult is arguably the clearest, most direct verbal expression of anger, and Milton's political writings contain, in the words of John K. Hale, "voluminous insults," which "cover the entire range of mudslinging." Such anger would be even clearer to current "humanist readers," according to Hale, if they were in the habit of reading aloud: Milton was apparently known for his "fierce" pronunciation of the letter R, generally known to Elizabethans as "the growling letter"; and Hale cites Milton's *First Defense* in the original Latin as a text in which "the sound of his insults did more for his argument than we can recover except in principle" (167-168). Hale's discussion of the orality of Milton's political prose is highly significant. It indicates a blurring of boundaries between poetry and non-fiction prose: in Milton's day much prose was read aloud as a matter of routine, as of course was poetry. Hale's argument also hints at the extent to which a written insult is envisioned as an oral communique; the reader imagines the speaker standing face-to-face with an enemy, even if he is in fact seated at his desk writing to an opponent who is far away. Milton's insults, Hale notes, "are well described as what the Greeks called *parrhasia*, meaning simultaneously 'loose [public] talk' and 'free speech'" (159).

The insults to which Hale refers have their source in ancient traditions of insulting, dating back to the rites of Demeter at Eleusis, and given voice by the "denunciative force" of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible:

For the humanist, the power and joy of insulting, as of everything which a poet could express with force, lay in saying universal and everyday things with a finesse derived straight from antiquity. [...] While insult is virtually universal, therefore, particular forms in the early modern period might have influenced Milton, whether directly or environmentally. They include flyting, defamation actions, philippics, licensed fooling, and the London drama. (161, 162-163)

It is thus not coincidental that in *Areopagitica*, that great plea for a more open, and therefore rational system of press censorship,¹⁰ Milton employs violent sexual and digestive imagery in his attack on the censorship systems of the Roman Catholic Church:

¹⁰ *Christian Doctrine* editor Norman T. Burns calls attention to the many points in that text wherein Milton "gives broad latitude for hate," making it clear that "hatred and vengeance have a role in the moral life of a Christian" (n.p.), thus legitimizing open expression of anger in published material.

the Councill of Trent and the Spanish Inquisition, engendering together, brought forth, or perfered those Catalogues, and expurging Indexes that rake through the entralls of many an old good Author, with a violation wors than any could be offer'd to his tomb. [...] [T]heir last invention was to ordain that no Book, pamphlet or paper should be Printed (as if S. Peter had bequeath'd them the keys of the Presse also out of Paradise) unlesse it were approv'd and licenc't under the hands of 2 or 3 glutton friers. (2:502-503)

Digestive and sexual images are violently intermixed. The Council and Inquisition “engender together” and bring forth, but then are guilty of “violation,” of disembowelling the author as they “rake through his entrails”; such evil is perpetrated by “gluttons.” This and more; the “most Antichristian Council, and the most tyrannous Inquisition that ever inquir'd,” had, according to Milton, instituted a new, vicious form of censorship, figured as infanticide: “Till then Books were ever as freely admitted into the World as any other birth; the issue of the brain was no more stiff'd then the issue of the womb” (2: 505).

Current usage tends to muddle the boundaries between cursing, insulting and using language which many find offensive. English-speaking children often refer to the proverbial four-letter words as “curse-words,” and may not at first be aware of the earlier, and still extant meaning of *curse*: to invoke or wish evil upon. Then too, young children often do not understand the connection between words or expressions referring to body parts and bodily processes, and anger. The common denominator of cursing, insulting and using language which one assumes will make others uncomfortable is, of course, the expression of hostility, of anger. In his overview of traditions of insulting and their function as a channel for verbal, rather than physical expression of aggression, Hale differentiates insulting from cursing. The latter, Hale avers, “arises from deadly serious intent, whereas insulting is more peaceable, an aggression-channeling and harm-averting obverse of cursing” (161). Yet it could be argued that in Milton’s assault on the Church of Rome’s censorship mechanisms we find a muddling of strict boundaries between the two in order to express the anger which engenders both.

In *Rabelais and His World* Mikhail Bakhtin exposes the connection between explicit discussion of bodily processes and imagery based on the human body on the one hand, and abusive language—language intended to express anger—on the other hand. Images of the “material bodily principle,” in Bakhtin’s words, are central to what he terms “the concept of grotesque realism” (18):

[T]he body and bodily life have here a cosmic and at the same time an all-people’s character; this is not the body and its physiology in the modern sense of these words, because it is not individualized. The

material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. This is why all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable. (19)

Bakhtin suggests, however, that the “essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (19-20). Bakhtin’s use of *degradation* is neutral; it does not herein bear the term’s current sense of dishonor or disgrace. Yet while the grotesque concept of the body does form “the basis of abuses, oaths, and curses” (27), it is of vital importance to add that:

Modern indecent abuse and cursing have retained dead and purely negative remnants of the grotesque concept of the body. Our “three-storied” oaths [Russian for *strong, coarse abuse*, as noted by the translator] or other unprintable expressions degrade the object according to the grotesque method; they send it down to the absolute bodily lower stratum, to the zone of the genital organs, the bodily grave, in order to be destroyed. (28)

The angry obscenity for which Rochester’s poems are noted, and which generations of readers and scholars have found both disturbing and amusing,¹¹ can, according to Ronald Paulson, usefully be viewed as the point of conflation of political and social satire, the wish to show the “real hollowness, human weakness, and corruption beneath the rich and respectable, supposedly divine, facade of the court,” (105) and the poet’s need to critique his own role within the court milieu. At the same time, Paulson suggests, Rochester’s uncompromising outing of the often unpleasant sights, smells and tastes of the human body may be taken as part of a general rethinking of values in which he was engaged:

¹¹ In what seems like an apology for the discomfort occasioned readers by Rochester’s lexicon, Samuel J. Rogal contends that in *A Ramble in Saint James’s Parke*, for example, “Rochester had no designs for drowning his reader in a sea of vituperation; he required only the quantity and frequency of baseness necessary to reflect his own despair and distaste, while openly lamenting the fact that his society—as well as he himself, as an active member of that society—saw fit to revel in the animal state to which it had sunk.” Of the 21,423 words found in Vieth’s edition of Rochester’s poems, “offensive language” comprises a mere 0.3 percent of the total: “vulgarisms” (specifically: *cunt, fart, frig, fuck, God damn, pissing, prick, shit, swive* and *turds*) are only found in nineteen of the seventy-five poems which Vieth confidently assigns to Rochester’s *oeuvre*; in other words, approximately 75 percent of the pieces actually assigned to the Earl of Rochester “may be declared essentially free from offensive language” (34-35).

The obscenity, for a start, was a facet of the low burlesque or travesty mode; the shock has the satiric function of awakening the reader and, by laying bare in the most vivid way his animal origins, making him reassess customary humanist values. Reacting politically and emotionally against the repressive years of the Commonwealth, many Englishmen—but most of all the Cavaliers—encouraged an attitude that was bent on exposing old pious frauds and treating grave subjects like life or love with disrespect. (105)

Such a reappraisal, however, may lead to conclusions for which one is not prepared. For Rochester, as Paulson avers, love originally became obscene and life scatological “in order to expose certain simpleminded illusions (or hypocrisies),” but then his own experience in life seemed to prove that “love and life are no more than obscene and scatological, that perhaps this is all there is” (106). If, moreover, “that is all there is” in love and life, “that may be all there is” in art as well.

Although Milton’s Adam spends much of his time in Eden listening to Raphael’s and then Michael’s narratives, in book 8 the First Father himself tells the story of his own early consciousness, both of himself and of his Edenic surroundings, and then recalls discussing his loneliness with God. Adam’s first reason for requesting a partner, or in today’s terms a lover, is that he lacks an equal, someone with whom he can converse:

of fellowship I speak
Such as I seek, fit to participate
All rational delight, wherein the brute
Cannot be human consort; they rejoice
Each with their kind, lion with lioness;
So fitly them in pairs thou hast combined;
Much less can bird with beast, or fish with fowl
So well converse, nor the ox with the ape;
Worse then can man with beast, and least of all. (8.389-397)

Adam imagines love as fellowship, as a relationship between equals. The repeated use of *fit/ fitly* here is salient: true companionship can only be with another of one’s kind.

In the painting *Rochester and his Monkey*, in which the poet is shown face-to-face with what is presumed to be a pet monkey,¹² the painter, as Paulson points out, has captured a sense of reciprocity, perhaps even of equality, between the species. Rochester offers the ape a bay-tree branch while “the ape (emblematic of imitation) offers

¹² *Rochester and his Monkey* (c. 1675) is exhibited in the National Portrait Gallery in London. Its provenance is not certain, although both Pinto and Treglown note that it is attributed to Jacob Huysmans (173; *Rochester’s Letters* Fig. 2).

the poet a page he has torn out of a book; he is aping the poet, sitting on a pile of books with another book in his hand, a finger marking the place where he has stopped reading or has torn out pages. Rochester himself, however, is holding in his other hand a number of manuscript pages, aping the ape" (116). This reciprocity may be said to interrogate, or even parody, Milton's claim that the brute cannot be human consort. The figure of the leaf can be carried forward: man and monkey both, by proffering to the other a leaf (whether of bay or paper), are sharing a coverup—a mask—for nakedness.

For Bakhtin the mask is "the most complex theme of folk culture. The mask is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation, with gay relativity and with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it rejects conformity to oneself" (39-40). In a reversal of what would be the expected order, i.e. that masks are fixed representations of various facial expressions, Bakhtin suggests that "such manifestations as parodies, caricatures, grimaces, eccentric postures, and comic gestures per se derived from the mask" (40). Yet masks also serve to hide the face, to muddle the identity of the wearer, both in his own eyes and in the eyes of others, and were used for the latter purpose in the cultural milieu to which Rochester belonged. The leaves which Rochester and his monkey are caught in the act of exchanging may indicate the need to cover up that which is too ridiculous, perhaps too discomfiting, too intimate to be shown.

If the narrative endeavour opens up possibilities of evil, the act of seeing, of observing, which must precede the narration may also be tainted. As Flinker has pointed out, for Milton: "Night and light are not opposites but rather different aspects of God's creation. It is fallen experience that introduces dualism into the universe and much of the justification of the 'wayes of God to men' (1.26) is a vision of the potential unity in the cosmos despite the divided nature of post-lapsarian reality" (96). At the same time, "[t]he route from blindness to heavenly or 'Celestial light' is traversed by the narrator with the guidance of Urania" (95), and in this sense the muse becomes a liminal figure, at once marking and blurring the border between fallen and unfallen nature.

As R.T. Jones notes vis-à-vis Rochester, the observer of the human body in all its possible ugliness may feel himself soiled by the very act of observing what had best be hidden (444). Yet Allen Dunn contends that there is a "sublime effect" in the spectacle of power combined with vulnerability, as presented, for example, in figures of the criminal hanged or tortured, Milton's Satan cast down from heaven, or the suffering Job: "The mangled bodies of Job, Satan, and the

hanged man [...] contain elements of grotesquerie and repulsiveness, and, like the bodies anatomized by the satirists, they dramatize the absolute distance that separates human reality from human aspiration"; these spectacular bodies are immanent in the diseased bodies of the "fops, whores and hacks" depicted by Rochester (102). These bodies pose the question: "Is this all there is?"

During the Restoration men as well as women employed masks to hide their identity, commonly wore wigs, and used cosmetics. Such means of hiding one's unadorned appearance bore more than a whiff of the satanic when employed by women, since the latter were presumed to aim at entrapping men by upgrading their appearance with the assistance of perfumes, cosmetics, wigs, corsets and other so-called beauty aids. However, simply looking at the undisguised, undressed body might have been seen as evil. In an anonymous comment at the end of a private collection of seventeenth-century verse and prose (in the handwriting of Sir William Haward [d. c. 1690], a knight from Surrey who had served as a gentleman of the privy chamber to Charles I), we are told that Haward's manuscript is "Of an exceedingly lewd and scurrilous nature." *The Looking-Glasse*, one of the verses in the collection, is couched in the form of a man gazing at and describing his newly-awakened lover. It begins:

Mee-thinkes I see you newly risen
From your Embroyder'd Bed, & pissing,
With studyed meene, & much Grimace,
Present your selfe before your Glasse,
To varnish, & rubb o're those Graces,
You rubb'd off in your nights Embraces;
To sett your hayre, your Eyes, your Teeth,
And all the powers you conquer with,
Lay frames of Love, & State Intrigues,
In powders, Trimmings, Curles, & wiggs. (1-10)

The woman's conventional use of "powers to conquer" and of "state Intrigues" is reminiscent, of course, of Rochester's *Satyr on Charles II*, in which the king's paramour is said to exercise power over the monarch's policy-making by means of her sexual favors. The observer/ poet of *The Looking-Glasse* does not, however, ponder and portray the previous night's activities, during which the woman was probably undressed, but rather her morning routine. The observer details his lady's toilet-toilette with mock seriousness, reflecting the seriousness with which she is simultaneously observing herself in the glass. He recalls that at night the woman lay down upon an embroidered bed, having previously varnished and and rubbed her own body, as if she, too, was merely a piece of furniture, an adjunct of the bed. There is, moreover, another piece of furniture involved,

or even invoked: the looking glass which gives the work its title. The observer is presumed to be lying in bed, observing the woman gazing at herself in the looking glass; perhaps he even sees the woman in the glass. The glass, not transparent but covered on one side by a layer of silver, serves as an extra layer of mediation between the “newly risen” sun (cf. Milton’s holy Light) and the man; it is, after all, unwise to look at the sun directly, as Milton knew. Looking and describing, that is, narrating what one has seen, can be threatening.

Rochester was a sharp observer, both of human behavior and the often hidden, apparently insignificant actions which reveal the motives behind behavior, and he reproduced this behavior in his poetry. In *A Ramble in St. James’s Parke*, for example, the narrator credibly depicts the “*Whitehall Blade*” who “had heard *Sir Edward Sutton/ Say how the King lov’d Banstead Mutton;/ Since when hee’d nere be brought to eat/ By’s good will any other meat*” (65;49-52). And the “*Grays Inn witt*” is believable as “*A great Inhabiter of the Pitt/ Where Crittick-like he sits and squints/ Steales Pockett Handkerchers and hints/ From’s Neighbour, and the Comedy/ To Court and pay his Landlady*” (65;64-68). As Norbert Elias has argued, such powers of observation were an important aid to survival in the court milieu; the art of observing was not an amusing intellectual exercise, but was rather necessitated by the importance of understanding the character, motives, abilities and limitations both of one’s peers and of those above one in the hierarchy:

This courtly art of human observation is all the closer to reality because it never attempts to consider the individual person in isolation, as a being deriving his essential regularities and characteristics from within. Rather, the individual is always observed in court society in his social context, as *a person in relation to others*. [...] But the art of human observation is applied not only to others but to the observer himself. A specific form of *self-observation* develops. [...] Accompanying the act of observing people is that of *describing* them. (104-105)

The Miltonic narrator of *Paradise Lost* employs angelic narrators as a means of avoiding engagement with those satanic overtones which adhere to the narrative endeavour. As Murray Roston suggests, Milton “maintained that the poet or orator must first be worthy in himself, inspiring confidence in his sincerity, as well as offering a moral message. The image created by the speaker is thus an essential part of the whole” (137). For a being who is unfallen, the source of inspiration would not be a muse, but God himself; and an unfallen speaker like Raphael does not torture himself with questioning the validity of his mandate to speak. When besought by Adam to tell him about the creation, Raphael stipulates that, although he had witnessed the war

in heaven, he will reveal only as much as the divine censor permits: “such commission from above/ I have received, to answer thy desire/ Of knowledge within bounds; beyond abstain/ To ask” (7.118-121). Raphael then warns Adam against seeking forbidden knowledge:

But knowledge is as food, and needs no less
Her temperance over appetite, to know
In measure what the mind may well contain,
Oppresses else with surfeit, and soon turns
Wisdom to folly, as nourishment to wind. (7.126-130)

It is not coincidental, of course, that *appetite* is used both in its abstract sense, that is, to indicate a strong wish or urge, but also concretely in reference to its function as part of the process of ingestion/ digestion. Northrop Frye calls attention to the significance of Milton’s dual usage of this concept:

In the soul of man, as God originally created it, there is a hierarchy. This hierarchy has three main levels: the reason, which is in control of the soul; the will, the agent carrying out the decrees of the reason, and the appetite. [...] Of the appetites two are of central importance: the appetite for food and the sexual appetite. Both of these are part of the divine creation, and are therefore good. Even so, it is curious how emphatic Milton is about food as an element of both paradisaical and heavenly life. [...] Few can have read *Paradise Lost* without being struck by the curiously domesticated nature of the life of Adam and Eve in Eden before the fall. Adam and Eve are suburbanites in the nude, and like other suburbanites they are preoccupied with gardening, with their own sexual relations, and with the details of their rudimentary housekeeping.¹³ (60-61, 65-66)

In warning that a surfeit of knowledge turns wisdom to folly in much the same way as overeating turns gustatory pleasure into gas pains, Raphael defines the place of appetite in the soul of man. He then limits his narration, since participation in the narrative endeavour—whether observing, describing, listening or reading—can be dangerous for humans; or as Kolbrener notes in his discussion of Raphael’s “rhetorical assurances” (such as: ‘For where is not he/ Present’” [7.517-518]):

Milonic language, even in striving towards representing unity, in the attempts to assert “continuity” between the Creator and the created world, inscribes difference, “contiguity.” [...] Milonic representation is presupposed upon difference, upon the ultimate inadequacy of the signifier to the signified. (139, 140)

Audience response to Milonic depiction of angelic and Edenic meals has been decidedly mixed. In his earlier explication of angelic

¹³ Had Frye revised the above ten or so years later, he might have added dieting and fitness to the list of the suburbanites’ major concerns.

digestion (5.404-443) Raphael emphasizes its physical reality: both humans and angels “hear, see, smell, touch, taste,/ Tasting concoct, digest, assimilate,/ And corporeal to incorporeal turn./ For know, whatever was created, needs/ To be sustained and fed” (5.411-415). Generations of readers have been amused by the apparent naiveté of the Miltonic narrator’s explanation that Adam, Eve and Raphael could enjoy leisurely conversation before partaking of their vegetarian meal without concern that the food would get cold: “No fear lest dinner cool” (5.396); and Milton editor Alastair Fowler does not spare the “hypersophisticated critics [who] despise the domesticity of this line” (281n). Milton, however, seems to have been willing to be the butt of his readers’ amusement in order to muddle the boundaries between human and angel by contending that angels bear elements of human physicality which humans themselves often find ridiculous.

Twenty-first-century readers are sometimes disconcerted by the Miltonic narrator’s depiction of the First Mother “barefoot in the kitchen.” When explicating Eve’s housewifely preparations for the meal which she and Adam are to share with the archangel (5.308-349), even Fowler cannot resist commenting that it was only natural for Eve to have technical knowledge about the storage of food, since “she was in no position to leave such things to the servants” (276n). Readers have, moreover, not failed to notice that, while Eve and Adam appear to have a fairly egalitarian division of labor in their work outside the bower, when at home the wife fulfills the traditional housekeeping functions; the description of the preparation and serving of the meal which the First Parents share with Raphael serves to exemplify Eve’s prelapsarian acceptance of woman’s position in the family hierarchy.

In “Freedom, service and the trade in slaves” Maureen Quilligan argues that “epic is that genre which, in making the ‘same’ into an ‘other,’ allows one group to fight, conquer, and subject an enemy. It is the genre of nation-building when the construction has imperial purposes” (214). Given the importance of the slave trade to England’s prosperity during the middle and later seventeenth century—Quilligan notes an estimate that by the end of the seventeenth century the slave trade accounted for more than a third of all commercial profits in England (221)—it is not surprising that Milton’s epic would imagine “the complications inherent in the duality between slave labor and free labor as a set of gendered relations, themselves forming a dichotomy constitutive of relations between the new subject and a redefined object of control, both the woman and the slave, those who do the physical labor of reproduction and production” (230).

For Rochester, women's sexuality, especially when put at the disposal of men, subverts the existing social hierarchy. While a man may actively wage war against his assigned place in a hierarchy, women blur boundaries between levels of hierarchy by their very passivity, their willingness to "accommodate" sexual partners from various strata. Pat Gill argues that in Rochester's writing of his "war against class intercourse" (334), what is perceived as women's sexual abandon "seems both a consequence and cause of social misalliances and always results in monstrous upheavals" (346). Critics must, according to Gill, connect Rochester's obscenity and scatology to a fear of class confusion, and then, coming full circle, connect that fear to his depictions of women:

[W]hat is indistinct, what is blurred and disordered, eventually becomes filthy. [...] [W]omen become conduits of, as well as symbols for, class ambiguity, and either explicitly or implicitly, women's anatomical attributes, their difference, become the foul passage to polluted equivocation. By allowing what is alien entry, women disintegrate by nature, and so by nature disintegrate social compositions. (347)

If a woman's body, and therefore her sexuality, was indeed tainted for Rochester as a "foul passage to polluted equivocation," homosexuality was an option, and the speaker of Rochester's songs appears at times to prefer male lovers to female: *Song* ("Love a Woman! y'are an Ass") ends with the claim that "There's a sweet soft *Page*, of mine,/ Does the trick worth *Forty Wenches*" (25;15-16). The Rochesterian speaker is as uninterested as the Miltonic narrator in "dissecting" the "long and tedious havoc" of "fabled knights/ In battles feigned" (*Paradise Lost* 9.29-31): the speaker of *Upon His Drinking a Bowl* entreats Vulcan not to decorate the cup with battle scenes (or pictures of the constellations), but rather to "carve thereon a spreading *Vine*,/ Then add Two lovely *Boys*;/ Their Limbs in Amorous folds intwine,/ The *Type* of future joys" (38;17-20); and in *Grecian Kindness* the speaker envisions the Greek victors embracing the Trojan women while "the kind Deity of Wine/ Kiss'd the soft wanton God of Love" (19;7-8). The poet's male lovers are soft, sweet, lovely; the god who is having sex with another male can be kind, and a carving of two embracing boys predicts future joys.

The male lovers clearly are not men, but boys, males whose sexual identity is not fully developed, and whose rank in society's hierarchy is correspondingly low; and as Harold Weber points out, for all their supposedly "liberated" variety, Rochester's poems never present a sexual relationship between two adult males of equal status (115). Rochester's engagement with homosexuality in his poetry is, according to Weber, highly unusual in its explicitness; yet Weber

claims that this homosexual content manifests itself “in ways that work against a coherent male homosexual subjectivity” (101-102). Even when “attempting to banish women from its sexual economy, Rochester’s homosexual verse cannot differentiate the female body from the male, its economy of desire predicated on a system in which boys and women are interchangeable objects circulating between men of equal position” (102).

Building on Weber’s analysis, Raymond-Jean Frontain contends that Rochester utilized biblical sources to construct a coherent homosexual identity. Frontain claims that by collaborating in the composition of the play *The Farce of Sodom* (whose attribution to Rochester is shaky at best)¹⁴ Rochester “takes one of the first steps towards the modern reclamation of the biblical narrative most often used to construct—or deconstruct—homosexual identity” (88). Yet while Frontain’s argument—that Rochester anticipates the use made of Genesis 18-19 by later writers in their attempts at creating a homosexual identity—bears traces of the tendentious, Frontain does not ignore the currents of darkness which underlie these attempts. Like Rochester, later artists would create:

worlds where the greater heroism is to transgress against biblical authority by indulging socially proscribed sexual desire even when to do so is fatal; indeed, the threat that hangs over the act guarantees its larger meaning and intensifies the pleasure of performing it. [...] [T]he characters in these works freely choose “buggery” because it enhances their sensation of being alive and allows them to enjoy a sexual carnival even while fully conscious of how dark that carnival may finally prove. (88-89)

When all is said and done—and it never is—the carnival is dark, as Frontain avers. The shadow is cast by the need to maintain hierarchy; or in Weber’s words, “Rochester’s male narrators, for all their ostensible freedoms, are libertines, not homosexuals, flaunting a deliberately provocative self-fashioning that depends on a conventional misogynous understanding of hierarchical relations between the sexes” (115).

For Milton, too, the carnival was indeed dark. The self-fashioned, self-imposed task of narrating heaven’s “distance and distaste,/ Anger and just rebuke,” (9.9-10) with the assistance of a female guide

¹⁴ See Note 1 in Frontain’s essay for his discussion of the play’s provenance (89). In his Introduction to the collected poems Keith Walker avers that it is possible, although not certain, that Rochester collaborated in writing *Sodom*; he adds that “To assert this twenty years ago would have damaged Rochester’s reputation as much as to deny it today” (x).

who could only be seen at night, was threatening to the poet himself. Milton might have discovered in the Speaker of Rochester's poems a reflection of his own fear of speaking, a sense that telling itself partakes of the satanic, that as a human speaker one is not only the object of Satan's attempt to seduce; one is also collaborator, subject, he whose attempt to speak to a clear, didactic agenda may prove to invoke and evoke the Satan which he had hoped, with the help of "holy Light," to defeat.

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“THE NUBIAN SCULPTOR”: RALPH ELLISON AND THE POLITICS OF THE WORD

Christopher Powers

Ralph Ellison was the first theorist in America to systematically consider the construction of race in the United States in the full breadth of its symbolic and cultural consequences in literature through the structuring lenses of Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxist political economy. He came of age in the decades in which African American writing was developing itself in relation both to the black consciousness and exploration of the vernacular ushered in by the Harlem Renaissance of the nineteen-twenties and in relation to the influence of the radical left and of European existentialist thought in the nineteen-thirties. He brought to African American letters a perspective that achieved a universal application found previously only in the work of W.E.B. Du Bois. He did this, furthermore, as the direct inheritor of the most advanced (African) American literary tradition as the closest friend and intellectual partner, the most staunch advocate and public defender of Richard Wright,¹ the creator of what might accurately if laboriously be called the African American socialist realist existentialist novel (rather than reductively pigeonholed with the beleaguered term “protest novel”).² From his immanent engagement with the writings of Wright and his negotiation of the rapidly changing political and literary scene in New York and internationally, Ellison forged both a unique literary style and a unique political and critical

¹ Jackson’s 2002 biography has provided the most comprehensive and well-researched account of their relationship and the most sympathetic reading of the young man’s relationship with his mentor. See especially Chapter 8, “Is Politics an Expression of Love? 1938-1941,” (198-236).

² For background on the discussion of the “protest novel,” see the debate involving Irving Howe and Ellison in “The World and the Jug” (1995 155-189) as well as Baldwin’s youthful critique of Wright in “Everybody’s Protest Novel.” A contemporary reprise can be found in the conservative Shelby Steele’s 1999 review of Ellison’s early fiction.

position in the late nineteen-forties, leading to the 1952 publication of *Invisible Man* and coinciding with his burgeoning recognition as a critic in those years. Specific themes regarding the operations of racial distinction in the United States in their sociological and cultural dimensions are articulated in such essays from this period as “Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity” (81-99) and “Harlem Is Nowhere” (320-327) and were to become hallmark features of the many essays he was to publish into the nineteen-eighties: the overdetermination of race in political and literary discourses and the obsessiveness with which it inserts itself as code and symbol in cultural products generally; the masking of the influence of African American culture on the general American culture; the consequences of the obsessive repression of this influence; the self-defeating ruse of totalizing white supremacist reason that assures the inclusion of black influence on itself the more assiduously it attempts to exclude it; the mythopoetical elements of practices of racial distinction; the modern primitivism behind the sexual scapegoating of African American men; the subtle literary and linguistic effects of the operation of race; and the universally human aspects of the African American experience, often obscured and suppressed by race in its insistent particularization of African American experience through segregation. Ellison, in a Copernican inversion of Wright’s brilliant portrait of the psychological effects of practices of racial distinction on the African American subject, was concerned from the mid nineteen-forties onward to show the effects of racialization as it shapes American culture as such. His writings investigate the psychosocial dimensions of ideologies and practices of racial distinction, rather than the socio-psychological impact of race on African Americans as in Wright. If Wright’s project was an existential psychoanalysis of the raced African American subject, Ellison’s is an existential psychoanalysis of the concept of race.

In this essay, I will investigate these Ellisonian motifs through readings of selections from his essays and literary texts. I begin with an article composed in 1946, “Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity,” which was only published in 1953. Here Ellison first articulated his own critical orientation through readings of the representatives of the (white) American literary tradition in their encounter with the dynamics of racial distinction. It conceptually outlines the theoretical landscape which Ellison would imaginatively represent, with an innovatively modernist attention to form, contour and shape, in his chef-d’oeuvre, *Invisible Man*. “Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity” is a study of the images of black characters and the representation of race in Twain, Hemingway and Faulkner, but its opening passages, its “preamble” (81-85),

contain the theoretical fundamentals upon which Ellison's later work would expand. It culminates in the following epiphanic and cinematic image:

During periods of national crises, when the United States rounds a sudden curve in the pitch-black road of history, this moral awareness surges in the white American's conscience like a raging river revealed at his feet by a lightning flash. (85)

The "moral awareness," of course, is that of the plight of the African American, whose body, Ellison imagines in the previous paragraph, is the "Negro giant...trussed up like Gulliver," upon whom the "whole of American life as a drama [is] acted out" (85). "Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity" is a key to the interpretation of that drama and its stage. But it is also a text about interpretation as such, informed by an understanding of the operation of racial distinction in African American experience. Its opening assertion, "Perhaps the most insidious and least understood form of segregation is that of the word" (81), positions his project as an effort of literary interpretation that is also sociological in its dimensions. The segregation of the word is the phrase Ellison uses to remark the ways that racism is operative in literary representation through characterization, but it also implies a figural economy of the text. The "word" stands for American letters, which perpetuate stereotypes of African Americans, as well as for the texture of language that is itself formed under the pressures of racial distinction and that registers its segregating significations. Ellison's opening sentence makes the claim to an *a priori* imperative in its use of the superlatives—"most insidious and least understood,"—which are hardly qualified by the "perhaps." The segregation of the word is both essential to know, because as the most insidious, it is a form of segregation without whose decoding segregation will not cease to operate, and, as the least understood, it demands the most urgent clarification. The essay, in promising the ability to understand the segregation of the word, is setting itself up in a privileged interpretive point of view, from which position alone it will be possible to understand the working of American literature. This gesture condenses and prefigures the claim of the entire essay, which is concerned to show that an understanding of the visible and invisible role of the African American is a *sine qua non* for an understanding of American literature as such. According to Ellison's analysis, any interpretation of American literature that cannot also account for the segregation of the word will miss the core contradiction that has propelled its development and will be effectively spellbound by the magic of the drama while remaining blinded and ignorant to the stage—"the Negro giant"—on which it is actualized. With this

imperative for interpretation, Ellison is fulfilling an urge of modernism as much as fulfilling an imperative of the understanding of racial distinction as an African American author.

The segregation of the word, according to Ellison, draws its insidious and hidden power from the ability of language “to suggest and foreshadow overt action while magically disguising the moral consequences of that action and providing it with symbolic and psychological justification. For if the word has the potency to revive and make us free, it has also the power to blind, imprison and destroy” (81). The stakes at risk in the segregation of the word are no less real because it is the segregation of the *word*. The word is the alley’s cloak of darkness that conceals the mugger’s assault, or the magic dust that blinds one’s opponent. Ellison’s investment in the understanding and decoding of the segregation of the word emerged from a very real activist impulse he felt as black militant and a socialist. He stresses the power of the word to create “overt action,” because he wants to empower the reader with the ability to decode the veil of signs that obscures a “morally”—and one can easily add “politically”—unjust social order. By mentioning the “symbolic and psychological” dimensions of the segregation of the word, he is signaling the ability of psychoanalysis and anthropology to provide the templates through which an operation that takes place in largely subconscious and mythical ways can be exposed, and what lies underneath can be revealed as the very real operations of power based on class and race. Like a magic potion, the word can “revive” and liberate, or kill and enslave. The task of interpretation would be to cut through the magic incantations the word erects like a thicket around itself to arrive at the garden of truth hidden within, to find the word that is liberating. The dual nature of the word is what will become the dominant trope of *Invisible Man*—ambivalence: “The essence of the word is its ambivalence, and in fiction it is never so effective and revealing as when both potentials are operating simultaneously, as when it mirrors both good and bad, as when it blows both hot and cold in the same breath” (81). Ambivalence in fiction is both “effective” and “revealing” when it is simultaneous, because it both conceals and reveals, separates and combines. In its negative function then, the segregation of the word is not just ambivalent, but it is ambivalence itself.

The greater part of the “Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity” is given over to readings of Twain, Hemingway, and Faulkner insofar as the segregation of the word is operative in their writings. Twain, who honestly confronts the “moral problem” of the nineteenth century, emerges as the hero of the bunch, while Ellison criticizes Hemingway and the young Faulkner, who twist and

distort the image of the African American when they are not busy suppressing it. Their depiction of blacks, Ellison concludes, is more like caricature, a “beast or angel,” but rarely portrayed “as that sensitively focused process of opposites, of good and evil, of instinct and intellect, of passion and spirituality, which great literary art has projected as the image of man” (82). This gets at what for Wright as for Ellison was nothing less than the fact that, as the latter affirms, quoting the former, “there is in progress between black and white Americans a struggle over the nature of reality” (82). Ellison proceeds to make unstable the notion of the American itself, implying that the “ideal American character” as “a delicately poised unity of divergencies” (83) will not be possible unless the conflict is settled, one whose stakes are nothing less than ontological. The very ability to define the nature of reality and to forge a truly American identity then, rests on the ability to perceive the elaborate deception that is instigated in American letters by the segregation of the word. If Hemingway and Faulkner were its witting or unwitting instigators in Ellison’s century, Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* was able to reveal it in the previous, and Ellison would assign himself the task of doing so for his time. That was the original mission of *Invisible Man*, the inception of whose composition coincides with that of “Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity.”

The obvious but ignored stupidity of American literature in its representation of black characters is the symptom that for Ellison becomes the key to decoding the sickness of American letters. But the segregation of the word is not only a reflection of white supremacist ideology, it is rather a “projection of processes lying at the very root of American culture, and certainly at the central core of its twentieth-century literary forms” (83). This projection is one of the necessity for a “democratic culture” to blind itself to the “essentially undemocratic treatment of its fellow citizens” (83). The historical oppression of African Americans is the thorn in the eye of American democracy. The facts of slavery and segregation expose the lie of the American claim to represent the ideal of freedom. This is the central contradiction of American society, which necessitates the massive project of the “institutionalized dehumanization” of the African American so that “white men could become more human” (85). For Ellison, most works of white American literature in its engagement with the African American are “projected aspects of an internal symbolic process” that arises from that necessity. The repressed, as we know, always returns. But it always comes back ugly. In Ellison’s essay, the task of reading is akin to a symptomatology of the pathology of race as the victims of its repression reappear. It is a forensic science that can

expose the scam because, as Ellison says, “these Negroes of fiction are counterfeits” (84). These are not just clichés or stereotypes, but rather are unconsciously created images that stem from the individual’s “need to believe,” “an inner craving for symbolic magic” (84). The representation of the African American in American literature resolves itself into a series of strategies of transferal or containment that reveal more about the American unconsciousness of race than about what is ostensibly being represented. Ellison’s essay points to the opportunity that this creates for interpretation, which can, in reading these images, reveal the core contradictions of American society and letters. And without the ability to do so, there will be no resolution to the great ontological conflict that still continues. Black is the space between the lines, the voided spots without an understanding of which no text can be read coherently. Until the “sleeping giant,” the “raging river” that is everywhere visible but nowhere seen is brought to the forefront, until the stage is seen with the play, there will be no end to the endless struggle over the nature of reality and the endless symbolic forms that it produces, “only then is the veil of anti-Negro myths, symbols, stereotypes and taboos somewhat drawn aside” (85). The ambivalence of the word is the fate of American letters as long as freedom is suppressed through the segregation of the word. Ellison’s task was to bring the African American experience and its exemplary encounter with the contradictions and possibilities of freedom to the forefront of consciousness, and he did that by combining the critical orientation as has been outlined here together with the accomplishments in African American literature up to Richard Wright and with the most advanced techniques of modernism. It is to the latter that I now turn my attention in the next section.

The Nubian Sculptor

Among the many formulae proposed to describe the changes that happen to literary expression in the twentieth century, the following by the Guyanese author Wilson Harris seems most suited for a discussion of the significance of *Invisible Man*. In the introduction to his 1962 novellas *The Whole Armour* and *The Secret Ladder*, Harris grants Herman Melville’s novella *Benito Cereno* a privileged position in the prehistory of modernism. Noting the “symbolist” and “expressionist” technique of the much-debated work’s opening trope—the illusion that the blacks onboard the mutineered slaver Benito Cereno’s *San Dominick* are cowed Friars—Harris suggests that the scene posits racial distinction as a force as central to the modern era as religion was to the preceding, and conversely to position this replacement

as the flip side of the coin, the other side of which is a process of the creation of general uniformity under the heading of value. Put simply, that race is the modern religion as commodity fetish:

When suddenly, in our age, the private or subjective imagination begins to secrete an immense caution—begins to secrete an awareness that a dominant value or faith is in process of becoming hideous bias—in process of conscripting all into a uniform instrument of value—we note alterations in an accepted texture of naturalism—alterations which reflect a necessity for vision. (7-8)

This vision is the “retrieval of ‘monsters’ back into ourselves as native,” a “fantastification of imagery” and “subjective alteration of form in order to relate new content or new existences to a revised canvas of community,” a content that ironically reveals itself “on another level” as “very old” and “buried” (8). Modernist innovation, in Harris’s reading, is literature’s reflex response to the advent of race under the pressure of the exchange principle, whose logic “conscripts all into a uniform instrument of value.” The “secretion of caution” is the secondary effect of the repression of the “great moral problem” that Ellison diagnosed in the segregation of the word. The consciousness of that problem—the “awareness of a hideous bias”—is a displacement that slips into the subjective imagination, expressed in literature. The anxiety attending this awareness is the fear that all are subject to the principle of exchange, that everyone can become commodity. A general fear propels the subjective imagination toward revisions in the “accepted texture” of “naturalism,” understood as the generic category of the (general) literary period in which Melville participated. Slavery, in other words, as the ultimate form of exchange value in the commodification of the body, its reduction to property as value, is the bugaboo of the general socio-psychological structure which was the matrix of modernism. This argument is interesting to my reading because it situates the secondary effects of the repression of the question of racialization, which Ellison diagnosed in “Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity,” in the center of the problematic of modernity and of modernism. Wilson’s reflections juxtapose concerns central to theories of modernity, e.g. Adorno and Horkheimer’s “dialectic of enlightenment,” with the literary consequences of the history of transatlantic slavery and its legacy in practices of racial distinction that are foregrounded in Ellison’s *Invisible Man* and in his essays. Harris’s exploration highlights the generative power of capitalism and slavery for the experience of modern society as such—rooted in terror:

It would be unsubtle to think Melville was indicting Black Friars or simply espousing the cause of emancipation for African slaves. His

juxtaposition of forces was an index of community steeped in terror unless it began to re-sense or resensitise a claustrophobic function of value... (8)

The passage identifies the source of literary innovation in the American modernist novel as what might today be called a containment strategy for the displacement arising from a “claustrophobic” uniformity, in which everything can be reduced to pure exchange value. The most extreme consequence of the uncanny spread of the exchange principle is the commodification of the body in slavery and the experience of terror at the root of the processes of racialization. Harris reads Melville’s story as an allegory of the community thus “steeped in terror” unless “something” was done: the deferral of the “resensitization” that Harris sees as necessary occasions the changes in the texture of “naturalism”—Harris’s catchword for the modernist novel. Literary modernism is thus the secondary effect of the lack of resolution to the great moral problem, of the ambivalence of freedom, the segregation of the word.

The opening motto of Ellison’s *Invisible Man* is taken from the same short novel by Melville that Harris interprets as a matrix for modernism, *Benito Cereno*: “‘You are saved,’ cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; ‘you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?’” (xxv). *Benito Cereno* recounts the experience, based on a true story culled from a nautical travel history, of the Yankee Captain Delano, who encounters a ship in an isolated harbor off Chile and boards it, finding its captain (Benito Cereno) in a state he understands as ill and possibly deranged. The slaves and white sailors, to his eyes, seem remarkably cooperative, if suffering from long months of wandering without sails, lack of water, scurvy and hunger. The upright Captain wavers between suspicion and a paternalistic sense of responsibility to help, which he does, staying aboard Cereno’s *Dominick* and supplying it with water, food and sails over the course of a day, and conversing with Cereno, aided by his ever-present African servant Babo. As Delano finally boards a boat to return to his nearby ship, Cereno leaps off deck into the boat, his white crew jumping into the water or climbing the masts. As Delano is made aware there has been a slave revolt aboard the *Dominick*, the white crew is retrieved, the *Dominick* attacked and the slaves recaptured. The broken captain and the captive slaves are brought to Lima, where they are tried, their leader Babo executed and his head, a “hive of subtlety,” (315) is placed on a stake. But the executed Babo’s eyes stare in the direction of Benito’s place of refuge after his ordeal, a monastery, and Benito is dead within three months.

The first striking aspect of the novella is the orchestrated decep-

tion of Captain Delano through the simulation of a normative *status quo ante* aboard the *Dominick*, a ruse directed by the leader Babo, who poses as the loyal, obsequious, devoted servant anticipating his master's every need. The mutiny having long before taken place and the surviving whites under the Africans' control, Babo and his fellows plotted to exploit Delano's visit to gain supplies by fabricating the appearance of the slavers' control and Africans submission expected by Delano. In fact Babo has been forcing Cereno to engage in the ruse, pulling Cereno's strings like a puppet master and planting words into his mouth like a ventriloquist—all the while simultaneously giving commands to his fellow mutineers, who all participate with craft and genius in the enactment of a carefully orchestrated if improvised deception. The inability of Delano to imagine the capacity and intelligence of the Africans to carry off such an elaborate deception prevents him, for an entire day, from seeing the "truth" of the situation. The bulk of the story follows the Yankee captain's observations and thoughts about the Africans on board, in the course of which many of the white supremacist stereotypes (which had been in a decades-long process of intense ideological concretization in American scientific and cultural discourses by that point of the novella's writing) about Africans are reproduced in horrific but subtly comic juxtaposition to the coolly reasoned and finely calculated revolt of the former slaves led by Babo, whose decapitated head Melville, with both symbolist and gothic flair, calls a "hive of subtlety." The literary effects of the novella revolve around the contrast between the white supremacist supposition, taken for granted by even the "liberal" Yankee Delano, of the innate intellectual inferiority of the African on the one hand and the real success of the deception, which is both cunning and creative, precise and improvised, finely calculated and coolly reasoned on the other. *Benito Cereno* is thus a work that, while constructing an elaborate riddle whose answer is the entire operation of race as an ideological construction and a historical force, paints a remarkably subtle (for a nineteenth-century white author) physiognomy of the specific ideologemes of racialization. But within the complex symbolic texture of *Benito Cereno* an insistent thread protrudes, which points to the productive and creative exemplarity of Africans in the creation of an American culture hegemonically typified as European. This is readable in moments of intense "symbolism" in the novella such as when Delano, on board the *Dominick* and considering his responsibilities as an upright mariner, sees Babo barbering Cereno and entertains a vision of the former as "a Nubian sculptor finishing off a white statue-head" as he trims Cereno's beard, with his razor to his throat, and of Benito as "a creature of his [Babo's] own tasteful

hands" (283), with a liberal appreciation of the African's servile conformity to his (supposed) master's needs. The scene can be read as an allegory for the irrepressible but unrecognized formative influence of African American culture on American culture generally that is the focus of Ellison's essays.

It is this figurative thread in my opinion that most motivated Ellison in his placement of a quotation from *Benito Cereno* as the lead motto for *Invisible Man*. For it is Ellison who demonstrated with the broadest application the location of the African American experience at the axis of American culture, both in his novel and in essays such as "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity." The quotation Ellison chooses for the *Invisible Man*, from *Benito Cereno*'s final pages—"You are saved," cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; 'you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?'" (*Invisible* xxv)—does not include Cereno's pithy response: "The negro" (Melville 314). The missing answer makes operative everything implicitly included (from an Ellisonian perspective) under the rubric "the Negro":³ the elided figure of the African American and African American experience in American literature; African American forms of cultural production as the obscured generative matrix of European American production; the ubiquity of symbolically filtered images of racialization in American cultural products—as the mostly hidden motivation in American modernist literary production from its incipit in Melville's story (as Harris defines it) to its mid twentieth-century culmination one hundred years later in *Invisible Man*. One cannot help but imagine how perfectly *Benito Cereno* allegorized for Ellison the absurd simultaneity of the genius and invisibility of the black artist.

Ellison's placement of this quotation at the forefront of *Invisible Man* highlights other, persistent forms of invisibility as well. In a general study of Herman Melville published at approximately the same time as *Invisible Man* (Chase 1949), a ten-page section on *Benito Cereno* discusses the remarkable narrative structure of the short novel, its fragmented and oblique diction and the significance of the insertion of long passages quoted from a (fictional) legal text. The critic emphasizes its importance as a work of "storytelling" and

³ Cereno's answer would have been spoken in Spanish as either "el negro," which must be understood as a reference to Babo, or as "lo negro" —all that which "black" or "negro" is. Melville's translation brilliantly enhances the ambiguity, demanding that both meanings be read.

not merely as a moralistic parable. His arguments might be meant to counter the work of critics like Yvor Winters who also wrote on the work. But at no point are the aspects of the novella that saliently address the question of race discussed: the fact that it takes place on a slave ship; the significance that *Benito Cereno* is the one work of Melville that contains an extended meditation on slavery and black people; the work's brilliant upturning of liberal prejudice; and its importance as a work by a nineteenth-century white author that succeeds in an intimate portrayal of the ironies of racialization. This critical blindness occurs, furthermore, in a book that is meant to be an introduction to Melville and whose only discussion of the moral problems implied by the novella is a vague engagement with the symbolism of "evil." He even manages not to use the word "slave" or "slavery" once throughout the entire reading. Similarly, in another, widely-read general study by the noted scholar Newton Arvin, *Benito Cereno* is summarily dismissed as an inferior work by the author, an "artistic miscarriage" (238), and Arvin implies that it was the result of an exhausted imagination. The only writing on the story from the time that did not completely bypass the novella's engagement with "the great moral problem," the most salient theme in the work, was a brief review by C.L.R. James (294). This critical blindness perpetuates the erasure of the significance and the wide-ranging historical implications of the transatlantic slave trade and the plantation system in the Americas as the centrally defining experience for new world modernity and, as *Benito Cereno* and *Invisible Man* both perform, for the history of modernism as well. *Invisible Man*'s mere placement of a one-sentence quotation from *Benito Cereno* at the beginning of his masterpiece thus implies a more profound reading of Melville's work than the rest of the criticism on Melville from that time, and positions the latter in Ellison's critical imagination next to the Twain of "20th Century Fiction And The Black Mask Of Humanity."

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RETURN TO THE BEGINNING: *HOUSE OF LEAVES* BY MARK DANIELEWSKI

Sudha Shastri

In his classic book on endings, Frank Kermode defends his choice of topic by declaring it as “infallibly interesting, and especially at a moment in history when it may be harder than ever to accept the precedents of sense-making” (Kermode 3). Mark Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* encourages a similar view of the notion of beginnings. Enacting several beginnings in the course of its narrative, whether by resisting a movement onwards, or through interruptions from new texts, this book spanning over 709 pages, elaborates without explaining its initial situation. The mystery looming large at the beginning of *House of Leaves* intensifies further, only to get denser and darker, and the novel’s token ending leads to new beginnings without having adequately ‘made sense of’ the story it began to tell. If one of the significant conceptual implications of a beginning is a sequence, the experience of reading *House of Leaves* is such as to belie this expectation.

House of Leaves was published at the beginning of the new millennium, the year 2000. A remarkable book on several counts, one of the various issues that dominate its experimental spaces is that of the beginning. Along with the stories it keeps beginning to tell, *House of Leaves* simultaneously raises questions about how we understand the beginning of a narrative, what assumptions work in our definitions of the beginning, what expectations we take to it, and how we demarcate it from the middle and the end. These questions make their presence sufficiently felt so as to carry the reader away from the beguiling world of the story into the non-mimetic realm of plot or discourse, a point I shall look at in some detail in a later section of this essay.

Of the stories that *House of Leaves* presents, the most significant is the central story of the film-maker Will Navidson’s mysterious, even uncanny experiences in his house, and the film he makes of them. In

fact he makes more than one film, the longest and most intelligible of them being *The Navidson Record*. *House of Leaves* is the account of these films and their making, by Zampanò, who is dead when *House of Leaves* begins, and it also has exhaustive notes provided by Truant. The authority and reliability of many of the footnotes and explanations are however open to dispute, and proved to have no validity in terms of either text or author beyond the claims of *House of Leaves*.¹

The precursors of the film entitled *The Navidson Record* are painstakingly described for us right in the beginning. The first of them, “The Five and a Half Minute Hallway,” is dismissed as “a five and a half minute optical illusion barely exceeding the abilities of any NYU film school graduate” (Danielewski 4). It is incomplete: abstract-fashion, it carries the bare minimum of the detail that was to amplify itself so largely and broodingly over *The Navidson Record*. In “The Five and a Half minute Hallway,” Navidson shows a bizarre space, about ten feet in length, extending into a wall of his house, without occupying a corresponding portion of space while viewed from the outside. When the camera moves to the outer wall, all the viewer sees is Navidson’s backyard.

The next film is called “Exploration #4” and is eight minutes long. This film, unlike the earlier, does not begin at the beginning. It seems reasonable to assume that “Exploration #4” would make better sense to a viewer who has already seen “The Five and a Half minute Hallway.” To excerpt from *House of Leaves*, “The structure of ‘Exploration #4’ is highly discontinuous, jarring... [T]he first shot catches Navidson mid-phrase” (Danielewski 5). It is three years after the last film that *The Navidson Record* appears; unlike its previous versions which enjoy a limited circulation, this film is screened nationwide and creates an impact amongst its audiences. In effect then, *The Navidson Record* has existed in earlier versions, so that this third version is in fact a third beginning of the same narrative. There is even a fourth version; an illicit lovers’ scene, featuring Navidson’s wife Karen and Wax, is edited into the film a few months after *The Navidson Record* is first released.

As the above recapitulation of *House of Leaves* would show, the novel’s concern in presenting the story of the missing hallway, a story fraught with suspense, takes up considerable space in its be-

¹ Aside from the tentativeness with which some of the notes present themselves, a good number of the texts cited in the footnotes are also spurious. See <http://www.invisiblelibrary.com/libtitle3.htm> for an eight-page list of the books that Danielewski cites in the form of footnotes in *House of Leaves*. None of them exist outside his imagination.

ginning—or beginnings, as the case may be. These beginnings are also beginnings of the narrations of the story itself. With the account of each film, the reader is returned to the beginning of the representation/recounting of the unaccounted space in the house. Thus the reader experiences a near self-reflexive focus on the beginning since her attention is drawn to the *representation* of a story.

As “The Five and a Half minute Hallway” and “Exploration #4” are replaced by the relatively more complete *The Navidson Record*, the notion of beginning itself becomes foregrounded as a concern for the narrator. This narrative concern with beginnings is reinforced in the various parallel texts that the novel throws up, so that *House of Leaves* holds a range of texts whose beginnings cut into the main text, mainly in the form of footnotes. Among other things, *House of Leaves* uses the beginning as a counter-intuitive² mode of effecting digressions, and it is the frequency of its use that alerts the reader to the discursal layer of this book.

Right at the outset, when we readers are seeking the space to orient ourselves into the narrative, we are confronted with a series of interruptions achieved at intervals of the main text, *The Navidson Record*. A possible outcome is that the narrative can lose the reader’s attention through frequent interruptions. Risk-taking indeed occupies a large part of the narrative strategies of *House of Leaves*.

What elements, then, are characteristic of a (safe) beginning?

Beginnings are built on expectations brought to the text by readers, and these expectations are born of both convention and reading experience. While beginnings are relatively less determined than endings, they are still conditioned by expectations which are guided by genre and modes of representation. The author has the choice, especially after postmodernism, to caricature, deliberately subvert or outright reject these conventions.

Beginnings make sense best when seen in the light of the endings they lead to; however the endings need not be, and are not usually, directly predictable from their beginnings. As Kermode says, “unless we are extremely naïve...we do not ask that they progress towards that end precisely as we have been given to believe” (Kermode 23-24).

² Intuitively, beginnings imply progression towards resolutions. *House of Leaves* thwarts such progression by introducing several texts all of which begin but do not lead very much further. A footnote is a good example of such a text because in itself it is a highlight—which makes it ‘less’ than a beginning, were such a thing possible—of a text which the reader is advised to begin reading to understand a point made here.

So the freedom that a beginning enjoys by being less determined is perhaps offset by the fact that it has to ensure that along the way to its end, it destroys some of its own premises and revives some others, taking care to balance suspense, surprise and credibility among other factors. This pattern of evolution would hold most unambiguously for the detective novel, which is one of the master-narratives that direct the reading of *House of Leaves*, and shape reader-expectations accordingly. I will discuss this in detail in the course of my essay.

Where does it begin?

Before its publication, *House of Leaves* appeared on the net for several months when it had a fairly sizeable reader-following. Its hypertextual history creates an added dimension to the debate concerning beginnings, the internet being a space that problematises beginnings and endings.

Consider Roland Barthes' statement on the ideal text which shares similarities with the hypertext: "this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one;" (Barthes *S/Z*, qtd. in Landow). Even in its published version, *House of Leaves* gives a fair idea of what the net version must have looked like. For one, the multiple-entry structure of the hypertext is replicated in the book, *House of Leaves*, through the use of paratexts like the Foreword, the Introduction, the innumerable footnotes, the Appendices and the Index. Some of these, like the footnotes and the Index are particularly suited to challenge a linear reading experience, akin to a hypertext.

Already therefore, the book *House of Leaves* has a 'previous' version. And it is a version such as to problematise the idea of a beginning. After having begun the inside book which follows the Introduction, viz. *The Navidson Record*, the reader is continually distracted from proceeding in a straight line by insistent footnotes, some of which even lead to other, previous footnotes. Let me take the following example on Page 4. Footnote number 4—for the sentence concluding "... 'Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace/And rest can never dwell, hope never comes/That comes to all' thus echoing the words copied down by hell's most famous tourist: *Dinanzi a me non fuor cose create/ Se non etterne, e io etterna duro./ Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate*⁴" reads thus:

⁴That first bit comes from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book I, lines 65-67. The second from Dante's *In-*

ferno, Canto III lines 7-9. In 1939, some guy named John D. Sinclair from the Oxford University Press translated the Italian as follows: "Before me nothing was created but eternal things and I endure eternally. Abandon every hope, ye that enter."⁵

⁵In an effort to limit confusion, Mr. Truant's footnotes will appear in courier font while Zampanò's will appear in Times. We also wish to note here that we have never actually met Mr. Truant. All matters regarding the publication were addressed in letters or in rare instances over the phone. – The Editors

(Danielewski 4)

Footnote 5, as we see, is a note to Footnote 4, not the main text. These footnotes also have variable sources, from Zampanò to Truant to the Editors, thereby indicating the different entry points that each of these authors has to the text.

Or consider Footnote 168, which has two inset passages, one recounting the voyage of Magellan in 1519, and the other of Hudson in 1610. Footnotes 169, 171, 180 and 170—in this order—are appended to these two accounts which are part of Footnote 168, thus producing multiple embedded footnotes. Thus *House of Leaves* variously shows how footnotes in themselves constitute a text that conceptually thwarts chronology and linear sequencing.

Moreover, when the question of 'the beginning' is located within the context of such a textual network as this, footnotes are seen to draw the reader back earlier in time from that in which she is reading, as they refer to prior texts. This is arguably one of the most obvious ways in which paratexts disperse linear sequencing, and with it, the idea of a concrete, decipherable beginning. Similarly embedded texts such as transcripts in *House of Leaves* produce new beginnings which dispel a comfortable belief in one single beginning.

The intertextual identity of *House of Leaves* having been established,³ I argue that one of the implications of intertextuality is

³ Apart from footnotes, epigraphs are strewn generously over *House of Leaves*. As intertextual devices, epigraphs encourage reverse-reading. An epigraph that is prefixed to a chapter or a book withholds its complete meaning (even when it is familiar to the reader) with respect to the chapter/book, until the reader has read the chapter/book to the end. Ideally, reading the text enables the reader to make better sense of the epigraph, so that she returns to the epigraph once again, expecting it to yield greater and richer meaning. Recurrence—another way of going back to the beginning—is thus ensured through the use of epigraphs. The chapter epigraphs in *House of Leaves* range from quotations from The Beatles, Mary Shelley, R.K. Narayan, to the Oxford English Dictionary, Borges, Virgil and Einstein, to cite a sample. Some chapters have more than one epigraph, suggesting that they 'begin' from more than one

that beginnings are not as distinct as one would think. A premise of intertextuality is that the purported and physical beginning of one text is in fact an echo, thread or trace of the beginning, middle or end of another text, since all writers and readers bring to the texts they write and read the memory and experience of other texts that they have read before. References to other texts within a particular text can happen either directly (the quoted word) or in a more subtle fashion, and they can carry attitude, producing parody or burlesque in certain instances.

Intertextual cross-referencing happens in an unfettered fashion in the novel, more than in any other genre perhaps. In the words of Mikhail Bakhtin, “Under conditions of the novel every direct word—epic, lyric, strictly dramatic—is to a greater or lesser degree made into an object, the word itself becomes a bounded...image...” (Bakhtin 111-112). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to recapitulate the main tenets of Bakhtin’s study of the novel, suffice it to say that his understanding of the novel as principally “indirect discourse” (112)⁴ endorses my premise here that the novel is an apt vehicle for intertextuality, a faculty that *House of Leaves* exploits to its best advantage.

Intertextual references are vehicles for self-reflexivity. Self-reflexivity is also created by rendering visible to the reader the twin narrative levels of story and discourse, which, by moving in mutually opposite directions, designate two beginnings, one of the story and another of the plot/discourse. *House of Leaves*, by presenting a story as well as presenting its presentation, as it were, draws the reader’s eye to the two levels of the narrative it enshrines, the story-level and the discursal level.

House of Leaves raises the issue of the beginning on the two counts of intertextuality as well as the story-discourse double-entendre, as I hope to show in the rest of my paper.

perspective. Chapter IX has in fact three epigraphs, positioned in the form of a triangle, a line in Latin each from Virgil, Ascensius and Nicholas Trevet.

⁴ Bakhtin describes indirect discourse as the “representation of another’s word, another’s language in intonational quotation marks” (112). This definition accommodates self-reflexivity as a feature of novelistic discourse.

Story and Discourse

House of Leaves offers an interesting selection of beginnings: a Foreword (vii) followed by the discouraging one-liner “This is not for you” (ix) and an Introduction (xi), before *The Navidson Record* begins on page 3 and ends on Page 528. It continues thereafter to include Six Exhibits (529-535), three Appendices (537-662), an Index (663-705), Credits (707-708) and Yggdrasil (709). The inter-mixing of story and discursal features that runs through *House of Leaves* is thus prefigured at the outset with the Foreword and the Introduction standing apart from the main story, as it were, and yet not quite in the reader’s world. Tucked within several independent frames, *The Navidson Record* is a description of the mysterious experiences of Will Navidson and his family edited by Zampanò, in turn edited by Truant, and both together edited by “The Editors” who sign the Foreword.

The incipit of *House of Leaves* is a complex issue to address. If we look at *House of Leaves* as a whole, then there are at least three distinctive openings into the novel: the Foreword, the Introduction, and *The Navidson Record*. Each new text opens to disrupt the sense of continuity established by the previous. Truant’s introduction to *House of Leaves* is brooding and pessimistic in tone, and it dwells largely on Zampanò’s compilations that go to form the novel *The Navidson Record*. Within *The Navidson Record* itself, the linear sequencing of the story is halting and fitful, as narrative continuity is arrested either by paratexts like footnotes, or by intra-textual—and therefore less easily visible—comments and musings by the author that impede the progress of the story. The footnotes run into pages sometimes, pursuing the life story of Truant in his own words. Truant may begin with a note to *The Navidson Record* only to recollect some analogous experience in his own life, which would take him away from his editorial role and into the role of a protagonist. His footnotes almost compete for attention with *The Navidson Record*.

The Navidson Record begins obliquely:

While enthusiasts and detractors will continue to empty entire dictionaries attempting to describe or deride it, ‘authenticity’ still remains the word most likely to stir a debate. In fact, this leading—to validate or invalidate the reels and tapes—invariably brings up a collateral and more general concern: whether or not, with the advent of digital technology, image has forsaken its once unimpeachable hold on the truth¹” (Danielewski 3).

What we have here is a comment on the nature of the story we are going to read, a story-internal comment. Note too, that the first footnote is appended to the very first sentence. This is followed by a paragraph

which debates the nature of *The Navidson Record* (is it “a hoax of exceptional quality?”) (Danielewski 3) followed by musings on the nature of hell, with quotations from Milton and Dante.

It takes a while for the ruminative passage to give way to the section that provides actual, factual information about *The Navidson Record*: that it “did not first appear as it does today. Nearly seven years ago what surfaced was ‘The Five and a Half Minute Hallway’—a five and a half minute optical illusion barely exceeding the abilities of any NYU film school graduate” (Danielewski 4).

With self-reflexivity and repetition combining to defer the actual beginning of the story, *The Navidson Record* remains, in spirit, at the start-line. *House of Leaves* generously enhances and prolongs the beginning, and across several pages deliberately sets the ambience of mystery. The danger of suspense being removed by such a procedure is, curiously enough, handled head-on by *House of Leaves* which takes 500-something pages to construct the mystery without explaining it. In short, the end is different from the beginning only in so far as that it has amplified and drawn on the beginning to affirm that the beginning is all there is to *House of Leaves*.⁵ The tendency of *The Navidson Record* to reflect and find parallels with other similar situations is so entrenched as to keep narrative progression at bay, and stay in exposition-mode. Indeed, discussion and reflection are the two main brakes that work against the narrative momentum.

In fact, in the light of what *The Navidson Record* does to the promise contained in the Introduction, replacing elucidation and unravelling with exhaustive description and debate, it is possible to

⁵ The mystery of the expanding and contracting hallway is never resolved unequivocally. Besides, the menace and the hidden horrors of the house affect Truant, spilling into his personal life, and he takes a holiday to recover. In the course of his holiday he goes to a bar, and buys the musicians a drink. They chat, and within minutes Truant finds that they have a “big brick of tattered paper” (Danielewski 513) whose title pages reads

House of Leaves
By Zampanò
with introduction and
notes by Johnny Truant
Circle Round A Stone Publication
First Edition

This is probably the only clear instance of *House of Leaves* bringing us right back to the beginning, or is it even prior to the book we have been reading? (The book we have in our hands is a second edition.)

argue that the Introduction constitutes an abstract of *The Davidson Record* itself.

Hence, one way of understanding the beginning of *House of Leaves* is to see it as a novel that keeps going back to the beginning, its own beginnings.⁶ The beginning is replete with questions raised by the mystery. By refusing to answer these questions in a categorical manner, *House of Leaves* ensures that the spirit with which it began never quite leaves the novel, and the partial answers we are left with at the end, fail to keep the questions themselves from coming back to us repeatedly.

This begs the question: how far can a narrative be poised at the beginning? The various thresholds at which different readers will balk, recognise that the narrative has not really progressed much beyond the beginning, and repose to this knowledge, is of course a matter of individual temperament. But then again, *House of Leaves* is a postmodern novel and risk-taking, as I have earlier observed, is natural to its mode of being.

Story and Discourse: The Prototype of the Detective Novel

As pointed out earlier, expectations typical of a mystery novel are laid out at the beginning of *House of Leaves*, and indeed define its status in the beginning segment. There is a mystery, its mysteriousness is reinforced; it is uncanny, it is unique, and to all purposes inexplicable. We as readers warm to the initial situation from our experience of reading other similar novels, which also tells us that however inexplicable the mystery seems at the beginning, it is the duty of the novel to unravel it believably for us. In the process of disclosing the answer, the mystery novel helps us re-cognise the beginning and understand it anew. Elements that in the beginning seemed to lead in a certain direction are generally proved to have led elsewhere, so that the reader's cleverest conjectures that arise from the beginning are still not as good as the novel's resolution of the mystery. In an interesting paradox, the reader expects the narrative to stay ahead of her.

⁶ Take Chapter V of *House of Leaves* which begins with an elaboration of echoes. The passage drives towards making the point that echoic repetition is not lifeless but meaningful; however my attention here is on the notion of recurrence, which is also suggested, in passing, as a function of echo. Recurrence and repetition, as I have argued, are strategies employed by *House of Leaves* to keep the beginning continually in view.

The beginning of *House of Leaves*, however, misleads. It fails to take advantage of what Kermode calls “a kind of forward memory... the mind working on an expected future” which is “an essential tool of narrative fiction” (Kermode 53), especially of mystery novels like detective fiction, wherein the beginning adroitly presents an idea in such a way as to make it very difficult for the reader to understand its full significance until way into the narrative.⁷

The plot of the prototypical detective novel is designed to begin after at least one murder has taken place. This involves a discursual re-ordering of the story, with the result that the narrative begins *in medias res*. The circumstances under which the murder has been committed are explained much later, towards the end, by the detective. The chronological beginning of the story is thus presented to the reader at the end; and a re-ordering of the sequence of beginning, middle and end is accomplished through an *in medias res* opening. An awareness of the twin layer of story and plot is crucial to enable a critical reading of the detective novel.

Mystery is built elaborately into the beginning of *House of Leaves*: in the death of Luke, the strange disappearance of most of the cats and the suggested violent deaths of the rest, the inexplicable gouges in the floor of Luke’s apartment. Together they point to a story which, the reader expects, would enlarge the mystery and eventually explain it. Having established that the initial set of propositions raised in the exposition of *House of Leaves* invite comparison to that of a detective novel, I shall devote this section of my essay to a discussion of how *House of Leaves* reads from—or away from—the blueprint of prototypical detective fiction.

Since an elaborate analysis of the form of detective fiction will take my argument away from the main thread, let me look only at the most fundamental expectations generated by this genre. One of the main conventions by which the genre is recognized is through an ending that fills in all the missing bits of the story without partaking of the supernatural. Since no ‘natural’ or phenomenological explanation is

⁷ A remarkable instance of such an opening is that of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: “Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice” (11). The anticipation of a critical event in the narrative appears to ruin the suspense that a reader could have delighted in, but the reader is still in for a surprise, because it transpires that the Colonel does not die in the encounter, and the highlight given in the opening sentence is in fact a hoax. As an opening sentence, it is a perfect combination of irony, anticipation, and suspense.

ever satisfactorily offered to the reader about the events surrounding *The Navidson Record*; since in fact the explanations tentatively provided do partake of the supernatural, it is only so far as its beginning goes that it is possible to see it as having the potential to become a detective novel. A more important deviation lies in the fact that where in the detective novel it is the ending that forms the crux of the narrative, in *House of Leaves* the ending is tame, the ending is just a notional one with Navidson, Karen and the children surviving the space in the house. The bizarre death of Tom is never explained.

In his comprehensive essay entitled “The Typology of Detective Fiction,” Todorov reduces the basic structural elements of a whodunit (classic detective fiction) to a duality. The whodunit “contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation” (Todorov 139). Furthermore,

The first story, that of the crime, ends before the second begins. But what happens in the second? Not much. The characters of this second story, the story of the investigation, do not act, they learn. Nothing can happen to them. A rule of the genre postulates the detective’s immunity. (Todorov 139)

This pattern underlies *House of Leaves* in various layers: it is possible to see Truant as the detective working on Zampanò’s story, just as it is possible to see Zampanò as the detective—one layer inside, embedded—working on *The Navidson Record*. The Chinese-box structure does not end here. Navidson himself is a detective vis-à-vis the events happening in his life, and he co-opts his friends, and even his brother as detectives on the job. By this time we have reached the domain of the first story. But none of the detectives has escaped with impunity, let alone immunity. Zampanò is dead, Truant has been deeply, possibly permanently affected, and Navidson who emerges from the ordeal of the strange house is never the same again. *House of Leaves* achieves a notable variation on the format of the whodunit.

Todorov also describes the two stories of the whodunit by stating, “the first—the story of the crime—tells ‘what really happened’, whereas the second—the story of the investigation—explains ‘how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it’” (Todorov 140). *House of Leaves* keeps us mystified till the end of the novel, and the reader never knows unambiguously *what* has “really happened,” or *how* she has come to know about what really happened.

Promise Withheld

Thus it is the second story that looms large over the beginning of *House of Leaves*, but its hallmark, which is that of investigation, presents itself primarily in the form of reflections and conjecture. These reflections and speculations persist mostly in a tangential fashion, and in the footnotes in the second story and as I have mentioned, their authority is open to question.

The first story, which can be said to begin in Chapter II, is synonymous with the film itself, *The Navidson Record*. Typical second-story sentences such as “In many ways, the opening of *The Navidson Record*, shot back in April of 1990, remains one of the more disturbing sequences because it so effectively denies itself even the slightest premonition about what will soon take place on Ash Tree Lane” (Danielewski 8), or “Not once during those initial minutes does Navidson indicate he knows anything about the impending nightmare he and his family are about to face” (Danielewski 8) have an intrusive role, and carry the trademark tone of hindsight and of being wiser after the event. Yet these are never developed to a conclusive resolution, and remain at the level of ruminations and considerations of possibilities. *House of Leaves* offers no explanation for whatever has happened and instead presents us with the horrific and incredible details of what happens in the house. In lieu of categorical explanations there are conflicting views, and these remain unresolved, thereby belying *House of Leaves*’s promise of being a whodunit. An alternative way of making sense of this phenomenon is to call it a position of perpetual beginning.

To wit: such views as “He [Navidson] is wholly innocent, and the nature of the house, at least for a little while, lies beyond his imagination let alone his suspicions” are followed at once by “Of course not everyone remains in accordance with this assessment. Dr. Isaiah Rosen believes, ‘Navidson’s a fraud from frame one...’” (Danielewski 8), and such recurring oscillations resist a clear denouement. 335 pages down the book, and 181 pages before the end of *The Navidson Record* the progression of the narrative is still recorded in such debates: “After Navidson had vanished down the Spiral Staircase, Karen found herself trapped between two thresholds: one leading *into* the house, the other leading *out* of it” followed shortly by “The pharmacotherapy study Karen participated in never mentions any history of sexual abuse (see footnote 69). However it does not seem unreasonable to consider a traumatic adolescent experience, whether a fantasy or real, as a possible source for Karen’s fears. Unfortunately when asked by various reporters to confirm her sister’s claim Karen

refused to comment” (Danielewski 347). Karen’s sister had claimed that their stepfather had sexually abused them. These debates are characterised not just by contradiction but also by progressive vagueness and the difficulty of establishing an incontrovertible truth.

Most pertinent to the analysis of *House of Leaves* from the perspective of a whodunit is the following observation made by Todorov about the two stories: “It is no accident that it [the second story] is often told by a friend of the detective, who explicitly acknowledges that he is writing a book; the second story consists, in fact, in explaining how this very book came to be written” (Todorov 140). Although neither is Truant Zampanò’s friend (they have never met, even) nor Zampanò (nor Truant) Navidson’s friend, both Zampanò and Truant are writing books of the ‘second story-type’, but books that parody Todorov’s definition of the second story, by refusing rather than providing an adequate explanation of the first story: adequate with respect to the expectations the first story raises in the mind of the reader, that is.

Todorov’s insightful analysis of the first story as the story of an absence is ironically fulfilled in *House of Leaves*. According to him, the absent first story has to be represented through the second story to the reader. The second story exists only in order to reflect the first story. *House of Leaves* uses this story-structure to undermine it, by refusing to illuminate the absence of the first story, which is literally an absent space. And the second story with which *House of Leaves* appears to begin shades imperceptibly into the first story, as even Truant begins to succumb to the menace present in Navidson’s house. The metaphorical absence that Todorov talks of thus becomes a literal absence, a house with a space that cannot be measured, contained, or even entered except experientially. Logic and the laws of Physics fail to accommodate it.

Threshold

To work towards a resolution is to go against the grain of the spirit of this novel. But my paper has to end, and I choose to conclude by evoking the trope of the threshold, of the boundary that space inevitably suggests. Beginnings and endings also constitute thresholds, and it is one of the main effects of *House of Leaves* to train our eyes to thresholds, whether literally in the way the margins of the pages expand and contract and rotate; the way the book’s outer cover is shorter than the inner cover, prefiguring the architecture of Navidson’s house; or the way beginnings lead to other beginnings instead of

an end. In addition, the counter-intuitive use of the present tense in *House of Leaves* (consider: in a narrative which is being recapitulated twice, since Zampanò's version is re-presented to us by Truant)—possibly because it narrates a film—retains the reader at the starting-line. In this way, *House of Leaves* presents the paradox of the beginning being both an all-extending feature of the narrative as well as a threshold: covering space, as well as constituting a boundary.

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SECRETS AND LIES

SECRET AGENTS AND THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

Bruce Bennett

Secrets and lies abound wherever public requirements and private needs come into conflict. Nowhere is this more evident than in the lives of secret agents who work in the service of a government or a cause. Yet while the task of some agents may be to plant disinformation in order to mislead or confuse their perceived enemy, the purported goal of espionage is usually to learn the 'truth' of a situation—the power structure of a regime, for instance, or the battle plans of an opponent. When government or other bureaucracies are directing the activities of spies, and knowledge of operations is restricted to those who 'need to know,' the 'whole truth' of a situation may be almost impossible for a single person to know or understand. Hence the appositeness of the phrase from T.S. Eliot's poem "Gerontion," which was popularised by the CIA's chief of counter-intelligence, James Jesus Angleton, when he described the experience of espionage as being caught "in a wilderness of mirrors."¹ Angleton seems to have been intrigued by Eliot and is said to have adopted a Thomas Stearns Eliot appearance (Helms 153).

Although many workers in the burgeoning intelligence services attached to Western governments talk of the boredom and bureaucratic red tape that bedevil their working lives, it is remarkable how many over the past century have also claimed the importance of imagination, both to their work and to their lives more generally. A good example is Michael Thwaites, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation's former chief of counter-intelligence who

¹ According to Hayden Peake, Angleton characterized Soviet disinformation and intelligence operations as a "wilderness of mirrors" in a TV interview. When author David C. Martin used the phrase as the title of his book, it became "a popular epithet for counter-intelligence" (*The Private Life of Kim Philby*, p. 343).

supervised the defection to Australia in 1954 of Vladimir and Evdokia Petrov, who were KGB agents posing as diplomats in the embassy of the USSR in Canberra at the time. In his account of these events, *Truth Will Out*, Thwaites mentions the circumstances of his own recruitment to ASIO from a lectureship in English at the University of Melbourne. "Out of the blue" he says, Colonel Charles Spry, director-general of ASIO, invited him to a meeting. Spry told Thwaites that "a very effective Soviet spy ring [was] operating in Australia" and Australia's Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, had asked Colonel Spry to upgrade the security services. "You're a poet aren't you?" Spry said. (Thwaites had won the King's Medal for poetry when he was a student at Oxford.) "You have imagination. We want imagination in the organization and people with analytical skills" (Farquharson 25). Thwaites accepted the invitation and made his contribution to Australian and international history with the defection of the Petrovs followed by Thwaites's ghost-written biography of the Russian spies' lives, *Empire of Fear*.

The exercise of imagination, and the movement of imaginative sympathy, can of course complicate moral dilemmas. In Thwaites's case his imagination seems to have operated within the moral boundaries of his Anglican religious upbringing and the precepts of Moral Rearmament, the anti-Communist movement which he had adopted in post-war years. Thwaites's axis of good and evil was thus quite strictly defined. But in the fictional works of Graham Greene and John Le Carré, for example, two acknowledged masters of espionage fiction, these moral boundaries are more blurred as their imaginations engage with the conflicting demands of keeping secrets and telling lies.

The psychological perils of immersing oneself in the secret world are encapsulated in Le Carré's *The Spy Who Came In From the Cold* when the author reflects on the role of his protagonist, Alec Leamas, who has been sent by British Intelligence to work undercover in East Germany:

In itself, the practice of deception is not particularly exacting; it is a matter of experience, of professional *expertise*; it is a facility most of us can acquire. But while a confidence trickster, a play actor or a gambler can return from his performance to the ranks of his admirers, the secret agent enjoys no such relief. (149)

Le Carré expands on this. Deception in such circumstances, he says, is first of all a matter of self-defence. The agent "must protect himself not only from without but from within, and against the most natural of impulses." Most difficult of all, "he must under all circumstances withhold himself from those in whom he should naturally

confide,” including family, lovers and friends (Charney).

Writers of fiction or biography about individuals involved in espionage engage with the psychological effects of sustained deception in a variety of ways, as we shall see. Psychiatrists also have their ways and means of doing this. Psychological profiling of factors in a person’s upbringing, background and behaviour which may prefigure an effective career in intelligence is widely used by psychologists in intelligence agencies, but may be of limited value. Case studies or composite descriptions based on a number of case studies can also provide insights. For example, psychiatrist David Charney, who has treated a number of high profile ‘caught spies’ in the U.S. including Robert Hanssen, has developed a model of stages in the experience of a ‘composite spy.’² Charney’s composite figure typically experiences nine stages as he moves to a decision to spy for a foreign power, is recruited, proceeds with his tasks, retreats, goes into dormancy for a time, then is arrested, when the anger, brooding and remorse set in. Charney rejects easy assumptions about greed—the typical kneejerk reaction from an intelligence agency to ‘traitors’ in their ranks—that ‘the greedy bugger did it for the money.’ The “trained subconscious mind” of the psychiatrist is a more effective tool, he claims, than the rush to judgment. In Charney’s view, a core psychological insight can be derived from the cases of the caught spy: he (95 percent are men) suffers from “an intolerable sense of personal failure as privately defined by the person.”

I would argue however, that the most profound insights into the mental state and behaviour of men and women engaged in espionage are provided by writers of novels and life-stories—autobiography and biography. And a central feature of such narratives is often the capacity of individuals to deal with secrets and lies.

Two novels which engage closely with these issues and are set in Latin America are Graham Greene’s *Our Man in Havana* (1958) and John Le Carré’s *The Tailor of Panama* (1996). The film of *The Tailor of Panama*, directed by John Boorman and starring Australian actor Geoffrey Rush as Harry Pendel, the tailor, gives another dimension to the presentation of these issues. Le Carré acknowledged the formative influence of Greene’s novel on his when he remarked that, “After Greene’s *Our Man in Havana*, the notion of an intelligence fabricator would not leave me alone” (Le Carré, *Tailor* 336). Indeed, Greene’s

² David Charney, ‘The Psychology of Insider Spies,’ lecture at the Center for Peace and Security Studies, Georgetown University, 23 February, 2006. The quotations which follow are from this lecture.

vacuum cleaner salesman in Havana and Le Carré's tailor in Panama both have a gift of the gab which attracts both admiration and scepticism. Their sales talk carries both themselves and their listeners away at times; and the slips they make only occasionally reveal gaps in their assumed personae. They are often on the edge of being 'caught out.' But what is remarkable about each of them is that they manage to convince key people, and even at times themselves, that they have secret intelligence of international significance to impart when what they offer are the products of invention.

The novel and film of *The Tailor of Panama* are closely linked. John Le Carré was executive producer and author of the screenplay for the film under Boorman's direction. Geoffrey Rush, who plays the film's protagonist, was commuting from Melbourne to Panama for the filming on location, and to Dublin, where studio filming was done. Rush has said that Le Carré's novel was a companion-piece and reference work for him to understand the character of Harry Pendel, the half Irish, half Jewish London Eastender who learnt his tailoring in prison but transforms himself into a tailor with pedigree in Panama.³ There was some consideration of filming in Puerto Rico but Boorman insisted that it be done on location in Panama itself,⁴ where Noriega had invented a Communist opposition and Harry Pendel in the film invents a 'Silent Opposition' for his handlers in British intelligence.

Characters in films come with the cultural baggage of their previous roles. Geoffrey Rush is a brilliant impresario and he has remarked that his previous role as the Marquis de Sade partly informed his playing of Harry Pendel. Similarly, it might be said, he carried *The Tailor of Panama* with him when he subsequently played Peter Sellers in his many guises. The role of Andy Osnard, the inexperienced British secret service agent who recruits and runs Harry Pendel as a spy in Panama also carries cinematic cultural baggage. Pierce Brosnan, who plays Osnard in the film, was consciously countering his recent persona of James Bond. Another clever piece of intertextuality in the film is Boorman's absurdist playwright Harold Pinter as Harry Pendel's Uncle Benny, the Jewish Londoner who has set him on his path of crime and redemption and reappears as Harry's unreliable but persuasive inner voice of conscience, with gems of advice such as: "Try sincerity, that's a virtue."

Le Carré's character Harry Pendel is the author's most brilliant

³ *The Tailor of Panama* (film), directed by John Boorman (2001), Interview on DVD.

⁴ Ibid.

invention of a con-man since Magnus Pym's father Rick in *A Perfect Spy*. Both characters seem to emerge from Le Carré's memories of his con-man father, Ronald Cornwell, who was jailed for fraud during his son's early childhood and went bankrupt twice during his son's early twenties. *The Tailor of Panama*, for all its humorous invention—in the spirit of what Greene called his 'entertainment,' *Our Man in Havana*, but far more buoyant than that novel—revolves around the most consequential lie imaginable, the fabrication of intelligence which leads to the invasion of another country. In this, as in other respects, Le Carré's novel anticipates the recent American invasion of Iraq, with British and Australian support. Le Carré, it should be said, strongly opposed the war in Iraq.

Among the most discomfiting insights into secrets and lies in *The Tailor of Panama* is how closely allied they are to wit, humour and performativity. Le Carré shows, as Freud has also shown, that while jokes may seem innocuous, they often arise from subconscious anxieties. The chief of these in Le Carré's novel is the fear of discovery, a fear that leads Harry to scale the heights of fantasy. As he had learnt to do in prison, Harry becomes a performer: "A performer is a performer. If your audience isn't with you, it's against you," he thinks. The author explains: "[W]ith his own fictions in tatters, he needed to enrich the fictions of others" (64). Harry knows he has "an excessive dose of fluence" but he can't stop himself (67). The rationalisation and self-justification take over as Harry ponders his inability to tell his wife Louisa about his past and he tries to persuade himself that "Everything in the world is true if you invent it hard enough and love the person it's for!" (77). As he slides across the various accents and registers at his command—Irish, Cockney, Jewish and the professional patter of a tailor who has remade his past—Harry Pendel exposes the human vulnerability which makes him an endearing figure despite the calamities he sets in train.

Harry Pendel is not alone in his manipulation of truth and reality. His handler for British intelligence, Andy Osnard, after failing at several other jobs, seems to find his ominous vocation in MI6. Le Carré writes ironically of Osnard's perception of his career:

Osnard had found his Grail. Here at last was his true Church of England, his rotten borough with a handsome budget. Here were sceptics, dreamers, zealots and mad abbots. And the cash to make them real. (165)

The metaphoric foundations of religion, theatre and economics are laid. To these we must add the Imperial theme, for Osnard is told by his bosses that "The British task is to persuade the Americans to

fill the vacuum they've created [in Panama]...We're the last of the Romans. We have the knowledge but they have the power" (169).

These are the deeply flawed ideological bases from which the anti-heroic James Bond figure in the movie of *The Tailor of Panama* emerges. When Harry tells Andy Osnard of opposition among some Panamanians he knows to the regime in power, Osnard elevates this to an upper case 'Silent Opposition.' He rewrites the gossip from Harry who has been ironically codenamed BUCHAN (after the author of spy fiction, John Buchan), until the material "fitted like perfectly turned pegs into [intelligence] analysts' Black Holes" (195). This new fiction, or hot intelligence, has been made from a tailor's cuttings. As Harry tells himself in one of his disconcertingly revealing asides to himself, it is "All fluence. Loose threads, plucked from the air, woven and cut to measure" (200). While the odd sceptical voice is raised about the lack of "substance" or "collateral" of this intelligence by evaluators back at London Station, such voices are overridden by the perceived urgency of a "visionary" conclusion which will lead to intervention. We seem to have heard all this again recently. A senior American, desperate for a "smoking gun" or other "peg" on which to hang the invasion of Panama, says: "This is a moment for decisive action and having the national conscience adapt retrospectively. The national conscience will do that—we can help it" (247). But unlike Cuba, where Castro denied his Russian rockets, while photographs showed they were there, nothing so decisive can be shown in Panama—only denials of an alleged silent opposition to the Panamanian government. Whatever basis of evidence it chose to believe, the American invasion of Panama, overseen by President George H.W. Bush and codenamed Operation Safe Passage occurred. Le Carré's unique contribution, through the fictional means at his disposal, is to show how apparently harmless observations, gossip and storytelling, if mixed in certain ways, can become a lethal cocktail and lead to tragic consequences.

In examining the representations of secrets and lies in works described as fiction or non-fiction, it is important to establish and to recognise the significance of point-of-view. In the Cold War, as in subsequent phases of confrontation between powerful opponents or enemies, the portrayal of truth has varied radically according to the viewpoint of the perceiver. Thus the KGB perceptions of Panamanian Presidents Torrijos and Noriega varied according to their previous value in combating American interests in the region. The Mitrokhin archives, smuggled out of Russia in 1992 by KGB archivist Vladimir Mitrokhin, with the help of the British Secret Intelligence Service, and described by Christopher Andrew in *The World Was Going Our Way*,

reveal KGB attempts in the mid-1970s to make new “confidential contacts” among “progressive” anti-American political leaders including Torrijos (107). As Mitrokhin’s files show, the KGB attempted to reinforce Torrijos’s suspicion of U.S. President Jimmy Carter and his administration by forging a document which purported to show how the U.S. was “dragging out the Panama Canal negotiations and removing Torrijos himself from power” (110). Forgery is one obvious way of distorting the truth, of telling lies. It would be naïve to think that such “disinformation” did not occur from the American side too.

Whatever the truth about Torrijos’s involvement in drug trafficking—and President Carter was inclined to believe Torrijos’s innocence—American propaganda portrayed his successor, Manuel Noriega, as a would-be Castro and therefore an enemy of the U.S. Subsequently, Noriega became “the first foreign head of state to face criminal charges in a U.S. court [and was] sentenced to forty years imprisonment on eight counts of cocaine trafficking, racketeering and money laundering” (111). The layers of rumour, propaganda, lies and simple truth in these events defy definitive conclusion. In these circumstances, perhaps an informed work of fiction, such as *The Tailor of Panama*, may offer more avenues to a truthful account of these events than chronological histories or legalistic accounts based on sworn testimony.

In the past decade, literary studies have followed popular interests in giving greatly increased attention to the genre of ‘life-stories,’ or autobiography and biography. What can such studies offer those of us interested in the nature of secrets and lies and their human consequences? In particular, what might we learn about the search for truth from biographies and autobiographies of secret agents or spies?

From a welter of memoirs by former CIA agents, Duane R. Clarridge’s *A Spy for All Seasons* gives promise of throwing light on that question. Clarridge’s life in CIA took him to Nepal, India, Turkey, Italy and Iran, but the critical events in his career took place when he headed the Latin America Caribbean division in the early 1980s. An attractive feature of Clarridge’s narrative is its bluff, no-bullshit tone, suggesting honesty and directness. He acknowledges he is an “aggressive personality” (300). And he displays an aura of masculine and sometimes machismo self-confidence as he describes the mountains of work to be done and his typical way of relaxing:

The first thing in the morning, when facing twelve inches or more of incoming and perhaps half as much of outgoing cable traffic to read, I was aided by strong coffee and a nice, heavy-bodied, six-inch Honduran cigar. One of the perks of being in Latin America division was ac-

cess to a variety of fine cigars from Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua, and, once in a while, even Cuba. (226)

Elsewhere, Clarridge describes heavy sessions of Scotch whiskey-drinking with a variety of Latin American leaders.

While the U.S. intervention in Grenada and the war against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua devoured large amounts of “Dewey” Clarridge’s time, he also throws some light, or at least colour, on the situation in Panama. As part of the CIA’s covert operations in Central America, Clarridge decided to visit Manuel Noriega “to explore the possibility of setting up a training camp in Panama” (235). “Sometimes in the spy business,” he remarks, “you don’t have a choice with whom you deal; unfortunately, it is often the unsavoury individuals who have the critical information” (237).

Clarridge also indicates that he relishes such occasions (237). At Noriega’s “modest” home, the two men drink Old Parr Scotch, Noriega’s favourite, and he gives Clarridge a box of Cuban cigars. Clarridge notes that Noriega was “a great collector of frogs, made from a wide variety of materials, including some of semi-precious stones” (237). He notes that the Spanish word ‘sapo’ is a word for a toad or, perhaps in some cases, a frog, and is also a colloquialism for ‘spy’ (238). Is this an invented James Bond touch in the narrative? Or an indication of Noriega’s ambivalent regard for spies—even, or perhaps especially, from the CIA? At any rate, Noriega is receptive to Clarridge’s proposal of a training base and offers the CIA Snake Island off the west coast of Panama—an offer that is later rescinded when Noriega becomes nervous that it will become an issue in the forthcoming elections. Clarridge adds that he suspects the reason was pressure from Cuba that made Noriega change his mind (238).

Are such episodes in a memoir of any value in establishing broader understanding of the use of secrets and lies? The British historian of intelligence, Christopher Andrew, taking an overview of Cold War operations in Latin America in *The World Was Going Our Way*, observes that “KGB operations were greatly assisted by the clumsy and sometimes brutal American response to Latin American revolutionary movements” (30). As head of Latin American operations for the CIA in the early 1980s, Clarridge must take some of the blame for this—especially for the mining of ports, which according to his account was his idea (269). Clarridge’s credibility was damaged badly when he was indicted on seven counts of lying to Congress and the Tower Commission during the Iran-contra hearings, only to be pardoned by George Bush senior on the eve of his departure from the presidency in 1992 (392, 397). Even in the crossfire of competing

ideologies, in which Latin America has been heavily embroiled, it is surely valuable to observe ways in which certain secrets are kept and lies are told. With such knowledge, our approach to truth-telling may be less naïve in the future. The danger is perhaps cynicism about the value of honesty and truth-telling in human affairs.

In conclusion then, I turn to several books which reassert the significance and value of the never-ending search for truth in human affairs in the twenty-first century. These books are Bernard Williams's *Truth and Truthfulness*, Paul John Eakin's *The Ethics of Life Writing* and Joseph Wilson's *The Politics of Truth*.

Against postmodern assertions of the endless deferral of meaning and the relativity of all versions of "truth," Bernard Williams argues with philosophical rigour that "truth has an internal connection with beliefs and assertions...[and that] truth figures in this connection as a value" (84). Williams makes the following statement:

Truthfulness implies a respect for the truth. This relates to the two basic virtues of truth, which I shall call Accuracy and Sincerity: you do the best you can to acquire true beliefs, and what you say reveals what you believe. The authority of academics must be rooted in their truthfulness in both these respects: they take care, and they do not lie. (11)

Williams concludes his careful philosophical analysis of what he calls a "genealogy" of truth and truthfulness on a note of hope:

The hope can no longer be that the truth, enough truth, the whole truth, will itself set us free... The hope is that [human beings who communicate] will keep going in something like the more courageous, intransigent, and socially effective forms that they have acquired over their history; that some institutions can exist that will both support and express them; that the ways in which future people will come to make sense of things will enable them to see the truth and not be broken by it. (268-9)

On a somewhat similar note, Paul John Eakin argues that life writing can be a form of moral inquiry in pursuit of something like self-knowledge and truth:

When we tell or write down our lives, our stories establish our identities both as content—I am the person who did these things—and as an act—I am someone with a story to tell. And we do something even more fundamental—we establish ourselves as persons... (5)

However, as Joseph Wilson's recent autobiographical study *The Politics of Truth* shows, men and women of conscience can have an uphill battle when the values they espouse conflict with those of an incumbent government. Wilson's book is both an account of his life and career as a diplomat in Africa, Iraq and elsewhere and of what

the subtitle of his book calls “the lies that led to war and betrayed my wife’s CIA identity.” Partly as a result of claims made in Wilson’s autobiography, U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney’s former chief-of-staff, I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, was indicted in October 2005 on five counts of perjury, making false statements and obstruction of justice, during investigations by Special Counsel Patrick J. Fitzgerald (Leonnig A5). Wilson argued that shortly after he had publicly asserted that the Bush administration had twisted intelligence about uranium in Niger to justify war with Iraq, senior officials in the White House had leaked the identity of Wilson’s wife, Valerie Plame, who was a CIA undercover operative, in order to discredit Wilson and his exposure of twisted intelligence. Libby’s defence is still being developed.

Our focus here, in conclusion, is on the figure of Valerie Plame, the real life CIA agent whose anonymity and secret service career were “blown” by the leaks which were published in newspapers in July 2003. The impact of these disclosures on the once-secret agent is graphically depicted by Wilson in *The Politics of Truth*:

...Valerie’s life was turned upside down. Nobody...could comprehend what it must be like for somebody who has practiced discretion and lived her cover for years—like a character in a stage play where the curtain never comes down—to suddenly find herself a household name. She likened it, aptly, to an out-of-body experience, floating above the new reality, unable to do anything but watch helplessly while people who knew nothing about her speculated about what she did. (388)

Secrets and lies are intertwined here. Valerie Plame had been required to lie to friends and acquaintances about her working life to maintain her cover. She had learnt to play a part. In her husband Joseph Wilson’s account, these are the necessary subterfuges of a secret service career. Far more serious are the lies involved when a President orders the invasion of another country on the basis of fabricated “evidence” that the other country is developing nuclear weapons. A similar scale of values underlies John Le Carré’s *The Tailor of Panama*. Harry Pendel’s little white lies that grow in the telling pale before the arrogance of a government (in this case the British government) that manipulates intelligence to suit its precarious hold on reality. It is never a foregone conclusion that “truth will out” in the world of spies and counter-spies. But this should not prevent the exercise of imagination and analytical skills in its perilous pursuit.

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FALSE AND SOOTH COMPOUNDED IN CAXTON'S ENDING OF CHAUCER'S *HOUSE OF FAME*

Nickolas Haydock

Si quis abstulerit vel curtaverit folium, anathema sit.¹

But for the postface, it is always both too early and too late.
(Gerard Genette, *Paratexts*)

God turne us every drem to goode!
(Chaucer, *House of Fame*)

In William Caxton's apology for the many sins of omission and commission in his first edition of *The Canterbury Tales* (1477) the publisher defensively maintains, "by me was nothyng added ne my-nussyd."² The formula is a favorite of Caxton's and appears often in his prologues and epilogues, sometimes as an invitation to his noble readers to correct his text as they see fit and sometimes as here it is a self-justification—no matter how corrupt Caxton's editions might be, the corruption was not introduced by him. The phrase also reveals something about how Caxton thinks of texts: they are malleable or elastic objects subject to his manipulations, just as he himself is subject to his customers' demands. Caxton perhaps adapts this conception of textuality from what Thomas Greene calls the "tacitly unfinished" nature of manuscripts,³ though his attitude is certainly

¹ The phrase is a well-attested formula in book curses and appears *mutatis mutandis* throughout the middle ages. For examples from the eighth through the fifteenth centuries see Drogin102-106.

² All of Caxton's original writings are quoted from the edition of Blake, which includes Caxton's poetic ending to *The House of Fame*. The prose is also available in Crotch.

³ See as well Lerer 149-150, which has an engaging discussion of these matters, although, as will become clear my reading of Caxton's *Book of Fame* departs from his general presentation of Caxton as humanist who stresses in his editions the gap between writer and reader. The ending of the *Book of Fame* would suggest that there is little space indeed between a text and its reception.

complicated by the printing revolution, one of the great benefits of which was supposedly the multiple and identical production of faithful copies (see Greene 81-88 and Bruns 125-126). The central space occupied by Caxton's print shop between Chaucer's texts and his late fifteenth-century readers is a central concern of this essay, a space, I will argue, where it is Caxton's business to manufacture authority through responses to and the channeling of demand.

The "Prohemye" to the second edition of the *Canterbury Tales* (1483) which contains Caxton's apology blames the flaws of the first edition on a corrupt copytext riddled with deletions and padded with scribal fillers: "wryters haue abyrdgyd it and many thynges left out and in somme place haue sette certayn versys that he [Chaucer] neuer made ne sette in hys booke." Hoping to market the new edition successfully, the publisher assures his customers that he himself has "dilygently oversen and duly examyned" the text "to th'ende that it be made acordyng unto his [Chaucer's] owen makyng." The repetition ("made," "making") while it is typical of Caxton's prose style also intimates something about the parallel roles of poet and publisher. Both he and Chaucer are makers of poetry: the one creates, the other hopes to reproduce this original intention a century later despite the intervention of careless scribes and compositors. However, Caxton's way of making the new edition of the *Canterbury Tales* accord with his idea of what Chaucer wrote is quite different than the strategy modern editors would employ to establish a text. It seems that when a patron offered him a better text Caxton simply corrected his old edition with the new manuscript. He did not collate the two manuscripts nor did he print the new, superior text, but rather conflated two separate manuscript traditions.⁴ Caxton has received a great deal of criticism for the cavalier ways he treated Chaucer's text but such hindsight need not detain us here. What we should note however is the publisher's willingness to supplement faulty or incomplete texts according to models he deems more accurate and complete.

In the same year (1483), no doubt intending to capitalize on the demand that a new *Canterbury Tales* would create, Caxton printed another of Chaucer's unfinished works, accepting the title given in the *Retractions*, *The Book of Fame*, to which he adjoins an extended

⁴ Scholars have ascertained that the two manuscripts descended from different manuscript traditions. The first derives from the *b* text to which Caxton made additions and corrections from a manuscript of the *a* text. See Blake, *Caxton and his World*, 102-106 and Boyd, 21-27.

epilogue.⁵ Also published at the same time was yet a third Chaucer folio, the *Troilus and Criseyde*. Caxton's use of prologues and epilogues is spotty: in all his publications of Chaucer only the *Boece*, the second edition of the *Canterbury Tales* and *the Book of Fame* include extended paratextual remarks. Caxton's *Troilus* has neither prologue nor epilogue and even lacks a title. About Caxton's three Chaucer publications of 1483, I would like to suggest the following hypothesis, which if accepted would help us fit the pieces of these three works together as forming a revealing example of the mixture of commercial motivation and literary appreciation in Caxton's presentation of Chaucer. As Alexandra Gillespie remarks:

It is possible... that Caxton's issue of three Chaucer folios in 1483 offered readers the opportunity to assemble collections of Chaucer's *Works*, which Leland and Pynson imitated. In a collection of works, the anonymous 1483 *Troilus* would be the logical extension of Caxton's representation of the *Tales* and *House of Fame* as books of Chaucer's "owen making." (173)

It is quite possible too that the production of these folios as *Sammelbände* includes "traces" of Caxton's marketing design. If as is likely Caxton designed these three poems to be assembled as a "works" anthology of Chaucer, then Caxton's paratexts for these publications can be seen as a marvel of economy and foresight. Binding the collection of *Sammelbände* in the order *Canterbury Tales*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and concluding with the *Book of Fame* yields a series beginning with a "Prologue" and ending with an "Epilogue." Both of the paratexts in this series, occupying the places of what Gerard Genette would call a "preface" and a "postface" (cf., 237-294), praise Chaucer as a "laureate poete," reference his worthiness to be read by the nobility, and advertise Caxton's diligent oversight of the preservation and restoration of these texts. If we imagine that such an order was planned, then the unfinished nature of Chaucer's *House of Fame* exerts special pressure on an editor wishing not only to round out his folio collection of *Sammelbände* with an appearance of complete-

⁵ Caxton calls the work, *The Book of Fame*, according to the format for titles established in Chaucer's *Retracciounes*. Only his editions of *The Book of Fame* and *Boece* have printed titles. I have referred throughout to Caxton's edition as *The Book of Fame* and to Chaucer's poem, apart from Caxton's publication of it, as the *House of Fame*. Caxton's publications of Chaucer cluster around the dates of the two editions of *The Canterbury Tales*: the first period (1477) saw editions of *The Parliament of Fowls* and other pieces, *Anelida and the False Arcite* with *Chaucer's Complaint to his Purse* and an edition of *Boece*; in the second period (1483) appeared *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The House of Fame*, along with the new edition of the *Tales*. The sequence and dates of publication were established over a century ago by Blades and are still widely accepted. See Blake, *William Caxton* 150 and Boyd 16-17.

ness, but also responding with a particular urgency to the matter of the poem itself: poetic fame and the transmission of literature.

Certainly Caxton's intervention at the end of the *House of Fame* displays an anxiety about the status of an unfinished text not in evidence in his other publications of Chaucer's fragments, such as the unfinished tales or the incomplete *Canterbury Tales*. With his edition of the *House of Fame* Caxton openly commits the same kind of additions to his source text for which he had castigated the scribes of Chaucer's *Tales* in the prologue. He appends "certayn versys" to the poem which Chaucer "neuer made," though he also prints his name in the margin across from the first of these lines to articulate the space between this prosthetic appendage and the crippled body of Chaucer's text.

They were a chekked both two
And neyther of hym might out goo
And wyth the noyse of them (t)wo⁶ CAXTON
I sodeynly awoke anon tho
And remembryd what I had seen
And how hye and ferre I had been
In my ghoost and had grete wonder
Of that the God of Thunder
Had lete me knowen and began to wryte
Lyke as ye have herd me endyte
Wherefor to studye and rede alway
I purpose to doo day be day
Thus in dremyng and in game
Endeth thys lytyl *Book of Fame*.⁷

⁶ The Caxton print reads "And wyth the noyse of themwo." Along with his modern editors I believe the emendation is justified:; it is probably what Caxton intended the compositor to set up. There are numerous mistakes and dropped lines in Caxton's version but these should not be attributed to Caxton himself. Besides minor errors of syntax and spelling, there are six significant omissions in Caxton's print: lines 65-66 which interestingly enough include the promise that the poet will tell his whole ("everydel") dream, lines 280-283 which exist only on Thynne's 1532 edition of the poem, lines 793-796, an oversight which makes nonsense of the Eagle's lecture on sound waves, lines 826-864, the second largest of the omissions was, I suspect, a conscious abbreviation of a rather windy avian monologue, lines 1540-1542 and lines 2095-2158—another omission which I think intentional and which I discuss at length later in this essay. Edwards (80-92) argues that Caxton's exemplar (probably closest to MS Pepys 2006 among the surviving 3 MSS of the poem) was defective at many points and that "Caxton's sense of his editorial role extended to filing such lacunae—just as he felt it appropriate to add his own ending to the incomplete text" (89).

⁷ These lines are most readily available in the "textual notes" section of modern editions of Chaucer (a testimony to their enduring adhesion to the poem). See, for example, Robinson's edition (901).

The spirit and the substance of Caxton's ending are modeled on the final stanza of *The Parliament of Fowls*. Just as Caxton had used another text of the *Canterbury Tales* to supplement and correct his initial, faulty edition, so too he uses one dream vision to complete another. While the conclusion is clearly not by Chaucer, still it is "made according to his making."

And with the shoutyng, whan the song was do
That foules maden at here flyght away,
I wok, and othere bokes tok me to,
To reede upon, and yet I rede alway.
I hope, ywis, to rede so som day
That I shal mete som thyng for to fare
The bet, and thus to rede I nyl nat spare.
(693-699)⁸

That Caxton fell prey to a temptation that threatens to seduce all editors has not endeared him to his modern counterparts. F.N. Blake is typically forthright in dismissing the printer's imitation of these lines. He judges the conclusion tacked on amateurishly in a hasty attempt to "tidy up the text: he wished to print an entire poem. Yet he was not sufficiently moved by the poem to think how it might have finished; he had neither the talent nor the inspiration for that. His addition is in no sense a continuation; it is simply a way of drawing the poem to an end as quickly as possible" (*Caxton and his World* 107). This is an unduly harsh and misleading judgment. As I will argue, Caxton's way of ending the poem demonstrates a canny as well as sympathetic reaction to the poem's ubiquitous concern with the transmission of literature.

The self-confessed forgery shows that the printer was attentive to many of the idiosyncrasies of Chaucer's style and tone. The noise within the dream that startles the dreamer awake, the author's waking resolution to record his experience and his dedication to reading are staples of Chaucer's dream persona that his fifteenth-century readers admired and imitated. Such effects became trademarks of Chaucerianism among poets from Hoccleve, Clanvowe and Lydgate to Dunbar and Skelton.⁹ The conclusion certainly highlights Caxton's familiarity with Chaucer's poetry: it is "made according to his making." Despite a few metrical irregularities, the imitation is quite an acceptable addition to the canon of Chauceriana, but the question remains:

⁸ All quotations of Chaucer's works, hereafter cited by line number within the text of this essay, are taken from Benson.

⁹ On the Chaucerian tradition see particularly Ebin; Spearing; Lerer; Trigg; Prendergast and Kline, eds. and Haydock.

why was it written? Either a cosmetic ending designed to conceal that the poem was unfinished—such as those favored by the scribes who wrote spurious endings to the *Canterbury Tales*¹⁰—or an extended completion frankly authored by Caxton would be readily explicable. But why append such a brief ending and then mark it as allographic? As I argued above the poetic conclusion and the epilogue which follows it may contain traces of an overarching editorial plan. It is likely as well that Caxton felt a completed poem had a greater claim on his readers' attention. And perhaps, like some modern scholars, he felt the poem all but finished. Caxton's name in the margin serves both as a barrier against charges of forgery and as a flag to signal the end of Chaucer's text, thereby shielding the printer against the charges of unidentified additions and subtractions brought against the *editio princeps* of the *Canterbury Tales*. Yet this act of editorial rectitude is also a wedge Caxton uses to insert his own poetry as well as his own name into Chaucer's *House of Fame*. I suggest that this critical act of closure is both more sensitive and more motivated a conclusion than Caxton's own editors have imagined.

Modern scholars have uniformly assumed that the manuscript from which Caxton produced his version must have lacked the final sixty-four lines of the poem as it is printed in modern editions.¹¹ His edition ends at line 2094 with the contrary voices of "leysyng" and "soth sayd sawe"¹² wedged in a slapstick stalemate at the window frame, "and neyther of hym myght out goo." Scholars have been quick to sympathize with Caxton's plea that he printed the poem just as he found it. Since the *House of Fame* is incomplete in all the extant MSS, it is easy to believe that the random loss of a folio page accounts for Caxton's copytext being even more incomplete than the two manuscripts (Fairfax 16 and Bodley 638)¹³ which end as modern

¹⁰ See, for example the moralizing conclusion to the abortive *Cook's Tale* in MS Rawlinson 141: "And thus with horedom and bryberye/ Together they vsed till they honged hye/ For who so euel byeth shal make a sory sale/ And thus I make an ende of my tale" (quoted in McCormic (328 and 426).

¹¹ See Blake (*Caxton and his World*, 106-107) and Blake (*William Caxton and English Literary Culture*), as well as Penninger (106), Painter (131) and Boyd (31-32).

¹² Fairfax 16, Bodley 638 as well as Thynne's edition (1532) have the reading "sad soth sawe."

¹³ It is interesting to note that Caxton's conclusion is affixed even to more complete versions of the poem, although in both cases the conclusion is not identified as Caxton's. Fairfax 16 includes Caxton's verses, although these are obviously set down by a much later hand. Thynne's printed version adapts the first two lines of Caxton's ending to make it fit the appearance of the man of great authority: "And therwithal I abrayde/ Out of my slepe halfe a frayde."

editions of the poem do—with the silent epiphany of the “man of gret auctoritee.” But if his manuscript did end at the exact point he claims, the remaining lines provided the editor an almost impossibly fortuitous opportunity to affix the ready-made ending adapted from the *Parliament of Fowls*. Should not the excellent fit of the *Parliament*-inspired ending to Caxton’s version make us at least a little suspicious? Like the second edition of the *Canterbury Tales* published that same year, Caxton’s *Book of Fame* may also have undergone a process of addition and subtraction quite different than he leads us to suspect.

It may be that Caxton’s honesty about his own contribution to Chaucer’s poem is, in part, a screen to hide what he takes away. In his version of Chaucer’s *House of Fame* there is no need to put words in the mouth of the “man of gret auctoritee,” no need for the printer to engage in what has turned out to be an endless debate about his identity and his message, no need to unravel the complexities of the dark conceit which few readers, medieval or modern, have felt confident to provide. Caxton avoids the Sisyphean task of having to make sense of all that has gone before. In his version of the *House of Fame*, as in the *Parliament*, the decision between contrary voices is simply deferred. And only a ruckus not a resolution is needed to draw the poem to a hasty close. Excising the final 64 lines, the printer escapes the necessity to make order out of this most chaotic of Chaucer’s inventions and instead offers an ending truer to the spirit of the poem as we have it than perhaps even Chaucer himself was prepared to do. He need only wake the dreamer at an opportune moment, one that freezes in stasis the poem’s central *agon* between truth and falsity. Chaucer’s window frame is made to serve as a framing device; in it he displays as the poem’s final image the contradictory properties of fame and of language itself: “lesyng” and “soth sawe” deadlocked in an inextricable paradox. Framing the winged rumors in this way presents Caxton’s readers with a memorable, telling emblem of the hermeneutic indecisiveness that rules the whole poem.

The “Epilogue” which follows Caxton’s poetic conclusion maintains a scrupulous division between poet and printer:

I fynde nomore of this werke to fore sayd / For as fer as I can vnderstande / This noble man Geofferey Chaucer fynysshed at the sayd conclusion of the metyng of leysng and sothsawe / where as yet they ben chekked and maye not departe / whyche werke as me semeth is craftyly made and dygne to be wretton and knowen / For he towechyth in it grete wysedom and subtyll vnderstandyng / And so in alle hys werkys he excelleth in myn oppynyon alle other wryters in our Englyssh / For he wrytteth no voyde wordes/ but alle hys mater is ful of hye and quycke sentence / to whom alle ought to be gyuen laude and

preysyng for his noble making and wrytyng / For of hym alle other
haue borrowed syth and taken / in alle theyr sayeng and wrytyng. And
I humbly besече and praye yow emonge your prayers to remember
hys soule, on wyche and on alle Crysten soulis I besече Almyghty
God to have mercy. Amen.

Emprynted by Wylliam Caxton

Caxton's obsessively conjunctive periods might lead us to snicker at the lack of self-consciousness in his praise of Chaucer for writing "no voyde wordes," but beneath the repetitiousness of the style lurks a genuine concern about the printing of an unfinished text. The next to last sentence could easily be passed over as just another in the long list of fifteenth-century tributes to the poet, yet it is also possible to read these words as an apology for Caxton's own verses. As a poet Caxton employs the combination of imitation and reverence that characterizes the Chaucerian tradition. As an editor, he has "borrowed" language from one of Chaucer's poems to restore another, like a stonemason rebuilding a vaulted architrave with stone of equal weight and size, taken from another building. But in order to make the restoration he has had to knock a jagged edge from the ruin. Caxton sacrificed the end of the fragment in order to make it conform to a pattern of closure for which there existed a ready-made example in the conclusion to the *Parliament of Fowls*. Paradoxically, the last 64 lines of Chaucer's poem are 'edited' in order to accommodate a conclusion that is recognizably Chaucerian. Caxton's *Book of Fame* is then circumscribed by the editor's understanding of symbolic form. A poem that seems to promise answers but fails to deliver becomes, like the *Parliament*, a finished but indecisive poem that dramatizes irresolution. In Roland Barthes' terms the movement is backwards, from "text" to "work," in that Caxton attempts to close down the openness of Chaucer's text by fixing its meaning in a comic image of indeterminacy itself.¹⁴ And again in Barthes' terms, this perhaps

¹⁴ Responding to a much earlier version of this argument in my 1994 doctoral thesis, Stephanie Trigg maintained: "Haydock's thesis goes against the received wisdom that all of Chaucer's words were treasured, in the early editions, but it does have the attractive merit of imputing Caxton with a more active editorial role, concerned to produce ontological and narrative closure, as well as textual completion of the text at hand" (118). In reply I would only quibble with Trigg's evocation of "received wisdom." It is modern scholars who "treasure" Chaucer's "words" not early printers like Caxton, who treasured his works considerably more. So much so in fact that they multiplied them with apocryphal texts and filled gaps in Chaucer with scribal continuations or those they themselves composed or inherited from earlier printers. Caxton's own edition of the *Book of Fame* includes a number of dropped lines and perhaps another intentional abbreviation not missing from the MS that most closely resembles his exemplar, Pepys 2006 title (see note 6 above). Also it is clear that Caxton hurriedly

regressive movement from text to work is performed in the service of bestowing “authority” upon the writer.

The publisher’s explanation specifies with admirable precision the exact line at which his text of Chaucer’s poem ends. The “Epilogue” also reveals a subtle appreciation of the resonance of this image for the poem. Caxton wryly updates the location of “lesyng” and “soth sawe,” claiming that they remain “as yet” right where Chaucer left them. And we may glimpse behind the clever joke about Caxton’s editorial rectitude a profounder point about the mixture of fidelity and distortion in acts of textual reproduction. As Paul Strohm reads the episode in his masterful *Social Chaucer*, the selfish bargain ultimately struck by lying and truth-telling (not in Caxton’s version) may represent a satire of the “essentially opportunistic” agreements that are “a source of social havoc” (96). Caxton’s own resolution of the conflicts aroused by the poem’s ending—or rather lack of one—then duplicates the very temporizing kind of alliance of truth and falsehood that Chaucer himself attributes to the rise of commercialism. However, in choosing to end his *Book of Fame* with the trapped birds Caxton may also be recuperating a traditional mnemonic trope often found in the borders of manuscripts.¹⁵ By stopping forever Chaucer’s contentious birds of rumor Caxton signals to his readers what they should remember about the *Book of Fame*, that it is a comic poem about the duplicities inherent in the transmission of any message, particularly in the reception and commercial reproduction of literary texts.

Caxton’s choice of “lesyng” and “soth sawe” as the ending of the vision may derive from his recognition of the importance of the concept in the representation of Fame and dreams in ancient literature. In Book Four (line 190) of the *Aeneid*, Fama herself ‘sang equally of things done and undone’ (*pariter facta atque infecta canebat*), as she does in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 12. 54-5 (*mixta cum veris. . . commenta*). In this most variable of goddesses, one

proofread what his compositors set up. In comparing Caxton’s first and second editions of the *Canterbury Tales*, Blake comes to the following conclusion: “The fact that he was willing to edit Chaucer’s work in this way shows he did not have that tender regard for Chaucer’s style and language which some scholars have claimed for him. The second edition was made hastily and without proper care... in general he was inspired more by commercial than by academic considerations” (1969 105-6). As I hope to demonstrate, however, in Caxton’s *Book of Fame* stylistic, even “academic considerations” can be shown to have worked in concert with commercial motivations. The most recent study of the MS tradition of the *House of Fame* by Edwards also suggests that Caxton “could be seeking to fill lacunae (i.e., of single lines) by his own invention” (88).

¹⁵ On caged or penned birds as a mnemonic trope see Carruthers (33-37, 246-248 and figure 27).

characteristic remains constant: she mixes truth and falsehood. But in choosing the confounding of truth and lying to end his version of the *House of Fame*, Caxton recalls an even more important subtext for the dream vision genre—the Gates of Dreams in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*:

Sunt geminae Somni portae, quarum altera fertur
cornea, qua veris facilis datur exitus umbris,
altera candenti perfecta nitens elephanto,
sed falsa ad caelum mittunt insomnia manes.

(There are twin gates of Dreams, one is said to be of horn through which an easy exit is given to true shades, but by another shining gate of brilliant ivory the spirits send forth false nightmares to the upper air.)

(lines 893-899)¹⁶

The last image of *Aeneid* 6 becomes *mutatis mutandis* the last image of the *Book of Fame*. Typically, Chaucer has comically deflated and transformed what is a founding text of medieval dream interpretation without robbing the image of its resonance or gravity. He leaves truth and falsity only one exit and Caxton fixes them there, provocatively entangled for all time.

It is a commonplace of medieval dream literature that dreams are very difficult to interpret. Indeed, Chaucer's *House of Fame* begins with an extended *dubitatio* about the categorization, causes, significance and validity of dreams. Caxton's conclusion brings about not a resolution of this difficulty but rather a disorderly sense of closure, of things having come full-circle. The ending returns us to the epistemological havoc of the beginning and confirms its proposition, that dreams are ambiguous. And the ring structure created by Caxton's new ending is faithful both to the poetics of the *House of Fame* itself and the experience of reading the poem, which, as McGerr's summarizes, "takes the reader on a textual path that repeatedly circles back on and mirrors itself, as though to return the reader to its beginning" (62). Donald R. Howard has argued ingeniously that the closing of Chaucer's poem is to be taken as a kind of shaggy dog story in which the silent "man of grete auctoritee" represents the message of Chaucer's poem, that there is no message (232-259).¹⁷

¹⁶ Quoted from Mynors' edition of Virgil's works.

¹⁷ Stevenson reviews the numerous modern attempts to solve the mystery of this man and his message, and concludes herself that the "most inconsequential conclusions to the *House of Fame* are least apt to trivialize" (27) Chaucer's poem. I agree for the most part with her evaluations of the history of this scholarship and endorse

By expunging this man from the end of the poem, Caxton leaves us without an expectation of a *deus ex machina* who will appear to make sense of it all. In essence this new ending takes from the poem its most provocative “lack” (in Middle English both a physical or moral defect, as well as a desideratum). Carol A.N. Martin notes the difficulties later Renaissance editors (like Speght) had with the poem’s “paradox-oriented dialectics” as against the “truth claims of the more usually employed dialectics of scholastic philosophy” (40), evident in Boccaccio’s treatment of the issue in the final two books of *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods* and in Sidney’s *Apology for Poetry*, for instance. If Renaissance editors had a problem with Chaucer’s *House of Fame* that caused them to marginalize the poem and attempt to mute its skepticism about poetry as a vehicle of fame and truth, as Martin maintains, then Caxton’s ending suggests that he too may have found the poem troubling, but that he was sufficiently concerned to offer a less dismissive resolution to the problems it poses. The message of Caxton’s version—that poetic messages are themselves ambiguous—is hardly a conclusion that either Boccaccio or Sidney would have disputed. Incidentally, this is also very much in keeping with the conclusions about the *House of Fame* come to by most recent critics of the poem.¹⁸

Chaucer’s poem dramatizes what happens to books when they enter a mind already cluttered with other books: some of them memorized verbatim, some barely and imperfectly recollected, some hopelessly muddled, and others (like the infamous “Lollius”) present only by reputation. When a book enters the messy, cramped space of a brain full of other books it is accommodated to what is already there, just as these books have to give up space—or share it—with the new arrival. Chaucer’s poem is a comedy about the cluttered space of readerly intellection, a carnival celebration of the imagination ruminating on memories of books. Through this menacing funhouse of folly and delight we venture forth into the uncertain future of a mind making itself up as it goes along. Books truncate and supplement

whole-heartedly her conclusion—which is why, in fact, that I prefer Caxton’s ending of the *House of Fame* to any of those suggested by modern readers. As a matter of record, I also prefer Caxton’s version to Chaucer’s.

¹⁸ See especially: Delany, Jordan, Sklute, Boitani, Doob and McGerr. For the notion that the debate genre itself evolves toward a poetics of irresolution, see Reed. Penelope Doob’s conclusions about the poem perhaps most succinctly sums up this trend: “The functional inseparability of truth and falsehood caused by our imperfect perspective and perceptions is the central epistemological theme of *The House of Fame...*” (313).

each other in the dreamer's vision. Just as the story of Troy is reduced to a set of tableaux by Virgil in the reliefs which adorn the Temple of Juno in Book One, so too the *Aeneid* itself is reduced to a combination rebus and picture gallery in the Temple of Glass in the first book of the *House of Fame*. This *ekphrasis* is instructive for the way it presents the difficulties implicit in the transmission of literature. The temple it seems is also a house of translation. The table of brass is inscribed with an idiosyncratic metaphrase of the beginning of Virgil's epic, suitably adapted to the tentative Chaucerian style: "I wol now synge, yif I kan/ The armes and also the man" (143). The multiform changes that language undergoes as it passes through time are foregrounded. After taking six lines to translate two plus a dactyl of Virgil's opening, Chaucer turns to paraphrase, but this paraphrase itself quickly slips into narration and includes pieces of direct address that have no classical source and seem to come from Chaucer's sympathetic participation in the markedly *Ovidian* pathos of the events he transcribes.

The dreamer re-members the events of the *Aeneid* out of proportion to Virgil's presentation of them and in chronological order (the rhetoricians' *ordo naturalis* rather than *ordo artificis*) so that the *iliupersis* and the odyssey (Books 2 and 3) of Aeneas are narrated before the events of Book 1. The first image on the wall described is that of Sinon whose name (Yes/No) and character form a human counterpart to the compounding of truth and falsehood later in the dreamer's voyage. In this temple sacred to Venus, Chaucer's narration of the Dido episode swells to many times the size of his retelling of the rest of the *Aeneid* and his account of Dido's tragedy is complicated by a different point of view on the love affair, contaminated by Ovid's *Heroides*. Chaucer's memory and discernment are also at issue, he thinks or pretends to think that Iulus and Ascanius are the names of Aeneas' two sons (177-178). The narrator also demonstrates that personal bias and sympathies have a role to play in the reception of a text: at one point he breaks off his tale to complain, in direct address, to Juno for her cruelty to his Trojan forebears—a *mise en abyme* of recrimination that takes its clue from similar sentiments expressed in Book One of the *Aeneid*, first by Virgil himself and later by Aeneas. And too his synopsis of the last half of the *Aeneid* is so hasty that only eight lines are used to cover the final six books. Wittingly or not, Chaucer has given us a model of how a courtly poet attends to classical, martial epic: the topic of love is brought to the forefront and magnified while events like the destruction and foundation of civilizations recede to form a dim and confusing backdrop—not unlike the ratio between the history of Troy and the sorrows of Troilus in Chaucer's own (romance)

epic.¹⁹ Chaucer's treatment of the *Aeneid* demonstrates that as texts are received they are supplemented and truncated according to the predispositions of the reader. Likewise, Caxton's encounters with Chaucer's poetry, his additions and subtractions, prove that he had learned from his master how to reproduce a text that bears the distinct traces of having been read at a particular time and place.

If Chaucer's great themes in the *House of Fame* are the posterity of literature and its capacity to grant renown to both its creators and their subjects, these themes are decisively undercut by the consistent insinuation that literature is distorted by transmission and that Fame is indeed a capricious goddess. Fame not only inspires literature to be written but also influences details of its production, an allegory in fact of the apprehension of a past reconstructed through error, bias, distorting paraphrase, annotation and outright fabrication. Such a view of literary transmission and the vagaries of posthumous reputation betray a profound suspicion of the future. While the dreamer is on a magical mystery tour through the afterlife of language in "Fames hous," the bathos suggests (to me at least) that Chaucer is whistling in the dark. Twice after writing the *House of Fame*, he is on record about the transmission of his works, most memorably in his curse of "Adam Scriveyn":

Adam Scriveyn, if ever it thee befalle
Boece or Troylus to wryten newe,
Under thy long lokkes thou most have the scalle,
But after my making thou wryte more trewe;
So ofte adaye I mot thy werk renewe,
It to correcte and eke to rubbe and scrape,
And al is thurgh thy negligence and rape.

Despite the subtle humor of this comic curse on the carelessness and pretentiousness of scribes, the poem also betrays a profound wish—that like Christ, the poet might always be there to repair the

¹⁹ I would also note the connection between the narrator of Chaucer's poem and Aeneas himself in Virgil's: both are overwhelmed, even dazed, by the pictures they see adorning the walls of the temple. Aeneas is dumfounded and entranced by the wonders (*miranda*) he sees there (*stupet obtutuque haerent defixus in uno*, line 495)—a state certainly echoed in Chaucer the dreamer's rapt affect throughout Book One of the *House of Fame*. Another late medieval reader of Chaucer's *House of Fame*, Gavin Douglas, took Chaucer to task for his personal reaction to Virgil's tale. But the Scot excuses Chaucer's distortion of the *Aeneid* with an indulgent identification of his bias: "He was evir, God wot, all womanis frend" ("Prologue" to Book 1 of the *Aeneis*). It is interesting to note as well that Douglas was less kind to Caxton. In the same Prologue he condemns the printer for sending out into the world an inferior version of the story of Aeneas (Caxton's *Eneydos*) and castigates him severely for trying to pass off this translation of a French redaction as the real goods.

sins of Adam and to keep his word(s) inviolate. The curse suggests that perhaps Chaucer did try to control the dissemination of his texts. But it also self-parodically encodes the futility of a mere mortal who wants his words to endure uncorrupted by human frailties. Caxton, like Adam, will make Chaucer's works anew and Caxton's appeals for correction will be addressed—unlike earlier writers in the Chaucerian tradition—not to Chaucer himself but rather to an audience of noble patrons.²⁰ Taste, commercialism and social deference not fidelity to an originary act of composition have become the new arbiter of what Chaucer wrote.

In the envoy to the *Troilus and Criseyde*—at the time of its completion the poet's greatest claim to the kind of fame granted to classical *auctores* like "Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace"—Chaucer prays directly to God to save his poetry from the wastes of linguistic change and he prays too that it will be understood (5. 1793-1799):

And for there is so gret diversite
In English and in writing of oure tonge,
So prey I God that non myswrite the,
Ne the mys metre for defaute of tonge;
And red whereso thow be, or elles songe,
That thow be understonde, God I biseche.

As we know, in the centuries that followed his death Chaucer's prayer was left unanswered. The writer of the *House of Fame*, who had not yet achieved the stature he would earn as the translator of the *Consolation of Philosophy* and the *Troilus and Criseyde*, was more wary and trenchant. He curses even his readers and sentences those who misjudge his work to a public execution (90-109):

And send hem al that may hem plese,
That take it wel and skorne it noght,
Ne hyt mysdemen in her thoght
Thorgh malicious entencioun.
And whoso thorgh presumpcioun,
Or hate, or skorn, or thorgh envye,
Dispit, or jape, or vilanye
Mysdeme hyt, pray I Jesus God
That (dreme he barefot, dreme he shod),
That every harm that any man
Hath had syth the world began
Befalle hym therof or he sterve,
And graunte he mot hit ful deserve,
Lo, with such a conclusion

²⁰ Chaucerian poets of the earlier fifteenth century often lament that Chaucer himself is no longer present to correct the flaws in their own works. Caxton's anxieties are consistently directed toward the appreciation of his aristocratic patrons.

As had of his avision
Cresus, that was kyng of Lyde,
That high upon a gebet dyde.
This prayer shal he have of me;
I am no bet in charyte!

The curse contains a clever conceit that aligns dreaming and reading. Those readers who misjudge the dreamer's recounting of his vision are condemned to wake from the poem as Cresus woke from his "avision": to death on the gallows. While he has been praised by much modern criticism for his jovial and good-natured self-mockery, Chaucer also perhaps discloses beneath the broad comedy of works like the *House of Fame* and the *Canterbury Tales* evidence of a poet dramatizing what was for him, perhaps even more than for most writers, deep fears of antagonistic, frivolous readers and of an uncertain posterity. I would argue that both works evince an ambivalent skepticism about how Chaucer himself and his works will be received. It is no surprise that Alexander Pope, that most venomous castigator of his critics, found congenial sentiments in the *House of Fame*.

The self-ridicule of the Prologues to the tales of Sir Thopas and Melibee, when looked at in this way, dramatize the poet's fear of rejection and humiliation by his audience. Harry Bailey reduces the poet to an effeminate doll and his poetry to excrement, valuing his "drasty rymyng" below a "toord." The Chaucer that Harry describes is a brooding, haughty, yet absurd spectacle to which the tavern keeper draws unwanted attention. Perhaps we should take this Chaucerian self-portrait with more "high seriousness" than we have done heretofore. The early fifteenth-century frontispiece of Chaucer reading his *Troilus* to an assembled gentry who converge on him from all corners of the picture to hear his poem is, I think, more an idealization of the way later generations of Chaucer's readers would see him than it is of the self fashioned by his poetry. The truculent, suspicious baggage of the *House of Fame* and the abashed, deferential doll of the *Canterbury Tales*, like many self-caricatures, display profound self-doubts. Harry's abuse depicts a man who shuns the companionship of the other pilgrims and is, in turn, mocked and rejected by them. Although there are obviously many things to recommend the traditional view of Chaucer as a congenial man of the world, his self-portraits suggest a more guarded stance toward his audience and may represent Chaucer's perception of himself as an indignant author whose poems are often unfinished because his audience doesn't like them.

Whether or not we can see glimpses of the man behind the poses, the character "Geffrey" who journeys through the marvelous worlds of the *House of Fame* wishes to exempt himself and his poems from

judgment. Interrogated by what one critic has seen as a satanic tempter about whether he has come to seek Fame, Geoffrey hastily responds that he is only there to seek gossip about others, “Somme newe tydyngs for to lere” (1886). He refuses to identify himself to his unknown questioner, begs for complete anonymity and vows to be the sole judge of himself and his works (1871-1882):

...”Frend, what is thy name?
Artow come hyder to han fame?”
“Nay, for sothe, frend,” quod y;
“I cam noght hyder, graunt mercy,
For no such cause, by my hed!
Sufficeth me as I were ded,
That no wight have my name in honde.
I wot myself best how y stonde;
For what I drye, or what I thynke,
I wil myselfen al hyt drynke,
Certeyn, for the more part,
As far forth as I kan myn art.”

The outburst strikes one as a blend of stubborn resolution and suspicious withdrawal from the judgment of others, it is as though Chaucer has closed himself off a fist in a gesture that is part pique, part burgeoning self-reliance. Chaucer understood at the time of writing the *House of Fame* that his own reputation among the great *poetae* was, as yet, far from established.²¹

Indeed, Derek Brewer characterizes the tentative, provisional nature of the Chaucer’s style at this early point in his career with a wonderful quip about “a poem that seems doubtful even of its own existence” (110). This fear of judgment and ambivalence about the transmission of his art are exactly what Caxton’s printing of Chaucer deliberately works to assuage. Yet, ironically, Caxton mimes the capriciousness of Fame herself in granting to the poet and his to work a renown he could not bear to seek. Caxton’s re-making of the *House of Fame* ‘according to Chaucer’s own making,’²² engages the text on its own terms. His conclusion is a cagey and celebratory rejoinder to the matter of the poem. The *House of Fame*—the most ebullient, even reckless meditation on the nature of literary transmission written in the Middle Ages—is exposed to the strange mixture

²¹ Derek Brewer speculates that the poem “suggest(s) a time in his life when Chaucer was debating the value of poetry, or, more painfully, the value of his own poetry, (but) there is also a sublimely carefree confidence that makes the poem, with all its oddities, unmistakably Chaucerian” (110).

²² I take Caxton’s line to be equivalent to and imitated from Chaucer’s line in *Adam Scryevyn*: “But after my makyng thou wryte more trewe.”

of teleology and caprice that Fame herself represents. The press in Westminster at the Sign of the Red Pale becomes a House of Fame which grants immortality to Chaucer and which processes his book according to the whimsical rules for literary transmission inscribed by the text itself. Caxton's *Book of Fame* confronts us with the strange and fascinating hermeneutic circle of a book that has come under its own influence.

Perhaps it was Koonce who offered the most profound commentary about the relationship of Chaucer's poem to literary tradition. In constructing a consistent and continual pattern of references in the *House of Fame* to the *Divine Comedy*, Koonce noted that Chaucer's poem parallels Dante's treatise on the state of souls after death with a comic exploration of the state of language after its production in speech or writing. As I have been arguing, following critics like Delany, Chaucer's view of the afterlife of language is a profoundly skeptical, perhaps even cynical one. Indeed, despite his recurrent allusions to Dante's journey from the Inferno to Paradise, the three books of Geoffrey's travels do not provide him with any progressive illuminations or inspirations of the spirit, he ends in the most infernal place of all, the house of twigs replete with the noisy, self-seeking and chaotic justice of the mortal world. The poem moves from the pathetic images in the Temple of Glass to a place where reputations are tortured by malicious Rumor. Perhaps Chaucer thought of his narrator as journeying in the opposite direction of Dante's, from the wilderness of illusion (see lines 480-495) to the bustle and confusion of his own contemporary world.

Many explanations of the unfinished ending of Chaucer's poem assume that the poem was to take a final turn toward current matters of state and that the "man of gret auctoritee" was set to announce a marriage in fulfillment of "love tydyngs," which the poet had entered the whirling wicket of rumor to hear. If such an occasional turn was planned, and I think it was, Caxton, a hundred years or so hence, was in no position to supply it. If the publisher did break the poem off short it was because the kind of occasional ending which the House of Rumor seems to demand had been rendered moot by the lapse of time. Even if he could have produced it, Caxton's readers during the reign of Henry VI would not have been likely to appreciate stale gossip about the marriage negotiations of the deposed and discredited Richard II. And Caxton is not the sort of man who would have finished Chaucer's poem by supplying his readers with a piece of contemporary gossip. But he and his audience did share with Chaucer a common experience that encouraged them to find shadows of their own world in the *House of Fame*.

Laura Kendrick, in an impressive piece of detective work, has demonstrated with some precision that many of the architectural features of Chaucer's poem derive from the Palais de Justice in France, which the poet may have seen on one of his many embassies to the continent. Pointing out a number of architectural similarities, she identifies Fame's house with the Great Hall of the palace and suggests that the adjacent Gallery of the Haberdashers provided the model for Chaucer's House of Rumor. She also allows for the intriguing possibility that St. Chapelle with its vaulted ceiling, starry heaven and its huge relic of a vulture's claw and talons suggested to the poet his inter-stellar voyage in the claws of the pedantic eagle. While I admire greatly the work of Kendrick and others who have sought out the material sources for the architectural oddities of the poem, I think it is also important to note that Chaucer probably expected his readers to equate the three buildings with major structures on their own soil. Here, I stress the importance of the environment within which the poem was read and reproduced. Chaucer used his French sources here as he often did in the dream visions: he translated the elements of continental ornamentation into his own environs. While his audience may have delighted in the strange and wonderful details imported from France and Italy, when they heard of a voyage from a church to a palace to a madhouse of tumultuous folly they would surely have imagined its location within the precincts of Westminster. They would have situated the Temple of Glass in the vicinity of Westminster Abbey perhaps in the Lady Chapel, itself influenced by St. Chapelle; they would have equated the House of Fame with Westminster Hall, the site where the (equally capricious) Richard II gave his dooms; and in the adjoining abode of rumor and trampling ambition they would probably have seen an allegory of their own parliaments.

Caxton's version also furthers the impression that the poet's vision is to be located in Westminster. The notion that an author's fame and the propagation of his works were dependent on the judgment of the Westminster *cognoscenti* must have been an attractive one for the publisher and his clientele. Caxton's business at the "Sign of the Red Pale" was within the abbey almonry and the shop he rented was on the path between the monastery church and Westminster Hall.²³ It is from this spot in Westminster, not far from the poet's

²³ I am indebted here to Nixon and especially to Rosser (211-215) who remarks on the symbolic centrality of Caxton's publishing works "strategically situated" between church and palace, which "may stand for the place of the book trade in Westminster: surrounded by the merchant residents of the sanctuary, while at the same time poised between court and cloister" (213).

tomb, where Caxton decides, on his own authority (“me semeth”), that Chaucer’s *House of Fame* is “crafly made and dyngne to be wretton and knowen” and that the poet himself is worthy of “laude and preysyng for his noble makyng.” The real House of Fame in England now resides at the sign of the Red Pale, and its proprietor Caxton, decides what works and authors will be granted the immortality of the printed page. The “textual environment” of the *House of Fame* has become Caxton’s shop in Westminster and this environment helped to determine how the publisher and his audience would read and reproduce the poem.

Indeed the print shop and what Caxton does to texts there appears to mirror many of the distinctive features of Fame’s House. Books move to the print shop, just as all speech moves to the House of Fame according to a magnetic force called “kyndely inclynyng” where words “may best in it conserved be” (732). Caxton’s prologues contain many wonderful stories about how this or that manuscript found its way into his hands. In the House of Fame words miraculously take on the appearance of the man who spoke them, and so, analogously, does Caxton in his allographic imitation and signature assume the persona of Chaucer within his print shop in order to end his poem: “And hath so verray his lyknesse/ That spak the word, that thou wilt gesse/ That it the same body be” (1079-1081). Like Fame too, he adds a little on to the end of what he receives before he passes it along to others (see lines 2065-2067). And, as I have been arguing throughout this essay, the text that Caxton produces, like all that is created in “Fames Hous,” is a mixture of “fals and soth compounded” (1029 and 2108).

Caxton’s *Book of Fame* is a provocative example of the ways that texts radiate out to new environments and new readers. Books are adapted to the tastes of changing audiences but they also help to set the paradigms by which they will be consumed. This is to say, in contradiction to the tenor of much reception criticism, that texts also determine their environments, albeit in unexpected ways. Chaucer curses interpreters and seeks to avoid the parlous futurity to which he knows all writing is subject, yet the House of Fame becomes the model for a printer a hundred years hence who wants to exalt Chaucer as the greatest of English poets and to make an incomplete poem appear (all but) “fynnyshed” and thereby worthy of his customers. Caxton himself steps forward at the end of the poem as the “man of gret auctoritee,” thereby transforming the dream vision from a pessimistic search for authority and a fear of recognition to a confirmation of Chaucer’s worthiness for fame. If, as many have thought, Chaucer’s *House of Fame* is a search through the materials

of literary history and the tumultuous present for a matter that would make the poet famous on the scale of the ancients or the admired Italians, then Caxton's ending transforms this search for fame into a vehicle for conferring upon the poet the "clere laude" he has earned. That a work such as the *House of Fame* could be made to represent a self-mocking laureation of the poet is something which later writers like Gavin Douglas and John Skelton gleaned from the poem, very likely from Caxton's edition of it.

In stepping forth at the end of the *House of Fame* as the authority the poet had been seeking Caxton emphasizes the extent to which the reputation of Chaucer and his poem are in his hands. While the printer may have imitated the processes of mutable Fame in disposing Chaucer's case, he finally emerges as a savior of the poet's spiritual as well as textual immortality. After recommending to his readers the value of Chaucer's work, he exhorts them to "remembre hys soule" in their prayers. The "Prologue" to the second edition of the *Canterbury Tales* also concludes with such a reminder, as does the only other text of Chaucer's to which Caxton appends a paratext, the *Boece*. Yet this time Caxton directs his readers not only to pray for Chaucer's soul but also to visit his tomb, to which he provides explicit directions: "the body and corps lieth buried in th'Abbay of Westminstre beside London tofore the Chapele of Seynte Benet." In guiding his readers to these precincts, he of course also directs them to the site where the printer defeats Chaucer's death by reproducing his words. The corpse lies buried in the tomb but Caxton has seen to it that an epitaph by the Italian "poete laureat," Steven Surigonus decorates the "sepulture" and to this too Caxton appends a conclusion:

Post obitum Caxton voluit te vivere cura
Willelmi, Chaucer clare poeta, tui;
Nam tua non solum compressit opuscula formis
Has quoque sed laudes iussit hic esse tuas.

After death Caxton wanted you, Chaucer, famous poet, to live on in his keeping, for he not only printed your dear works on his press but he also commanded that your praises be set down here.

Of course this epilogue also testifies most bravely to the circular nature of Caxton's literary judgments and his marketing strategies. It casts Chaucer's readers as pilgrims to his tomb, which incidentally lies fast by Caxton's own shop.

Caxton's paratexts manifest the ways in which he makes himself responsible for the poet's physical and literary remains (see Lerer 147-175). Both Chaucer and his works have found a savior whose

love and whose justice are immutable. Chaucer's words and his memory—thanks to Caxton—are now eternal: his works “shal endure perpetuelly and therefore he ought eternally to be remembrid,” which in turn is followed, as in all of Caxton's writings on Chaucer, by a plea that his readers pray for the poet's soul. Indeed publishing and reading Chaucer have come to seem acts of devotion, which confer an immortality that is the humanist equivalent of the eternal blessedness of heaven.

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DEMONIZING THE AFRICAN OTHER, HUMANIZING THE SELF: HOLLYWOOD AND THE POLITICS OF POST-IMPERIAL ADAPTATIONS

Paul Ugor

Dominant definitions connect events, implicitly or explicitly, to grand totalizations, to the great syntagmatic views-of- the-world: they take 'large views' of issues: they relate events to 'the national interest' or to the level of geo-politics, even if they make these connections in truncated, inverted or mystified ways. The definition of a 'hegemonic' viewpoint is (a) that it defines within its terms the mental horizon, the universe of possible meanings of a whole society or culture; and (b) that it carries with it the stamp of legitimacy—it appears coterminous with what is 'natural,' 'inevitable,' 'taken for granted' about social order. (Stuart Hall 57)

Cinema is thus a privileged locus for the investigation of the coming together of nineteenth-century obsession with the past, and the twentieth-century desire to make visibly comprehensible the difference of cultural 'others.' (Fatimah Tobing Rony 9)

I. Introduction

Since the emergence of critical attention to the gothic genre over half a century ago, a salient character of that literary category that has been somewhat ignored is "its long obsession with race" (Delamotte 17). As far back as the late eighteenth century, when what Delamotte calls "Anglo-Gothic" literature emerged, through to the nineteenth century, a significant feature of this literature has always been the "racial Other." The many supposedly fearful and dangerous racial Others in Euro-American imaginations—Indians, Chinese, Native Americans, Western Europeans—include what Toni Morrison termed the "Africanist persona." These "Symbolic figurations of blackness," as Morrison puts it, refer to "the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany

Eurocentric learnings about these people” (Qtd. in Delamotte 18). In these popular and dominant Anglo-American figurations of the African racial Other, consistent perceptions of the black person, culture, and even landscape (geography) as monstrous are repeatedly reproduced. These perceptions have not changed dramatically since the eighteenth century: they have been inherited by twentieth-century purveyors of culture (novelists, playwrights, poets), and by producers of other media of mass culture such as films, television, Internet, and so forth.

In this essay I examine this continuous reproduction of the monstrous African racial Other in contemporary American Hollywood films. As a specific site of interest, I will interrogate the Hallmark’s 2004 adaptation of Rider Haggard’s sensational adventure novel *King Solomon’s Mines*, originally published in 1885. By conducting a close reading of this film and its original text, I hope to call attention to the unique way in which contemporary Euro-American mainstream visual media (especially film and television) repackage and re-circulate Victorian fantasies and racial stereotypes of African peoples, especially around the idea of monstrosity. I argue that because the hue of imperialism in the twenty-first century has changed from an earlier frontal colonialism to new forms of subtle subjugations, mainstream American media continually seek new ways of catering to the sustained colonial desires of Euro-American media audiences. These audiences suffer from a particular kind of social craving which Renato Rosaldo has appropriately termed “imperialist nostalgia” (1993). I take up Rosaldo’s term to refer to the continued desires of modern Euro-American media audiences to consume mythical images of “lost” empires. These peculiar neo-imperial desires continue to put pressure on Hollywood and indeed other mainstream American media to excavate, repackage and re-circulate nineteenth-century fantasies of supposed African monstrosity.

As a point of entry into this discourse, I begin with an examination of the politics of adaptation. In this regard, I interrogate what it means to adapt a work of art. The first reason for this approach is very obvious: Hallmark’s film is an adaptation from a famous nineteenth-century imperial romance novel. Second, as an apparatus of cultural dissemination, motion picture technology inherited the social functions of the nineteenth-century novel: Joss Marsh and Kamilla Elliott have characterized this inheritance as a continuance of nineteenth-century “fiction’s burden of social commentary, community-building, and the dramatization of values” (459). I consider it fruitful and important then to investigate which twenty-first-century Euro-American values are being “dramatized” in the new filmic prog-

enies of Victorian fiction about Africa. By reviewing the subterranean politics underlying the process of adaptation, I hope to unravel the deeply troubling hinge between twenty-first-century productions of culture in Euro-American mainstream media and continuities of imperialism.

In spite of the lingering debates about the formal disparities between film and literature—images and words—Francesco Casetti has argued that both media can “be considered as sites of production and circulation of discourses; that is, as symbolic constructions that refer to a cluster of meanings that a society considers possible (thinkable) and feasible (legitimate)” (82). Here, film and literature no longer function as mere media of mass entertainment and education but as discursive centers and vectors of mainstream ideologies. Dominant ideologies are continuously generated, re-circulated and re-enforced in these two media in very subtle but strongly effective ways. Modern electronic media and literature therefore function, beyond their traditional roles of entertainment, as conveyor-belts of popular mentalities and dominant mainstream social values. If we ascribe any validity to these views, then adaptations in these media have enormous social ideological implications. According to Casetti, adaptations then become “the reappearance of discourse” (82) and not merely the re-emergence of a variation of the original/previous text. By using the term “discourse,” Casetti elaborates, “what we are dealing with is the reappearance, in another discursive field, of an element (a plot, a theme, a character, etc.) that has previously appeared elsewhere” (82). The “reappeared” discourse then is re-inserting itself in a new moment and addressing old issues in the light of new *resents*. Put differently, the “discourse” is made continuously relevant through acknowledgement that the moment has changed—the adaptation emerges to address a “new” time and space in the light of current realities. In this regard, adaptation as a cultural phenomenon functions primarily, Casetti argues, as a “recontextualization of the text” (83). It is significant to note that when discourses “reappear,” they do not do so in a static and unchanged mode: they are reinvented anew. But this *reinvention* still embodies the structural frame of the original “discourse,” concealed in new social logics.

Casetti’s insights about the re-emergence of discourse in adaptations have significant implications for this study. For instance, Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), has illuminated the deeply inextricable relations that exist between nineteenth-century literary productivities (such as novels) and Victorian politics and culture. The argument advanced by Said is not that nineteenth-century literary culture was responsible for imperialism but that “imperialism and the

novel fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible...to read one without in some way dealing with the other" (84). In light of Casetti's arguments—and by extension my own position—about adaptations as "reappearance of discourse," the crucial question I want to raise is: If nineteenth-century empire novels, as Said suggests, arose out of the specific moments of imperialism—of British adventure, conquests, and imperial expansionism, what are the adaptations of those Victorian literatures doing for the present century? After all, as Roy Armies has argued, "though Edward Said make [*sic*] no mention of film, a connection remarkably similar to that linking the novel and European colonialism can be posited between the Hollywood movie and US twentieth-century imperialism" (2). So is there a "discourse" in nineteenth-century empire novels about Africa that has "reappeared" in the Victorian "second-lives," such as contemporary Hollywood films? Or to rephrase it in the words of Jennifer Green-Lewis: "why, when we want to reinvent and revisit the past, do we choose the nineteenth century as the place to get off the train? What is it about the look of this past that appeals to the late twentieth-century passenger?" (30). In attempting to answer these questions, I re-examine some of the mythical archetypes of Africa[ns] constructed in nineteenth-century novels such as Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, see how those mythical stereotypes and the "discourses" they encoded in the nineteenth century "reappear" in Hallmark's film adaptation of the novel, and then critique the implications of this "reappearance" for the present century, many decades after European colonialism in Africa. Inevitably, this essay will navigate a comparative negotiation between the 1885 original text and the 2004 Hallmark film.

II. Mythical Archetypes

In revisiting nineteenth-century stereotypes of Africa[ns] in both the novel and film, I will pay specific attention to the idea of the "dark unknowable" land, the "uncanny and weird heroine," and the "monstrous power maniac." These three are not the only stereotypes of Africans in the film or even the novel, but the three categories have been chosen as representative samples of the visual rhetoric of the film. These categories, in one way or another, directly or indirectly, are connected with the construction of monstrosity in Victorian literary rhetoric, and those narrative strategies are reenacted in the film adaptation.

A. The “Dark Unknowable”¹ Land

It is only in the last decade and half or so that a new critical interest—one “concentrating on the relationship between literature and the natural environment—has become one of the fastest growing areas in literary studies” (Carroll 295). But the metaphor of landscape has featured in western literature as far back as even the romantic writings of the eighteenth century. By the nineteenth century, physical place assumed a prominent role in literary narratology. According to Joseph Carroll, the nineteenth-century British writer lived in a fairly “densely populated” and emerging “industrialized country,” where “world exploration, colonial expansion, and the still fresh scientific revelations about geological time and evolutionary transformations offered a wild field for imaginative exploration into wild places” (305). Carroll notes also that it was a moment when the idea that “the world can simply be divided into *wild* and *cultivated* tracts” was popular. So in most of the writings of this period, place and individual/national/racial identity were frequently conflated.

Africa as a geographical entity had a strong hold on popular Victorian imagination during this period, not only as a potentially rewarding colony belching untapped wealth such as diamonds, gold, and other industrial resources, but also as the gothic landscape—*terra incognita*. Consequently, the mystified topography that is Africa was vividly narrativised in popular novels. But the said topography “is not merely described and then set aside as the novelist gets on with the plot; it is vividly kept before the reader’s eyes,” with all its component dangers, “as an essential aspect in the quality of experience” (Carroll 308) of the narrated imperial adventure. It is important to note that as a narrative strategy the literalization of the “dark unknowable” geography was undergirded prominently (thought not solely) with the logic of Gothicism, which Ruth Bienstock Anolik describes as “marked by an anxious encounter with otherness” (1). In this regard, Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* is based on an adventure played against a sensational gothic background. Indeed it is believed that it was Haggard who first coined the term “Heart of Darkness,” which Joseph Conrad later adopted for his own novel.² This became the prototypical colonial metaphor for Africa as “a dark, primordial alterity where the physical and human landscape would express instinctual

¹ This is a term Ruth Bienstock Anolik uses in referring to the general conception of the gothic in western episteme (1).

² See Itala Vivan (p.53). On p. 250 of the *Three Adventure Novels* (which is the version I use in this essay) Haggard describes South Africa as “this dark land.”

levels of consciousness that might cause the regression of civilized white man" (Vivan 53) such as Quartermain and his safari team. Hence the racial identity of Africans as Other was embedded in the very land that was narrativised. This vivid Victorian depiction of Africa as "ancient," "static" and "savage" achieved a dual function. According to Itala Vivan, "it created stereotypes of immobility and primitivism that ideologically contributed to justifying the "civilizing mission," but at the same time proved fascinating and seductive because they constructed a cultural alterity" (53).

As a typical nineteenth-century novel of adventure into the geographically threatening labyrinth that is Africa, *King Solomon's Mines* is contoured by what Vivan catalogues as "wild human races, sensational landscapes, dangerous wild beasts, hidden dangers, and especially the duel with the classic lion" (54). In the 2004 Hallmark film, this archetypal African geographical labyrinth is inherited from the nineteenth century and vividly transposed onto the screen. The film's action vacillates between two distinct spatial horizons—London and Africa, colonial centre and periphery, self and "Other." Of course the specific locales that the film chooses in narrating Africa conforms to and reinforces the Victorian perception of Africa during the nineteenth century as the "dark unknown"—backward in human civilization. As the film's jacket clearly and sensationally advertises, it is "a journey into the Heart of Darkness." The film's opening sequence is a medley of long takes, high angle shots, and close-ups of an African jungle replete with wild game—elephants, lions, zebras, giraffes and other strange animals regarded as exotic when compared to the domesticated pets of English civilization. Deep valleys, gullies, wild forests, and large expanses of desert land characterize the African landscape in the film. As Mrs. Maitland says in the film, "it is a place that clearly hasn't changed for thousands of years." By contrast we are presented with London, with its clean streets, wonderful architecture, well-furnished homes and trimmed lawns, horses and carts, etc. This disparity between what constitutes the landscape of London on the one hand, and Africa on the other, is itself part of the visual poetics of articulating a sub-human spatial zone or continent. That is, space becomes actively implicated in the construction of the ideology of racial degeneracy integral to Victorian society and its hierarchy. The visual logic in the film is simply that the land is as wild and untamed as those who inhabit it—a conflation of identity and place that, as I suggested earlier, is coterminous with nineteenth-century literature. This depiction of a wild and uninhabited geography itself is a deeply troubling visual rhetoric that reintroduces the age-old perception of vast unclaimed lands—a rhetoric that once legitimized imperialism.

This assumption—that the land, because it is empty and holds such enormous natural resources, should be possessed—is central to imperialist ideologies. Why has this colonial narrative strategy been reenacted? I argue that the continued portrayal of African land as wild is itself a reintroduction of the colonial logic of the monstrous landscape that consumes all who dare to adventure into it. This is reinforced in the film in many ways—one being that a lion in the wild African forest decapitated Quatermain's wife during his first phase of sojourn to the continent. This historical reference conjoins with the wildness of the landscape in the film to reinforce popular western notions of Africa as monstrous geography.

If Africa was (as implied in the novel), and still is (as the film imputes), a “dark unknowable” place, then a renewed rhetoric of recolonization is implied. But this new discourse of imperialism is “purified” and strategically “dissociated” from the core of the film's thematic concern. Citing Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, Jeff Bass defines dissociation as “those techniques of separation which have the purpose of dissociating, separating, disuniting elements which are regarded as forming a whole or at least a unified group within some systemic thought” (262). This narrative strategy is itself inherited from the novel. Bass argues that while the underlying motive for the adventure of Quartermain and his safari team is imperialistic economic exploitation, through the manipulation of his characters Haggard creates a façade of indifference “which relegates his characters' desire for material wealth to a position of minimal importance” (262). Thus “economic exploitation is ...presented as the ‘appearance’ of imperialism while its ‘reality’ becomes the act of establishing justice and its reward the resulting transformation of identities” (262) in Kaukauna land. This dissociation is also central to the logic of the film too.

The adventure starts out purely as a rescue mission for the dear life of Professor Maitland, Elizabeth's father, held captive by the despotic Twala. But the introduction of Elizabeth Maitland³ is another rhetoric of concealment that diverts attention and serves as a tapestry over an obvious imperialistic mission. Anne McClintock broaches on the feminization of the “Empty Space” as a key strategy in Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*. This is marked by the use of such gender-

³ The introduction of Elizabeth Maitland is a direct inheritance from the 1985 film adaptation of the book produced by Cannon Group and directed by J. Lee Thompson. There, Lee Huston (played by Sharon Stone) seeks her father, an archeologist held captive by Germans who want him to give them information about the mythical Solomon's Mines. See Philip Leibfried, p. 140.

oriented descriptive phrases as “Sheba’s Breasts,” “nipples,” and the “blushing” of the sky “like the cheek of a girl” (242).⁴ In the film, this feminization is physically realized with the character of Elizabeth. When we meet Elizabeth in the film she is a spinster hob-knobbing with her uncle Captain Good in London. Quartermain is also a widower as he has lost his wife in the “dark” African jungle to a lion during his first sojourn to the continent. He desperately needs his son but his in-laws will not allow him custody of the child because he does not possess responsible family credentials such as a stable home and a wife to raise a child. It is almost at the end of the adventure then that Quartermain proposes marriage to Elizabeth inside the mythical cave redolent with diamonds. Here the western patriarch conquers the African land and its wealth, represented by the cave and the diamonds, but that imperial “conquest” is symbolically enunciated by the intense romance that ensues between him and Elizabeth inside the cave. The very setting for this romantic encounter is significant. The cave, like a woman, is “penetrated” and its feminine interiority ransacked by the new American imperial patriarch, Quartermain. As Quartermain escapes from the cave in the film, he takes no gold or diamonds, yet in the novel he makes time, in spite of the frenzy, to fill his pockets with “a couple of handfuls of big ones out of the third chest” (400). By escaping only with the woman, the film tactically dissociates the imperialistic theme of economic exploitation. But it is the ending that unravels that narrative strategy. The film does not end with Quartermain’s returning to meet with Sir Henry Curtis in London. Rather, it ends with Quartermain’s son coming to join him and his new wife Elizabeth in South Africa. Quartermain can stay, live off the land, and see that a gleeful African servant, Khiva, attends his family.

Here, the film initiates an interesting post-colonialist hegemonic take. Africa is no longer to be infiltrated temporarily, and dispensed with after it has been ransacked like a treasure trove. Rather, almost invoking the “Bering-Strait theory”⁵ in North America, the edenic land that is Africa is vast and free and “whosoever cometh” can stay; hence the new imperialist remains in the colonized space. Africa, like North America, could become another settler-colony. This is a significant political take that the film advances if read in the context of South-

⁴ See p. 281 of *Three Adventure Novels* for such examples of feminized images.

⁵ This has been the argument advanced by white settlers insisting that land in North America was wild hence all peoples, including First Nations, made forays into it as adventurers thus dismissing “First Peoples’ claims to occupying the land since time immemorial” (Wakeham 6).

ern Africa. For the benefit of the current white minority Boers in say Zimbabwe, Mozambique, or even South Africa, dominant notions of settler-colonies are still being re-inscribed in the public imagination. But this dominant hegemonic imperial ideology is initiated, purveyed and fostered thousands of miles (the USA) from the heartland of Southern Africa. But it is effective because the American, British, and other European audiences whose nationals are still stuck to these colonial spaces are being convinced persistently that this option of a settler-colony still remains the best one possible.

But far from the imperial domination insinuated by the reincarnation of a supposedly “dark” and “savage” geography, another kind of subtle imperialism, racial domination, is going on in the film—a unique kind of “nostalgia”⁶ which Renato Rosaldo argues “makes racial domination appear innocent and pure” (68). Rosaldo uses the term “imperialist nostalgia” in referring to “a particular kind of nostalgia, often found under imperialism, where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed” (67). At the height of imperialism, Europe saw its role in the colonies as a “civilizing mission.” Europe’s “burden,” then, was to civilize and refine the frontier physically as in the environment, the social values, religious mores, etc. But at the time Europe itself was engaged in vigorous industrialization, which necessitated the destruction of its own natural environment. So apart from the allure of the African colony as a site of wealth, a number of young Victorians who mourned the unfolding decimation of nature went to the colonies as a journey back to “uninterrupted nature.” However, the reality of contemporary Africa is a testimony of colonialism’s “achievements” in its goal of “civilization.” Africa has its own big cities with sky-scrapers, automobile-filled streets, train subways, oil and gas industries, and all the general markers of a modern industrial world. Its “pristine” world celebrated in Victorian literature is gone. The new generation of Euro-American families read about the “dark” continent in novels such as Haggard’s and Conrad’s in high schools, colleges, and universities, but that world has changed and is thus inaccessible on a realistic level. When family television companies, like Hallmark, produce the “second-lives” of Victorian fiction such as *King Solomon’s Mines*, a unique kind of post-imperial voyeurism is going on. It is a classical case of “imperialist nostalgia”

⁶ According to Rosaldo, the term “nostalgia” was originally coined by a Swiss physician (in the seventh-century) from the Greek words *nostos* (meaning “a return home”) and *algos* (“a painful condition”) in referring to the psychological “conditions of home sickness among his nation’s mercenaries who were fighting far from their homeland” (71).

where, as Rosaldo notes, “someone deliberately alters a form of life, and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to intervention” (70). But this feeling is not an innocent one: it contains hope that the past should return and “mourning” because it will not.

No wonder the film’s opening sequence begins with Quartermain’s dissension with his hunting team over the wanton killing of female elephants in a thick forest in South Africa. This conservationist slant is a radical deviation from the original text. But it is interesting that this narrative innovation opens the “reinvented” visual text. The lesson is apparent: what is left of the “wild” nature of the continent must be preserved for the posterity of Euro-America families to assuage its “imperialist nostalgia.” Today, there is still an on-going thriving popular culture of westerners going ‘on safari’ to Africa, which is now billed often as a kind of ‘eco-tourism’ and juxtaposed to Africans’ own frivolity or lack of care for the landscape and especially the endangered species (due to poaching, etc.). The current thriving reincarnation of Victoriana in film and television thus presents “idealized fantasies”⁷ of Africa’s past, excavated and re-served to contemporary Euro-America families for their vicarious participation in that mythical colonial past which the modern western audience cannot see anymore. Of course the extinction of nature is traceable to Euro-American’s own very project of “civilization.” As Rosaldo concludes, “Mourning the passing of traditional society and imperialist nostalgia cannot neatly be separated from one another. Both attempt to use a mask of innocence to cover their involvement with processes of domination” (86). “Imperialist nostalgia” functions as an alibi for the concealment of post-imperial hegemonies. The reintroduction of Victorian texts in modern visual culture is therefore a clear example of how Euro-American society is complicit in a new kind of imperialism that furthers racial domination through modern media technology.

B. The Uncanny and Villainous Heroine

In his famous harangue on Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Chinua Achebe wrote that Africa for Conrad was “the other world, the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man’s vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality” (3). This was not the Africa of Conrad alone; it was also Af-

⁷ Rosaldo borrows this term from Marshal Berman in his strong criticisms of “reverential postures towards traditional societies,” arguing that these are strategies that gloss over violence and brutality. See Rosaldo p. 72.

rica in the eyes of earlier Victorian writers like Rider Haggard. A good example of that “other-worldliness” that was Africa for the Victorian writer and his readers is found in the character of Gagool in Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*. She is described thus:

The wizened, monkey-like figure creeping up from the shadows of the hut. It crept on all fours, but when it reached the place where the king sat it rose upon its feet...revealed a most extraordinary and weird countenance. It was apparently that of a woman of great age, so shrunken that in size it was no larger than a year-old child... Set in the wrinkles was a sunken slit that represented the mouth, beneath which curved outward to a point. There was no nose to speak of, indeed the whole countenance might have been taken for that of a sun-dried corpse had it not been for a pair of large black eyes... As for the skull itself, it was perfectly bare, and yellow in hue, while its wrinkled scalp moved and contracted like the hood of a cobra (320-1).

No other description could have elicited the conviction of Africa as a metaphysical cultural alterity so well as this. It is a fantasy of absolute evil laced with the most primeval icons of horror and bloody ferocity such as “sun-dried corpse” and “cobras.” This textual creation immediately encodes a “line between a mundane and day lit moral Anglo-Saxon self and some colossal dark evil oneiric other” (Delamotte 27). This portrayal of racial degeneracy was significant at the time because it fit tidily into popular imaginations of racial Others as seen in other imperial romances set in India, eastern Europe, and South America. Generally, however, due to her femaleness, some critics have read Gagool as a metaphor for the typical Victorian “anxieties about female power and its threat to helpless men.”⁸ But distinctively, what marks her character as an evil Other is that she serves “as foil for the protagonists of their respective works, heightening the pluck, good humor, courage, and idealism of Quartermain and his companions” (Rogers and Underwood 129). Gagool is made to function as a foil to the imperial agenda of Quartermain and his team because she is infused with an unflinching sense of protection for territorial integrity, fierce ethnic nationalism, a deep consciousness of political power, and an avid propensity for material wealth. These capitalist instincts were not attitudes the British conqueror expected from a society supposedly devoid of any civilization.

So central to the film too are the supernatural propensities of Africans symbolized by Gagool. Ironically, in the Hallmark film *Gagool*

⁸ Haggard himself is said to have been a victim of domestic abuse by a “maladjusted” nurse while growing up in London. It is believed that part of the inspiration for Aisha (in *She*) and Gagool is Haggard’s vicious childhood nurse. See Philip Liebfried, p. 6.

is ripped of all agency. Rather than the exotic “fiend” we see in the book—fiercely oppositional to the imperial ambitions of Quartermain and his safari team, she becomes treacherous to Twala and sides with the imperial forces symbolized by Professor Maitland, Quartermain, and his “rescue” team. When we first encounter Gagool in the film she is a pernicious African witch with strange powers to cause pain and even death to her victim. So whenever Professor Maitland exhibits the arrogance of the English patriarch who fears no primitive African king (Twala), or when he tries to escape, she pierces her hand-held statue and Maitland writhes and winces into unconsciousness with pain. But dramatically, Gagool becomes sympathetic to Maitland and thus transforms from a fierce African “savage witch” to an ally to the new imperial force led by Quartermain and Umbopaa. This radical visual poetics that ensures the reinvention of Gagool from the symbol of the nadir of African savagery to a benign imperial accomplice is indeed a fortuitous “reappearance” of the beliefs of nineteenth-century writers. According to Laura Chrisman, “many imperialist writers, among them Haggard, were not automatically antagonistic to the new spirituality and things occult, but were on the contrary attracted to them and saw their usability for imperialism” (42). The nebulous zone—for and against imperialism—that the Gagool of the Hallmark film occupies is interesting and revealing in many ways. It unravels the very double politics that characterizes the conceptualization of good and evil in the project of imperialism. As Laura Chrisman argues, “it is through Gagool that imperialism’s ambivalence about rationality and knowledge, as well as about Africa and the feminine, are best dramatized” (53). Though she is evil and a threat to the imperial course, she possesses supreme knowledge that is invaluable to the imperial project. In the book Gagool leads the empire, though under duress, into the treasure trove that is the ominous cave, but the stone finally crushes her as she attempts to impede the imperial project. But in the film, she leads Quartermain willingly and obsequiously to the entrance of the cave, posing no threat of any kind to the imperial adventure. For this reason the Gagool of the Hallmark film is not crushed but retained for future alliance with the empire.

Gagool fulfills a new social function in the film narrative, apart from the political implications of being retained as an exotic spectacle of the degenerating racial Other. That function, I argue, is that of “ethnographic spectacle” (Rony 17). In the introduction to her book *Fatimah Tobing Rony* calls attention to what she describes as “fascinating Cannibalism.” She defines this as “the obsessive consumption of images of the racialized Other known as primitive” (10). In this social dynamic, there is a curious admixture of “‘fascination’ and

'horror' that the ethnographic occasions" (10). In this context she said "'cannibalism' is not that of the people who are labeled savage, but that of the consumers of the images of the bodies—as well as actual bodies on display—of native peoples offered up by popular media and science" (10). Though Rony uses this argument in referring to ethnographic films, its logic has a fitting application to Hallmark's *King Solomon's Mines*. As she notes, the people in ethnographic film are always portrayed as "exotic," "savage," "primitive," and without a history, civilization, technology, and generally at the very early stages of the evolution of human history (7). As a genre that purports to record a realistic historical moment, the "ethnographic film" implies "truth" and is thus linked, like its printed/written kin, to what Rony calls "discourses of power, knowledge and pleasure" (10). Images of the likes of Gagool in twenty-first-century cinema, though not explicitly conceived as ethnographic, purport to provide the public with true anthropological "knowledge" of Africa, but that "knowledge" of "savagery" is viewed with "pleasure," almost like the "voyeuristic gaze" of the male viewer on the female image that Laura Mulvey talks about in cinema (10). A different kind of "power" game, specifically at the psychological level, is going on in this neo-imperialist voyeurism. It is something of a psychological pathology earlier diagnosed by Chinua Achebe which has to do with the west's "deep anxieties about the precariousness of its own civilization" and the constant need "for reassurance" by comparing itself with Africa (17). The image of Gagool is an encounter with the Other. And as Sherene Razack argues, "without such encounters, the west will not know its own civility" (208). That is, contemporary images of supposed African savagery (of any kind) "offer an imperial personhood [the individual viewer] and statehood [the polity]" a feeling of "ultimate membership in the family of civilized nations" (Razack 208). This is the true aesthetic and cultural function of the obsession with "savagery" in Victorian "second-lives" such as Hallmark's *King Solomon's Mines*.

C. The Monstrous Power Maniac

One of the key legitimizing strategies deployed in imperialistic discourse is that "of exaggerating and playing off difference among diverse others" (Chrisman 40), especially supposed racial Others. This is primal in the narrative rhetoric of Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, and is indeed replicated in the 2004 film. In the book, as soon as the motivation for the adventure is established—the rescue of Sir Henry Curtis' brother—and the onerous task of finding their destination through a "tortuous" and "savage" landscape is achieved, our at-

tention is immediately turned to the differences between two political camps in the book, one being the more civilized imperial team led by Quartermain, and the other, Twala, “an unusually bloodthirsty tyrant who has a soldier put to death for accidentally dropping his shield while standing in review” (Bass 264). Such images of mis-governance and other terrifying wholesale massacres such as the “witch-hunting” episodes clearly constitute Twala as a power monster engaged in the savagely wanton decimation of his subjects. And since imperialism’s “burden” was the restoration of “civilized” culture—social, political, religious, etc., in a supposedly barren moral landscape, Twala had to be ousted and replaced with a new and reformed noble savage, Umbopa. This is of course one of the key strategies through which imperialism purifies itself, as Jeff Bass has brilliantly established. But this strategy is effective because the creation of a stereotype of a politically monstrous racial Other efficiently dredges up sympathy for the colonizing authority.

The Twala in Hallmark’s film is similar to the one in the book yet different in a number of important ways. First, we do not see those images of jungle justice inscribed in the book. Second, there are no witch-hunting scenes led by Gagool. Third, unlike Haggard’s Twala sequestered in the “dark” forests of the Kuakuana land, Hallmark’s Twala claims “he grew amongst” the white race. The bestiality of the Twala in the film, then, is solely his threat on the life of an imperial subject, Professor Maitland. That threat of course emerges from his desperation to retrieve the map leading to the proverbial Solomon’s mines where the “sacred stone” that grants ultimate and eternal power to its bearer is preserved. The political shake-up that follows in the Kaukauna land of the film thus arises from Twala’s love for political power independent of imperial support. Twala then can be likened to any Third World political leader who has been to Europe and North America, learned their ways, and has returned back to the continent to rule but does not defer to imperial authorities in the First World, nor cater to their economic interests. As far as contemporary African political history goes, that leader is always demonized and ultimately ousted and replaced with an imperial stooge such as Umbopa. In the Middle East, a fine example of the Euro-American role as the *Patria* is already playing out. Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, all former protégés of western political interests, have now either been demonized (as in the case of Osama) or demonized and deposed (Saddam) because of their supposed threats to global (in a way implying western) lives and property. But beneath this dominant western logic/rhetoric lurks the true picture, which is these leaders’ intrepid attempts at being autonomous, that is, without regard or deference to

western political hegemonies. And like the Twala of Hallmark, these are all “monsters” manufactured by the First World.

In the new world order contoured by American hegemony, a new logic of subtle or enlightened imperialism is being fostered. Hallmark’s film, like its forebearer the imperial romance of the nineteenth century, re-incarnates the discourse of what Anne McClintock calls “the power of white *patria potestas*” (248). This was a dominant political logic that underlay nineteenth-century imperialism, which accorded hegemonic imperial regimes “the authority to inaugurate what they believe will be a subservient black monarch, on terms favorable to the colonial state” (McClintock 249). The economic interests of Europe and America in Africa have not ended. A vast amount of the west’s industrial raw materials like crude oil, iron ore, tin, and agricultural products such as cocoa, cotton, and coffee, etc. are still being sourced in the continent. Those huge economic interests cannot be left in the hands of [un]trusted African leaders. The continuing political upheavals in African countries such as Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Sierra-Leone, to mention only a few, countries whose stories of genocides have become the subjects of fascinating documentaries⁹ for Euro-American Film companies, are in many ways not unconnected with crises arising from imperial impositions of leadership from North America and Europe. But those impositions are couched in and legitimized by the deceptive rhetoric of clearing away the stereotypical African power monster. The installation of political stooges by Euro-American imperial mercenaries is still a regular occurrence in the Third World¹⁰ and films like Hallmark’s *King Solomon’s Mines* “re-circulate” those neo-colonial political tropes, thereby “re-legitimizing” and “re-enforcing” dominant neo-imperialist political ideologies amongst their watching audiences.

III. Implications of the “Re-emergence” of Discourse in Hallmark’s *King Solomon’s Mines*

In attempting to outline some of the typical mythical stereotypes of African monstrosity inflected in nineteenth-century fiction that have then been popularized in contemporary western technologies of cul-

⁹ See Sherene Razack’s essay “Those Who Witness the Evil.”

¹⁰ Afghanistan and Iraq are clearly not in Africa, but they constitute a vivid example of Euro-American propensities for wanting to control political scenes outside their spheres of sovereignty primarily for economic interests. Saddam was another Twala ousted from power for killing his people with noxious gases and constituting a threat to American subjects.

ture such as the film and television, I have simultaneously problematized the subtlety of encoded cultural, social, and political rhetoric embedded in those reincarnated archetypes. In this section, I will do a rather broad, though brief, critique, from a theoretical standpoint, of the implications of those discourses that have “reappeared” in modern media technology.

I have already made reference to Francesco Casetti’s ideas on adaptation, inferring that adaptations do not simply imply a fervent or partial replication of an original text, but rather the inflection of the implicit discourses that are embodied in that work. The discursive “reappearance” takes place within what Casetti terms “the communicative situation” (83), which is the sum total of the large number of interrelated factors that coalesce to give a text its meaning. This involves the complex interplay of the text[s] with a number of social influences that are interactional, institutional, intertextual and existential (84). What is crucial about the “communicative situation” is not just the assessment that takes into cognizance the reinvented text and its environment, “but, more importantly, it means dealing with the relationship between these elements and the way in which they, together, bend the text one way or another” (Casetti 85).

Keeping this in mind, it is important to note the significant social shifts between the nineteenth century through to the mid-twentieth century on the one hand, and the later twentieth century to the present on the other, to see what role the culture industry still plays in “bending” the meaning of visual texts in a new “communicative situation.” For instance, as soon as the narrative potentials of film crystallized in the early twentieth century, the American film industry flourished in the production of imperial films that gave meaning to the whole idea of imperialism through the fabrication of imperial heroes. “Britain was the biggest market for Hollywood films outside America,” argues Richards, and both countries “shared a cultural commitment to the values of chivalry, service and *noblesse oblige*...” (129). But by the mid-twentieth century, agitation for political autonomy and consequent independence had begun to take shape in the colonies, especially in Africa. Today, direct invasion, conquest and occupation of foreign lands by Europe and America purely in the name of imperialism have almost completely ended (I say “almost,” recognizing the absurd theatre of American imperial misadventure in Iraq). But the grand tropes of imperialistic ideologies have not. In 1997 for instance, as part of the events to mark the centenary of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, the *Daily Telegraph* conducted a poll to assess the popularity of British imperial history. As this poll revealed, a large percentage of the respondees, especially from the younger generation,

knew almost nothing of the history of the British Empire.¹¹ But there was ironically a striking conviction about the sanctity of the imperial project by this same ignorant generation: “Do you take pride in the fact that Britain had an empire? Seventy per cent said yes. Do you regret that Britain no longer has an empire? Sixty per cent said yes. Did Britain do more good than harm in her colonies? Fifty-eight per cent said yes (as opposed to thirty-one per cent saying more harm than good)” (Richards 143). It is clear from this data what films like *King Solomon’s Mine* and other “second-lives” of Victorian fiction do for Euro-American audiences: They help these audiences “retreat into nostalgia for an empire which they barely remember and of which they know almost nothing” (Richards 143). Here is a classical example of a new “communicative situation” where, as John Mackenzie notes, “popular culture can have precisely [the] role of projecting illusions when a different form of reality has taken over” (32). Frontal imperialism has ended, but a deep conviction about its sanctity has remained etched in the imagination of western publics. The obsessive “Persistence of Empire in Metropolitan Culture” (2001), as John Mackenzie calls it, is thus lucid evidence of the ways in which the mass media, such as television and film, function in modern societies precisely as “important sites for the production, reproduction and transformation of ideologies” (Hall 19). Ideologies of racial superiority, of the sanctity of the European-American “burden” of cleaning the “axis of evil” all over the world, and its anointed role of playing the father-figure to non-European/American geo-political entities is still very much a dominant discourse in mainstream western media of mass communication such as film and television. These discourses need to be sustained if the First World’s unflinching and irreversible projects of imperialism all over the world must be legitimized amongst a growingly inquisitive and suspicious global public. Hallmark’s *King Solomon’s Mines* is only a small fragment of this socio-cultural trend in modern societies and what it serves, be it “imperialist nostalgia,” “fascinating cannibalism,” or what I have called “post-imperial voyeurism,” is precisely to further the cultural trope in western societies where the racial Other is demonized so that the western-self can be humanized.

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¹¹ See Jeffrey Richards, p. 128.

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EL EFECTO DE LOS SPOTS PUBLICITARIOS EN LA CONDUCTA DEL VOTANTE: EL CASO DE LA ELECCIÓN PRESIDENCIAL EN MÉXICO, 2006

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1. Introducción

Las campañas electorales modernas, en países con regímenes democráticos, no pueden ser entendidas sin el uso de diferentes técnicas y estrategias de mercadotecnia, todo con el fin de tratar de influir y moldear la opinión y decisión de los electores. De hecho, todos los partidos políticos de distinto signo ideológico y político del orbe, como los diferentes candidatos que participan en procesos electorales locales o nacionales, han acudido al expediente de la mercadotecnia, como instrumento persuasivo, buscando, como objetivo central, obtener ciertas ventajas competitivas y ganar las elecciones, mismas que les permitan avanzar sus pretensiones políticas. Para tratar de conseguir tal propósito, han invertido grandes sumas de dinero, tanto de origen privado como público, principalmente en el rubro de comunicación política a través de los diferentes medios electrónicos de comunicación. Sin embargo, no existe la certeza de que la mercadotecnia política en forma de *spots* en radio y televisión pagados por los candidatos y partidos, hoy por hoy preponderante en las campañas electorales, realmente influya en la opinión pública y genere ciertos efectos persuasivos en los votantes, de acuerdo a lo que esperan los políticos.

En este sentido, cobra relevancia la realización de investigaciones académicas que traten de explicar la relación existente entre la mercadotecnia política y la opinión pública, buscando pautas aclarativas que nos ayuden a determinar el efecto (si existe) y el grado de impacto de la comunicación política moderna (en lo particular, de los *spots* publicitarios), en la conducta de los electores. Por ello, nos hemos planteado una serie de interrogantes usando como caso

de análisis la campaña electoral presidencial del 2006 en México. En lo específico, son tres los cuestionamientos que nos hemos propuesto contestar: ¿Qué tanto influye la mercadotecnia política y, en lo particular, los *spots* publicitarios de los candidatos y partidos, en la decisión de los votantes? ¿Puede la mercadotecnia política, en forma de *spots*, moldear la opinión pública? ¿Qué influencia ejercen los *spots* sobre la conducta y las actitudes de los electores?

En el presente escrito, se presentan los resultados de investigación a los que hemos llegado, después de sondear la opinión de los estudiantes del Centro Universitario de Ciencias Económico Administrativas (CUCEA) de la Universidad de Guadalajara, respecto del efecto que generan los *spots* en radio y televisión que promocionan los diferentes candidatos y partidos a la Presidencia de la República en México de cara a la elección general del 2 de julio del 2006. En consecuencia, los resultados de esta investigación son válidos única y exclusivamente para este universo de estudio.

En América Latina existen pocas investigaciones que traten de indagar sobre el efecto e impacto de los *spots* publicitarios en la conducta de los electores. La mayoría de las investigaciones sobre esta temática se han hecho en otras regiones, predominantemente en los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica y Europa. Sus conclusiones se han utilizado como propias en muchos países latinoamericanos. Sin embargo, es necesario impulsar investigaciones endógenas para generar conocimiento propio sobre la conducta del electorado en la región.

2. Estado del arte

El estudio de los efectos que las campañas y, en lo particular, la comunicación política, generan en la conducta de los votantes no es nuevo. Al respecto, existe una amplia bibliografía y diferentes teorías que se han construido en los últimos años, tratando de explicar el impacto que la comunicación política usada en las campañas electorales genera en la conducta de los votantes.

Por ejemplo, la teoría de los efectos, impulsada por lo que se conoce como la Escuela de Sociología de Chicago en los años cuarenta, sostuvo que los medios de comunicación ejercen un fuerte poder sobre las ideas de las personas y, en lo particular, señala que durante los procesos electorales existe una influencia directa de la comunicación política en la conducta de los votantes,¹ de tal manera

¹ Por ejemplo, Jaime Sánchez Susarrey señala “insistir en que serán los

que el resultado de los comicios electorales es determinado o afectado por el tipo y carácter de la campaña (Mendelsohn y O'Keefe 132; Noëlle-Neumann 65).² Es decir, en un sistema de cuño democrático, la comunicación política en las campañas electorales es determinante y define el carácter de la representación pública, de tal forma que las preferencias de los votantes se rigen por las circunstancias de cada elección (Patterson 136; Iyengar, Peters y Kinder 98; Page, Shapiro y Dempsey 63; Bartels 42; y Fan 112). De esta manera, de acuerdo a esta concepción, las preferencias electorales de los votantes siempre pueden ser modificadas por las campañas y, en lo particular, por la comunicación política (Graber 87, Campbell *et al.* 52, Geer 118, Norris *et al.* 42).

Sin embargo, existen otras apreciaciones teóricas que contradicen los supuestos de la teoría de los efectos, como es el caso de la teoría conocida como de la Universidad de Columbia, la cual postula que las campañas no son determinantes para el resultado final de los comicios, cumpliendo solamente un papel de reforzamiento de predisposiciones electorales generadas por una previa identidad partidista, social e ideológica (Lazarfeld 45, Berelson 103 y Gaudet 39, McCombs y Shaw, Butler y Kavanagh). En este sentido, las campañas electorales son importantes sólo porque activan y refuerzan predisposiciones latentes existentes entre los votantes, lo cual no resulta en la ganancia de nuevos adherentes, sino más bien, ayudan a la prevención de la pérdida de los votantes ya inclinados o anclados favorablemente, generando efectos mínimos sobre la conducta del elector (Heath *et al.* 118).

En este mismo sentido, Kappler señala que los medios de comunicación de masas no son la causa habitual de los cambios en el comportamiento o las actitudes de los electores, sino sirven para reforzar, a través de la exposición, percepción y retención selectiva, las disposiciones preexistentes (Kappler 74). Los medios de

candidatos, las campañas y los debates los que definirán al ganador (de la elección) es correcto." Véase Sánchez Susarrey, Jaime. "Calderón Entrampado." *Mural* (4 de febrero del 2006): 7.

² Al respecto, por ejemplo, en una encuesta realizada por el CEO de la Universidad de Guadalajara a 300 habitantes de la zona metropolitana de Guadalajara sobre los efectos de los medios en la construcción de opinión pública, el 48.3 por ciento de los entrevistados consideró que los personajes públicos pueden influenciar a la sociedad con lo que comunican a nivel masivo, un 33.7 por ciento señaló que sí, pero solo influyen a algunas personas, el 11.6 por ciento afirmó que no y el 6.4 por ciento dijo que no sabía o que no le interesa (Véase Mendoza Gallardo, Ingrid Michelle. "La mediatización y la construcción de opinión pública." *Gaceta Universitaria* 418 (12 de diciembre del 2006): 4.

comunicación operan en el seno de un grupo de influencias, como la familia, la religión, los amigos, la escuela, etc., los cuales son más importantes en la creación de actitudes, creencias y comportamientos (Cooper y Jahoda 85).

Por su parte, la teoría económica, también conocida como de elección racional, que, por cierto, difiere igualmente de los postulados de la teoría de los efectos, apunta que las utilidades esperadas por los votantes de los resultantes de su acción política generan preferencias sobre los diversos cursos de acción (Downs 69). Los electores prefieren los candidatos y partidos que le generan una real o perceptivamente mayor utilidad (Kreps 117). El ciudadano reconoce su propio interés, evalúa a todos los candidatos y partidos, según sus intereses personales y vota por el que mejor valora (Enelow y inc. 77). En este sentido, las campañas no generan efectos persuasivos mayores, ya que el resultado electoral puede predecirse en función de unos pocos indicadores económicos (Dunleavy *et al.* 82).

Ahora bien, en los últimos años han surgido nuevas concepciones teóricas y estudios empíricos que recalcan la importancia creciente de los medios de comunicación y, en lo particular de la televisión, en la conducta del elector en un contexto caracterizado por la agudización de la crisis de credibilidad e identidad de la gente con los partidos y la extenuación de las ideologías, así como por el papel crecientemente protagónico que están jugando en las campañas la personalidad, imagen y carisma de los candidatos (Campbell *et al.* 116; Geer 92; Norris *et al.* 67). Es decir, estas nuevas concepciones, como por ejemplo, la teoría de los efectos cognitivos,³ la *agenda setting*⁴ y de la persuasión política, apuntan que las campañas sí influyen la conducta de los votantes (Patterson 86).

Todos estos últimos estudios sobre el efecto de la comunicación política en la conducta del elector, si bien consideran a los *spots* en radio y televisión como parte central del proceso comunicativo,

³ Esta teoría señala que los individuos tratan de mantener sus actitudes, creencias y comportamientos de acuerdo entre sí, prestando atención a los mensajes que estén en consonancia con sus opiniones previas, buscando información que refuerce su decisión, por ejemplo, prestando atención a los *spots* de campaña del candidato a favor del cual se ha decidido, protegiéndose, a su vez, de información que cuestione su decisión (Festinger 65). El individuo puede distorsionar, deformar, interpretar incorrectamente o argumentar en contra de la información disonante que apoya al candidato por el que no se ha decidido.

⁴ MaCombs y Shaw, creadores de esta teoría, señalan que los medios de comunicación consiguen transferir al público la importancia que otorgan a los temas que se discuten en campaña y de esta manera los candidatos y partidos influyen en los votantes.

también incluyen otras formas de comunicación que realizan los candidatos y partidos políticos durante las campañas, como las entrevistas de los candidatos en los medios, los debates públicos, las noticias sobre las campañas, los objetos utilitarios, los mítines, el contacto directo, los anuncios en prensa escrita y toda la publicidad callejera como los gallardetes, los espectaculares, los posters y las calcomanías, entre otras.

Sin embargo, no existen estudios que hablen, en lo particular, sobre los efectos que generan en la conducta de los votantes los *spots* en radio y televisión que pagan los candidatos y partidos durante las campañas electorales en la búsqueda de algún espacio de representación pública. Es decir, las investigaciones que se han realizado en el orbe, principalmente en los Estados Unidos y Europa, se han enfocado en el papel que han jugado los medios de comunicación, y la información en general, en la conducta del electorado, pero no han particularizado en indagar sobre el efecto que generan, en lo particular, los *spots* pagados en radio y televisión —que representan una forma dominante que ha adquirido recientemente la mercadotecnia política en las campañas electorales en muchos países de América Latina— en la conducta del electorado,.

3. Mercadotecnia política y *spots* publicitarios

La mercadotecnia política es, por un lado, una disciplina científica que se estudia y desarrolla en muchas de las universidades públicas y privadas del todo el mundo, lo cual implica una área del conocimiento y, por el otro lado, es también un campo pragmático de acción que implica, en un primer momento, la comprensión profunda de las necesidades, problemas, deseos, sentimientos y emociones de los ciudadanos y, en un segundo momento, la elaboración de un programa y diferentes acciones de comunicación, cortejo, persuasión, organización y movilización de los ciudadanos en torno a una causa pre-establecida.⁵ Es decir, la mercadotecnia como paradigma de la política en la era moderna tiene una dimensión teórica y una práctica.

Una parte importante de la dimensión pragmática de la mercadotecnia política, lo constituyen los *spots* de radio y televisión, también

⁵ La planeación estratégica, la investigación y segmentación de mercados, la comunicación, la construcción de imagen, las estrategias y el gerenciamiento de los procesos de intercambio son partes constitutivas de lo que hoy día se entiende por mercadotecnia política.

llamados comerciales o anuncios políticos, ya que gran parte de las labores de comunicación y persuasión que impulsan partidos, candidatos y gobernantes recaen en este tipo de instrumentos.

Como es ampliamente conocido, el *spot* es una proclama de audio y/o video de corta duración, entre 10 a 60 segundos, que se transmite por radio o televisión, utilizado como medio de publicidad para transmitir mensajes y tratar de generar ciertos efectos en una audiencia determinada.

Los *spots* iniciaron en la radio en la década de los treinta, siendo usados como medios de propaganda para tratar de convencer y movilizar a las masas sobre temas políticos. En la televisión, los primeros *spot* políticos se usaron en la elección presidencial de los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica en 1952, cuando el candidato del Partido Republicano, Dwight D. Eisenhower, utilizó la televisión como conducto para ganar la elección presidencial. A partir, de este año, los *spots* en televisión se han vuelto muy comunes, de tal forma, que la clase política privilegia los *spots* como parte de sus estrategias de persuasión de los electores.

De hecho, hoy día, una gran cantidad de recursos económicos y de esfuerzos persuasivos que realizan candidatos, partidos y gobernantes, de diferentes signos partidistas e ideológicos en el mundo, se destina al pago de publicidad mediática, a través de los *spots* publicitarios. Por ejemplo, en el caso de México, cerca del 70 por ciento de los gastos multimillonarios que reciben los partidos del erario público se destina a pago de publicidad mediática, donde el *spot* es la forma más tradicional que ha tomado esta publicidad política.⁶

En el 2003, en la elección intermedia en la que se eligió a los diputados federales en México, se gastó por parte de los partidos políticos 538 millones de pesos en televisoras y 150 millones en radio. Para la elección presidencial del 2006, se estima que el gasto fue doble. Es decir, de más de mil millones de pesos para anuncios en televisión y de 300 millones de pesos para anuncios en radio. En América Latina y el Caribe, en materia de gastos electorales,

⁶ Según el Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) en 1994 los partidos utilizaron en los medios 24% de su presupuesto, pero en 2000 gastaron 54%. En los comicios intermedios de 2003 la inversión promedio fue de entre 50 y 70%, aunque el Partido Verde gastó 80%. Para el 2006, la Cámara de Diputados autorizó un presupuesto de 11 mil 892 millones 136 pesos para la organización y financiamiento de las campañas federales (Ramírez Cuevas, Jesús. "Más gasto, menos democracia. Políticos ricos, política pobre." *Masiosare* 399 (14 de agosto del 2005) p. 83.)

las cosas son muy similares, con la notable excepción de Chile y Venezuela, donde los partidos prácticamente no reciben dineros del erario público.

4. Marco metodológico

El estudio que aquí se presenta estuvo enfocado a conocer el impacto que los *spots* de radio y televisión pagados por los partidos y candidatos, durante las campañas electorales, generan en los públicos a los que van dirigidos. En lo particular, el estudio estuvo enfocado a tratar de indagar sobre los efectos que los *spots* generan en un público relativamente indeciso y muy atractivo para los políticos como son los jóvenes universitarios de nivel licenciatura, quienes estudian en una universidad pública en el estado de Jalisco, México.

La metodología utilizada fue el levantamiento de una encuesta, misma que se realizó entre el 27 de febrero al 3 de marzo de 2006 en el Centro Universitario de Ciencias Económico Administrativas de la Universidad de Guadalajara, ubicado en el municipio de Zapopan Jalisco, México. Se levantaron, en total, 742⁷ cuestionarios aplicados a los estudiantes a nivel licenciatura, considerando un error estadístico de $\pm 3.5\%$ y una confiabilidad del 95% (Scheaffer 59). La selección de los estudiantes fue mediante una muestra aleatoria por conglomerados. El grupo elegido se censó (Lohr 62).

Se realizó en México porque es una nación con una naciente democracia que enfrenta un proceso electoral inédito, de cierta manera, en su historia, y porque se considera que es un lugar representativo de la diversidad cultural, étnica y política de la región. Se escogió el Centro Universitario de Ciencias Económico Administrativas (CUCEA) de la Universidad de Guadalajara porque en él estudian jóvenes con un nivel socioeconómico medio, quienes están relativamente lejanos de la política partidista y quienes representan un *target* muy apetitoso, políticamente hablando, para los candidatos a la Presidencia de la República. De hecho, uno de los objetivos centrales y estratégicos de las campañas presidenciales es la conquista del voto de los jóvenes, ya que representan el 34 por ciento del electorado a nivel nacional.⁸

⁷ La población objetivo fue de 13,800 estudiantes de nivel licenciatura, información proporcionada por el Departamento de Control Escolar del CUCEA de la Universidad de Guadalajara.

⁸ De acuerdo al IFE, uno de cada tres de los votos que se emitan en las

Resultados de la investigación

El estudio muestra que una gran mayoría de los alumnos entrevistados, un 94.88 por ciento, ha visto o escuchado algún *spot* en radio o televisión sobre las campañas presidenciales. Un 3.37 por ciento no lo ha hecho y el resto no contestó o escogió la opción de no sabe. De este universo de posibles votantes, un 38.95 por ciento manifestó que ha visto más *spots* de Roberto Madrazo, candidato presidencial por el PRI; un 32.88 por ciento de Andrés Manuel López Obrador, candidato de la Alianza Por el Bien de Todos; un 21.42 por ciento de Felipe Calderón, candidato del Partido Acción Nacional. De Roberto Campa, candidato del Partido Nueva Alianza, y de Patricia Mercado, candidata del Partido Alternativa Socialdemócrata y Campesina, muy pocos entrevistados manifestaron haber visto o escuchado *spots* en radio o televisión.

Sobre una de las preguntas centrales del estudio referente al impacto que los *spots* generan en la conducta de los electores, un 24.39 por ciento de los entrevistados contestó que nada y un 39.76 por ciento que poco. Es decir, la mayoría (64.15%) señaló que los *spots* no generaban un impacto significativo en su conducta política. Solamente un 10.38 por ciento y un 2.29 por ciento señaló, respectivamente, que los *spots* influyen mucho y/o son determinantes en su conducta política.

De acuerdo a este estudio, los que dijeron que sí los impactaban consideraron que los medios de propaganda que más impactan en la decisión del voto son la televisión y la radio, seguidos de los espectaculares y folletos (bíptico, trípticos, volantes, etc.). Respecto de los debates transmitidos a través de medios de comunicación (radio y televisión) los entrevistados señalaron que estas deliberaciones entre los candidatos sí les generaban cierto impacto en su decisión electoral. De acuerdo a la encuesta en comento, el 13.88 por ciento afirmó que los debates son determinantes, un 37.33 por ciento señaló que el impacto es mucho y un 23.32 afirmó que algo o regular.

Los noticiarios en radio y televisión sobre asuntos políticos y electorales generan cierta influencia entre los votantes, ya que un 76 por ciento de los entrevistados señaló que sí impactan de manera determinante, mucho o algo su decisión electoral. Sólo el 4.9 afirmó que no influían nada dichos noticiarios. Las entrevistas de los candidatos en los programas de radio o televisión durante las campañas,

elecciones federales del domingo 2 de julio del 2006 será de ciudadanos jóvenes, quienes tienen una edad entre 18 y 30 años.

también, generan cierto impacto en la conducta de los electores, ya que sólo el 6.87 por ciento afirmó que no le impactaban en nada.

Los comentarios y afirmaciones que hacen los analistas que son invitados a los programas de radio y televisión, así como los editoriales de periódicos y revistas tienen un alto impacto en la conducta de los electores, ya que más del 75 por ciento de los entrevistados contestó que son determinantes, le impactan mucho o algo en su conducta y preferencia electoral. Por su parte, sólo un poco más del 22 por ciento señaló que nada o poco impactan los comentarios y editoriales de los analistas.

Es común, hoy día, que los candidatos participen en diferentes programas de entretenimiento en televisión como el Otro Rollo de Adal Ramones. Al respecto, la encuesta concluye que este tipo de presentaciones generan poco impacto en la conducta de los electores jóvenes.

Las entrevistas de los equipos de campaña son mucho menos efectivas en influir la conducta del elector, lo que demuestra que los votantes ponen mucha más atención y son influidos más por los candidatos que por sus equipos de campaña o dirigentes partidistas.

En una pregunta para validar el resultado anterior, se les cuestionó el impacto que generan los *spots* de televisión y radio en la determinación del voto. De los entrevistados, un 57.55 por ciento señaló que nada o poco, mientras que un 14.56 por ciento que mucho o que son determinantes. La gran mayoría considera que la decisión y orientación del voto es una decisión estrictamente personal.

Sobre las diferentes mediaciones sociales que inciden en moldear la conducta de los votantes, la encuesta encontró que las opiniones de los familiares sí influyen en la conducta de los electores, pero de manera no determinante. Lo mismo pasa con los amigos y compañeros de trabajo. Sobre el papel de la iglesia en la conducta de los electores, se encontró que la gran mayoría (94.07%) señaló que no toma en cuenta la opinión de la iglesia en la orientación de su voto, a pesar de que Jalisco es un estado relativamente religioso y conservador.

En la decisión del votante se toma en cuenta, en mayor medida, al candidato (74.30%), después las propuestas (73.18%) y, al final, el partido que lo postula (30.19%). A pesar que se dice que la ideología ya no es importante como referente de los electores, la encuesta encontró que un 67.38 por ciento sí toma en cuenta mucho o es determinante la ideología que representa el candidato postulado. La clase social a la que pertenece el candidato no es relevante para

moldear su conducta y decisión electoral para la gran mayoría de los entrevistados, pero sí la experiencia del candidato para ejercer el puesto.

Sobre el tema central de este estudio, se hicieron preguntas reiterativas a los entrevistados. Algunas de ellas tienen que ver con las actitudes, motivaciones y emociones que les generan los *spots* en radio y televisión. Al respecto, el estudio concluye que los *spot* en radio y televisión generan una actitud de indiferencia entre los electores (57.55%) y de rechazo (13.21%). Sólo un 19.68 por ciento afirmó que los *spots* les generan aceptación. Asimismo, de acuerdo al estudio, los *spots* en radio y televisión motivan poco para votar u orientar el voto (13.21% y 30.46%, respectivamente). Principalmente risa, enojo y, en menor medida, esperanza son las emociones que mayormente generan los diferentes *spots* de los candidatos.

La credibilidad, que es una variable muy importante en la política, está por los suelos entre los jóvenes universitarios respecto de lo que dicen los candidatos a través de sus *spots* y mensajes, ya que más del 75 por ciento de los entrevistados señaló que no le cree o le cree poco a los *spots* en radio y televisión de los candidatos a la presidencia de la república. Solo un pequeño porcentaje (0.4%) señaló que les cree mucho a estos *spots*.

Persuadir a los ciudadanos es uno de los principales objetivos de la publicidad política, sin embargo, no todos los *spots* logran alcanzar el objetivo. Al respecto, de los tres principales candidatos que compiten por la presidencia de la república, el estudio encontró que los *spots* más persuasivos han sido los de López Obrador (36.76% así lo consideran), después los de Calderón (24.53%) y finalmente los de Madrazo (20.45%).

Los candidatos y sus partidos no han sido exitosos en posesionar el lema central de campaña entre los electores, ya que un 69.41 por ciento de los entrevistados no recordó el lema de la campaña y sólo el 27.09% afirmó que sí lo recordaba. Sin embargo, cuando se les pidió que señalaran el lema un 74.93 por ciento no lo supo decir, un 10.78 por ciento acertó parcialmente de que Calderón utilizaba el lema "Pasión por México", un 8.89 por ciento dijo que López Obrador utilizaba el lema "Honestidad valiente"⁹ y un 4.58 por ciento afirmó

⁹ Los lemas de campaña de Andrés Manuel López Obrador hasta el momento del levantamiento de la encuestas habían sido dos: "Por el bien de todos, primero los pobres" y "Cumplir es mi fuerza." El término honestidad valiente lo ha usado López Obrador como jingle en sus *spots*, pero no como lema de campaña.

que Madrazo utilizaba el lema “Para que las cosas se hagan”.¹⁰

Finalmente, a pesar de que los entrevistados consideraron que Obrador es el candidato que más seguramente ganará la elección presidencial (49.46%), que sus *spots* son más persuasivos y que han captado mayor su atención, un 43.94% de los jóvenes universitarios señalaron que votarían por Calderón, 26.61 por ciento por López Obrador y un 10.92 por ciento por Madrazo. Por Patricia Mercado y Roberto Campa sólo lo haría un 1.89 por ciento. El candidato y el partido que más voto negativo genera es Madrazo y el PRI, mientras que el PAN y Calderón son los que más apoyo tienen entre los jóvenes universitarios entrevistados en Jalisco.

Conclusiones

El objetivo de la investigación fue conocer los efectos que los *spots* de radio y televisión generan en la conducta de los electores durante las campañas políticas, haciendo un estudio del caso de la elección presidencial en México del año 2006, así como conocer las apreciaciones y valoraciones que los votantes hacen de este tipo de instrumentos y acciones publicitarias. En lo particular, se encuestó a los alumnos de las licenciaturas del Centro Universitario de Ciencias Económico Administrativas de la Universidad de Guadalajara del estado de Jalisco, México.

La investigación nos ayudó a entender, de mejor manera, el efecto que generan los *spots* de radio y televisión que contratan los candidatos y partidos como parte de sus campañas electorales en la conducta política del elector mexicano, en lo particular entre los jóvenes universitarios de Jalisco, ayudando, además, a clarificar su verdadero peso específico de estos instrumentos en el área de persuasión política.

Al respecto, este estudio concluye que los efectos que generan los *spots* de los candidatos y partidos en radio y televisión en la conducta y decisión de los electores se ha sobredimensionado. Comúnmente se cree que el efecto es mucho mayor. Sin embargo, los resultados aquí mostrados contradicen esa creencia.

La conducta del elector es moldeada e influenciada por múltiples factores y no sólo por los *spots* en radio y televisión. El votante

¹⁰ Aquí es necesario informar que el lema de campaña usado, en el momento de levantar la encuesta, por Calderón fue “Valor y Pasión por México,” el de López Obrador “Cumplir es mi fuerza” y el de Madrazo “Mover a México para que las cosas se hagan”.

toma la decisión sobre la orientación de su sufragio influenciado, por ejemplo, por el tipo de cultura política predominante en su núcleo habitual de convivencia (trabajo, amigos, familia, religión, relaciones, etc.) y la suya propia; los hábitos de votación que se ha formado en el tiempo; la valoración que hace sobre el partido gobernante y sobre sus opositores; las experiencias vividas en pasados procesos electorales; la ideología que representan los candidatos y partidos en coincidencia con la suya propia; las expectativas de bienestar que el votante tiene de los candidatos y partidos participantes en las contiendas; la circunstancia y momento particular de la elección; el tipo de estrategias de las campañas (centradas en el miedo, el cambio, la continuidad, etc.); las redes de interés creadas y su relación del elector con las mismas, así como la opinión de los líderes y la información proporcionada por los diferentes medios de comunicación, entre otros.

Es decir, existen diferentes fuentes de influencia en la conducta del elector, siendo los *spots* en radio y televisión sólo uno más de los factores participantes, pero con un efecto relativamente menor.

Finalmente, se podría concluir que los *spots* de radio y televisión que publicitan los candidatos, durante las campañas electorales, generan un efecto e impacto menor en la conducta de los electores debido a tres principales razones:

Primero, los electores indecisos¹¹ oponen una “mayor resistencia”, adoptan una visión más analítica y más crítica a la publicidad dada a través de estos medios. En consecuencia, tienden a rechazar, más que aceptar, la publicidad. En este sentido, se puede decir que el gasto en *spots* como medio principal de propaganda política es poco eficaz para persuadir a los electores.¹²

¹¹ Los *spots* publicitarios van dirigidos centralmente a los indecisos, ya que los votantes fieles (voto duro) y los opositores (voto opositor) ya tienen una identidad y preferencia política, por lo que difícilmente pueden ser persuadidos de cambiar su decisión.

¹² Al respecto, hay un estudio muy revelador sobre el impacto que generan los *spots* en la decisión de los votantes. Por ejemplo, en el caso de las elecciones internas para nominar candidatos a la presidencial en México, ninguno de los tres aspirantes presidenciales que más gastaron en publicidad mediática durante la precampaña figuraron en las boletas de la elección del 2 de julio del 2006. El precandidato del PRI, Arturo Montiel, por ejemplo, emitió 5,209 *spots* con duración de 65 mil 421 segundos, equivalentes a más de 18 horas en televisión. Este precandidato gastó 154 millones de pesos durante la elección interna. Bernardo de la Garza, precandidato del PVEM, gastó cerca de 230 millones de pesos, emitiendo 1,972 mensajes. Por su parte, Santiago Creel, precandidato del PAN, empleó 35 mil 102 segundos y 1,484 mensajes, gastó 202 millones (Granados Chapa, Miguel Ángel. “Monirotos Derrotados: Plaza Pública.” *Mural* (1 de diciembre de 2005), p. 94.)

Segundo, la credibilidad de los electores a la “información” que les proporcionan los candidatos y partidos a través de los *spots* publicitarios es muy reducida. Los votantes tienden a creerles más a sus familiares, a sus amigos, a sus compañeros de trabajo, a sus líderes y a los noticieros que a los *spots* publicitarios.

Tercero, los electores observan y escuchan los *spots* publicitarios de los candidatos y partidos a través de la televisión y la radio a la luz de sus preferencias políticas, simpatías, antipatías, fobias y filias partidistas e ideológicas, de tal forma que, con mayor probabilidad, aceptarán aquellos con las cuales haya coincidencia y rechazarán aquellos con las que no tengan coincidencias políticas e ideológicas.

En conclusión, sólo resta decir que se tienen que buscar medios alternativos y complementarios que permitan a los partidos y candidatos hacer un uso más racional de sus recursos, que finalmente son de la sociedad, con el fin de lograr persuadir a los electores a que participen en los comicios y decidan apoyarlos, ya que los *spots* en radio y televisión resultan limitados y, de cierta manera, agotados como formato para lograr la persuasión.

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FEMALE EMBODIMENT AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION IN JESSICA HAGEDORN'S *DOGEATERS*

Maria Zamora

Entitling her tour-de-force debut novel "Dogeaters" was an especially provocative move on the part of Filipina-American writer Jessica Hagedorn. Considered a nasty slang word for Filipinos, the term is a derogatory reference to a Luzon highland tribe's pre-colonial penchant for eating wild dog.¹ There remains considerable sensitivity in the community over a stereotype that continually hurts and haunts. As the label has ignited Filipino and Filipino-American shame, denial, and outrage at being branded a savage, it has been consistently and emphatically disavowed. Still, in choosing this title for her novel, Hagedorn employs a double-edged irony. Her reclamation of the term "dogeaters" implicitly challenges not only the civilizing missions of the Philippine colonial past, but also the somewhat predictable and emotive nationalist response of the Filipino community itself.

As author Robert Stone has commented on the 1990 National Book Award nominee, "this is the definitive novel of the encounter between the Philippines and America and their history of mutual illusion, antagonism, and ambiguous affection" ("Jessica Hagedorn").

¹ The American name for a frankfurter was invented at the St. Louis World Fair, 1904. A Bontoc Igorot tribe from the Philippines was one of many ethnographic "showcases" that was imported to the Midwest that winter for America and the world to witness. Much "buzz" and humor resulted from the sensational presentation of the Bontoc Igorot village practice of eating wild dog. "Hot-dogs" were facetiously sold by vendors outside of the Philippine Village pavilion exhibit.

Apart from the regular dog eating, one of the more sensational aspects of the Bontoc Igorot village at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair was the near-nudity of the Bontoc males. The Bontoc male representatives were striking warriors who appeared in only their customary G-strings. As Victorian Americans at the time were as a rule clad head to toe, summer and winter, such display of the body was extraordinary, revelatory, and much photographed.

Set in the turbulent period of the Philippines' late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, *Dog eaters* is a dreamlike world in which U.S. pop culture and local Filipino tradition mix flamboyantly and where storytelling, melodrama, gossip, and extravagant behavior thrive. The novel offers a widely disparate group of characters who are caught in a maelstrom of events which culminate in a beauty pageant, a political assassination, a film festival, and a narrow underground escape. Hagedorn has described her novel as "a love letter to my motherland: a fact and fiction born of rage, shame, pride...and most certainly desire" (*Danger and Beauty* xi).

Dog eaters is a collage of non-chronological narratives, news flashes, personal letters, dream sequences, political speeches, and historical documents. The problematic mapping of narrative and of history is the crux of this work. As the real (McKinley's speeches, Jose Rizal's poems, historical documentation, and quips from the Associated Press) is interspersed with fiction, *Dog eaters* persists at conflating our sense of what really was. The result is a montage-style chimera of Philippine society. From its inception, the text is riddled with the question of what is real and authentic and what is false and artificial. This question lies at the heart of the text yet takes on different dimensions and ultimately offers itself as unanswerable. *Dog eaters* foregrounds the connections and discontinuities between a diasporic location and the Filipino nationalism that emerges as a consequence of (and challenge to) Spanish colonialism (16th century –1896), U.S. colonialism (1902-World War II), and neo-colonial martial law (1954-1972). The novel is a dense pastiche that brings alive in messy detail a history of particular Asian American inter-penetrations. The reach and grasp of America on the Philippines, as well as the ensuing Filipino understanding and response to such a grasp, is at the center of its inquiry. We come to understand the refracted Filipino landscape as infiltrated and imprinted by U.S. power. Ultimately, what the novel captures is not so much "the Philippines" per se, but the syncretism of global cultural exchange and a particular Asian American (or Americanized Asian) manifestation of it. The collage style of the novel interrupts the development of a distinct national subject, as it places together discontinuous, simultaneous first and third person narratives about a diverse range of characters.

Dog eaters resists the leveling of emancipatory politics to a post-colonial nationalism that would operate at the expense of women. The novel's consistent focus on the contours of female embodiment opens up new considerations for the roles women are often conscripted to play in the making of the nation. The multi-plotted narratives of *Dog eaters* vital female characters "bring to life" not only the

constraints often placed on women, but the multiform trajectories of female empowerment. As *Dog eaters* questions the act of representing history, it offers its own version of a post-colonial political awakening that leaves room for the many fissures and cracks that disrupt the nation-as-narrative (or narrative-as-nation). The technique of utilizing various “unofficial” discursive structures as well as recognized historical representations at once seems to undermine history. Yet the approach not only undermines official history, but also interrogates the politics of representation. In the end, *Dog eaters* not only insinuates that the oftentimes “subjugated knowledges” of the popular remain unavailable in official narrative history. Hagedorn’s novel also dramatizes the recollection of history as spasmodic hearsay and as an ongoing process of partial, imperfect recollection.

The reception that *Dog eaters* has had in the Filipino and Filipino-American community is telling. There remains a lively debate as to whether this book has “set back the race,” or has misrepresented and exoticized Filipinos. The novel has been understood by some as a “sell-out” to the West by employing a thoroughly postmodern aesthetic as it ignores the more indigenous modes of expression that might possibly align it with a politics of de-colonization. In other words, some critics have accused *Dog eaters* of reproducing an imperialist sensibility in its approach to the story of the Philippines. But such essentially nationalist critiques have failed to recognize the novel’s central concern with the politics of representation and in particular, with the constraints imposed on women in the act of shaping national history. The pastiche redraws the frame of a postcolonial transnational culture, and it does so from the perspective of the non-subjects of history. *Dog eaters* thus retells the stories of the Marcos years not from the perspective of the political or military leaders, the Western press, or subaltern historiographers, but largely from the viewpoints of Filipina mothers, mistresses, sisters, daughters, and wives. “Rather than conveying the upheaval of the Marcoses’ regime through panoptic, godlike vision, the novel is steeped in questionable recordings and skewed looks” (Lee 78).

Far from being simply an American orientalist portrait of the Philippines, *Dog eaters* is a complex novel that presents a vital portrait of resistance. In particular, it employs a strategy of representation that critiques the discursive formations that normalize and naturalize the relationship between women and nation. While the novel admits a national desire that possesses and controls women, it simultaneously challenges the putative naturalness of discourses of nation that require a rhetoric of territorialization. In this respect, notions of a national homeland are made metaphorically equivalent to female

corporeality. In the context of nationalism, the female body has been traditionally assigned great ideological and symbolic significance. Astutely exploring this particular aspect of the nationalist paradigm, *Dogeaters* weaves several narratives that explicitly link female embodiment to questions of the nation. The novel explores how women become the mute but necessary allegorical ground for the transactions of nationalist history. Jessica Hagedorn's special attention to female specularized bodies sets a particular stage—one that ultimately allows her to explore and question the figurative role of women in the nation. Ultimately, *Dogeaters* addresses the limits imposed on women in the act of shaping a national history by asserting a contradictory and dynamic female embodiment written beyond the restraints of trite national allegory.

National Desire & the Erotics of Politics: Daisy Avila

The chapter entitled “Sleeping Beauty” introduces one of the novel's most emblematic characters, Miss Daisy Avila. In this chapter's opening, Hagedorn takes a rare moment to foreground the psyche of the nation itself. In doing so, she conjoins this pointed reflection with a consideration of what “supreme irony” resides between father and daughter:

The latest national survey reports that eighty dialects and languages are spoken; we are a fragmented nation of loyal believers, divided by blood feuds and controlled by the Church. Holy Wars are fought in combat zones of our awesome archipelago. Senator Avila declares that our torrid green world is threatened by the legacy of colonialism and the desire for revenge. He foretells more suffering in his eloquent speeches, which fall on deaf ears. He is ridiculed and vilified in the government run newspaper. The underground circulates a pamphlet of his writings, “The Suffering Pilipino”: “We Pinoys suffer collectively from a cultural inferiority complex. We are doomed by our need for assimilation into the West and our own curious fatalism. . .” “Fatalism is fatal,” begins another influential essay. He describes us as a nation of complex cynics, descendants of warring tribes which were baptized and colonized to death by Spaniards and Americans, as a nation betrayed and then united only by our hunger for glamour and our Hollywood dreams. Is it a supreme irony then, when such an otherwise wise man as the Senator allows his gullible daughter to participate in a government-endorsed beauty contest run by the First Lady? (101-102)

As the novel consistently offers a gendered critique of nationalism, the text begs a simple question: How are private passions invested with public purpose? How does a wise father sacrifice a daughter unwittingly? The Avilas' story is at once a familial and national, and *Dogeaters* continually stresses how politics impinge upon the intimate

venues of family and desire. It repeatedly exposes the presumptions of the part-public, part-private nationalist narrative.

Daisy Avila, the daughter of a prominent Senator and opposition leader, is introduced as the most beautiful woman in the Philippines. Winning the “Young Miss Philippines” pageant, she is perceived as the hope of the nation, the flower of the archipelago.² She is a vision of beauty, the embodiment of nationalist pride. Yet during the days following her extravagant coronation, she is gripped with an unidentifiable anguish, left only to sleep or weep in self-elected hibernation. The postponement of her promotional tour and her cancellation of a cameo role in an upcoming melodrama are cause enough for national crisis. The media is despondent; a “hungry pack of journalists, photographers, and fans maintain a twenty four hour vigil on the sidewalk outside the gates of the Avila property” (107). Their reaction to Daisy’s reclusive depression exposes the salience of her national role as visual object. To see her becomes the citizen’s right. Her body becomes a sanctioned site of national production and government surveillance. Daisy Avila is the screen upon which public desire is projected. By hiding, Daisy defies the traditional role of a Filipina to serve her country through self-exhibition (Lee 91). Daisy’s insult to the nation resides in her simple refusal to be seen (Lee 92). It is in her silence, her unnamed angst, and her inability to articulate her own frustration, that we can recognize a burgeoning feminist consciousness. Although her father cannot understand her withdrawal, her mother is not surprised:

During the days following her extravagant coronation, something peculiar happens to Daisy Avila, something which surprises and worries everyone in her family except for her indomitable mother. Each morning, as Daisy struggles to wake from her sleep, she finds herself whimpering softly. Most of her waking hours are spent crying, or trying in vain to stop. Her eyes are continually bloodshot and swollen. The once radiant beauty cannot pinpoint the source of her mysterious and sudden unhappiness. (105)

² The Filipino fascination with beauty pageants throughout the twentieth century is well represented in Doris G. Nuyda’s “picture book” entitled *The Beauty Book: A History of Philippine Beauty from 1908-1980* (Manila: Mr. & Mrs. Publishing Co., 1980.) Nuyda’s book features glossy photos and personal biographies of most winners in the past century. The Philippines’ principal beauty pageants are of utmost prestige, and most of the crowned “Miss Philippines” have been of mestizo or mixed race heritage, reflecting the national politics of body image and the cultural legacy of colonialism. The pageants have become an important national venue for securing future position, political clout, and power. Many former winners have ascended to prominent roles in society: some have eventually become the first lady or wives of congressmen or senators; and in more recent years, several winners have reached prominent political office in their own right.

This uncertain feeling precedes a later rejection of the role she has been bequeathed in the Philippine national arena. She is paralyzed with a dread that she does not quite understand. Eventually, the angst she suffers metamorphoses into a new feminist consciousness. Only her mother grasps the beginnings of such a transformation.

Cynthia Enloe notes that anti-colonial nationalism rarely takes women's experiences as a starting point for understanding how a people becomes colonized or how it throws off the shackles of that material and psychologized domination. Rather, "nationalism typically has sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope." (Lee 90)

In such nationalist efforts, women assume the role of cultural marker for the national agenda. Their patriotic function is to serve as symbolic embodiments of the nation. Such is the explicit fate of Daisy Avila. All those watching, including her own emblematically politicized father, are at a complete loss to understand her seemingly strange behavior. As her father carries the torch for the postcolonial nationalist movement in his country, he cannot understand his own daughter's experience. But Daisy's reaction exposes the blind spot of her father's nationalism. Although he continually critiques the national government's collusion with the West, Senator Avila fails to oppose the state's representation of itself through women's bodies. In her moment of inarticulate depression, the figure of Daisy Avila opens a space for women's struggle and for women's experiences. Her depression and withdrawal from the public eye foregrounds the gap between who she is internally and what she must come to represent externally. Daisy's instinctive retreat points to the overall effect this metaphorical burden has on her literal experience—her body, her psyche, and ultimately her life. In the end, Daisy emerges from her repressed identity as beauty queen, transforming herself into nationalist guerrilla leader.³ As Daisy comes out of her self-imposed seclusion to claim a new public voice, she resumes center stage to offer a critique of that from which she has emerged. On a nationally broadcast talk show, she denounces the very beauty contest she won

³ It is presumable that Daisy's character is inspired after the real life example of two former beauty queens-turned-underground activists: Nelia Sancho and Marita Gomez. In Nuyda's *The Beauty Book: A History of Philippine Beauty from 1908-1980*, Nelia Sancho is depicted: "A few years after becoming 'Queen of the Pacific,' Nelia turned her back on the glamorous life. Her Asian and Pacific travels, she explains today, 'widened my scope of the self and family.' With this realization came her conversion to a radical ideology and association with the underground movement. In 1976 Nelia was arrested for her activities in Cagayan de Oro City and detained, a year ahead of Antonio Lao, the childhood friend who had become her comrade and later her husband."

as a “giant step backward for all women” (109). Daisy Avila comes into her own brand of nationalism through feminism (Lee 91).

In the chapter entitled “Famine of Dreams,” Daisy’s continued story reveals the complexity of the novel’s politics of embodiment. Here *Dog eaters* deconstructs the conjunction between romance, scripted consumer desire, and the violation of woman. Accenting a gang rape with romantic melodrama and catchy commercialism, the novel foregrounds a particular connection between national ideology and violence. Daisy Avila is detained and taken to “Camp Meditation” to be interrogated and raped by the General and army henchmen:

The Colonel who arrested her has a baby face. He speaks to her politely in English.

They arrive in an unmarked car at the recently renovated military complex. It is after midnight. Colonel Jesus de Jesus holds her by the elbow in a deferential manner, as if he were escorting her to a formal ball. “Contemplate your sins and your crimes here at our cozy Camp Meditation,” Colonel Jesus de Jesus chuckles. (211)

Daisy’s arrival at the torture camp is marked by romantic innuendo as well as ironic colonial and Christian overtones. Her name alone is a sardonic reference to Saint Theresa of *Avila*’s ecstatic devotion to Jesus Christ. As an eroticized and exalted saint, or a princess at a ball, she is escorted to her own rape. As the gallant and polite lover, or as the Christ-figure namesake, the Colonel is in reality the rapist.

Throughout *Dog eaters*, Hagedorn repeatedly foregrounds the heightened romantic sensibility of popular culture; as melodrama is woven throughout the entire novel and plays a central role in the national culture reflected here.⁴ Doris Sommer, in her book *Foundational Fictions*, considers how romance and national melodrama go hand in hand with patriotic history. She proposes that they fuel a desire for domestic happiness that spills over into dreams of national prosperity. Sommer also suggests that love and romantic sensibility reflect a certain hope for productive union on the national stage. In *Dog eaters*, romantic drama (either fed by popular culture or generated individually) seems to play a central role in every character’s life, no matter from what walk of life. But romance is consistently figured in *Dog eaters* as ironic. Romance is invariably an exposé of

⁴ From the Hollywood movies that play a prominent role throughout the text, to the reappearing radio melodrama entitled *Love Letters*, to the continuing fantasies of the First Lady, this novel is stitched together with the threads of the romantic narratives of mass culture.

the underlying difference between what a character (or a nation for that matter) desires and what really exists.⁵

The country's earlier obsession with Daisy's choice of lover/husband reiterates this paradigm of romance. Who Daisy chooses will automatically hold significance for the citizen's imagination. Romance becomes the vehicle of a particular national inscription as Daisy's mate will either fulfill or fail to satisfy communal imaginings and desire. After her short marriage to the foreign banker Malcolm Webb, she flees into hiding with Santos Tirador, the leader of the guerrilla movement. How does the rhetorical relationship between heterosexual coupling and the hegemonic state function here? As an allegory, each discourse (romantic and nationalist) is grounded in the other: from her endorsement as "Young Miss Philippines," to her seduction by a foreign moneyed interest, to her delivery as heroine of the political underground. Daisy Avila always embodies the constitutive connection between private and political passion. With the characterization of Daisy, *Dogeaters* addresses the compelling power of romantic imaginings and how they inform nationality, sexuality, and gender. Hagedorn points to how these imaginings come to constitute a modern Filipina subject.

This national proclivity for romance is confronted in the episode where Daisy is violated. The chapter "Famine of Dreams" rewrites (or un-writes) the foundational fiction of romantic melodrama as a dangerous and cruel failure. The culmination of Daisy's story can be read as an ironic commentary on the omnipresent romantic will to bridge private and public spheres. National romance is exposed as power play that traffics in women. This key chapter reveals the violence undergirding nationalism, as the final "dance" of this allegory is waged on Daisy. While Daisy is gang raped, the radio melodrama *Love Letters* plays on with heightened intensity. Incessant commercial jingles fill the air. And the General watches and awaits "his turn." The chapter is interwoven with these three distinct discursive threads: ⁶

Magdalzna: Where have you been? You didn't go to the river again, did you? (Ominous music in the background.)

Ponciano: Magdalzna, please. I . . . I don't want to talk about it-

⁵ For example, the episodes involving Pucha Gonzaga's romantic aspirations for Boomboom Alacran, as well as Trinidad Gamboa's obsession for Romeo Rosales, always encompass an incisive yet sympathetic exposition of their romantic delusions.

⁶ In this passage from Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* different fonts are used in order to distinguish different narrative voices. The fonts used here remain consistent with the different voices represented in the passage, although they are not exactly the same fonts as used in the original text.

Rosalinda: Papa, what are you trying to hide?

Magdalena: (accusatory) You did, didn't you? You did it again-

("One of your favorite father's favorite songs," the General tells her, "was 'White Christmas' by Bing Crosby. [...] your father was a stubborn man. He believed in moral lessons. He wanted everyone to be perfect, to consider him as an example. That stubbornness might have contributed to his downfall, di ba?")

**Thirst quencher to the star's.
The thinking man's soft drink.
After a long hard day at the office or school—TruCola!**

*TruCola Calypso
Ay, ay, aray! Bili
Mo ako nang
Ice-cold TruCola!
Sa-sa-sarap ang TruCola!*

[. . .] Colonel Jesus de Jesus asks to be first. He assaults her for so long and with such force, Daisy prays silently to pass out. Her prayers go unanswered. The other men crack jokes, awaiting their turn. "Lover boy *talaga*," one of the officers grunts in admiration. . . . "My woman," he announces, heaving himself off her. [. . .] He describes the special equipment set up in another room, and a smaller room where the General plans to take her when the men are through. "We can finally be alone," the General says. He calls her *hija* once again, exclaims at her extraordinary beauty. He promises to make her dance. (215)

How might the commercials and serial romances playing on the radio comment on the Daisy's rape? How is commercialism connected to the degradation of the "national body"? The radio commercials at this narrative juncture are reminders of the underlying economy and "hard sell" of the nationalist consumer culture. They reinforce the ubiquitous reality of neocolonial capitalism and the destructive power of this legacy.⁷ The free market has yet to engender freedom for the citizens of the Philippines, despite the assertions of the nationalists in power. By linking radio commercials to the physical torture of rape, the text discloses the lethal power of global consumerism in nation making. Romance alongside global commercialism serves here as a central and essential frame for the representation of such sexualized violence. Here *Dogeaters* "plays" on the way the nation is troped as a woman's body—borders are meticulously drawn and resources territorialized (either by colonists or post-colonial nationalists). In

⁷ During the period of unprecedented growth of global capitalism in the 1950s and 1960s, the Western domination of the Philippines that had been expressed through direct colonialism was transformed into a U.S. imperialist project by way of modernization and development.

turn, the brutality, economic exploitation, and civil rights abuses that are condemned when perpetuated by foreign powers, become sanctioned as necessary components of a native nationalist agenda.⁸ What Daisy's story illustrates is that the recuperation of violence "from within" the nation situates Filipina women precariously. In the end, it is their bodies that become the open terrain upon which both colonizers and nationalists alike ruthlessly represent themselves.

The Ascetic: Leonor Ledesma

Adding another layer to representations of female embodiment in the novel, Leonor Ledesma brings new meaning to religious piety. Constantly engaging in tortuous acts of self-deprivation, her own bodily disavowal is revealing:

Upstairs, the General's wife tosses and turns on her spartan bed, a regulation army cot she once asked her husband to send over from one of the barracks. The General found her request perfectly understandable, in light of her devotion to an austere, forbidding God and her earnest struggles to earn sainthood through denial. (67)

Leonor's self-imposed asceticism seems a surrogate penitence for the violence her husband the General dispenses. Leonor emphasizes the body as locus of pain and limitation. Her body foregrounds the somatic qualifications necessary in "proving" a woman's piety. Her self-afflicted and penitential suffering is a veiled form of action. She is both world fleeing and world serving. Leonor's religious asceticism, her constant prayer and masochism seeks to expiate the General's perversities. Leonor Ledesma's bodily disavowal seeks to compensate for other female bodily violations (that of Daisy for example). The General is the only beneficiary in such an equation. She will suffer for his sins, and she does so locked in her coffin-like room, "waiting for the ceiling to fall away and seal her away forever." (70)

⁸ Under Ferdinand Marcos' martial-law dictatorship, torture became a significant instrument of state power. Alfred W. McCoy's book entitled *Closer Than Brothers: Manhood at the Philippine Military Academy* provides an important analysis of the *theatricality* of Filipino "salvaging" and the phenomenology of torture (Chapter 6, p. 191): "The torture cell was a play within a larger play. Inside the safe house, Filipino interrogators acted out their script before the victim, their audience of one. If the plot, through twists and turns, ended with the victim's death, then the interrogators discarded the mangled remains in a public place, a roadside or field, to be seen by passersby. Such displays, called 'salvaging' in Filipino-English, became the larger play that made the road or plaza, indeed all public space, a proscenium of terror. Seeing the marks on the victim's body, or simply hearing of them, Filipinos could read, in an instant, the entire script of the smaller play that had been acted out inside the cell."

Leonor's self-privation simultaneously blinds her and relieves her of her spouse's failings (Lee 98). Her characterization is complicated by the fact that on the one hand she is ignorant of the details of her husband's existence. Leonor Bautista was forced into this marriage with the General by her elderly parents. After much initial resistance and the intervention of her parish priest, Leonor Bautista succumbed and married the General. She found life with the much-decorated war hero undemanding and rather tranquil, except for the strangers frequently trooping in and out of her house. She is not expected to accompany the General to social functions he attends; for this she is eternally grateful. The General seems to want nothing from her at all after their marriage. Leonor is in the dark regarding her husband's violent exploits; she has no real understanding of the identity of the strangers who frequent her house. Her marriage is a fortress or prison, where she is simultaneously protected and trapped. And if her own room is more like a coffin, she constantly conflates death with heaven:

She lies in the suffocating dark, waiting for the ceiling to fall and seal her away forever. She imagines that being smothered might be a sweet death; she waits for this death to claim her every night. The yearning for a sudden, painless death is her most selfish desire, her greatest sin. Father Manuel has warned her about this many times, in confession. Female escape in this configuration emerges as grave sin. (68)

Leonor's asceticism is a gothic somatic display of women's social responsibility. Leonor must make her body impenetrable through militant chastity, self-entombment, spiritual exile, and self-imposed clausturation. She atones for Ledesma's fall by enclosing her body in her tiny coffin-like cell. Leonor's body is in turn an instrument of salvation for national history. She atones for the wounds afflicted by her husband. She turns inward to heal the fissures of the corrupted self. But ironically, that "corrupted self" takes on the spiritual/symbolic responsibility for the violence that is reaped on women in general. Her battle against evil as internal struggle becomes a struggle against women's fate. One female bodily violation (Leonor's self-mortification) pays for another (Daisy's rape). Leonor's body is a barren attempt at functioning as a receptacle, exorcising corruption in an act of self-sacrifice.

The Female Grotesque: Baby Alacran

Hagedorn's novel continues to explore the relation between the symbolic and cultural constructs of femininity, as it considers constraints of female embodiment. Baby Alacran's story suggests

an ambivalent redeployment of taboos around the female body as grotesque and as unruly. Mikhail Bakhtin's seminal work on the carnivalesque and the grotesque body offers suggestive commentary on Hagedorn's writing of Baby Alacran. Bakhtin's discussion of the discourse of carnival moves the issues of bodily exposure and containment, abjection and marginality, and parody and excess, toward a dynamic model of a new social subjectivity. With the carnivalesque as a hermeneutic model, Baby can be read as pivotal to *Dogeaters'* inquiry into the politics of representation. As a model for transformation and counterproduction, carnival refuses to surrender to the critical and cultural tools of the dominant class. In this sense, carnival can be seen above all as a site of insurgency, and not merely withdrawal. The characters of carnival resist, exaggerate, and destabilize the distinctions and boundaries that mark and maintain high culture and organized society. As Mary Russo notes, "It is as if the carnivalesque body politic had ingested the entire corpus of high culture and, in its bloated and irrepressible state, released it in fits and starts in all manner of recombination, inversion, mockery, and degradation." (Russo 325) In *Dogeaters*, Baby Alacran is the novel's grotesque body.

Baby is the daughter of the richest and most powerful man in the Philippines, Severo Alacran, and his beautiful and heartless wife, Isabel. The Alacrans are at a loss to understand how their own child could be so awkward, sickly, and homely. They show little feeling or concern for their Baby, who ends up being a source of embarrassment for them:

Baby hangs her head in shame. She has been repeatedly reminded that she is not blessed with her mother's presence and feline allure. She is unbearably shy, soft, plump, short like her father, without any hard edges. Her complexion is marred by tiny patches of acne. Her breasts are flat, her waist narrow, her hips much too wide and out of proportion to the rest of her. Her legs are thick and muscular—"peasants legs," her mother calls them—. (25)

Baby has always suffered from physical ailments. Mysterious and undiagnosed, her ailments come to define her very existence. Her childhood is essentially an extended convalescence. Her body is the site of unchecked excess: from profuse and unnatural sweating, to constant eruptive skin rashes from which she can never recover. This is the source of the family's greatest shame. Her body becomes the family's repressed secret as she spends most of her childhood in hidden seclusion, with only the servants to change her pus-laden dressings. Baby's grotesque body perpetually undermines the Alacran reputation as a social stronghold. As they are at the very apex of

the privileged world of capitalist fortune and power, the domain that the Alacrans occupy is synonymous with that of realized aspirations of bourgeois individualism. But in spite of the fact that Baby is the sole heiress of the greatest fortune in the nation, she literally embodies a consistent family disgrace:

Lately, she's been forgetting to apply the men's deodorant she's forced to use. Mortified, she feels the wetness under her armpits, the sweat darkening the long sleeves of her new dress. She tries to recall if she remembered to spray herself with deodorant this morning, after taking the first of her daily showers. She bathes three times a day, sometimes four, in a frantic effort to ward off the nervous sweat that breaks out automatically in her parents' ominous presence. She is ashamed, sure her mother will make a comment any second. Her mother is impeccable; her mother never sweats. (27)

Baby Alacran's body is continually characterized as the open, protruding, extended, secreting body, the body of excessive becoming, process, and change. Her body keeps her at the fringes of society. There is nothing completed, nothing calm, stable about Baby. A doctor is hired for her constant care. He offers limited commentary on her overall condition. His final condemnation:

It could dry up and vanish tomorrow. It could last a few more months. Think of your daughter's body as a landscape, a tropical jungle whose moistness breeds this fungus, like moss on trees. (29)

Likened to the fertile, fecund, indigenous land that teems with growth, that cannot be contained and cannot be groomed, her grotesque body symbolically mirrors the nation in a new way. The tensions of centuries of colonization in the tropical archipelago erupt on the fertile terrain of her female body-become-landscape. In this context, her ultimate act of resistance is her illegitimate pregnancy. In defiance of the national and cultural codes of respectability, she negotiates a controversial shot-gun marriage, known later as "the wedding of the decade." If making a "spectacle" of oneself is a specifically feminine danger, Baby's sweet revenge is her final performance. From the veiled halls of her childhood convalescence, she appears in her grand publicized ceremony in a spectacular gown of silk and white Chantilly lace, her empire waist unable to conceal her swollen belly. She is simultaneously both decaying, deformed flesh, and the flesh of new life. The body of Baby Alacran reveals a rebelliousness echoed in a Dionysian sense of abandon and sensuality, while its fluidity and resistance to normalisation continues to constitute the "fearful Other." She is the wild card in an ordered and controllable world. She is unchecked and irreconcilable. As Baby Alacran's grotesque body resists easy classification, her existence is dangerous for the national

project—for it makes a mockery of any strict hierarchies, controls, or embodied reason that seeks universal recognition.

Conclusion

In closing I turn to the last chapter of *Dogeaters*, entitled “Kundiman,” which translates as a traditional Tagalog love song. The genre of the kundiman actually arose under Spanish colonial censorship. As Felipe Padilla de Leon notes, the form derived its force from its “covert and forbidden expression of love for the motherland, translated into the acceptable vocabulary of hopeless love for a woman” (Lardizabal and Legrado 160).⁹ This chapter is Hagedorn’s final love song, a poetic tribute to motherland and memory. She writes:

Our Mother, who art in Heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done. Thy will not be done. Hallowed be thy name, thy Kingdom never came. You who have defiled, belittled, and diminished. Our Blessed Virgin Mary and Most Precious Blood, menstrual, ephemeral, carnal, eternal. Rosa Mystica, Black Virgin of Rhinestone and Velvet Mystery, Madonna of Volcanoes and Violence, your eye burns through the palm of my outstretched hand. . . .

. . . . Our Mother, who art in heaven, forgive us our sins. Our Lady of Most Precious Blood, Wild Dogs, Hyenas, Jackals, Coyotes, and Wolves, Our Lady of Panthers and Jaguars, Our Lady of Cobras, Mournful Lizards, Lost Souls, and radio Melodramas, give us this day. . . .

. . . . Ave Maria, mother of revenge. The Lord was never with you. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed are the fruits of thy womb: guavas, mangos, santol, mangosteen, durian. Now and Forever, world without end. Now and Forever. (250-251)

Impassioned ambivalence towards the Philippines consummates this final tribute. From what Jessica Hagedorn herself terms the “exile within” come the tangled languages and lineages that inform the entire novel, a “torrid zone” of mingled memories and dreams (Hagedorn, “Homesick” 186-187). Is this final homage in *Dogeaters* a traditional love song, a prayer, a curse, an elegy to nation? With a sense of a profound longing, this closing “Kundiman” expresses passionate and unfulfilled yearning for the lost and the seemingly

⁹ Padilla de Leon further writes: “. . . the kundiman came into popular existence during the later part of the Spanish regime. It is, by far, the most popular and the most typical of all Philippine songs. Its theme generally portrays the faithful and true, but often hopeless and forlorn pleading of a sincere and devoted lover. The practice of Spanish colonizers of forbidding the natives to utter anything that pertained to nationalism is, perhaps, the reason for the decidedly passionate and ardent emotional feeling contained in the kundiman, which served effectively as the best medium for expressing Filipinos’ love of country changed to romantic love” (Lardizabal and Legrado 160).

unattainable. In this explosive re-writing of the “Our Father” and “Hail Mary”, the novel forges a hybrid, sacro-political interrogation of how history is determined. The kundiman transforms these pious litanies into an anguished love song to a once colonized motherland. With this final invocation (a gesture to the sacred as well as the profane) the many stranded and snarled histories of the novel are exposed at once as personal and political, individual and collective, polyglot and dissonant. Hagedorn’s kundiman weaves varying strains of iconography and imagery, reverent and at the same moment irreverent of the symbols appropriated. What results is an insistence on the lack of cohesion in any civilizing mission, whether it be the church, state, colonial legacy, or nationalist historiography. What endures is effervescence—a bubbling over, an evaporation of image and idea. The effervescing of mysterious things unordered, unregulated, and unconquered.

This *Ave Maria*, curse, love song, and lament opens a hybrid heterogeneous space for resistance to multiple levels of colonial authority, simultaneously subverting what Homi Bhabha calls “the Word of God and Man-Christianity and the English language.” As he puts it, “Blasphemy is not merely a misrepresentation of the sacred by the secular. ...It is a moment when the subject-matter or the content of a cultural tradition is being overwhelmed, or alienated, in the act of translation” (Bhabha 225). With “eyes...veiled and clouded by tears,” the “Madonna of Volcanoes and Violence” presides over a “damn history” that even Rio will never resolve or “get straight” (Hagedorn, “Homesick” 248-249), The fruits of Our Mother’s womb compromise a literal catalog of natural abundance—the fruits ever ripe for perpetual plucking. Closing with an echo instead of an “amen,” the prayer and the novel remain open-ended. *Blessed art thou among women, and blessed are the fruits of thy womb: guavas, mangoes, santol, mangosteen, durian. Now and forever. World without end. Now and forever* (251). It is this echo of open-endedness, of indeterminacy, that may be read ultimately as an offering to the power of growth, rehabilitation, regeneration, and interpretive possibilities. *Dogeaters*’ final offering is equivocal, multivocal, blasphemous, and prayerful. Hagedorn suggests there is no singular place of “return” to a place of female/national wholeness, assuming that such a utopian site or subjective state ever existed in the first place (Lee 103). Both the novel’s complex treatment of female embodiment and this closing kundiman undermine the assumption that such a utopian site ever existed. Rather, *Dogeaters* reveals the extent to which nationalism is a kind of theatrical performance of invented community. Ultimately, *Dogeaters* seems to focus on the salient force of nationalism as a

scopic politics, as a politics of certain visibility which subjects women in particular to an especially vigilant and violent discipline.

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POESÍA / *POETRY*

HOUSE OF WORDS

Bill DeGenaro

At three or four I learned to read.
My sister Anna sat me
on a wooden chair with casters,
formed letters and words
on an easeled blackboard
our dad brought home from school.

Anna buckled me to the chair
with an old belt,
raced me around the house full speed
whenever my mind wandered.

I would holler
cries of terror and delight,
cries that amplified the rusty
squeaking of the casters,
belt just tight
enough to keep me upright.

Still belted in,
I listened to Anna
read Richard Scary,
the labeled scenes—
schoolhouses, kitchens, pop-up campers—
no narrative, no story,
words.

Words Anna copied in chalk,
the careful font of a classroom
alphabet border.
She sounded out each letter,
defining, de-mystifying,
deconstructing the meaning
of a 'b,' a 'u,' an 's,'
transforming the abstract
into the concrete
as I mouthed her
phonemic chants,
repeated Richard Scary's
everyday words
like a believer saying "Amen,"
my heavenly reward a thrill ride
through the kitchen,
dining room, foyer,
rooms full of
windowsrugschairswalls
scenes from Richard Scary.

I imagined Scary's
labels in our house
as I whirled through the rooms.
Today I wonder if Anna
chose her methods
on purpose, if she
wanted me to think
of our house as a house
full of words,
if she wanted words to be a
thrill ride
that required a seat belt.

THE BICENTENNIAL

*You walk up in front of me,
Miss Marian.
I carry Master William back here.
It don't look right, me
walking with no
white woman.*

Malcolm Howell cradles
me in his massive hands,
the black, raw hands of a
West Virginia coal miner.
Starched white dress shirt,
work pants, scuffless brown
workshoes, he makes his way
to the teller, asks for all
silver dollars.

Mr. Howell buys fresh
goat's milk from my mother,
only pays with money
right from the bank.
*Miss Marian, I don't want
you to touch no dirty money.*

He signs the slip with an X,
emits a deep cough, fills
his pants pockets with
brand new 1976 bicentennial
coins, a grandson of slaves,
and we leave the bank
carrying history.

Mr. Howell's home
is the smell of
furniture polish, mild bleach,

Josephine Howell's biscuits.
After the bank I eat two
with a glass of goat's milk.

My mother reads Mr. Howell
some papers, one eye
watching me drop crumbs on
pristine linoleum.
I tell Mrs. Howell
about the goats
who gave my dad the milk
that morning.
Her grey, straightened
hair pulled back,
tight, into a round bun.
Light skin, glasses
with round frames,
skirt to the polished floor,
Mrs. Howell tells me
her mama, half free, and
her grandmama before that,
had a hundred ways to cook
a goat, one ear listening
to my mother's alien words—
black lung, class action.

To three-year-old ears
"master" and "miss" lack weight,
having only a certain music
like the music of *I reckon* and
I'm fixin' to and
grandmama worked in the house.

I hope the Howells heard
my mother's gentle,
ineffectual protests:
Everyone calls me Marian, or

Everyone calls him Billy.

I hope her words had some history,
some weight of their own.

Months later, after

trips to the lawyers,
drives to the mining office,

forms,
papers,

visits to specialists,

a settlement, a check.

Again, the bank.

Give Miss Marian

Mr. Howell insists

*A brand new five-hundred
Dollar bill.*

*Well then, how many
one-hundred dollar*

bills make that much?

More protests but he
insists she take it.

That night a swanky
Italian dinner.

The next week we tell

Mr. Howell what we ate,
he smiles.

Full of thanks, my
mother confesses the bill
was almost seventy-five
dollars, which Mr. Howell
laughs off as a *tall tale*.

Mrs. Howell treats

herself to new white carpet
and my mother, eyeing my shoes,

worries aloud it will show dirt.

Miss Marian, if there

any dirt in my house

I want to know about it.

Bill DeGenaro

University of Michigan-Dearborn

United States of America

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