Atenea

revista bilingüe de las humanidades y las ciencias sociales/

a bilingual journal of the humanities and social sciences

ATENEA

REVISTA BILINGÜE DE LA FACULTAD DE ARTES Y CIENCIAS
DE LA UNIVERSIDAD DE PUERTO RICO, RECINTO DE MAYAGÜEZ

VOLUMEN XXVIII • NÚMERO 2
DICIEMBRE 2008

Centro de Publicaciones Académicas
UPR-RUM
Facultad de Artes y Ciencias

ATENEA

Revista de la Facultad de Artes y Ciencias
de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Mayagüez

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ISSN 0885-6079

URL: http://www.uprm.edu/atenea

Tipografía: HRP Studio

Diseño y arte portada: José Irizarry y Nandita Batra ©

El diseño de la portada viene de un tetradracma de plata ateniense del siglo V a.C. Presenta a Atenea en el anverso y su atributo, la lechuza, en el reverso. Cortesía del Foro de Monedas Antiguas.

Ilustrador: José Irizarry

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publishes articles on the humanitites and social sciences written in English or Spanish, as well as some poetry and fiction. Articles should conform to the norms stipulated by the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) and be sent in triplicate to the Editor, Revista Atenea, PO Box 9265, University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez, Mayagüez, Puerto Rico 00681.

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ISSN 0885-6079

URL: http://www.uprm.edu/atenea

Typography: HRP Studio

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The cover design is based on an Athenian silver tetradrachm from the 5th century B.C., depicting Athena on the obverse and her owl on the reverse. Courtesy of the Ancient Coin Forum.

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LA POÉTICA DE LOS SENTIDOS EN LOS FILMES DE LUCRECIA MARTEL

Hugo Ríos

El espacio cinematográfico ha sido definido tradicionalmente por lo visual. Es de entenderse que ésta sea la idea general aceptada pues el cine nació precisamente poco después de cuando se comenzaba a capturar el mundo en fotografías. El camino que siguió la teoría de cine fue uno de acercamiento a los planteamientos de lo visual, a los aparatos para desarrollar y fomentar las necesidades del espectador, anticipándolas y controlándolas. Cabe destacar la invaluable aportación de teóricos de la mirada como Laura Mulvey, Teresa De Lauretis, y Christian Metz, entre otros. Sin embargo, no es éste el único acercamiento válido. La hegemonía de lo visual no es total; existen modos de desplazar el control de la mirada, utilizándola para fomentar otros sentidos, otras maneras de percibir el cuerpo cinematográfico, estrategias para acercarse a la textura, sabor y olor de la imagen a través de lo visual pero eliminado su control y autoridad.

Vivian Sobchack y Laura Marks, entre otros, han escrito abundantemente sobre la importancia de los sentidos dentro de los parámetros cinematográficos. La teoría cinematográfica, en especial la generada durante los años setenta, ha enfatizado la mirada sobre cualquier otro sentido. Al respecto, Sobchack señala, "We do not experience any movie only through our eyes. We see and comprehend and feel films with our entire bodily being, informed by the full history and carnal knowledge of our acculturated sensorium" (63). El dominio de lo visual es cuestionado con una invitación a reintegrar los sentidos. El propósito de este regreso a los sentidos no consiste en menospreciar lo visual sino en devolverle a un contexto adecuado junto a los demás sentidos. Una relación que de acuerdo a Marks, "acknowledges its [visuality's] location on the body," mientras que del mismo modo, "it seems to escape the attribution of mastery" (132). Con esto se plantea un modo de visión que deja de ser un instrumento de reconocimiento y clasificación y se acerca

a la totalidad del cuerpo para realzar la experiencia sensual. En el cine esto se traduce a una inversión de códigos; la visión ya no se somete a los demás sentidos sino que sirve para promoverlos. No como una ilusión sino como una "extension of the viewer's embodied existence" (Marks 149).

El problema con la conceptualización de la visión en el cine es su apego a los instrumentos de control. Por eso, Marks contrasta los aparatos de representación simbólica con los de la representación mimética. Lo simbólico tiende a la generalización, simplificación y a facilitar el consumismo, mientras que lo mimético sugiere un contacto más cercano y continuo con el mundo real. Cuando experimentamos el cine si bien es cierto que lo hacemos a través de los ojos no son éstos los que controlan la experiencia total. En algunos géneros como el horror, el melodrama, el suspenso y la pornografía, la complicidad de los sentidos es necesaria para el éxito del filme. En estos géneros, considerados menores, el espectador "vive con su cuerpo" reproduciendo las emociones experimentadas por los personajes en la pantalla con sus propios sentidos. Al hacer esto, las fronteras entre los espacios de representación y espectador se confunden, se mezclan. Sobchack señala que el cuerpo "enacts this reversibility in perception and subverts the very notion of *onscreen* and *offscreen* as mutually exclusive sites or subject positions" (67). Ésta es una crítica directa y devastadora a los sistemas de la mirada monolíticos de los años setenta pues abre la opción a un cine donde se puede escoger una posición a gusto, rechazando la existencia del espectador ideal.

Para poder adaptar al espectador a los nuevos conceptos sugeridos por esta sensualidad cinematográfica es necesaria una nueva forma de conceptualizar la mirada. Marks le llama "haptic visuality" al modo que intenta reemplazar la mirada institucionalizada (optical visuality). Ésta última asume que tiene todos los ingredientes para poder determinar la naturaleza del objeto: distancia, profundidad y poder de representación. El "haptic" consiste en una mirada de cercanía que se mantiene sobre la superficie del objeto con el cual entabla una relación de respeto a la individualidad. Las imágenes que permiten este tipo de relación requieren mayor colaboración del espectador, un tipo de envolvimiento total, inmersión en los sentidos inmediatos y culturales, además de una complicidad activa para poder funcionar. Marks señala que estas imágenes son "so thin and unclichéd that the viewer must bring his or her resources of memory and imagination to complete them" (163). Sobchack menciona como ejemplo la manera en que Jane Campion desarrolla su filme *The Piano (1993)*. Campion logra transferir al espectador los sentidos

que sus personajes están experimentando en la pantalla, que si bien lo que se recibe no es exactamente lo mismo, sí se tiene una "partially fulfilled sensory experience" (76). Por medio de un plano detalle, Campion defamiliariza parte de la anatomía de la protagonista, los dedos. Pero según se va enfocando Sobchack indica que sus dedos ya sabían lo que sus ojos miraban; un reconocimiento táctil que antecedía el visual. Sobchack insiste en que no se trata de metáforas sino de una experiencia lograda a través de los sentidos del espectador pero motivada por los sentidos del filme. ¿Cuáles son las posibilidades de lograr este modo de interacción y qué tipo de filmes lo permiten o promueven? Algunas de esas contestaciones se encuentran en la obra de Lucrecia Martel.

La breve filmografía de Lucrecia Martel presenta excelentes ejemplos de los métodos que se pueden utilizar con el propósito de realzar la importancia de los sentidos en combinación con los elementos visuales del cine. Su obra total consta de cuatro cortometrajes "El 56," "Piso 24," "Besos rojos" y "Rey Muerto". Este último fue incluido en la versión DVD de *La Ciénaga,* y además, ganó un importante premio en el Festival de Cine de la Habana. A pesar de que algunas de sus preocupaciones están presentes en el corto, éste no presenta las mismas características que unifican su trabajo posterior. Ya con *La Ciénaga* (2001) comienza a tomar forma el perfil autorial de Martel. El filme retrata a dos familias, una en el campo, otra en la ciudad, sumidas en el ambiente aplastante y claustrofóbico de la clase media con una relación colonial hacia sus vecinos nativos de la región. Por otro lado, *La Niña Santa* (2004) ganó la Palma de Oro en el Festival de Cannes. En este filme se puede notar una continuación de los temas de *La Ciénaga* pero refinados y con aún mayor maestría cinematográfica. Es una historia que abarca muchos temas desde el despertar sexual de una niña, la mística de las vocaciones religiosas, el discurso médico y el abuso sexual. Pero sobre todo, destaca la manera en que Martel se acerca a los espacios y los puebla con una textura y un campo sensorial saturado. Este acercamiento para nada indica que no existan acercamientos a la teoría de la mirada dentro de estos filmes. Se puede notar además del enfoque sensorial un intento de recuperar o de apropiar la mirada para establecer una subjetividad femenina e inscribirla tal y como indica Ana Forticinio, como una llena de acción y deseo. Pero mi enfoque es otro. Es el propósito de este proyecto investigar las estrategias utilizadas por Martel para cuestionar el imperio de la mirada, retándolo desde el punto de vista del cine "haptic". ¿Qué estrategias utiliza Martel para privilegiar los sentidos utilizando la mirada, para regresarla al contexto del campo sensorial total? Pretendo privilegiar mayormente en

cuatro estrategias: la de-centralización de la visión, el campo expansivo de la audición, el olfato combinatorio y el tacto de la imagen.

De-centralización

Para que las teorías del "haptic" puedan funcionar, como se mencionó anteriormente, es necesario desarticular el andamiaje cinematográfico que, heredado de la estructura del Hollywood clásico, mantiene la centralidad de la "optical visuality"' Para lograr esto, Martel acude al sabotaje sistemático de las tomas por medio de la de-centralización de lo visual. Martel ataca el estilo clásico de centralización, el mundo ordenado llevado a su cúspide por el cine de Hollywood y con esto crea nuevos contextos y expectativas. En *La Ciénaga* esto se demuestra con la concentración de figuras en espacios cerrados y fuera de foco para lograr, primero, la desorientación temporal del espectador y luego, la familiarización con las texturas de los objetos. Un fuerte ejemplo de esto ocurre a diez minutos de comenzado el filme. La escena abre con una toma de lo que más adelante reconoceremos como la casa de Tali (Mercedes Morán). En el espacio limitado de la escena se puede notar en la parte izquierda inferior de la toma, en primer plano y fuera de foco, una parte del brazo de Tali que habla por teléfono. A medio plano y fragmentada, se encuentra la hija de Tali, Agustina. Mientras, en el fondo podemos ver la puerta que da a la calle, fuertemente iluminada y también fuera de foco. El hijo de Tali entra por la puerta del fondo y cruza los tres planos hasta salir de la toma por el extremo derecho de la misma. La escena apenas dura 14 segundos y sin embargo demuestra el hacinamiento en que viven las dos familias, la comunicación interrumpida y la falta de privacidad; todo esto sin privilegiar ninguna imagen en particular y sí la interacción de los cuerpos al cruzar e interrumpir las imágenes.

En el campo donde vive la familia de Mecha (Graciela Borges), se puede notar una configuración similar de cuerpos desplazados sin centralización y una falta de comunicación aún mayor. Los únicos personajes que ganan cierta independencia del conglomerado son las sirvientas, que por ser excluidas por el racismo se mantienen al margen, aunque en el caso de Isabel, no totalmente libre del hostigamiento laboral y de la mirada sexualizada de Momi (Forcinito 7). Resulta curioso que Joaquín, uno de los hijos de Mecha, critica a los "indios" por ser "unos quiscudos, viven todos juntos allí en la casa; el padre, la madre, la abuela los perros, los gatos". No es la única ocasión en que Joaquín emite un comentario racista, eco de las palabras de la madre, y al mismo tiempo resulta como un espejo de la

situación que vive la familia de Mecha en su casa de campo.

Para terminar la de-centralización de la imagen en *La Ciénaga* con un toque de de-familiarización al estilo de Antonioni, Martel presenta en una secuencia de tres tomas los interiores de la casa de Tali después del accidente del niño; espacios vacíos deshabitados, extraños por carecer del elemento humano que durante todo el filme los inundaba. La secuencia termina con una cuarta toma donde al fondo se muestra el cuerpo del niño muerto, Luciano, junto a la escalera.

En *La Niña Santa* se encuentran muestras aún más radicales de de-centralización. El escenario es más recargado que en *La Ciénaga* pues se trata de un hotel donde convive una familia con los huéspedes y al mismo tiempo recibe la visita de una convención de médicos. Pero no es solo el hacinamiento lo que ayuda a crear este efecto donde la imagen colapsa sobre su peso recargado. También se crea un ambiente claustrofóbico con tomas apretadas, saturadas de objetos y un uso excesivo y pesado (como términos positivos) del primer plano. Identifico dos instancias principales de la de-centralización de lo visual ya sea por la fragmentación o por la invasión de otro sentido.

El primero de los casos se da en una de las escenas de la pileta donde Amalia observa detenidamente el cuerpo del doctor Jano. La secuencia comienza con un primer plano de un material no identificado al principio, una especie de plástico marcado por pequeñas líneas que asemejan un acercamiento exagerado a la piel humana. De repente aparece una mano. Las puntas de los dedos visiblemente marcadas sobre el material. La cámara corta a un primer plano del rostro de Amalia detrás de la cortina. Por un pequeño agujero del plástico Amalia observa. Con una moneda comienza a frotar el poste donde se sujeta el plástico produciendo un tintineo metálico. Este sonido se añade al ya aumentado rumor del agua de la piscina. La cámara corta a un plano detalle de la cabeza del doctor Jano (el mentón y parte de la oreja queda fuera del marco de la toma). Somos testigos de cómo el sonido desmantela la relajación de Jano que busca el origen del sonido. Amalia, al saberse observada, retrocede detrás de la cortina y eventualmente se marcha, una vez más cruzando el plástico dejando a su paso la impresión de una silueta religiosa, una aparición de la virgen. Ambas figuras, Jano y Amalia, aparecen fuera de los bordes de la toma, señalando a un espacio exterior y a la mediación, en el caso de Amalia, de una sustancia, el plástico, que le añade una capa adicional de textura a su figura. Sobchack, en un estudio sobre Kieslowski, menciona el uso del primer plano para “foreground objects as cut out of and cut off from a

larger visual field that their hermetic and portentous presence also insists on the what is outside sight and makes us aware of a Gaze of the other enveloping sight on all sides" (102). Esta fragmentación permite explorar la superficie de los objetos sin pretender controlarlos al estar consciente de que siempre existe parte del objeto fuera del marco privilegiado por la toma.

El segundo caso ocurre en el cuarto de Helena una vez que Freddy regresa de hablar con el doctor Jano. La secuencia comienza con una toma desde la espalda de Helena en la que vemos su cabello y un poco más adelante, parte de la pierna derecha. Freddy entra a la habitación pero solo vemos su torso, su cabeza está ausente de la toma. Hay un corte a una toma de la cama; Freddy, que sigue decapitado, sentado sobre ésta, pero no centralizado. La otra mitad de la pantalla la ocupan las sábanas de la cama que por su arreglo y la de-centralización de Freddy tienen más presencia que el cuerpo humano. Helena llega hasta la cama y ocupa la mitad derecha del plano sobre las sábanas. Pero su ropa es como una continuación de la textura de las sábanas no por ser del mismo material, sino por ocupar con sus pliegos un espacio mimético correspondiente a éstas. Helena mueve las piernas, las toca, las frota mientras la figura de Freddy se mantiene casi totalmente fuera de foco. La escena que en contexto de la trama probablemente no tiene ningún significado erótico entre los hermanos, en el contexto "haptic" se desborda de sensualidad, revelando otros significados, abriendo espacios para nuevas lecturas. Los hermanos divorciados (a pesar de que Freddy aún utiliza el anillo que toma gran importancia en los acercamientos cuando habla por teléfono) participan de una visión cargada de connotación sexual. A pesar de que el aspecto diegético no contribuye a esta lectura, la sensualidad de las texturas realzadas por los códigos "haptic" sí sugieren este plano sexual. Esto es a lo que Marks alude cuando comenta la erótica de la imagen "haptic":

> They construct an intersubjective relationship between beholder and image. The viewer is called upon to fill in the gaps in the image, to engage with the traces the image leaves. By interacting up close with an image, close enough that the figure and ground commingle; the viewer relinquishes her own sense of separateness from the image—not to know it but to give herself up to her desire for it (183).

Estas imágenes recargadas de textura sexual se divorcian de la trama y se mueven por sí mismas sobre el lienzo de la secuencia para saturar al espectador, provocando una fuerte identificación no con los personajes, sino con la piel del deseo que flota independiente de éstos.

Audición

Otra de las estrategias utilizadas para socavar la primacía de lo visual instalando otro sentido es el uso sensibilizado de la banda sonora del filme. El sonido se desasocia de la imagen y recorre la toma creando sus propios caminos, interrumpiendo la narrativa con ideas que no obedecen directamente a la trama. Dominique Russell plantea, en su acercamiento al cine polifónico de Martel, la centralidad de "paradoxes of sound, with its confusión of materiality and inmateriality, its sensous elusiveness as well as difficulty of interpretation" (3). Un ejemplo magistral de esta técnica es la escena de los créditos iníciales en *La Ciénaga*. El filme comienza con una toma del cielo nublado que luego corta a un primer plano de unos pimientos rojos acompañados por el fuerte sonido de truenos. Después de un segmento de los créditos tenemos una toma en *close-up* de unas botellas de licor y unas copas en una de las cuales una mano de mujer coloca cubos de hielo. El sonido está privilegiado en esta escena, quizás hasta un poco más de lo necesario. El repicar de los cubos de hielo en la copa sirve a modo de señal o invitación pues comienzan a aparecer en tomas consecutivas otras personas que reaccionan al llamado. Estas personas comienzan a moverse lentamente, en tomas en las que han quedado fragmentados sus cuerpos, y van arrastrando las sillas de metal produciendo una cacofonía que asemeja el sonido de las construcciones en las grandes ciudades. Marks, trabajando una idea de Paul Rodaway, señala que "some urban warning sounds seem to have turned into aural decorations" (244). Rodaway compara estos signos gastados con el "rich environment of ambient sound typical of rural life" (Marks 244). Martel precisamente logra instalar una crítica de los "non-places" que menciona Marks, al invertir los sonidos esperados de una casa de campo. Lo logra asociando el desplazamiento de cuerpos gastados y las sillas metálicas a una cinta transportadora industrial o al paisaje sonoro de una ciudad. Esta secuencia es un ejemplo de lo que Marks nombra (aunque no desarrolla extensamente) "Haptic hearing: usually a brief moment when all sounds present themselves undifferentiated before we make the choice of which sounds are most important to attend to" (183). En un momento el sonido de los cubos de hielo en la copa, las sillas de metal y los truenos se combinan sin privilegiar ninguno dejando la opción al espectador. Pero también la suma de todos adquiere un efecto de alienación que anticipa la caracterización de los personajes principales.

Existen otros sonidos que de igual manera son introducidos para desorientar al espectador o para alimentar la trama. Un ejemplo del primer caso es una escena donde Tali sale al patio interior de

la casa cargando una olla caliente. Se escucha un zumbido que no parece estar atribuido a ningún objeto dentro de la toma. Un poco más adelante se escucha la voz distorsionada de las niñas cantando "Doctor Jano, cirujano, hoy tenemos que operar". En ese momento la cámara corta hacia la fuente del zumbido y de la distorsión: las niñas cantan frente a un ventildor. La imagen y el sonido flotan sin ningún significado importante adjunto a éstas (salvo quizás imitar un comportamiento infantil casual), pero sí conecta con la de-familiarización que forma parte del proyecto total de Martel.

El otro caso es el sonido que sí va junto a la trama pero que permanece independiente e incorpóreo. Este es el caso del perro del vecino. Este sonido que proviene del otro lado del muro se alimenta de imágenes esparcidas por toda la película sin tener mayor conexión que tal vez la mente del pequeño Luciano. A través del filme en la casa de Tali se escucha el perro del vecino. Luciano, el hijo menor, está fascinado con el animal que nunca ha visto. Se encuentran otros perros y se narra una historia del perro/rata africana. Todos estos aspectos desconectados le dan un cuerpo narrativo a la imagen descarnada del perro del vecino el cual provee un final no cerrado al filme.

En *La Niña Santa* el sonido resulta vital no solo en sí mismo como parte de la totalidad del filme, sino para mantener a raya la imagen. Los sonidos actúan como puentes aurales que rebasan los límites de la imagen y la manipulación del audio es aún mayor que en *La Ciénaga*. En momentos determinados las conversaciones ocurren en varios planos (la pesadilla de los encargados de los subtítulos). El espectador, en algunos casos, está a cargo de escoger qué fragmento de conversación va a seguir, arriesgándose a perder parte del dialogo. Esto ocurre mucho en el filme cuando hablan las figuras de autoridad y tradición que en este caso son encarnadas (no exclusivamente) por Inés y la madre de Josefina. En el caso de Inés en más de una ocasión su clase de catecismo es sumergida en el trasfondo para privilegiar la charla entre Jose y Amalia. Mientras, en la casa de Jose, ocurren tres conversaciones al mismo tiempo que opacan las quejas de la madre, aunque en esta ocasión la banda sonora no guía al espectador. Las tres conversaciones no se relacionan entre sí; están superpuestas. Nadie parece escuchar a nadie lo que acentúa el tema de alienación y desintegración de la familia.

Un caso más drástico de manipulación ocurre en la primera escena de la piscina donde los campos aurales de tres personajes coinciden en una intersección de caracterizaciones. Primero, Amalia comienza a rezar mientras observa al doctor Jano que acaba de salir del agua. Mientras el punto de vista de la cámara prefiere a Amalia,

el rezo se escucha más fuerte. Pero la mirada de Amalia cae sobre Jano y se va perdiendo el sonido del rezo que se vuelve un susurro. Entonces el punto de vista cambia de Amalia a Jano que observa a Helena, a punto de entrar al agua. El rezo ha desparecido pues Jano no puede estar escuchándolo. Su atención se enfoca en el fuerte sonido de la toalla de Helena y del agua. Jano observa intensamente a Helena y el punto de contacto aural cambia una vez más. Esta vez estamos dentro del campo sonoro de Helena; es un zumbido acompañado de un incremento en el sonido del agua. Todos estos cambios están enmarcados por fluctuaciones en la percepción del agua y fragmentos de conversación inidentificables. El propósito de este catálogo de percepciones obedece a un intento de de-centralizar la subjetividad. En la secuencia no se privilegia el punto de contacto aural de ninguno de los personajes. El espectador adquiere diferentes perspectivas que van unidas a puntos de vistas variados aunque en ocasiones se confunde la fuente de su origen. Pero también, contrario a las teorías del Hollywood clásico, se pierde sonido. Hay fragmentos del diálogo que no escuchamos, que no nos están permitidos. Si la voz es el trazo de la unidad y separación con los cuerpos, como indica Mary Anne Doane (44), entonces la interrupción, la carencia de diálogo y el silencio señala una ruptura con la unidad de la imagen.

La extensión y enfoque del campo sonoro de los filmes de Martel invitan no a desestimar la imagen, sino a devolverla a una totalidad; a trabajarla en conjunto, a destronar su monopolio instaurando una pluralidad de sentidos. En algunas ocasiones como la escena de la piscina y ciertamente en la conclusión de los filmes, Martel parece privilegiar el sonido a la imagen. Este es el caso de los créditos que están cargados por la banda sonora que continúa reproduciendo sonidos del filme. En *La Niña Santa* las risas de Amalia y Josefina, el sonido de la pileta termal y ruidos asociados al agua; en *La Ciénaga,* disparos y otros sonidos de ambientación que reproducen el espacio del campo. Al extender el sonido fuera de la narrativa, Martel nos sugiere una apertura del filme, indicándonos que es mucho más que una historia con principio y fin (de hecho carece de un sentido de cierre tradicional). Se puede tomar como una renuncia a la narrativa y como una invitación a aceptar su obra como un fragmento de una totalidad inaccesible.

Olfato

El menos privilegiado de los sentidos en el filme *La Niña Santa* es el gusto. Pero le sigue el olfato, que, si bien ocupa un lugar interesante, se ve reducido en comparación con el tacto y la audición. Sin embargo, el filme sí contiene una estrategia relevante para realzar o señalar la interacción de lo visual con el olfato. La escena ocurre después de la epifanía del ascensor discutida más adelante. Amalia entra en la habitación del doctor Jano, toma un envase que aparenta ser crema de afeitar y se la aplica al cuello de su camisa. Amalia aspira el aroma en el exacto momento en que una de las sirvientas esparce aerosol por la habitación. La conexión entre la acción de inhalar y la de propagar aromas, forman una combinación de elementos visuales y auditivos que resultan en un tercer sentido: el olfato. Es interesante que el equivalente del aroma de Jano no provenga de Jano sino de un olor artificial, del mismo modo que un hotel utiliza olores artificiales para darle frescura a sus habitaciones. Marks se refiere al problema de la fabricación de experiencia por medio de olores artificiales como "the work of olfaction in the age of chemical reproduction" (245). Este es un problema que no afecta a la representación mimética en el cine. No se produce por medio del olfato "haptic" un olor artificial, sino que se apela a lo que se conoce en la filosofía de Deleuze como un "optical image". De acuerdo con Marks, esta imagen es "one that requires the viewer to complete the image by searching his or her own circuits of sense memory" (212). El modo más sencillo es por identificación. Si la imagen en la pantalla contiene elementos de olfato seguramente sentiremos que se activa nuestra memoria sensorial y si el objeto representado es reconocido por nuestra experiencia cultural sentiremos el olor emanar de la pantalla.

Tacto

La última de las tácticas utilizadas por Martel es la "hipertextura" de la imagen. En sus filmes, el tejido de las imágenes se intensifica para acercar al espectador no a la trama pues ésta en ocasiones es solo una excusa, sino a la superficie de los objetos. Es precisamente el roce de la mirada sobre los objetos, no para clasificarlos o imponer un orden sino para generar fricción con su aura, lo que provee el "haptic visuality". Una de las características principales de este tipo de visión es la sensación de estar observando por primera vez y también ir "gradually discovering what is in the image rather than coming to the image already knowing what it is" (Marks 178). La idea de esta imagen es liberarla del significado preconcebido, destruir los

amarres que tiene con la percepción automatizada y de ese modo ir redescubriendo el mundo de los sentidos.

Un ejemplo de esta estrategia en *La Ciénaga* es la escena donde todos los hijos de Tali y Meche están juntos en la pileta. La cámara se acerca a los cuerpos (que están de-centralizados) y los explora de cerca. No hay *close–ups* extremos pero la fragmentación de los cuerpos (en todas las tomas hay un cuerpo incompleto, pero privilegiado y se presenta junto a torsos, brazos, cabezas y manos de otros personajes) y la cercanía, junto al fondo de agua que enmarca la secuencia, le da un sentido de proximidad, de intimidad que se trasmite al espectador. Esta manera de "enfocar" no le da prioridad al lugar (la pileta) sino a los objetos en el lugar (los niños, un flotador, un perro). El espectador no siente que está en el lugar, siente que puede palpar el ennui de los personajes sobre la piel húmeda de éstos.

También la escena del baile del pueblo presenta aspectos del "haptic visuality". La transición a ésta es abrupta: dejamos la casa de Tali y los ladridos del perro del vecino y de repente nos encontramos en medio de un baile con figuras fuera de foco, movimientos bruscos y música fuerte. Es un asalto total a los sentidos. Reconocemos a algunas figuras: el chico llamado Perro, José el hijo de Mecha e Isabel. La fiesta de carnaval (posiblemente La Chaya) aparenta requerir el uso de pintura corporal y lanzar harina sobre las personas. La combinación de cámara de mano y los cuerpos en movimiento sudados y pintados crea un acercamiento extremo a la escena. La harina le añade una capa a la imagen que parece un velo delgado y suave, similar a la porosidad que Marks comenta en los videos experimentales (porosidad que también adquiere por la inserción de clips televisivos sobre la aparición de la virgen).

Todas estas estrategias que en *La Ciénaga* van tomando forma, en *La Niña Santa* se desarrollan al máximo. La proximidad de los cuerpos es mucho más intensa en este filme; el uso de los *close-up* mucho más definido y abarcador. Por ejemplo, a los veinte minutos de comenzado el filme la cámara sigue al doctor Jano y al doctor Vesalio a un ascensor. La puerta metálica se abre y se puede ver dentro a una sirvienta con un carro lleno de sábanas. La puerta se cierra y la cámara corta a un *close-up* de la parte posterior del cuello del doctor Jano. De momento no sabemos que es una toma de punto de vista. Cortamos a una toma de otro de los pasajeros del ascensor y de ahí al doctor Jano, esta vez de frente y fragmentado. En la toma se puede ver también un pedazo del rostro del doctor Vesalio. Al fondo de la toma, primero en un espejo y luego fuera de foco, descubrimos a Amalia. Martel nos revela poco a poco y sin prisa de dónde provenía la toma de punto de vista que enfocaba al

doctor Jano. Regresamos al cuello del doctor, ahora con la certeza de que se trata de Amalia mirando. Con el suspenso de la mirada física e intensa de Amalia el espectador está listo para la próxima toma: un *close-up* de la mano de Amalia acercándose lentamente a la del doctor Jano. Pero el ascensor se detiene y los ocupantes salen, interrumpiendo la epifanía del tacto. El espectador que ha seguido la intensidad de ese toque frustrado de Amalia podrá seguir las próximas escenas pues comprende la situación porque ha sentido la misma estática concentrada en la punta de los dedos de la niña. Martel corta a un *close-up* del brazo derecho extendido de Amalia que roza levemente los muros y luego sigue el movimiento del brazo izquierdo que se yergue y roza las cabezas de un grupo de niños que pasa corriendo por el pasillo. Todo esto ocurre fuera de foco, las figuras apenas definidas. Es claro que se está privilegiando un sentido que no es la visión. Es el desgaste de la intensidad que Amalia ha acumulado durante el viaje en el ascensor lo que queda pegado reflejado en la escena. El espectador siente con Amalia, palpa los muros y las cabezas infantiles; participa del tacto de la secuencia.

Aparte de las grandes escenas como la anterior, cuidadosamente estructuradas para traer a primer plano una epifanía sensorial, Martel coloca pequeñas escenas que también tienen como propósito sugerir una hipertextura de la imagen y que son independientes de la trama. Una de estas escenas ocurre a la hora y dieciocho minutos del filme. La secuencia comienza con un *close-up* de los brazos y manos de Jose. Se puede observar parte del suéter de ella, mientras examina sus manos. Luego la cámara corta a una toma de Amalia acostada con la cabeza reposando sobre una toalla y los ojos cerrados. En el borde izquierdo de la toma aparece el cuerpo fragmentado de Jose. En el fondo de la habitación se ve un grupo de mujeres vestidas de blanco y una sentada frente a una máquina de coser, todo fuera de foco. Entre las chicas y las mujeres y dentro del foco privilegiado por la cámara se observa un pequeño muro de toallas que tiene la misma textura que la ropa que Amalia lleva puesta. La secuencia de las manos de Jose a la costurera de fondo y de regreso a las toallas crean un manto visual que dirige la atención inconsciente hacia la suavidad del tacto.

Por último, Martel inserta en *La Niña Santa* una especie de comentario sobre la condición del cine y los sentidos que aparece en diversos momentos esparcidos a través del filme. Este comentario presenta situaciones de tacto que no se concretan completamente pero que sí tienen resultados parecidos. Es así como el cine "haptic" funciona. El tacto real no existe sino más bien es el estímulo del tac-

to a través de la memoria cultural y de los sentidos del espectador. Identificaré tres.

El primero y más obvio de estos es el instrumento theremín. El Oxford English Dictionary lo define como "an electronic musical instrument in which the tone is generated by two high-frequency oscillators and the pitch controlled by the movement of the performer's hand towards and away from the circuit". (El diccionario de la Real Academia Española no contiene el término). La importancia del instrumento que aparece persistentemente a través del filme consiste en realzar al "tacto que no toca". El instrumento se maneja flotando una mano que interrumpe las ondas y hace variar sus vibraciones. Hay dos pequeños ejemplos más sobre el "tacto que no toca".

En otra escena, Helena duerme en su cuarto y su hija Amalia se acerca a ella y le pone la mano sobre la espalda sin tocarla. La cámara insiste en el espacio entre la mano de Amalia y el cuerpo de Helena. La mujer despierta bruscamente; reacciona como un theremín al toque frustrado de la mano de Amalia.

La última de las escenas ocurre en el cuarto del doctor Jano cuando éste coloca su mano sobre el radiador para sentir el calor que emana. Una vez más se siente sin tocar. Como una especie de mística de los sentidos los objetos irradian su aura. Al ser expuestos a todos estos pequeños instantes de tacto, los espectadores se ven motivados a recurrir a sus experiencias táctiles para reproducir lo experimentado visualmente en la escena. Esta conflagración de sentidos es el origen del "haptic visuality". Ante este estímulo, dice Sobchack "I will reflexively turn toward my own carnal, sensual and sensible being to touch myself touching, smell myself smelling, taste myself tasting, and, in sum, sense my own sensuality" (77).

El cine se ha abierto. Aunque sigue el dominio de la mirada en el cine "mainstream" muchos tipos de cine ya desde algún tiempo vienen usando los demás sentidos para cumplir con la promesa del cine total que se desvió con los experimentos del odorama y la teoría de la mirada de los años 70. En el caso de Martel, por medio de las estrategias que aparecen en *La Ciénaga* y en *La Niña Santa* se logra desestabilizar la hegemonía de lo visual. Con la de-centralización, se fragmenta la imagen y se interrumpe el tránsito de identificación entre sujeto y objeto. Por otro lado, el paisaje sonoro del filme no está esclavizado a la imagen sino que contribuye con ésta y en ocasiones la subvierte. Por último, la imagen deja de intentar ser solo pura representación y gana cierta independencia de la trama, la que expresa a través de una corporalidad intensa que realza su textura. La comunión de estas características forman lo que Marks se refiere

como “the cinematic encounter [that] takes place not only between my body and the film’s body but my sensorium and the film’s sensorium” (153). Esto crea un encuentro de sentidos donde todas las barreras son negociadas y se alimentan unos de otros para fomentar una experiencia total.

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ANIMAL PLANET: PHYLLIS GOTLIEB'S BESTIARY

Dominick Grace

Phyllis Gotlieb occupies an odd in between space in Canadian Literature. Her primary output has been Science Fiction, but SF of such density and complexity that "Regular readers of science fiction are somewhat resistant" to her work (Columbo 37). She is also well-regarded as a poet, having been short-listed for a Governer General's Award for *Ordinary, Moving* in 1969, but Gotlieb herself believes her SF output has impacted negatively on her reputation as a poet: "there was always in my audience a bit of reluctance to take my work seriously because I wrote science fiction, which has never been greatly respected as a form of art in Canada even to this day" (Gotlieb, "Blue Apes"). As she notes in another interview, "the fact that I wrote SF put people off, because it's not Canadian. People would ask me, 'What do you think about landscape, as a Canadian writer?' I said, 'I don't think about landscape.' I didn't quite get the same respect that, say Margaret Atwood did" ("Interview"). She is, in a way, neither fish nor fowl. The animal metaphor is appropriate, given how Gotlieb makes use of animals, and especially of the blurring of distinctions between them, in significant ways in both her poetry and her fiction. Indeed, for Gotlieb SF is a worthwhile literary pursuit because "people need to spread their imagination with visions, chimeras, speculations" ("Interview"). Note the association of SF's value with the invocation of imaginary animals, in her reference to a chimera. Gotlieb's characters frequently bridge the "human"/"animal" gap in arresting and insightful ways. The most productive use of animals in her work interrogates the concept of the human by juxtaposing it with variations and iterations on animality in ways that require her readers to break down the conventional binary opposition between the two. Gotlieb's SF—and even her poetry—is heavily populated by various

I wish to thank Brescia University College for providing Professional Development and Travel funds in support of this paper. Thanks also to Lisa Macklem for invaluable editorial assistance.

"animals" (human and otherwise) engaged in a complex symbiotic relationship, though even the most important critic of Canadian SF, David Ketterer, allows anthropocentrism to override this fact when he presents a human, Duncan Kinnear, rather than the telepathic cats (known as Ungrukh) as the hero of the Ungrukh trilogy (see Ketterer 70). A complex and encompassing view of the "human" (or sentient) as extending well beyond the parameters of human flesh is central to Gotlieb's work, from her first novel (in which animal imagery is used relatively conventionally to depict those who fail as human) to her mature work, in which the concept of the human is almost entirely superseded in a universe in which even being sure what *is* an animal is problematic. Via the tropes of SF, Gotlieb literalizes the moral and ethical problems inherent in being a thinking animal.

"Animals are ideas as well as living, breathing creatures," as Ralph H. Lutts observes, and "people and cultures have given them special meanings and responded to them in terms of those meanings" (2). Explicit in this observation is that what animals mean is determined by humans, not inherent in animals themselves. Divine, terrifying, important, trivial, animals are what people say they are; the relationship, as Randy Malamud points out, is hierarchical: "The predominant Western moral code positions humans with regard to animals as unilaterally supremacist" (3). While animals may function in art and literature to reveal things about ourselves, they do so on our own terms, not theirs. However, as Marian Scholtmeijer points out, "Anthropomorphism received a severe blow with the advent of the theory of evolution" (6): as we have come better to understand our origins through scientific investigation, we have discovered continuities as well as disjunctions between human and nonhuman animals and have been faced with the challenge of coming to terms with our literal animal heritage.

If science has modified our understanding of our relationships with animals, Science Fiction, or SF, the literature of science, has explored speculatively some of the ramifications of our modified understanding, and Gotlieb is hardly unique in her interest in nonhuman life. There is a strong historical association in SF between the alien and the animal. From H.G. Wells's Martians on, aliens have frequently been presented as chimerical combinations of various Earth creatures, and the less humanoid they are, the less good they are.[1] Despite its interest in the alien, however, there is a strong

[1] Indeed, Wells explicitly invokes evolution as a motif in the novel, imagining his Martians as creatures that have evolved from creatures very like humans into horrifying monsters. On the one hand, they are imaged as creatures almost of pure

anthropocentric streak in SF, so the alien, animalistic, and monstrous commonly coincide. Indeed, one can almost find an equation —alien=animal=monster—in much SF, especially in SF written prior to the nineteen-seventies. As Gary K. Wolfe has noted,

> still today the icon of the beast [in SF] suggests the flow of unreason that underlies all rational structures. [. . .] In a genre in which the humanness of man is often overshadowed by wonders of technology and vast historical patterns, the beast stands as an inescapable and extreme reminder of our own animality, of what we may have been and what we may yet become. (86)

Though her career began in the late nineteen-fifties, however, Gotlieb never really embraced such a simple conception of the alien, animalistic, or monstrous. Indeed, her most "monstrous" characters are also often her most human ones, while her animals/aliens are often her most complex and civilized ones.

A particularly good example of Gotlieb's mature practice can be found in one of her best-known poems, "Was/Man," which is about a werewolf. One might argue that, strictly speaking, the werewolf is not a creature of SF, but Gotlieb includes the poem in *Son of the Morning*, one of her collections of SF short stories, so she invites readers to see the poem as of a piece with her SF work. This poem literally inverts the werewolf myth, in part through some linguistic play, to re-present this familiar hybrid creature of horror not as a man who must become a wolf when the moon is full but rather as a wolf which must become a man when the moon disappears. Even the title plays upon and blurs the distinction between man and animal. On one level, the title "Was/Man" plays on noun and verb forms: was/were man/wolf. The title compresses the relationship: the werewolf was man. However, it does more. Though the etymology of the word "werewolf" is doubtful, the usual speculation is that "werewolf" combines the Anglo-Saxon "wer," or "man," with "wolf."[2] A werewolf is therefore literally a man-

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mind, "minds that are to our minds as ours are to those of the beasts that perish, intelligences vast and cool and unsympathetic" (ch. 1), but on the other they are given physical traits such as tentacles and dietary habits such as the consumption of blood that associate them not merely with the animal but with the horrifying and monstrous. However, Wells also explicitly problematizes a simple equation of the Martians with the alien other by suggesting that they evolved from creatures similar to humans and by repeatedly comparing their depredations to European colonialism and to how humans treat animals generally. This comparison is implicit even in the above passage, which identifies human minds, in comparison to Martian ones, as akin to those of animal ones in comparison to human ones.

2. The OED reports this proposed etymology and expresses doubt about it based on the variant spellings of the word in the oldest texts. However, the OED offers no alternative etymological proposal, so the possible link to "wer" cannot be discounted

wolf, as the alternative term for werewolf, wolfman, suggests. As the expression "fuzzy wuzzy" suggests (the nursery rhyme "Fuzzy Wuzzy was a bear" is a good example; Gotlieb's verse is strongly influenced by nursery rhymes), Gotlieb may also be punning on the homonymic association between "was" and "wuz": "was/man" is "wuzman" is furry man, or wolfman. Even the poem's title, therefore, compresses much into its designation of the poem's character, a character who inverts and subverts the conventional associations of the werewolf or wolfman.

Conventionally in stories of such a creature, the aberrant and therefore abhorrent creature is the werewolf, but here, the human rather than the animal is presented as strange, alien, lacking. The conversion from wolf to man is presented in predominantly negative terms. Though "at first he found all that / grown flesh of his luxurious, new senses nipping him / every minute," becoming a man is predominantly a process of loss; "he lost quite a lot of hair, his fangs pulled in about half an inch," and he loses his claws and tail. What he grows instead is bulk and a "crazy complex inefficient / nose." Human flesh becomes a prison: "he wanted to gnaw on himself, drag off the excrescence / caught himself thinking of barred places, jail, cage, zoo / got scared he'd be trapped in this strange meat, man till he died." A trapped animal can gnaw off a paw, but if the trap is the body itself, how does one gnaw oneself free? Becoming a man is not a release from negative bestiality to a positive, civilized, human world, as we might imagine, but rather an entrapment. If turning into an animal is something horrible, as it is consistently portrayed in werewolf stories, then surely turning back to a human would be good. Not from the wolf's perspective, Gotlieb suggests. When he becomes wolf again, he "dashed water in his thickening fur to douse the rank / civil insidious urge of the secret man." Gotlieb puns on the meanings of rank as status and bad smell; human rank is rank. Being human stinks. The ritual of purification here involves the washing away of the human, the "civil insidious urge" that can be contrasted with the animal nature humans tend to think they need to suppress. Indeed, imaging civility as insidious and an urge undercuts its common associations. Civil behaviour is public and valorized, not secretive and dangerous—not insidious—we think. And urges are what civil behaviour normally suppresses or conceals. The wolf, however, must conceal the urge to civility, an insidious desire hidden within him, as the human must

(and indeed seems to me to be on the whole more likely than not). In any event, regardless of the word's etymology, the range of associations allowed by assuming a link to the Anglo-Saxon "wer" adds irresistible depth and texture to the poem.

conceal the insidious urge to bestiality. The poem, however, valorizes the animal urge rather than the human one by allying its perspective with that of the wolf rather than with that of the human.

In her earlier work, Gotlieb does invoke the conventional notion of the animal in the human as a negative, though even there she problematizes the equation of the animal and the monstrous. Gotlieb's first novel, *Sunburst*, tells the story of Sorrel Park, a small community scarred by the sunburst of a nuclear mishap that has led to mutations in children. Most of these children acquire superhuman abilities such as powers of telekinesis, telepathy, and teleportation, and they run riot, ending up caged by the army in a facility known as the Dump, which dampens their extrasensory powers, thereby containing them, if not really controlling them. Shandy Johnson, the protagonist, is a different breed of mutant, but the product of the same nuclear accident, and the novel deals with her growing understanding of what the Dumplings (as these confined children are dubbed) are, and what she herself is. Such stories form a subgenre of SF, but Gotlieb's version is unconventional in many ways. Only one such way is important for this discussion, however: how Gotlieb invokes the idea of the animal in the context of the story.

The cover copy of the first edition of the novel sells it as a conventional story of "a new race of monster," and there are elements of the novel that capitalize on the conventional association of the mutant with the monster, in ways that invoke animal metaphors. Jason Hemmer, for instance, is the first superpowered character we meet, and he looks to Shandy like an escapee from the Dump:

> He had a boxcar-crouching bullethead set on a bull neck, thick arms, and a barrel chest tapering into short legs and small feet. But he was so obviously an extreme of his type she began to wonder if he hadn't escaped from a zoo. He had a longlipped chimp mouth, and best of all, one fantastic black eyebrow curling around his eyes and across the bridge of his nose. (5)

The predominant impression created by this passage is that Jason is or resembles some sort of a simian, and indeed the novel's thesis is that the psionic powers possessed by the mutant children represent a kind of genetic throwback to humanity's animal ancestry. The Dumplings are described by Shandy as like animals, and animalism in these terms is fairly clearly negative, since the Dumplings are also generally destructive and criminal. The conventional human/animal hierarchy is invoked, with humans represented as more developed than animals and jettisoning things that as humans—logical, rational creatures—they no longer need from their animal roots. Shandy suggests that "For herd animals that have to stick together [telepathy]

might be useful, but I bet a human being born with it could never separate his mind from everybody else's long enough to develop a logical idea" (151). So far, animalism is associated with the primitive and irrational and therefore with the monstrous and dangerous in the novel.

However, the first example I cited, Jason Hemmer, is an exception. He may seem physically simian—an atavistic throwback—but he is as human and sympathetic a character as is Shandy herself. Nor should we forget that Shandy herself is also a mutant, and in some ways even stranger and more alien than Jason and the other psis. Like Jason, she is also imaged in estranging terms when she is first described:

> She was [. . .] a very tall cranelike girl, rather sallow, with narrow torso in a navy sweatshirt and long bluejean legs like articulated stovepipes. A high forehead and pointed chin gave her face the look of a brown egg poised on the small end, and her long crinkly black hair was tied in a ponytail with a shoelace. (5)

If Jason Hemmer is simian, Shandy is avian. The simian associations suggest brutishness and violence, whereas the avian ones suggest, in addition to awkwardness, fragility and a strange kind of beauty. The egg image also suggests potential; Shandy is a kind of embryo, a bird still in its shell, an idea explored further in the novel and which has been discussed elsewhere (see Grace). However, it's worth note that Hemmer's simianism is not, or not simply, a fact about him but is a reflection of how Shandy sees him: the initial description of him is narrated in the third person, but is filtered through Shandy's perspective. Similarly, the initial description of Shandy follows her own gaze, as she looks at her own reflection in a plate-glass window. The objective physical reality of the characters, therefore, is tempered by subjectivity, and the animal associations are therefore somewhat qualified. Furthermore, an image reflected in a window is translucent at best; in looking *at* herself, Shandy is also looking *through* herself. The insubstantiality of the image suggests the problematics of perception. When looking at a reflection—and when reflecting—what is one doing? The image's transparency suggests further that the process of examining the self—and the other—requires not merely looking at what is on the surface but seeing through the superficial to what lies beyond.

Certainly, what lies beyond literally in this novel, the Dumplings, are imaged in negative animal terms. The description of the first full manifestation of their power likens them to a pack, and there are numerous other instances of explicit animal associations, which translate into how they are treated when they are trapped and caged. This

passage from the sequence describing the Dumplings' coalescence as a powerful and dangerous group makes the animal metaphor explicit: "Every ugly thought locked in the mind broke free and dragged with it the animal hates and terrors of childhood, the horrors of the Blowup, and all the small bestiaries accumulated by even the sanest mind living the calmest life" (37). Here we have Gotlieb's first bestiary, and superficially at least it is populated by creatures manifesting the conventional negative associations of animals: hate, terror, violence, and so on. However, it is crucial to note that these beasts remain resolutely human and manifest animal traits found in "even the sanest mind living the calmest life." If the pack unleashes something, it is not something that can be scapegoated, cast off and caged. Rather, it is something inherent in humans, merely clarified and exposed. The animal, then, is not ultimately other but rather inherently human. The novel renders this point explicit later on, when the townsfolk themselves form a mob, as did the Dumplings earlier. When Shandy comes upon them, she hears them "raising their voices in the dark animal cry of the mob" (99). One of their leaders is even named Fox; Gotlieb here engages in a conventional example of characterization by comparison. Fox, as the fox is traditionally seen, is a sly, treacherous, predatory vermin.

The Dumplings may be dangerous, then, but so are the "normal" humans. Consigning these mutant children to a prison, the Dump —the name of which of course suggests that its inhabitants are refuse, garbage, discarded by the culture that produced them—fails as a humane, or even sensible, solution to the problem they represent. The novel ultimately seeks a model for controlling and reintegrating the Dumplings into the larger human culture, rather than suppressing and alienating them, and in doing so its perspective anticipates the more complex and nuanced treatment of the animal other in Gotlieb's later works.

All of Gotlieb's SF novels other than *Sunburst* are set in the far future and in space (we visit Earth occasionally, but most of these works are set on other planets), at a time in which the Galactic Federation coordinates relations between various worlds and species. Unlike *Sunburst*, these novels feature not only extraterrestrials but also characters who are literally rather than metaphorically animals, though often animals modified to possess sentience. In *O Master Caliban!*, for instance, two important characters are a gibbon, Esther, and a goat, Yigal, the latter of whom is quite fond of Montaigne. These animals are of course anthropomorphized to some extent, by virtue of the genetic modifications and mutations (radiation again plays a major role) that have given them sentience and speech, but Gotlieb

manages to retain a sense of their animal difference nevertheless. Despite becoming a surrogate mother for the protagonist, for instance—he even calls her mutti—"Esther is definitely a gibbon," as Douglas Barbour notes (114), and she behaves consistently as one throughout the novel. Her animal status, however, is only gradually revealed over the first few pages, as we read of her engaging in such human activities as making stew, talking, and so on, while encountering occasional details that are puzzling. We are told "she sat on his shoulder" (1) as she feeds Sven the stew, for instance, a statement we discover is literal in the subsequent paragraph when Sven lifts her off his shoulder and places her on the table. In the context of an SF novel, we might therefore imagine she is an alien or some sort of mutated human, so the revelation that she is in fact a gibbon is still surprising. Even in SF, sentient animals are more of a surprise than are aliens. Gotlieb plays on readerly expectation to shock us into the recognition that despite being a monkey, "With her intelligence exponentially increased, Esther had become simply another species of extraterrestrial human being" (11).

In this statement, Gotlieb articulates one of the central theses of her mature work. Gotlieb repeatedly insists on the commonality among all sentient creatures, not merely humanoid ones. Indeed, she has the feline protagonists (technically both alien and animal, as they come from another planet but were originally earth cats taken there by a powerful alien and modified to be given intelligence) of her Ungrukh trilogy refer to each other as "man" and "woman." One might argue that such a practice is anthropocentric speciesism, as some have argued that Ursula K. Le Guin's use of the masculine pronoun to describe the ambisexual characters in her novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* perpetuates the sexist stereotypes the novel attempts to challenge. However, just as the narrator of *The Left Hand of Darkness* is confronted by his own sexist preconceptions when one of the ambisexuals begins to assume female form, so is the reader shocked out of his (or her) preconceptions about that character, as derived from the pronoun reference, when that transformation takes place.[3] A simple matter of language use strips the implications of the

[3] After originally defending it from such criticisms, Le Guin has since repudiated this pronoun use, arguing that the generic use of "he/him" "does in fact exclude women from discourse" (15) and expressing the wish that she had created some new pronoun form (she reports using her created pronouns in readings from the book, but she has not revised the book—as of 2006—to eliminate the gendered pronouns). While it may be true that the generic pronoun has this effect, however, what Le Guin perhaps fails to recognize is the power of the moment in the book at which Genly Ai, the (male) narrator, must confront his own preconceptions about sex when Estraven,

reader's preconceptions bare at this point. Similarly, by requiring her readers to associate cats or other overtly alien and animal creatures with themselves, Gotlieb arguably does not so much transform her animal aliens into humans as she forces her readers to redefine what human means.

The point is rendered more strongly in *O Master Caliban!* in its treatment of animal experimentation. Edvard Dahlgren is a scientist interested in modifying life forms to live in inimical environments, so he has come to the hostile planet Barrazan IV with a team of scientists, robot (or erg) labourers, and experimental animals. Esther and Yigal both emerge from these experiments and might be seen as positive results, but the novel does not simply present animal experimentation as a good or even a necessary thing. Indeed, the plot focuses on the ergs' acquisition of intelligence and their own engagement in experimentation in imitation of their human creators. The results are various monstrosities (in physical terms, anyway), human and otherwise. However, only some of the physical monsters are moral monsters, as well; many are not. The novel clearly critiques the treatment of living creatures (sentient or not) as the subjects of experiment. Dahlgren's cold, clinical attitude is reflected in his assertion that "'any organic creature is a kind of machine because it operates by the laws of physics and chemistry, and even uses metal in various forms'" (192).

While this may be true, the implications of thinking in such terms are explored in the novel when the creatures of pure metal take over and imitate their creators. Dahlgren tries to differentiate between himself and these mechanistic monsters by considering that "He had manipulated flesh, flexed limbs. But I did not do that to torment. Did you not, Dahlgren? Only to be powerful" (162). Dahlgren himself comes here to question the purity and benevolence of his own motives. Indeed, the ergs explicitly model themselves on Dahlgren, so the pain, torture, and death they cause are linked, if not to Dahlgren's intentions, at last to his practice: "Dahlgren had made and marred at will; so had they" (192). The novel confronts Daghlgren's facile self-justifications and forces him to see anew his reality when the ergs treat him literally the way they treat their animal experiments and lock Dahlgren up in a Pit with these creatures. The most dangerous creatures in the Pit, however, are not the ones derived from animals

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his friend and rescuer, begins to become biologically female. The fact that Estraven has been "he" throughout the book forces this recognition on the reader as well as on Genly. The reader, like Genly (who, as narrator, is the one responsible for the pronoun choices), is caught by his (or her) preconceptions. Had Genly been as enlightened as some critics and ultimately Le Guin herself wished, some of the point of the novel would have been lost.

but rather the clones of Dahlgren produced by the ergs as "degraded images [that] did not even have the ugly dignity of proto-men who ate lice and fleas but carried promises in their gonads" (256). These clones are animalistic parodies of the human (even referred to in the text as Yahoos). Nevertheless, Dahlgren immediately recognizes them as reflections of himself: he "immediately recognized his bestial image in the cage when erg-Dahlgren's appearance, which he believed must be the truest reproduction possible, did not bother him. He could not even find himself in Sven. Yet he recognized the beast" (113). The easy hierarchizing of self and other, human and beast, falls apart.

The most explicit exploration of this idea occurs in Gotlieb's books about the Ungrukh, largely because Gotlieb shifts her focus from humans as protagonists to animals as protagonists. The Ungrukh are leopards transplanted to an inimical planet and modified to be given sentience by one of the Qumedni, a race of virtually omnipotent energy beings that figures in several of her novels and short stories (indeed, they first appear in "Phantom Foot," the first story she sold, though not the first one published). One might see in them something of an echo of Dahlgren in Gotlieb's previous novel; what they do for the Ungrukh, Dahlgren has done in a more limited way for Esther and Yigal. Despite being given sentience (and, in the case of females, telepathy), however, the Ungrukh remain resolutely cats, as Esther remained resolutely a gibbon. Their animal appearance repeatedly governs how humans view them—it even has affected how one major critic reads their stories, as I noted earlier: David Ketterer has identified a relatively minor human character as the protagonist of the Ungrukh novels.

However, the perspective of the books is unquestionably that of the Ungrukh, not of their human friends or enemies. Indeed, early in the first volume, Gotlieb plays on readerly preconceptions about what is normal and what is alien (as she did in the first chapter of *O Master Caliban!*) by having Prandra, the female and telepathic Unqrukh, feel disturbed at the prospect of coming among such strange and alien beings as humans: "She thought it might be more pleasant to make the acquaintance of some of Solthree's big cats" (*Judgment* 20). Just as we might expect a human when visiting an exotic new place to be interested in socializing with the locals rather than with the local wildlife, these giant cats when visiting earth imagine visiting not with the self-identified superior species but instead with earth's felines. The human is rendered other, alien, and human preconceptions about the other are therefore undercut.

They are confronted directly later in the novel, when Prandra

recognizes that her animal appearance governs how she is viewed by at least some humans. Captured by a criminal named Quantz and his cohorts, not all of whom are human, Prandra reflects, "A few in that company were scaled, and one or two had tentacles, but all were what a Solthree would call 'humanoid.' She and Lokh were not, and she knew what the difference meant to Quantz. A pair of skins . . ." (159; ellipses in original). Some aliens may have some animal features, such as scales or tentacles (common features, in fact, for evil or horrifying aliens in SF—Wells's Martians are tentacled, for example), but if their structure is essentially humanoid, they can pass, or at least be given provisional status as humanoid, if not actually human. Even the term "humanoid," however, is subverted. Whatever valorising power it has, the passage makes clear, is human-specific; as its etymology shows, "humanoid" is a specifically human (Solthree) term to describe those who conform in some significant respects to human form. As an absolute measure of one's status, however, it is meaningless—except to humans for whom physical form defines one's nature and function. And the relative unimportance of humanness is stressed by the fact that humans are called "Solthrees," or inhabitants of Sol's third planet, a term that localizes them and diminishes their significance in the larger context of GalFed (which is NOT centred on Earth).

As "animals"—as not humanoids—Prandra and Khreng are accorded, by Quantz, no value except the value of being a hunter's trophy. Indeed, and perhaps overstressing the point, Gotlieb has Quantz not simply kill them but actually release them in order to hunt them down, in a sort of play on and inversion of "The Most Dangerous Game," in Gotlieb's version of which in fact the most dangerous game is not the human being but the animal. What makes humans human does not therefore make them superior. Indeed, in *Emperor, Swords, Pentacles*, the second Ungrukh novel, another Ungrukh, Raanung, goes up against another human who can't see past Raanung's animal body: "'Ever look at yourself in a mirror? I don't make deals with animals,'" he says (243). When the human tries to kill him, Raanung acts:

> Raanung, sadly, waited for the hand to draw the gun from the zipper opening. Then he moved. His long tail whipped out to hook Hands between the cords of his nape and pull him forward so that one padded forepaw could slap the side of his neck. It broke with a crunch. (243)

Because Raanung is an animal, the man believes in his superiority and in his ability to kill Raanung easily. The human's name is Hands, and the reference to "the hand" in the passage underscores the point. The hand is the specific human physical feature most often

pointed to (no pun intended) as the one that differentiates humans from animals. The term "paw" tends to be applied to the animal appendage, even when it is in fact a hand, Heidegger's assertions about the animal lack of hands notwithstanding. For Gotlieb, even if the animal does not have a hand (as Raanung does not), tail and paw can trump Hands anyway. The human looks in the mirror and sees itself, and therefore assumes that that reflection expresses the sum total of sentience. That which is not a reflection of the human does not reflect, in effect.

Gotlieb, however, stresses that such a view is blinkered. The animal is not an alien other but a genuine reflection, and reflector (a point implicit perhaps in the use of reflection in *Sunburst*, as well).[4] The point is literalized in *A Judgment of Dragons* in Quantz's fate. When Prandra defeats Quantz, she does so with her telepathic powers: she "smashed the brittle walls of Quantz's mind to free the red beasts of fear and rage among the synapses" (188). Quantz is, briefly and subjectively, transformed from man to pig (the title of this section of the novel, no doubt for obvious reasons, is "Nebuchadnezzar"), his body being apparently forced for a time to reflect his inner animalism. The inability to see beyond the animal, in effect, reflects the animal status of the observer.

In short, and in conclusion, Phyllis Gotlieb problematizes the concept of a human/animal divide in her SF. She employs the animal, both metaphorically and literally, to explore human presuppositions about what being human means. She does so in largely metaphorical terms in *Sunburst*, but in *O Master Caliban!* and the Ungrukh trilogy (*A Judgement of Dragons*, *Emperor, Swords, Pentacles*, and *The Kingdom of the Cats*), she deals more directly and literally with animals as characters. While arguably Gotlieb does not fully reconcile the human and the animal, since she does retain the association between certain negative emotional traits and animalism, she does significantly undermine the notion that form in and of itself is a reliable or even useful guide to determining what is animal and what is human. Humanity as a concept ceases to apply to homo sapiens and

4. Reflection is a major motif in *O Master Caliban!* as well; the scientist Sven Dahlgren is to be replaced by a robot, or erg, double, who looks exactly like him, a point reiterated throughout the novel. One of the novel's ironies, indeed, is that the machine Dahlgren is in some respects more human than Dahlgren. As noted earlier, Dahlgren has been cloned, as well, providing further mirror images in which Dahlgren is horrified to see himself.

even to humanoids in Gotlieb's work, and as a result, her readers are asked to reconsider what they are.

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PENSARNOS CON LA ALTERIDAD: INTERPRETACIÓN DEL FILM *UN BUDA* (2005)

Liliana Judith Guzmán

A Fabio,
amigo en tiempos de luces y sombras

Buscar las fuentes del alma,
Bañarme en ellas al amanecer
Y cuando digo cielo,
Digo cielos azules.

—Herman Vinson

I

¿Puede el arte proporcionarnos modos de pensarnos a nosotros mismos, hoy? Quizás. Puede afirmarse, tal vez, que el arte es hoy la morada del pensar desde la consideración de la *experiencia del arte* como experiencia formadora que, en nuestros tiempos de estetización y pauperización simultáneas, señala caminos, horizontes, fisuras, perspectivas para un pensamiento auroral de nosotros mismos.[1] En este marco filosófico hermenéutico, abordaré una interpretación del film *Un Buda* (2005, dir. Diego Rafecas),[2] considerando la misma como un *relato de formación y experiencia*, y como una invitación a *pensar con la alteridad*, para abrirnos a otras interpretaciones del pensar y otras panorámicas de la obra cinematográfica argentina como *evento filosofante y transformador.*[3] Algunas de las inquietudes abordadas en la lectura

[1] Pensamiento auroral especialmente sugerido, en este caso, por Diego Rafecas en los planos aéreos de Buenos Aires cruzando horizontes aurorales y crepusculares, entre tantas imágenes del film aquí leído.

[2] Página web en http://www.unbuda.com.ar/, Premio Argentores 2006.

[3] Abordo la noción de "experiencia del arte" (y del cine, en este caso) como evento siguiendo la interpretación realizada por Gianni Vattimo (1936-) sobre la obra

de *Un Buda*, serían: ¿cómo despliegan los personajes la búsqueda de sí mismos?, ¿qué sentidos tiene el amor, en el film?, ¿cómo es pensado el problema del tiempo en el film?, ¿cómo la búsqueda interna de *piedras preciosas* es pretexto de respuestas provisorias para nuevas preguntas? Con estos interrogantes, y partiendo del enunciado formativo de enseñanza universal del maestro zen que dice *"al comienzo la enseñanza es amarga, como la buena medicina"*, proponemos un abordaje de esta película argentina contemporánea como obra verdadera para un pensamiento o "filosofía práctica" de nosotros mismos, a partir de una experiencia con la alteridad, en este caso, una práctica espiritual.

II

Para interpretar esta obra de Diego Rafecas (1969-) como un *evento filosofante y transformador*, que produce instancias de pensamiento e inquietud a partir de una práctica espiritual, haré una interpretación transversal de las preguntas enunciadas previamente. Abordaré esas inquietudes en los lugares de los acontecimientos tal como muestra la obra: los lugares de la Infancia, del conocimiento, del arte, del pensar, del espíritu, del amor, de la celebración, del dinero, de lo sagrado, entre tantos.

Previo a ello, es preciso enunciar las notas fundamentales que hacen de la *experiencia del arte* una experiencia de formación transformadora. Noción que abordamos desde la filosofía hermenéutica contemporánea, particularmente desde Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002). Considerada la obra como un *juego* (como el juego de un devenir en el que "se es jugado" por aquello que viene en la obra), la *experiencia del arte* es un movimiento mediador entre quien es jugado y aquello que lo juega (esa alteridad, ese elemento desconocido que entra a jugar en la obra), y es el devenir de un fluir en el que algo aparece, se autorrepresenta, y toma cuerpo o unidad de sentido (Verdad y Método I). Este juego de la obra, esta experiencia

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de Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002). En ella, la *experiencia del arte* (específicamente en Vattimo, la experiencia de la palabra del poema) es la morada del *dasein*, la manifestación verdadera del ser-ahí, y produce o genera las posibilidad para una experiencia formadora y transformadora de sí y de la obra (*gebilde*). Entendemos así por *gebilde* la noción según la cual la experiencia con la obra es una *experiencia de formación* en la que somos jugados en un instante (de acontecimiento de la obra) y transformados por esa nueva (y otra) verdad que nos habla en la obra. Cfr. Vattimo, Gianni (1993) *Poesía y ontología*. Traducción de A. Cabrera Serrano. Valencia: Universitat de Valencia. Y también Gadamer, Hans-Georg (2003) *Verdad y Método I.* Traducción de Ana Agud Agapito y Rafael de Agapito. Salamanca: Sígueme.

de y con la alteridad, lleva implícita una posibilidad de conocimiento y verdad puesto que tiene su propio fin, su propia verdad, la obra tiene su propio modo de ser y, a su vez, es morada del ser-ahí, del *dasein*. Por otra parte, la obra de arte (y su propio juego) al mostrarse, al darse al mundo en el devenir de sí misma, toma un tiempo propio: el juego de la obra es un instante de simultaneidad entre el tiempo singular o subjetivo de quienes juegan la obra y el fluir con el que juegan esa verdad que la obra trae al ahí, al encuentro de los jugadores. De este modo, en ese instante, la obra actualiza el ser de la obra, su verdad se hace acto en el acontecer de su propia presentación y según cómo (al jugar-nos) va construyendo y reconstruyendo ése su modo de ser. Esa actualidad de la obra, del ser-ahí, es un instante de entusiasmo y permanencia: de entusiasmo con la verdad de la obra, y de permanencia de la misma en ese autoolvido con que juega a sus participantes.[4]

Sinopsis de *Un Buda* (2005)

Previo a la interpretación, es preciso dar cuenta de la historia del relato, en breve: un joven (Tomás) decide abandonar el mundo de lo conocido para encontrar un maestro zen y una vida espiritual plena. Su novia (Laura) y hermano (Rafael) deciden encontrarle y aprenden a acompañarle construyendo una experiencia de sí mismos y de recreación de la memoria y los afectos entre las inquietudes filosóficas y la espiritualidad. Todos los personajes podrán ver otro modo de ser de las cosas, más allá de lo que parecen, más allá de lo que creemos suponer que parecen, y se abren a un viaje del que devienen transformados por aquello que aún no se atrevían a conocer, pensar, hacer de sí mismos.

El camino de sí de la mano del otro

Los lugares de los acontecimientos para pensar con el film y transformar el alma en una *experiencia de filosofía práctica y espiritual* serían, quizás, los siguientes:

El lugar de los sueños: la Infancia, la llamada. En *Un Buda*, los sueños aparecen de varias maneras: como momentos interrumpidos por la violencia del secuestro típico de momentos dictatoriales en nuestro país (capítulo 1: Rafael y Tomás son secuestrados con

[4] Tomo estos conceptos de la *gebilde* o experiencia del arte de Gadamer, Hans-Georg (2003) *Verdad y método I*, trad. de Ana Agud Agapito y Rafael de Agapito. Salamanca: Sígueme.

sus padres, y ambos niños abandonados en la puerta de casa de su abuela); como momentos de anticipación del deseo o de algún destino soñado (capítulo 5: Tomás "entra" al sueño de Rafael estando aquel de cara al mar, y luego dentro del mar mientras su hermano mayor le llama desesperado "*¡Tomás, Tomás!*"; como momentos de entrega solidaria de Tomás y su abuela en el comedor marginal al que contribuyen con entrega solidaria (capítulo 3). Los sueños, de alguna manera, en el film son un modo de llamada al alma del otro: tal sucede cuando el joven Tomás aparece en los sueños de quienes le aman —su novia Laura, su hermano Rafael—, como una demanda de amor y como una llamada a abrir el alma a nuevas experiencias y horizontes del amor y de la construcción de sí mismos. Y por último, los sueños tienen un papel crucial en la trama de la obra pues es allí, en momentos del soñar —mejor, ensoñar—, en los que Tomás intuye y se anticipa a su encuentro futuro con un maestro, encuentro en el que sucede no sólo una experiencia iniciadora a una práctica espiritual (ante el pedido de Tomás "*maestro, quiero ser su discípulo*", un simple y silencioso "*ya es la hora*", dice el maestro zen) sino más aún, un cruce de lecciones para encontrarse a sí mismo, para volver sobre sí mismo y renacer a una vida de tedio de lo corriente o habitual pero que lo necesita transformado para seguir construyendo mundo (las dos grandes enseñanzas en sueños del maestro zen son "*la enseñanza al comienzo es amarga, como la buena medicina*" y "*tienes en tu mano piedras preciosas*").

Los lugares de tránsito: la ciudad y el campo. Los dos grandes espacios en los que los personajes viven experiencias filosóficas y espirituales son la ciudad y el campo. En la ciudad encontramos varias situaciones en las que los protagonistas piensan, padecen sus propias preguntas: en el caso de Tomás, recorriendo la ciudad con vistas a los cielos y sin comprender qué sucede en un mundo donde todos van a prisa sin objeto alguno. En esas circunstancias, Tomás realiza discontinuidades en el tiempo: entre las prisas del trabajo, la oficina y los bancos, se detiene a hacer meditaciones en los parques o las orillas de las calles transitadas. Rafael, por su parte, hace de la universidad, el café y su casa los lugares de irrupción de las preguntas, que comparte con sus alumnos, con Laura, con Sol, consigo mismo. También Laura hace experiencias de búsqueda en la ciudad: mientras busca a Tomás, se busca a sí misma, en su casa, el barrio del novio, la clase universitaria de Rafael (capítulo 1). Por otra parte, el campo es el otro lugar de encuentro de los personajes consigo mismos, no sólo en el templo sino en los modos de relacionarse con los monjes budistas por vía del trabajo o de la discusión por si se debe pagar el alojamiento o no, de la misma manera que allí cada

subjetividad se reconcilia con la naturaleza y los afectos, que llegan hasta allí a buscarles para saber cómo están y para estar con ellos, aún no comprendiendo los sentidos de las prácticas espirituales que allí se realizan. Una gran instancia de iluminación en el alma y de encuentro de sí, podrán realizar los protagonistas en plenas lecciones de filosofía zen, meditaciones y preguntas con el maestro.

Los lugares del conocimiento: la universidad, el libro, el maestro. La película nos instala en algunos escenarios típicos en y por los cuales se produce el conocimiento, o una experiencia de sí con la verdad. Tales escenarios de la verdad para una experiencia de sí y con el otro, en este caso, son: (a) la ***universidad***, espacio educativo en el que trabaja Rafael y en el que es interpelado por sus alumnos y la mirada atenta de su cuñada Laura, destaco especialmente el trabajo interpelativo de su alumna Sol que sobre las *preambula fidei* tomistas, le inquieta con un claro *"¿profesor, usted cree en la existencia de Dios?*", pregunta que luego ella misma traduce en *"¿el cosmos simplemente ocurre accidentalmente, o hay alguna pauta u orden o algo que lo completa?*"… todas ellas preguntas que Sol no necesita que se las respondan desde las corrientes filosóficas —al menos, no desde las reconocidas académicamente—, sino desde la posibilidad de pensar distinto, hasta llega a plantear a Rafael la filosofía como un problema de "*coherencia o ejemplaridad*", con dilemas morales y problemas éticos. En esta primera inquietud, vemos cierta experiencia de la verdad aconteciendo en quien puede interrogarse desde los contenidos del aula (la alumna) y desde lo que ese interrogar de la alumna puede producir en Rafael (un lento despertar del adormecimiento y la comodidad intelectual); (b) *el* ***libro*****:** el libro es, en ambos hermanos y casi en toda la película, un elemento vital de formación en búsqueda de una verdad sobre sí mismo, así nos lo refleja la relación de única lectura vital de Tomás con el libro sagrado budista, como también la amplitud de textos con los que trabaja Rafael y por los cuales va construyendo también una relación (profesional y editorial, luego afectiva) con Sol, también dedicada a la producción de textos para promover el conocimiento de otras culturas y otras filosofías al margen de la academia universitaria y sus escuelas… pero en todos los casos, los personajes establecen relaciones singulares con la lectura, relaciones que les posibilitan ciertas búsquedas sobre sí mismos para inquietudes de toda la vida; (c) ***el maestro*****:** la figura del maestro es fundamental (y de presencia circular: está presente en el comienzo y fin de la película, con la misma imagen) en la trama de *Un Buda*, pues la figura del maestro es una de las tantas búsquedas de Tomás, figura que cuando aparece no responde a todas sus inquietudes, no responde

directa y afirmativamente a su avidez e inquietud ni tampoco le confirma que todo termina con el encuentro con un maestro, sino todo lo contrario: la frase "*ya es la hora*" del maestro, quizás refleja la hora de comienzo de otro camino de búsqueda en el que Tomás debiera dejar de transitar los márgenes de la sociedad y aprender a implicarse en ella con otro sentido de la responsabilidad de sí y de su entorno, del cuidado de sí y del otro, y de la prudencia con la cual armonizar la búsqueda existencial con una práctica espiritual que no le auto-margine en un conocimiento parcial sino que lo ayude a crecer en la solidaridad y el compromiso ético y responsable con sus prójimos… y este modo de verdad que el maestro procura transmitir a su discípulo, en una línea cercana al *epimeleia heautou* de la antigüedad griega[5] (Hermenéutica del sujeto), es la verdad del zazen: esa verdad no es religión, ni meditación ni gimnasia, sino un estado quieto del alma para despertar y verse a sí mismo ("*abandonar los pensamientos … estudiarse a sí mismo, olvidarse a sí mismo, olvidarse a sí mismo es ordenarse, dejar que cada cosa ocupe su verdadero lugar, sin categorías*").

El lugar del recuerdo: la fotografía. A través de un objeto artístico, una fotografía, la memoria actúa en el alma de ambos hermanos operando un encuentro con la figura del padre, a su vez, compañero del maestro del templo. La fotografía no revela el modo de relación entre el padre y el maestro, sólo nos muestra dos monjes budistas con rostros de felicidad. Por esa fotografía, discretamente reservada por el maestro durante todos los días de alojamiento de Tomás y Rafael en el templo, ambos se reconcilian con la figura del padre en un acto de la memoria testimoniado, en este caso, por la imagen fotográfica alcanzada por Layla en el camino.

Los lugares incontables de las inquietudes filosóficas. Las preguntas e inquietudes existenciales son las grandes notas de este film, como los aguijones que desbordan a todos los personajes. La primera gran figura de la pregunta es Sol, al comienzo como alumna y luego como novia de Rafael. En Sol, sus preguntas son inquietudes de una persona con muchas búsquedas, muchas lecturas y mucho deseo por comprender más allá de lo que las apariencias y las verdades instituidas y formales dicen acerca de las cosas. La otra gran figura colmada en inquietudes es Laura, la novia de Tomás, quien busca incesantemente saber cómo acompañarle mejor y tratar de comprenderlo incluso más allá de sí misma. Preguntas como "*¿qué te pasa?, ¿dónde estás?, ¿ayúdame a entenderte?, ¿qué necesitas?*"

[5] Foucault, Michel (2002) *Hermenéutica del sujeto*. Traducción de Horacio Pons. Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

son las inquietudes con las que Laura acompaña a Tomás en todo su peregrinar, desde sus días de desaparición temporaria, hasta sus reclusiones de meditación en un lugar desconocido (Capilla del Monte, Córdoba). A su vez, es Laura quien desde sus tantos interrogantes procurará ayudar a Tomás a integrarse de alguna manera a este mundo cruel en el que vivimos pero en el que, sin embargo, es posible hallar algunos fragmentos de alegría, como lo es una disco o un rato de diversión juvenil. Al mismo tiempo, como Sol, pero de otra manera, Laura es uno de los grandes aguijones del alma de Rafael con las preguntas sobre el estar de su Tomás ("*¿es que no lo ves?, ¿no podes comprender lo que le pasa?, ¿sabés algo de tu hermano?, ¿podés ayudarme a encontrarlo?*") y con los desafíos al alma misma de su cuñado ("*sólo una cosa voy a pedirte: abrí el corazón, Rafael, y dale tiempo*"). Rafael, por su parte, recorre cada secuencia del film cada vez más abrumado de preguntas, tantas como las de su hermano. Si las preguntas de Tomás son las propias de todo joven aspirante a encontrar un maestro zen *("¿puedo ser su discípulo?, ¿qué debo hacer para hallar el éxtasis?*"), las preguntas de Rafael serán las que harán que su vida pueda hacer un vuelco o giro hacia su propia transformación, hacia una serie de operaciones internas consigo mismo y que irán desde saber encontrar el *kairós* (el momento oportuno) hasta descubrir y confesar su amor con el alma que ama. Por otra parte, los demás personajes del reparto están también desbordados de preguntas, tanto en sus preguntas domésticas (el vecino de Tomás, figura esencial para el encuentro y comprensión del joven budista), como en los interrogantes enunciados desde la vanidad y el humor de encontrarse ante lo extraño (Lucy, la madre de Laura).

Los lugares del espíritu. Las lecciones del maestro. Un capítulo especial, y quizás preponderante, ocupan en el film los lugares de práctica espiritual del zen, como así también las enseñanzas del maestro. Las prácticas espirituales —el aprendizaje y repetición de los ritos zen— están atravesadas a pleno por las enseñanzas que, entre muchas más, podríamos enumerar como: (1) "*zazen es una práctica universal, una transmisión de maestro-discípulo, de corazón a corazón, "za" significa en japonés* sentarse *y "zen" es* fundirse con el cosmos entero *(la gran puerta)*"; (2) "*su exceso de devoción solamente produce conocimiento parcial, egoísta, la sabiduría que usted busca solamente se puede encontrar sirviendo en el mundo social*"; (3) "*el dolor es tensión, ilusión, es importante no escapar del dolor, hay que intentar integrarlo*"; (4) "*el zen no puede atribuirse ninguna verdad… entonces, ¿qué se puede obtener?*"; (5) "*usted debe seguir el orden cósmico sin exceso, respetar que sea familia o no familia,*

respetar lo diferente, abrazar la contradicción"; (6) "*la razón es tan esencial como la intuición, en la creación siempre van juntas, el problema de la razón es el límite, pero hay que ir más allá"*; (7) "*el tiempo es una impresión… es lo mismo un pequeño trozo de eternidad que un gran trozo de eternidad*"; (8) "*usted va a ser un gran monje (¡y está pagando muy poco, debiera pagar más!)… la enseñanza al principio es amarga, como la buena medicina, pronto vas a encontrar (ya es la hora) piedras preciosas*".

Los lugares del amor. El café. La lectura. Los abrazos. La transformación. Desde el comienzo, la historia de *Un Buda* desborda espacios en los que el amor es el poder con el que cada vínculo se cultiva y se abre a nuevos procesos formadores y de cambio. Aquellos lugares del amor son varios: uno es el de los espacios familiares en el que los niños comparten lecturas literarias, filosóficas, espirituales, como sucede con Rafael en compañía de su madre o como sucede con Tomás acompañando a su padre en una incursión de curiosidad a ritos budistas. Los lugares familiares de la infancia, sea con la lectura o la curiosidad inquieta por el budismo, marcan así la historia de ambos hermanos. Otros espacios de diálogo mediado de amor serán los cafés: espacios en los que Rafael, especialmente, se entrega (no sin grandes resistencias) a profundos procesos de transformación de sí: desde tratar de comprender qué le pasa a su hermano y, en cambio, aprender a comprenderse a sí mismo… hasta ser interrogado por Sol ya no como editora-alumna y profesor de filosofía, sino como mujer-hombre que necesitan abrirse al amor. Un lugar específico de transformación de Rafael es la posibilidad de diálogo con Laura, que veremos más adelante como *experiencia hermenéutica*. Un último gran lugar de amor como apertura al cambio, a la alteridad, es esa bella escena casi al final de la película: Rafael y Tomás cruzan un gran abrazo cuya imagen se funde al abrazo de manos de cuando pequeños, en el momento en que fueron secuestrados y abandonados en la puerta de Lely.

Los lugares celebrativos: la música, los ritos, el hip-hop, la disco. ¿De qué modo el arte es un tiempo de celebración? *Un Buda* parece darnos algunas respuestas: si el arte es, como experiencia transformadora, un *evento de juego, fiesta y celebración*, en *Un Buda* encontramos algunos elementos que confirman esta posibilidad del arte. Tales elementos serían, por un lado, la música, puesto que todas las canciones y temas de la banda sonora se reúnen en la voluntad de producir un efecto de comunión tal como el que va desplegando la historia del film, comunión que amén de representar y acompañar los momentos de camino y espiritualidad de los personajes, también logra la armonía entre modos diferentes de pensamiento, entre las

culturales occidental y oriental, entre la diversión y el esparcimiento (como sucede en la disco), entre las distintas cosmovisiones del mundo, entre los distintos proyectos de cada subjetividad de la obra. Armonía a la que no le falta la presencia del humor: la música se hace presente en un gracioso diálogo en japonés entre un par de maestros zen, hablando sobre el *hip-hop* y su quizás predecesor, el *rap*. Por otro lado, otro elemento celebrativo del film es, propiamente, la constante presencia de los ritos: oraciones, plegarias, cada momento de aprendizaje en el templo disponen a los personajes a distintas aproximaciones a una práctica espiritual prácticamente desconocida, y cuyo conocimiento sólo se hace verdad e interioridad en la práctica misma del zazen.

El lugar del diálogo: Rafael-Laura, Rafael-Sol. En el doble encuentro de develamiento de verdades para consigo mismo de Rafael —de a momentos, con Laura y/o Sol—, vemos que ambos modos de diálogo construyen un camino del habla lleno de preguntas y acaecimientos de algunas verdades que Rafael aún no ha podido oír ni aceptar. Y que no son verdades absolutas sino verdades sobre sí mismo, verdades para una *experiencia de sí*. En el diálogo con Laura, que acontece fragmentado en básicamente dos escenas que se descomponen en varias otras escenas que van construyendo el film, Rafael es interpelado por las preguntas de Laura, que no son para él, propia o directamente, sino para procurar ver qué se puede hacer con Tomás que ha desaparecido de la escena cotidiana hace ya varias semanas. En este diálogo con Laura, como con el de Sol, vemos acontecer una "*experiencia hermenéutica*" o de comprensión del otro[6] (Verdad y Método I y II), en sí, dotada de ***pregunta-comienzo*** (¿podes ayudarme a encontrar a tu hermano?) a su vez desplegada en otras, de ***horizonte*** (Laura habla desde el horizonte del amor,

[6] Concepto tomado de Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Verdad y método I* (2003), trad. de Ana Agud Agapito y Rafael de Agapito. Salamanca: Sígueme, como también *Verdad y método II* (2004), trad. de Manuel Olasagasti. Salamanca: Sígueme, entre otras obras del autor. La noción de "experiencia hermenéutica" se define –en general- como aquello que nos pasa y nos da la posibilidad de pensarnos como tiempo y finitud, como tradición y lenguaje, y que requiere de un estado de apertura a la alteridad, a la escucha de un tú que nos interroga y con quien podemos poner en movimiento una palabra de inquietud renovadora. En el caso del *diálogo*, la experiencia (para que sea hermenéutica) consta de una travesía compartida en la palabra, construida en el fluir del diálogo mismo y por la cual se arriban a alguna verdad común para los hablantes. Tal proceso consta, básicamente, de momentos diferentes: comienza con una pregunta, se formulan verdades o supuestos transitorios, se sigue la dirección de la pregunta y el camino o sentido que los hablantes imprimen en ella, y se arriba a verdades tal vez provisionales, o no, por las cuales quienes dialogan son transformados por esa alteridad de lo que viene en el diálogo en la palabra del otro.

sus inquietudes y la desesperación por encontrar al joven, y Rafael lo hace desde el horizonte del parentesco y su formación filosófica académica y occidental), y de ***nuevas verdades*** escondidas en misterios y develamientos (en efecto, Rafael no sabe muchas cosas de su hermano, como tampoco conoce todo ese extraño universo que Laura le describe como prácticas de ascetismo y espiritualidad que a menudo le parecen fuera de lo normal, de lo lógico, y fuera de control —los ayunos, por ejemplo). Por otra parte, en el diálogo con Sol, Rafael es profundamente afectado por las preguntas de la chica, que serán también sus propias preguntas. Tal diálogo de inquietud que se despliega desde la relación profesor-alumna a la relación autor-editor y luego hombre-mujer, se nutre de los mismos elementos de una *experiencia hermenéutica*: comienza con una ***pregunta*** *("¿profesor, usted cree en la existencia de Dios?*"), se realiza desde un ***horizonte*** (pues Sol habla desde sus inquietudes y trabajo como editora de una firma que edita filosofías académicas y de otras culturas, y Rafael lo hace desde su academicismo ahora quebrado por su búsqueda emocional para tantas preguntas sobre sí mismo) y atraviesa muchas ***verdades nuevas*** para ambos (para Sol, ayudándole a mirar más allá de sus supuestos, y para Rafael, ayudándole a comprender mejor qué le pasa a su hermano y cómo puede hacer él mismo para reconciliarse con su corazón y su deseo).

El lugar de la familia: Lely. La figura de la abuela constituye, en la historia del film, una figura clave no sólo por ser el refugio de ambos niños luego del secuestro y desaparición de sus padres, sino por ser luego también la compañera y guía espiritual de Tomás. En efecto, Lely es uno de los pulmones de Tomás: si él es su "único sostén" (económico), ella es su modelo de ejemplaridad sea en el cuidado de cierta economía doméstica como también en el de las prácticas solidarias en un barrio marginal. De la misma manera, la muerte de Lely marca un antes y un después en la vida de Tomás, pues tras su muerte y coincidiendo con el despido del trabajo, el joven decide partir en busca de un maestro a un templo en la montaña, quizás como pretexto para encontrarse a sí mismo y buscar respuestas a sus preguntas de siempre, aún no halladas en el ruido megalómano del urbe.

El lugar del mercado: Lucy. La madre de Laura, Lucy, personaje típico de la sociedad de consumo (productora de televisión que vive en el disfrute de los placeres del dinero y con el tiempo como eje de rendimiento en producción y capital), hace un simpático contrapunto con la vida de claustro y austeridad de Tomás, pues este joven que representa todo lo opuesto a lo que ella como madre aspira para su hija (alguien como Carlos, modelo y adinerado). Este contrapunto,

sin embargo, tiene una importancia vital en el film, no sólo por ser la madre típica de una figura tan inquieta como Laura, sino también por representar todo lo que nos sucedería a los occidentales típicos en situaciones de meditación o silencio como el del templo zen: Lucy es esa figura que todo lo pregunta desde la ignorancia de una filosofía desconocida y el pragmatismo redituable en el mundo de hoy ("*¿nena, estás en un spa?*"), como así también la sensación de extrañeza ante sacrificios impensables hasta ese momento (el ayuno, el trabajo comunitario, los golpes sobre el hombro) y situaciones graciosas de las que no se le ocurre cómo salir (un enorme insecto en el piso, entre las hileras de monjes). A Lucy le ocurre, quizás, lo que a cualquiera de nosotros nos puede pasar en esas circunstancias: las prácticas espirituales le resultan desconocidas, extrañas, y su modo de interpretarlas y relacionarse con ellas es desde el asombro y distancia que ellas les representan a los fines de lograr algún objetivo redituable.

El lugar de la hospitalidad: el vecino de Tomás. El vecino de Tomás es, como Lucy y Lely, una figura también crucial en la historia del film. De hecho, este señor vecino es el mediador entre Laura y Tomás, en prolongados períodos de ausencia de éste, y más aún, entre Rafael y Tomás, siendo él quien le permite entrar a ver si Tomás está allí y si está vivo, es también la persona que interrumpe un asalto a Rafael en plena noche oscura y quién orienta, con agudas preguntas, esta necesidad de Rafael por encontrar a su hermano y, desde luego, encontrar algún camino de sí mismo.

La lección del buda: el mono y el pez. En uno de los pocos diálogos entre Rafael y su hermano (pues quizás las situaciones de diálogo más frecuentes y a su vez más abiertas son las que acontecen entre Rafael y Laura y Rafael y Sol), el hermano menor interpela a su hermano con preguntas y máximas, o sentencias, acerca de otro posible modo de ser de las cosas *("¿tenés miedo a la locura?*"). Con esas interpelaciones, Tomás realiza algunos quiebres en la racionalidad —a veces, clausurada— de Rafael. Uno de los momentos más elocuentes entre ambos tal vez sea el de la lección del mono y el pez: en el parque Tomás señala a Rafael hacia el lado sufriente de sí y hacia lo desconocido de aquello que él desea: la liberación espiritual. La imagen de la lección fragmentaria de Tomás a Rafael está dada en la parábola del mono y el pez ("*el mono ve al pez en el agua y sufre, piensa que su mundo es lo único que existe verdaderamente*"). Lección por la cual Tomás se niega a seguir "moldeado" por el sistema occidental del trabajo, la máquina y el vacío espiritual.

El lugar de la frontera: el éxtasis y el quiebro. Quizás como uno de los límites más marcados en el film, o mas bien un exceso, sería

el del atravesamiento en Tomás de toda experiencia corriente para alcanzar y soportar el éxtasis. Para lograr tal exceso, fueron necesarias varias semanas de claustro y ayuno, semanas en las cuales los familiares y queridos de Tomás desesperan por encontrarle y salvarle de un riesgoso ayuno prolongado, mientras él medita quietamente en la oscuridad de un silencio solitario e incluso —así reprochado por su maestro— egoísta. Sin embargo, tras la experiencia del éxtasis, Tomás renueva su diálogo con Rafael, quien también padece en ese encuentro una crisis, quizás no tanto por el efecto del éxtasis en su hermano sino en sí mismo: una experiencia que lo pone en camino de reencontrarse con su niñez, sus preguntas, sus dolores. Experiencia con la que entra en un profundo sueño del que despierta acompañado de su hermano, ya liberado, superado el éxtasis y dispuesto a iniciar un viaje buscando un maestro. *Experiencia de éxtasis* en Tomás, *experiencia de quiebro* en Rafael. En ambos casos, interpretamos tales experiencias como salidas a la exterioridad, un camino en el través de lo desconocido y extraño.

Lugares de experiencias: los viajes. El viaje de Tomás para buscar un maestro en un templo zen en la montaña es el motivo de comienzo, a su vez, de viajes sucesivos de los otros personajes: Tomás invita a Laura, que acepta feliz. Ambos jóvenes se comunican con sus familiares y en pocos días, Lucy y su compañero llegan al templo, al que posteriormente viajan Sol y Rafael. En el caso de Lucy, ella abandona rápidamente el lugar sin comprender ni aceptar de qué se trata, pero no así su compañero, que se manifiesta decidido a quedarse entre los monjes. Otra cosa sucede con Sol y Rafael: llegan a visitar a Tomás, pero Sol ya venía dispuesta al zen como una práctica espiritual, y será Rafael quien ahora abrirá su alma, razón y corazón para comprender la elección de su hermano y aceptar alguna enseñanza del maestro. Tomás, Laura y Rafael serían entonces quien más son afectados y atravesados por el viaje al templo en Capilla del Monte: estos personajes son afectados, transformados, renovados por algo que no esperaban encontrar, por algunas verdades que les fueron afectando en el camino, por ciertas experiencias de sí que en Tomás se traduciría como *aceptación del límite y responsabilidad de sí*, en Laura como un *proceso de conversión* (no exenta de humor, por cierto, y afortunadamente) y en Rafael como un arduo camino de *comprensión y apertura a la diferencia*, como una experiencia de alteridad.

El lugar del dinero: ¿pagar para creer y pensar? El deseo de encontrar un maestro se convierte en Tomás en un gran interrogante: *"¿desde cuándo hay que pagar una práctica espiritual?"* Pregunta que tiene un ir y venir puesto que el mismo maestro es

quien decide que Tomás no sólo debe pagar sino, además, pagar el doble. Tal contrariedad aparente, al comienzo produce en los jóvenes extrañeza y rechazo, hasta decepción, pues en efecto *¿desde cuándo se paga una práctica espiritual?* Pero con el enunciado de la pregunta, comienza a hacerse visible progresivamente el signo que el maestro ha dado a la misma: Tomás debe aprender a pagar, a ganarse el dinero trabajando para así asumir un pago mínimo incluso por una práctica espiritual. Si bien las apariencias muestran lo paradójico de un templo que cobra por día para el mantenimiento del lugar, y demanda trabajo a sus fieles, la pregunta del dinero va cobrando en Tomás otro sentido: tal es la necesidad de trabajar, así lo hace efectivamente en el pueblo, y la necesidad de comprender que no todo misticismo es tan abstraído del mundo real como a él le parecía. Las cosas no son lo que parecen, y ésa es una lección que Tomás aprende a lo largo del film, más allá de sus búsquedas y en el recorrido de esa experiencia por una práctica espiritual de conversión y liberación.

El lugar de la metáfora para sí mismo: piedras preciosas. En esa bella imagen, el maestro desafía al viajero Tomás a encontrar algunas cosas aún en deuda. "*Piedras preciosas*", le pide, en un presente de búsqueda y en un porvenir desconocido pero promisorio en sabiduría y crecimiento del alma. "*Piedras preciosas*" es la metáfora anunciada en el ensueño de Tomás, como también el horizonte señalado explícitamente en el espacio de las preguntas, en "mundo" ("*ya vas a encontrar piedras preciosas*"). Y, con o sin propósito específico del autor, "*piedras preciosas*" de alguna manera evoca a la imagen de la piedra magnética de Heracles, aquella tan bien descripta en el diálogo juvenil *Ion* (Platón), según cuyo magnetismo es posible la creación de la palabra poética como obra de inspiración divina nacida del entusiasmo. De la misma manera que "*piedras preciosas*" remite a aquella imagen borgeana de *La Rosa de Paracelso*: un joven pide a Paracelso ser su discípulo y demostrar su sabiduría quemando y resucitando una rosa de las cenizas (La memoria de Shakespeare, 1973)[7]. El pedido del joven al alquimista es "*quiero conocer el Arte que conduce a la Piedra*", como imagen ésta de alguna sabiduría enigmática, críptica, puesta en obra en verdad por obra de un arduo camino de preguntas y enigmas.

[7] Borges, Jorge Luis (1996) Obras Completas, Tomo III, Barcelona: Emecé. Incluye el libro de relatos fantásticos *La memoria de Shakespeare* (1973).

III

El lugar del pensar: una filosofía práctica. Finalmente, podemos plantear algunas notas conclusivas (aunque abiertas o provisionales) sobre este recorrido filosófico por el film. Si interpretamos el texto de la película *Un Buda* como un *evento* sobre una *experiencia transformadora y verdadera*, tendremos varios aspectos puestos en juego en la obra. Tales elementos estarían interactuando como en un ejercicio de filosofía práctica: dando a leer algunos pensamientos que se ponen por obra en la obra de arte y su verdad, en este caso, este film. Ellos serían los que ya vimos pero que enunciamos como lugares transitorios en un camino hacia la verdad, hacia alguna verdad, y en una búsqueda de una sabiduría con la cual cultivar una práctica espiritual. Estos lugares eran el deseo de conocimiento, el amor, las preguntas, la celebración musical y ritual, el mercado, los sueños, la memoria, el dinero, los ejercicios espirituales, la familia, el diálogo, los excesos, la metáfora de las piedras preciosas. Lugares todos en los que hemos visto cómo una *experiencia de sí* es posible en una *experiencia con el otro.* Experiencia sellada de amor, en la que la inquietud de sí se solidariza a cierto estado de apertura y actitud de *hospitalidad* y apertura a un tú, a otro, para que aquello aún no conocido sea un elemento formador y transformador en la vida y proyecto de quien (se) pregunta. Y *experiencia del pensar* en la que se integran experiencias padecidas como la de la desaparición de los padres, en una presencia vital y como recuperación de la memoria, en un camino poético de sí abierto al tiempo de un porvenir construido en un cielo de sueños, aquellos cielos azules de la canción principal de la banda de sonido del film.[8]

¿Qué notas del film podemos señalar, entonces, como huellas para y de una *experiencia o evento transformador*? Retomando lo enunciado previamente sobre la noción hermenéutica de *experiencia del arte*, veíamos que la misma era abordada (en Gadamer) en tanto la obra se interpreta como un *juego*, como un movimiento entre quien es jugado y aquella verdad y alteridad que lo juega en el devenir autorrepresentativo de la obra, en su sentido. Este juego del arte, a su vez, es una verdad que implica y trae (a nosotros) su propio modo de ser y el *dasein,* puesto que allí acontece el ser, en el movimiento por el que la obra nos juega con su verdad. Y la obra tiene un tiempo propio: sucede en un instante de simultaneidad entre el tiempo singular de quienes juegan la obra y el fluir de la misma, en su propia actualidad, por la que reconstruye —cada vez e implicando

8 *Cielos azules*, de Herman Vinson.

a quienes la juegan— su modo de ser.

Veamos de qué modo *Un Buda*, entonces, nos da a pensar una *experiencia del pensar*, un *evento transformador* con y desde este texto cinematográfico. Entre tantos elementos que atraviesan el film, como elementos de una experiencia, encontrábamos según veíamos: (a) *la Infancia*, marcada por el secuestro de los padres y el crecimiento vital según dos modos de inquietud filosófica: en un caso, con el pensar orientado hacia la filosofía occidental racionalista, y en el otro, mediante el aprendizaje de la práctica espiritual del budismo zen; (b) *las estaciones de tránsito*, o los lugares específicos en los cuales los protagonistas atraviesan un camino de interrogación o experiencias de sí: la ciudad, o el lugar de las responsabilidades y compromisos familiares y sociales, y el campo, o la morada de las preguntas y el retiro silencioso para buscar nuevas verdades acerca de sí; (c) *los lugares del conocimiento o la verdad*, que identificábamos como lugares específicos (la universidad, los libros, los espacios del maestro) en los que se daba cierta transmisión y formación para cultivar la filosofía como una disciplina del pensamiento y como una práctica de cuidado de sí; (d) *los objetos del recuerdo*: o las imágenes de la memoria y reconciliación con una experiencia dolorosa aún padecida, representadas simbólicamente por la fotografía en la que se devela la amistad y sabiduría compartidas entre el maestro zen —del presente— y el padre de ambos hermanos —hace ya largos años—; (e) *las inquietudes filosóficas*: especialmente cultivadas por Tomás y Rafael, y por sus respectivas novias, procurando comprenderse mutuamente; (f) *las lecciones del maestro*: que no intentan revelar al joven ninguna verdad sobrenatural sino más bien le insta a una actitud reflexiva respecto de sí, para no hallar respuestas en verdades exteriores sino desde sí mismo; (g) *los espacios para el amor*: o aquellos lugares atravesados de deseo y necesidad por amar y ser amado, también viviendo el amor como una experiencia espiritual; (h) *los instantes celebrativos*: evocados permanentemente como el movimiento del alma con la práctica espiritual de preguntarse a sí mismo (sea en discontinuidades que acontecen en la disco, en el templo, en los ratos de dispersión, en el mismo fluir de la banda sonora del film); (i) *las situaciones hermenéuticas de diálogo*: especialmente marcadas en el doble movimiento del habla entre Rafael y Laura, y Rafael y Sol, y atravesadas de la búsqueda de comprensión acerca de la práctica espiritual que tanto ocupa a Tomás —y a sí mismos—; (j) *los afectos de familia*: y el lugar esencial que en la vida de los personajes producen huellas de inquietud para interrogar la vida con el deseo de buscarse a sí mismos; (k) *las sospechas sobre el mercado*: especialmente enunciadas por Tomás y acerca del objeto particular

que dinamiza y determina el mercado (el dinero), como un elemento que no puede vincularse al (y mucho menos determinar el) ejercicio de una práctica filosófica; (l) *la hospitalidad*: puesta en acto en la apertura y ejercicio de los personajes que rodean (en reparto) a los protagonistas principales, y que son vecinos, familiares, anfitriones del templo; (m) *los quiebres o desasosiegos*: que devienen en las situaciones extremas o de crisis, tales como el éxtasis budista, o la angustia inexplicable por la razón; (n) *los viajes*: como aventuras y riesgos —y metáforas de la experiencia— a los que se entregan casi todos los personajes de la obra; (o) *las piedras preciosas*: como imagen poética de la sabiduría, y del arte de la verdad, cultivado por el aprendizaje y la búsqueda de los conocimientos necesarios para una práctica del pensar según la cual sea posible transformarse a sí mismos, permanentemente.

Por último, y como nota al margen, si traemos a la escucha un enunciado de Jacques Derrida que expresa: "*un acto de hospitalidad no puede ser sino poético*"[9] (La hospitalidad, 2006), podemos inferir que aquí *Un Buda* actualiza ese enunciado, puesto que allí encontramos ese hilo tensado entre la pregunta por sí mismo y la experiencia (y de hospitalidad) del otro, como camino verdadero, inquieto, abierto, fragmentario y entregado al enigma de las tantas preguntas sin responder. Quizás, ese camino de experiencia del relato del film se abrevia en la pregunta por la hospitalidad, pues sin ella no sería posible *pensar(nos)* como sujetos, como subjetividades con deseo de pensar-se y transformar-se según cierta inquietud de sí, abierta a hacer una experiencia con lo otro, con la alteridad, con lo que (nos) pregunta, y como existencias capaces de abrir lugares al pensar con las preguntas del otro, que no son otra cosa que las nuestras. Tal vez una *palabra poética* nos puede mantener, entonces, el alma inquieta en esa apertura a la hospitalidad, al deseo por la pregunta, a la mirada del otro, al camino de tantos caminos por venir, a *una experiencia en verdad con el alma del otro*. Dice un poema de Paul Celan:

Caminos hacia allí.
Una hora de bosque a lo
largo del carril murmureante.

Re-
cogido,

9 Citado por Anne Dufourmantelle en prólogo a Derrida, Jacques, y Dufourmantelle, Anne (2006) *La hospitalidad*, Buenos Aires: De la Flor.

pequeño hayuco
hendido: ennegrecida
abertura que
los pensamientos dactilares
preguntan por –
¿por qué?
Por
lo irrepetible, por
eso, por
todo.

Caminos hacia allí murmureantes.

Algo que puede caminar, sin saludo,
como lo que se ha vuelto corazón,
viene.[10]

ANEXO

Entrevista con Diego Rafecas[11]
EN CAMINO DEL ZAZEN… Acerca de *UN BUDA*[12]

Diego, ¿qué papel jugó tu camino de formación en el teatro, la filosofía y el budismo a la hora de construir la película Un Buda?

Supongo que todos confluyen a la hora de expresar... no sé si alguien puede escapar de hablar de sí mismo... el teatro fue para

[10] Trad. Reina Palazón en versión traducida al castellano de Jacques Derrida (2002) *Shibboleth. Para Paul Celan* Trad. Jorge Pérez de Tudela. Madrid: Arena Libros, 2002.

[11] Diego Rafecas (1969) hizo formación teatral con Cristina Banegas, bajo cuya dirección debutó en una obra de Griselda Gambaro, *Sólo un aspecto*. Estudió Licenciatura en Filosofía de la Universidad de Buenos Aires y se inició en la práctica del Zen, con el Maestro Stephane Kosen Thibaut. Sus primeros cortometrajes fueron *La buena vida* (2002) y *El secuestro* (2001), con Pablo Flehner. Estudió Dirección de Cine con Eduardo Milewics, escribiendo y dirigiendo bajo su asesoramiento el corto *Vivir en Nueva York* (2000), galardonado con premios en festivales nacionales. También estudió Guión Cinematográfico y Televisivo con María José Campoamor, Ernesto Korovsky y Eduardo Milewicz, elaborando allí los primeros esbozos del guión de *Un buda*, su primer largometraje (2005). En septiembre de 2003 crea la empresa Zazen Producciones S.A. a fin de producir y realizar historias de ficción, especializándose en la creación de contenidos que expresen y manifiesten valores humanos. Sitio web en <http://www.diegorafecas.com.ar/>.

[12] Entrevista personal, 1 septiembre 2008.

darme cuenta que actuar es ponerse la gorra y salir a la cancha; la filosofía me ayudó a diferenciar el conocimiento adquirido del conocimiento genuino; el zen, que no es el budismo clásico, es una práctica justamente que despierta ese conocimiento genuino, que se encuentra en el silencio, en la fuente de todo, el vacío.

¿Qué modos de pensar te parece que produce el cine?

No sé. Estoy viendo cómo es, recién hice dos películas, una todavía no se estrenó, y empiezo a filmar la tercera en dos meses. Yo no sé lo que hago hasta que la gente empieza a ver la película. Como si pintas un cuadro de 100 metros con la nariz pegada a la tela, y tenés 100 personas que te ayudan pero no podés ver bien lo que estas haciendo... Y cuando terminas, la ves y te vas alejando de a poco... Ves... Ahhh... Uau... ¡Mirá!... ¿Y eso?... Jaja... Mmm que mal eso... Y así. Y te das cuenta mucho después de hecha la obra, lo que hiciste.... No sé si a todos los directores les pasa eso, o trabajan así. A mí me quema si no pinto. Si no pinto me muero, me drogo, me pongo agresivo, neurótico... Y pintar, cuadros grandes, películas, me ayuda a sobrellevar mi temperamento, a soportar la existencia de tanta estupidez, soy muy feliz haciendo mis cosas sin mirar a nadie. Hay cine que no produce nada y cine que conmueve hasta la médula. Prefiero el segundo. Hay cine de festivales, y cine comercial. A mí me parece que tenemos mucho que aprender de los americanos. Y a la vez estoy más cerca de los europeos... Naturalmente, pero es importante equilibrar los valores artísticos con los comerciales, porque éste es un juego caro y si quieres seguir filmando, la gente tiene que pagar la entrada...

¿Por qué elegiste ese valor ético, bello y humano que desde la antigüedad los hombres llamamos amor para mostrarlo, en tu obra, como uno de los caminos que hace posible la comprensión del otro?

Porque la experiencia del vacío, la fuente de todo lo creado, aunque no tenga forma (Dios no tiene barba ni espada, ni arco y flecha, ni túnica naranja, esas son formas...) y el sin-forma a pesar de parecer algo sin-forma-sentido-individualidad-entidad... es muy dulce. Y si uno puede experimentar eso, frente a maestros realizados o en profunda meditación, luego en el mundo la palabra *amor* parece ser el concepto que más se acerca a eso.... Salvando las enormes distancias entre el amor de la superficie y la experiencia de la divinidad. Digo, Hitler amaba a sus perros... Era un gran amor el que mantenía con su esposa, era vegetariano... Ja. Por lo que el amor no nos salva de nada, y en cambio la experiencia de la divinidad,

es un sello que no te lo podés sacar de encima nunca más.... Pero esa experiencia tiene que ser honda, y verdadera, secreta. De todas maneras, el maestro zen de *Un Buda* le habla del amor al personaje racional, no a Tomás. A Tomás lo manda a trabajar.... El exceso de amor, es un exceso al fin.... Sobra algo.

¿Qué enseñanza abierta nos dejaría Un Buda, para pensar la filosofía como una práctica de la espiritualidad?

No sé si se puede pensar una práctica... Repetir cosas de otros todo el tiempo, es insoportable, para mí. No lo tolero, y trato todo el tiempo de hacer y decir cosas nuevas. En el momento. Yo no quise enseñar nada, quise mostrar sin juzgar que existe el plano de la no dualidad, que el femenino tiene razón, y el masculino también tiene razón... Y que el femenino es incompleto y no tiene razón, y el masculino es incompleto también, y no tiene razón tampoco. A la vez. Al unísono. Y es sólo cuando se tocan los opuestos que se enciende la luz, se hacen uno, se fusionan en otra cosa.... Como la lamparita de 40 watts, positivo toca negativo luz enciende, ya no hay más + o - ... Es uno, luz. Enciende la luz, pero adentro.

¿Quisiste con tu obra darnos a pensar otras dimensiones de la temporalidad, otra relación humana con el tiempo? ¿Por qué?

Porque somos nosotros los creadores de la realidad. Lo dice la ciencia. No hay sustancia en el universo. Todo es intangible. La materia no existe. ¡¡¡Pero nadie lo asimila!!! Nadie lo realiza. O quizá muy pocos... que pasan desapercibidos a la mayoría. Somos dios, dioses, creemos a través de nuestros procesos de pensamientos, el pensamiento es holográfico, pensamos en hologramas, que entrelazan la realidad... Queramos o no. Nuestra mente crea realidad, en un instrumento poderosísimo, con la simple observación... El observador es el creador.... Y si somos concientes mejor, porque vamos a poder elegir... Y elegir lo que queremos crear... Creer... Crear...creer... crear.... Y así. Acá el tiempo es solamente un contexto... Igual que el espacio.... Lo mas pequeño es lo mas poderoso, en la distancia entre tus dedos ¡está todo el universo y más!... El vacío contiene todo y no hay sustancia por lo tanto.... Podemos elegir otra forma del tiempo, que se estire, y pasar más despacio. O al revés, que pase rápido. O que se detenga. Es difícil de realizar porque es vencer creencias muy antiguas que están en las células...

¿Te parece que esas subjetividades representadas por los personajes de Un Buda*, esas máscaras, pueden resolver de alguna manera la búsqueda inquieta de sí mismos? Si es así, ¿de qué manera lo*

hacen, al menos temporal y fragmentariamente?

No sé... El buscador debe encontrar. Si no encuentra, es preferible que muera y vuelva a nacer en un cuerpo con un poco más de suerte... Porque buscadores de treinta o cuarenta años de búsqueda, creen que la búsqueda es el camino y todas esas estupideces, que los llevan a ellos y a mucho que los siguen a un sinsentido total. He visto un poco de eso. Es importante y difícil encontrar verdaderos maestros.

¿Qué imágenes del film te parece que más simbolizan el proceso de experiencia espiritual como un proceso de cambio?

Cuando Tomás se pela la cabeza. La charla entre Rafael y la rubia, acerca del hermano en la cama... El no-juicio de la película sobre nada.

¿Por qué elegiste la metáfora de las piedras preciosas como horizonte señalado por el maestro al aprendiz de buda?

No sé bien. Me gustaba.... No tenía importancia, sólo era importante que el maestro le hable del sueño en común, en estado de vigilia... Así hicieron conmigo. Y en ese momento adelante de todos me parecía muy cinematográfico...

El enunciado zen que dice "al comienzo la enseñanza es amarga, como la buena medicina", ¿te parece que hoy tiene actualidad en nuestro mundo tan humanamente degradado y, a su vez, tan necesitado de respuestas provisorias para descubrir caminos de libertad y de construcción de sí mismo? ¿Y para pensar la educación?

La buena enseñanza... Actual... A mí me gusta mucho todo lo *old school*. Aunque escuche Red Hot Chilli Pepers... En el sentido que los místicos antiguos de tradición verdadera, de transmisión oral... Me atraen sobremanera, por su alto grado de verdad.... De simplicidad... Estos maestros no te hacen las cosas fáciles de entrada... Por lo menos eso me pasó a mí con varios... Hay que pasar algunas barreras, que por supuesto son interiores.... Es amargo ver tu ego... Tu imposibilidad de ser humilde, de disfrutar un momento sencillo en silencio sin tener que llamar la atención... De decir cosas que no tengan que ser palabras casi imposibles de entender... Vaciarse molesta al principio... Dejar, abandonar, tanto por lo que uno luchó... No es tan fácil... Pero es así. Eso o el contacto con el dulce vacío. Cocaína o iluminación....

¿De qué manera te parece que el arte, el cine en este caso pero

también el arte en general, hoy sería una vía de filosofía práctica para pensarnos a nosotros mismos?

Cada artista sabrá. Para mí expresar es liberar... Después de hacer *Un Buda*, se me fueron todas las ganas de dios y meditación, etc. En realidad se me fue lo que había de más... Lo que sobraba, el fanatismo, la tendencia a militar por algo que nos da pertenencia... Ah, soy un gran monje zen... El más grande.... Por suerte mis maestros me destruyeron cualquier tipo de club que me puede armar en la cabeza....

¿Qué horizontes de creaciones futuras se han abierto, luego de Un Buda*?*

Muchas. Seguir filmando y alimentar a mis hijos, y crear una realidad superpoderosa, como las chicas.... Superpoderosas.

Gracias por tu palabra, en verdad.

Ficha técnica del film *Un Buda*

Argentina, 2005

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Productor: Diego Rafecas, Ricardo Parada

Página web: http://www.unbuda.com.ar/

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WOMEN WHO MAKE A MAN: FEMALE PROTAGONISTS IN TONI MORRISON'S *SONG OF SOLOMON*

Soophia Ahmad

The central character of Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* is Milkman—a male—, but the novel is, nevertheless, supported by a brilliant cast of female protagonists. These women include Milkman's paternal aunt—Pilate—cousin—Hagar—mother—Ruth—and sisters—Magdalene called Lena and First Corinthians. Harry Reed notes that Milkman's quest is "buttressed by his female relationships. The fluid constellations of black women loving him, supporting him, guiding him and even rejecting him confirm the nurturing aspects of black life" (54). All these characters contribute significantly, but in varying measures, to Milkman's development from a headstrong, chauvinistic, arrogant, materialistic young man to a mature person who finally comes to appreciate the richness of his African background as well as the worth of his ancestors, and makes both an integral part of his identity and selfhood. Each woman demonstrates characteristics and personality traits very different from those of the others. This paper seeks to study these female characters to show how their race-consciousness develops as a result of their experiences—both within and outside the community—and manifests itself in their varying attitudes toward life. Even as these women lead Milkman toward an understanding of his true self, the search for their own identity and purpose in life, the craving to understand who they are, and what they desire becomes, eventually, the deciding factor between life and death, self affirmation and self negation, ecstatic joy or desperate misery. It decides, ultimately, who finds meaning in life and whose years on the earth are a waste—and why.

Ruth Foster Dead is the first of the Dead women to be introduced in the story. She is the wife of a ruthless real estate agent—Macon Dead (he is literally "Ruth-less" because he does not even acknowledge her presence)—and the daughter of the first Negro doctor in town—the late Dr. Foster—a rather conceited man who takes pride

in his wealthy, light-skinned family, and feels superior to other black people. Morrison depicts Ruth as a motherless girl whose pathetic existence can be traced back to a rich but lonely childhood and her subsequent, unfortunate marriage to the ferocious, money-minded Macon Dead who keeps "each member of his family awkward with fear" (*Song of Solomon* 10).[1] Even though Ruth lives a life of comparative luxury and affluence, initially because of her father's position, and later because of her husband's, she derives no happiness from it. She considers herself too superior to other black women, and is ignored by the white women who know her father. During her father's lifetime, her days are marked only by an unusual devotion to him which continues in strange ways even after his death. On the day that Dr. Foster dies, Macon discovers Ruth lying naked next to her father's dead body, with his fingers in her mouth (she vehemently denies this fact when Milkman confronts her, but Macon is convinced that he is right). Extremely repulsed by the sight, he decides on the spot to have nothing to do with her henceforth. Morrison paints a rather miserable picture of Ruth, and attributes most of her problems to the lack of meaningful love in her life. She is, in Pilate's words, "dying of lovelessness" (151). Her father's death and Macon's abhorrence of her lead her to an uncanny relationship with her son whom she continues to breast-feed till he is well past infancy. Even though she senses Milkman's "restraint, his courtesy, his indifference" (13), it only pushes "her into fantasy. She had the distinct impression that his lips were pulling from her a thread of light. It was as though she were a cauldron spinning gold…. And that was the other part of her pleasure, a pleasure she hated to give up" (13-14). Ruth feeds Milkman not because she derives sexual pleasure from it, but because it makes her feel important and useful—as if she is lending him sustenance and life. Ironically, however, the milk with which she hopes to nourish him succeeds only in choking all the love out of him so that, like the late Doctor, he too begins to find her attentions unwanted and unnecessarily stifling.

In Ruth Foster Dead, Morrison creates a black woman whose life is meaningless because she makes no attempt to justify her existence. She is immensely passive, and terribly apathetic toward her own self. She enjoys all the privileges of being connected to a rich and influential family, but does not utilise them either for personal growth or for the betterment of the community. She has inherited

[1] Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (London: Picador in association with Chatto and Windus, 1993). All subsequent references are to this edition, and appear in parentheses throughout this paper.

this trait in part from her father. Karla Holloway blames Dr. Foster for rearing Ruth "away from her heritage—establishing her as the 'doctor's daughter' and therefore less black than the townsfolk he services. He values her lighter skin precisely because of his desire for this demarcation between his daughter and other black people. As adults, Ruth and Macon Jr. perpetuate this distancing" (106). Since Ruth has been brought up without a native, ethnic cultural identity, she lives under the misapprehension that she is superior to other black folks and must not associate with them. She and her husband never cross the societal boundaries that separate them from the rest of the community because doing so would mean a degrading descent down the social ladder. Ruth knows very well that Macon is cruel and unsympathetic when it comes to collecting money from the poor blacks who rent his houses, but she never comes to their rescue. She is never assertive enough to stand up to her husband and demand that he treat other members of the community with compassion and respect. Her disinterestedness in the black community is all the more strange because she has both the means and the potential to alleviate some of its miseries—but lacks the initiative. Though Macon Dead holds an iron hand over her, she does have the guts to assert herself and stand up to him when she wants to—and does so only once—when she compels him to part with a substantial amount of cash for Hagar's funeral. In the entire book, this is her only redeeming act, but it comes too late. She has already become a stranger to her own family, and a permanent alien in the black community to which she rightfully belongs. Her emulation of hollow white values, and conceited efforts to maintain a superior, elitist lifestyle, also tells on both her daughters, and adversely affects their initial growth and development too.

Both Lena and Corinthians are unmarried, and still living with their parents even though they are in their forties. Their lack of initiative and drive can also be traced back to their childhood spent under the shadow of a tyrannical father like Macon Dead and an insipid mother like Ruth Dead. Both try their level best and succeed, for the most part, at keeping the girls away from other black people whom they consider socially inferior. They try to inculcate in the children the values of elitist, white, America—emphasising the importance of money and social status. Even though Lena and Corinthians appear to live a privileged and luxurious life, their existence is no less artificial than the roses they laboriously make out of red velvet—showy and delicate on the outside—no substance inside. Just as the girls cut out patterns from velvet, Macon cruelly cuts out all spunk and individuality from their personalities and shapes them into models of envy for the

rest of the community. Lena and Corinthians are, therefore, ultimately caught in the same rut as their mother. In spite of their advantageous position in society, they too remain trapped in the tangled web of their family life—a shadow that haunts them wherever they go.

Only Corinthians makes an attempt to pull her life together by going to a prestigious white women's college. She even spends her junior year abroad in France, but it does not fetch for her the advantages she had assumed it would—working, rather unfortunately, to her disadvantage instead. Morrison implies here that the American education system trains people only in the elitist pursuits of life, and deludes them into believing that they are far above others of their class. This is exactly what happens to Corinthians, and she suffers greatly because of it. Ruth has led her to believe that her education will enable her to become "a prize for a professional man of color" (188), but her hopes are dashed because the coloured men of the day desire wives who are not complacent. They seek women who would appreciate the struggle for social status and hold on to it (once they had acquired it) as a priceless possession. Corinthians is a misfit in their midst because she is "a little too elegant" (188) for them, and her training is such that it gives them an inferiority complex. Her wealth and education, unfortunately, do not allow her to become part of either the black or the white community—leaving her suspended between the two classes instead. Stephanie Demetrakopoulos suggests that Corinthians is "a perfect example of the educated Ivy League daughter who is to use her class and learning only as a persona, as a decoration for her family" (96). This comment reveals an unfortunate truth: Macon and Ruth are so obsessed with their elitist image, that they literally display Corinthians as just another ornament to adorn their house and assert their superiority over other members of the community. Education objectifies Corinthians.

In an ironical turn of events, Corinthians' quest for independence, and her determination to find a job, ultimately leads her to become a maid to Miss Grahams—the State Poet Laureate. She, however, tells her family that she is an "amanuensis." Holloway contends that "a college-educated woman having to assume the position of a maid…illustrates the psychological and social abuse suffered and endured by black women who work in these roles, subjugating their pride for some personal goal" (110). This comment demonstrates that black women in white society are not recognized for their true capabilities. They have to constantly diminish and negate their achievements because the dominant culture, and its influence on their own families, does not let them rise above social and cultural stereotypes. In spite of this, however, being a maid benefits Corinthians in several

ways. The very fact that she chooses a difficult and humbling occupation over the pompousness of her earlier life-style allows her to shed the enormous burden of hypocrisy, and free herself of the shackles of social superiority her parents had wrapped around her. It also makes romance with Henry Porter (her social inferior) possible, and ultimately allows her to view herself as part of the community to which she belongs. These developments suggest that Corinthians succeeds in making an attempt to carve an identity for herself, and identify her own priorities—the formal beginning of the formation of her consciousness as an individual.

Lena's existence is quite different from that of Corinthians'. In a completely unremarkable life, her only redeeming act is when she rebels, just once, against her brother, Milkman. She finds out that Milkman has complained to Macon about Corinthians' relationship with Porter—with the result that her father has forbidden Corinthians to go out, made her give up her job, and had Porter evicted from his house. Lena calls Milkman to her room and gives him the proverbial piece of her mind: "where do you get the right to decide our lives?…. I'll tell you where. From that hog's gut that hangs down between your legs" (215). These words demonstrate Lena's outrage at the fact that a mere biological reality gives men the right to dominate each female member of the family. They also draw attention to the disturbing extent to which the Deads have adopted the white value system—believing that only a male can control the family and propagate its name. Black values that emphasize the importance and contributions of women as important mother figures are totally neglected. Demetrakopoulos views the life of Lena and Corinthians as "a true, bitter, virulent portrait of what happens to sisters who are made subservient body-servants to a selfish, adored brother simply because he is male" (95). This comment suggests that the Dead household is not unique in its mistreatment and neglect of women. It is merely symbolic of the preference families give to male children over female ones. Lena falls a total victim to this concept of women as the less privileged sex. She represents the women who continue to be repressed and dominated by the male species, but do not give enough importance to their own selves to retaliate against the existing system and go in quest of their own identities.

Milkman's sisters are, however, not the only women who suffer because of his arrogant, domineering attitude. His association with Pilate's granddaughter, Hagar, has a drastic and fatally damaging effect on her. He abruptly ends their twelve-year-long romantic relationship by writing her a cold, callous note. A few days later, she spies him in a bar with another girl, "whose silky copper-colored hair cascaded over

the sleeve of his coat" (127). Hagar is totally devastated, and goes mad with jealousy. She seeks revenge by trying to kill Milkman—and stalks him with an ice-pick or knife at the oddest of moments and in the strangest of places, but never succeeds. Milkman's friend, Guitar, feels sorry for her, and knows exactly what she needs: "She needed what most colored girls needed: a chorus of mamas, grandmamas, aunts, cousins, sisters, neighbors, Sunday school teachers, best girl friends, and what all to give her the strength life demanded of her—and the humor with which to live it" (307). These comments, though bordering on the tongue-in-cheek, indicate that Hagar must get in touch with her essential roots with a little guidance from women who make up the core of the black community, and are capable of passing on its sustaining qualities to her through their nurturing abilities. Hagar has, however, been conditioned by exposure to the majority culture, to think of a successful woman as one who is beautiful, one who dresses up in chic clothes, and one who has men falling at her feet. It is because she has internalized these false, empty concepts that she finds herself greatly lacking when she looks into the small mirror in the pink compact gifted to her by Pilate. "I look awful. No wonder he didn't want me. I look terrible" (308). Edward Guerrero interprets Hagar's looking into the mirror as an invocation of a "deadly, ensnaring, self-reflexive gaze into an alien standard of beauty." He contends, therefore, that by rejecting her reflection in the mirror, she rejects, essentially, "the self shaped by the traditions and lifestyles of…Pilate and…Reba, both of whom represent Nature…and…work against the allure of outward appearances and the colonizing powers of 'the look.' Hagar fantasizes a persona that she imagines will make her more desirable to…Milkman" (769). In a stubborn negation of all that Pilate and Reba stand for, Hagar detests her dark looks, and yearns for the kind of face and hair that she thinks Milkman would appreciate—smooth, pale skin and silky hair. She decides to get up and "fix" (308) herself up by going shopping for the latest in clothes and cosmetics.

The description of Hagar's desperate shopping spree demonstrates the extent to which the white culture propagates the values of success based on materialism and a certain fixed concept of beauty. The underlying assumption is that a woman is worthy only if she is desirable to men—and they will find her attractive only if she lures them by the power of her clothes, make-up and perfume. Hagar tries to be alluring and beautiful for Milkman by attempting to diminish and tone down her African looks in favour of a more Westernized style. Western white culture presents fantasy as reality, and hypnotizes the consumer into believing that she too can enjoy the ecstasy that

follows a successful seduction only if she has a peaches and cream complexion (guaranteed by their products) and lounges around in satin robes. Hagar falls a hapless victim to these calculated bates, and spends a fortune purchasing clothes and cosmetics so that she can achieve the desired look that would win Milkman's heart.

The look is, however, out of her reach—in every possible way. As she returns home, she gets caught in a downpour, and all the chic, new items fall into dirty mud puddles. Morrison paints a pathetic picture of Hagar as she bends to retrieve one or two items while the others fall out. Her inability to hold on to these chic, Western items symbolizes the futility of her mission—her attempt to transform the ugly crow into the proverbially beautiful swan. Hagar reaches home "limp, wet, and confused, clutching her bundles in whatever way she could" (314). She rushes straight into her room and, without drying herself, puts on her new, dirty, soiled clothes, and plasters wet, lumpy make-up all over her face. It is only when she presents herself for Reba and Pilate's inspection that she becomes aware of the pathos of her condition.

> It was in their eyes that she saw what she had not seen before in the mirror: the wet ripped hose, the soiled white dress, the sticky, lumpy face powder, the streaked rouge, and the wild wet shoals of hair. All this she saw in their eyes, and the sight filled her own with water warmer and much older than the rain. Water that lasted for hours, until the fever came, and then it stopped. The fever dried her eyes up as well as her mouth. (314)

This episode is significant because it shows Hagar's acceptance of reality—and what it does to her. She realizes that she can never become the kind of beauty she has seen advertised in the shopping mall, but she cannot reconcile to this cruel fact. She finds it difficult to believe that the products that promise so much deliver so little—and make her look so ridiculous. The sheer disappointment she feels manifests itself into tears of desperation and frustration, and then a dangerous fever that refuses to subside.

As Hagar's temperature rises, she murmurs deliriously, that Milkman "loves silky hair…. Penny-colored hair…. And lemon-colored skin…. And gray-blue eyes…. And thin nose…. He's never going to like my hair" (315-316). The description she gives is that of a typical light-skinned beauty—with complexion and hair she now knows she can never have. These are the last desperate words that Hagar speaks before her voice is silenced forever, and her ugliness buried with her. She dies believing that she has failed in life because she could not get Milkman's love since she never possessed the traditional beauty that would make romance possible and lend meaning to her existence.

Susan Willis argues that "Hagar's hysteria and death mark the limits of her assimilation into bourgeoisie culture. Neither through withdrawal nor through commodity consumption can [she] transform herself into an object. Her marginality, by reason of race and lumpen background, is the basis for her inalienable human dimension. As Morrison might have put it, she is simply too black, too passionate, too human ever to become reified" (312). Willis interprets Hagar's inability to become white-like as a failure to be commodified ("reified") and views it as the reason for her failed initiation into bourgeoisie society. In spite of her best efforts, her native cultural background—the inherited essence of Africanism—keeps her from becoming an object of appreciation for the male gaze. Hagar, unfortunately, is unable to appreciate this fact, and instead of viewing the resistance as her strength, allows it to become the reason for her doom.

Hagar's negative outlook and alarmingly low self image are juxtaposed by Pilate's zest for life and her self-affirmation. The difference lies in the way each views herself against the culture to which she rightfully belongs, and the culture in which she has to live. Pilate rejects the very values that Hagar reveres. She looks with disdain on Western concepts of success and prosperity, and lives without modern amenities such as electricity, gas and running water. She is different from the other women characters of the novel in several ways—the first being a freakish physical reality. She does not have a navel, and is rumoured to have birthed herself—since her mother dies seconds before she was born. She lives on the outskirts of town, and practices an unconventional profession—the illegal production and sale of home-made liquor. Unmarried by choice, she heads a strange house-hold of women consisting of her daughter Reba, and a thoroughly spoilt granddaughter, Hagar. Pilate is possessive only about her bag of bones, her geography book, the rocks she has collected from each place she visited during her twenty years of wandering, and her name which she wears in an earring made out of her mother's brass snuff box. These objects, and the owner's reverence toward them, indicate her strong ties to her past, and her veneration of the culture that has shaped her. Valerie Smith writes that "instead of repressing the past, she carries it with her in the form of her songs, her stories and her bag of bones. She believes that one's sense of identity is rooted in the capacity to look back to the past and synthesize it with the present; it is not enough simply to put it behind one and look forward" (729). Though Pilate settles down in a predominantly white town where she has access to various contemporary comforts, she rejects them in favour of a simple, natural lifestyle. She does not view progress as something that involves a negation of history, and a

concentration on only the future. Rather, she integrates her ethnicity into her present lifestyle and, by selecting emotional treasures over material wealth, braces herself against the onslaught of Western materialism that Macon Dead's family is prey to.

By identifying herself as part of a larger African community, Pilate is able to reject the imprisonment of white society that entraps Macon's family. Though both brother and sister have carved independent lives for themselves, their priorities are entirely different. Macon has deliberately internalized white values, and measures success in terms of money, property and social status. Pilate, on the other hand, derides such values and draws sustenance only from her memories of the past, her father's words, and a recognition of herself as part of a larger black community. She does not allow the white West to dictate or dominate her lifestyle.

Reed contends that Pilate "transcends…gender-related oppression…She can not only support and live happily within a woman-centered environment but she can also accept the love of men without being devastated by its absence" (58). Pilate has experienced love of the finest kind, and rejected it deliberately because she had felt that she would not be able to hide her navel-less stomach from a husband forever. She does not, however, allow this loss to hamper her growth—viewing it instead as something that frees rather than victimizes her. This suggests that even early in life, when she is most vulnerable, she has both the confidence to stand alone and the ability to rise above traditional Western anxieties about women being incomplete without the support of a man. Unlike Ruth, Pilate rejects artificial Western values symbolized by table manners and hygiene—the cleanliness of only the body as opposed to that of the mind or spirit. She also places a high value on the words spoken by her dead father, and follows his advice as she interprets it. All these traits connect her to her African past, and give her the sustenance required for surviving whole in a world given to the emptiness of etiquette and the artificiality of modern survival techniques.

Pilate's basic initiation into life thus puts her through various tests—the most notable of which are poverty, communal isolation, and early orphaning. She, however, emerges as a strong individual because she draws sustenance from her racial memories and never breaks the vital connection to her native agricultural past. This is why, though she can claim no umbilical cord that has linked her genealogically to traditional mother figures, she is the one, of all the female characters, who is most connected to her African heritage, and whose relationships with other people have always been nurturing ones. Her words are comforting, her touch is healing, and her concoc-

tions or potions always work where other endeavours fail. Milkman is conceived because of the home-made herbal mixture she gives Ruth to put in Macon's food when she learns that they have not had a physical relationship since Dr. Foster's death. He is born because she thwarts Macon's attempts to force Ruth to abort him by placing on his office chair a male voodoo doll with a red circle painted on its stomach, and a small chicken bone stuck between its legs. She uses these traditional means to ensure both protection and privacy for Ruth—instead of going to the police or a social welfare organization which would have violated the latter without guaranteeing the former. Just as she plays a crucial role in bringing Milkman into the world, so she instils in him a craving to discover his true identity and roots—to go in search of his name—to trace his origins back to his rich African past so that he can shed the false illusions he has been brought up with, and be able to surrender to the air so that he can ride it.

Referring to the significance of Pilate's name, several critics have asserted that she acts as a literal pilot who shows Milkman the way out of the snobbish, elitist white world and leads him to a genuine appreciation of his rich ethnic origins. Peter Bruck contends that "Pilate emerges as Milkman's pilot, guiding him…out of the death-world of his parents towards his true destiny, i.e. the discovery of his African heritage" (293). Bruck refers to Macon and Ruth's world as a "deathworld" because it encompasses only hollow values related to the amassment of material wealth and lays emphasis on a decadent, artificial, bourgeoisie lifestyle. It does not throb with the pulse of life, love, caring, and the richness of natural values as Pilate's household does. Milkman, therefore, needs genealogical guidance from his aunt to emerge out of this Hades-like environment, and breathe the free air of his sweet cultural heritage.

Though Pilate's life is full of creditable deeds, her greatest failure is her inability to instil in her beloved granddaughter, Hagar, the authentic African values she herself holds so sacred. Pilate's one failure is devastating for Hagar and ultimately marks for her the difference between life and death. As her granddaughter gives up her life in desperation, Pilate turns the Christian funeral service into a genuine African ritual at the end of which she declares passionately, as if trying to convince herself along with the rest of the congregation, "And she was *loved*" (319). Reed observes that "through her actions, Pilate rejected the empty Christian sermonizing. Her references were to activities Hagar shared with the living: the music, the morning and the evening" (59). This comment suggests that Pilate chooses to perform Hagar's last rites in true African fashion—more in keeping with her own preferences. She thus brings an element of

warmth and compassion to an otherwise impersonal, rigidly prim and proper ceremony so far removed from the way she and her family have always lived. Most importantly, however, by manipulating the funeral service, Pilate does for Hagar in death what she could not do for her in life—integrates her into African culture and reclaims for her the ethnic heritage Hagar had, unfortunately, never learned to acknowledge during her lifetime. Pilate also performs another duty for her granddaughter when she presents a shoe box full of Hagar's hair to Milkman on his return from the South. A matured and mellow Milkman, just back from a journey that has helped him rediscover himself, has already realized the magnitude of his folly. He receives the box with gratitude—promising to hold on to the hair as a prized possession. Smith explains that "Milkman, insensitive to Hagar and unwilling to accept responsibility for her in life, understands her post-humously and assumes the burden of her death…[he] resolve[s] to carry with him the box of Hagar's hair: a symbol of his newly acquired cyclical vision of a past he no longer needs to escape" (731). After his journey, Milkman has learned to appreciate both the larger and the immediate community of black women surrounding him. He has also attained a new selfhood by assimilating himself into his past, and by recognizing the real value of his ethnic background—a background that he had previously shunned in favour of white, upper-class values. His acceptance of Hagar's hair signifies a victory for Pilate not only because she succeeds in exorcizing her granddaughter's unrequited-love ghost but also because it indicates that she has finally handed down to her nephew the priceless legacy of his African heritage. He is now able to understand why the hair is as much part of him as it was part of her, and finally realizes the value of the tresses he could not cherish while Hagar was alive.

Milkman also reveals to Pilate the intricate messages contained in her father's words which she had hitherto been misinterpreting, and stuns her by the revelation that she has, in fact, been carrying his bones around rather than those of the white man. He then takes her back to Virginia so that she can bury the bones on Solomon's Leap. It is here that Guitar, who has come in search of Milkman, shoots him, and kills Pilate. As she lies dying, she tells Milkman, "I wish I'd a knowed more people…. If I'd a knowed more, I would a loved more" (336). Even her last words are about other people—indicating her selfless devotion to the black community—and her willingness to sacrifice her self in its service. She wants to embrace all humanity—to pass on the priceless value of the African cultural heritage to the black world before she departs from it. As Milkman bends over her, she asks him to sing to her. For the first time in his entire life, Milkman

raises his voice in song. He renders for her the Sugargirl version of her favourite Sugarman song—the song of Shalimar (Solomon) which has already conveyed its legendary wisdom to the singer and helped him define himself genealogically and communally. As Pilate breathes her last, Milkman finally understands that "without ever leaving the ground, she could fly" (336). This understanding is compounded by the image of a bird that scoops Pilate's earring in its beak, and flies away. Milkman realizes that Pilate could fly because she was without vanity, without complexes, and not bound to the ground by earthly possessions or materialistic desires. She had, instead, the rare quality of detachment that allowed her to soar far above the rest of the world. She was one of the mythic flying Africans who could rise above the literal and metaphoric enslavement to white society and fly back to the freedom of their African past and ethnic origins.

Perhaps the character most similar to Pilate in disposition and spirit is Circe—an old (or, rather, ancient) black woman whose white employer kills Macon Dead Senior—Pilot and Macon's father. Circe shelters the young siblings till they come to terms with the tragedy and are able to fend for themselves. Just as her healing touch soothes and protects them when they are impressionable, innocent, and stunned, her prophetic wisdom guides Milkman several years later—when his quest for his true identity leads him to her house. Judith Fletcher draws an impelling connection between Morrison's Circe in *Song of Solomon* and Homer's Circe in *Odyssey*. She contends that Circe plays a pivotal role in Milkman's awakening.

> Milkman's episode with [Circe] has been, despite his disappointed expectations, a transformative experience. She is a liminal figure who mediates between death and life, but she also sits at the portal between two stories, not only the two sections of the novel, but also the novel and the epic tradition. Under her direction time for Milkman has folded in on itself: he experiences a reversal of the birth process and is then reborn. (414)

When Morrison tinges Circe's character with an epic and mythical quality, she turns the quest of a mere individual (Milkman) into the quest of generations of people who go relentlessly about the business of living without any inkling of a rich and abundant past that can give meaning to their existence. Circe is a housekeeper and midwife by profession—with both words connoting deeper meanings. She is, in essence, a keeper of the house of Africa. It is as if she has willed herself to surpass the average lifespan of an average woman so that she can keep African traditions alive in an alien land as long as possible. She is able to kindle in Milkman's heart an appreciation of long-cherished and revered black customs and values—thus ensuring that they will be passed on to future generations as well.

The uncanny longevity of her life, combined with her rather obvious aging, gives her an almost ethereal, mystical, enigmatic quality—all of which combine to have a mesmerising effect on Milkman. In spite of himself, Milkman finds that he is pushed along—as if by a spell—to go in search of his true identity. At another level, Circe has literally helped countless mothers to bring countless babies into the world, but figuratively she acts as a midwife for Milkman—delivering him from ignorance into knowledge, from a meaningless existence to a meaningful one. She gives a new birth to him because she motivates him to discover the real names of his people and places—all of which are an integral part of him and his identity. She teaches him to cherish who he is and where he comes from. It is with her figurative, mythical touch that she subtly wipes away the sheen of complacence and uncaring that shrouds his being like the amniotic fluid—and a new, awed, yet wiser Milkman emerges.

This essay is not about Milkman's exemplary awakening, however, but about the women who shaped his quest and made such a self-discovery possible. Roberta Rubenstein asserts that Morrison "portrays a hero who achieves manhood by assimilating a traditionally female moral perspective into his previously limited vision…the sacrifices on his behalf by Pilate and others generate his own sense of himself as part of a community to which he belongs by reciprocal responsibility" (151). Milkman is able to define himself as an individual only because of the contributions of the remarkable women he has come in contact with. His rediscovery of his selfhood and new identity as a black man is compounded by a new awareness of these women in his life whom he had always taken for granted.

In *Song of Solomon*, therefore, Morrison seems to have scored a double victory. The main character is male, but he becomes a complete man only because of the direct and indirect but always powerful influences of the women in his life. These women themselves grow, develop and change because of Milkman's involvement in their lives. After finally laying her dead father's ghost by burying his bones, Pilate dies secure in the knowledge that she has ultimately understood the message contained in the words he always repeated to her. Hagar dies posthumously appreciated by Milkman, and one hopes that her ghost will rest in peace. Lena and Ruth continue in pretty much the same way, but both have redeemed themselves slightly. Lena has finally released her pent-up anger at Milkman, and Ruth has atoned for his deplorable act by ensuring a decent burial for Hagar. Corinthians emerges as the most successful of the Dead women (excluding Pilate) because she finally realizes that self-worth is more important than material worth, and begins to appreciate her new identity. She

learns to defy her tyrannical father, and finds that she has no qualms about living with Porter in a small, ramshackle house. She learns, in essence, to listen to her heart, and to appreciate herself for what she *is*, rather than what she *has*. Morrison reiterates in the end that the women who define themselves in terms of their ethnic heritage and larger community do not need to validate their existence by the presence of such externals as the compulsory love of a man, a craving for material wealth or the desire to be beautiful by majority standards. This suggests, ultimately, that the women who deride their blackness or try not to acknowledge it fail in life—like Hagar and Ruth. Those who view it with pride from the beginning or learn to respect it later, find in it their greatest strength and their happiest reason for living—or dying.

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THE BANGLADESHI GENOCIDE IN ROHINTON MISTRY'S *SUCH A LONG JOURNEY*

Bindu Malieckal

The genocide of "black Africans" by "Arabized Africans" in Darfur, Sudan, consists of murder, rape, and pillage of horrific proportions.[1] Thousands have been and continue to be killed, violated, orphaned, and displaced.[2] As Andrew Bell-Fialkoff, Eric Weitz, Samantha Power, Peter Balakian, Götz Aly, and others have argued, other genocides of the last one hundred years, among them the Armenian genocide (1.5 million killed) and the Holocaust (6 million Jews murdered), have shown a similar trajectory.[3] "Genocide," according to Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term in 1944, is a combination of *genos* (Greek for "race" or "tribe") and *cide* (Latin for "murder") (Rothenberg 396). The United Nations' Genocide Convention of 1951 explains that genocide consists of "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group" (Rothenberg 396). According to Patricia Viseur Sellers, trials following the war in the former Yugoslavia and the Rwandan genocide have established rape as a "crime against humanity," a recognition that claims retroactive relevance to rapes committed during World War II and later (866).

Few publications on genocide and racism examine the Bangladeshi genocide of March 25 to December 16, 1971. Estimates of casualties vary, but the most recurring figures, as per the analyses of Craig Baxter, Norman Brown, James Heitzman and Robert Worden, Rounaq Jahan, and Edward Kennedy suggest that approximately 3 million Bengalis lost their lives, 250,000 women were

[1] See Kristof and Prunier for overviews of the Darfur genocide.

[2] See Buckley; Kristof; McCandlish and Hay; Polgreen.

[3] Included on this list are the Rape of Nanking, the Killing Fields of Cambodia, and the Rawandan genocide. For additional sources, see Chang; Gellately and Kiernan.

raped, 10 million refugees entered India, and 30 million Bengalis were dispossessed.[4] Like the Armenian genocide, often labeled "the forgotten genocide," the Bangladeshi genocide might be called "the neglected genocide," for recent studies of genocide give the disaster the briefest of reviews.[5]

In contrast, literature does depict the Bangladeshi genocide: authors Jahanara Imam, Jhumpa Lahiri, and most recently Tahmima Anam recount its horrors,[6] but Indo-Canadian author Rohinton Mistry, in his novel *Such a Long Journey* (1991), in addition to condemning the genocide, theorizes on the despotism and racism that precipitated the genocide and argues that similar reasons account for conflicts in a family with a tyrannical patriarch, as is the case in protagonist Gustad Noble's household; in Bombay due to the Shiv Sena's exclusionary political ideology; in India under Indira Gandhi's corrupt rule; and in an international arena controlled by a "superpower" such as the United States. Despotism, racism, and genocide are described through the metaphor of the "fracture." Gustad's broken hip, among other examples of separation, parallels the rift in Pakistan. These literal fractures represent a collective, figurative break of the human "state," a break preventable and repairable with both acceptance and determination, the untraditional medicines to adhere otherwise broken relations, exemplified by the Bangladeshi genocide, in *Such a Long Journey*.

In *Such a Long Journey*, the blackout paper covering the windows of Gustad's apartment is a holdover from the India-China War of 1962, nine years previously. Gustad is pleased that he never removed the paper, as it was useful during the India-Pakistan War of 1965, and it becomes necessary for the India-Pakistan War of 1971, which commences by the end of the novel. The blackout paper reminds Gustad of personal "wars," past and present, from his battle with depressing memories of his family's bankruptcy to the defiance of Sohrab, Gustad's oldest child. "War" might describe the everyday clashes that Bombayites experience as inhabitants of a bustling, poorly-governed city: the hustle to collect water during the two hours that public water

[4] For additional sources on the atrocities of the Bangladeshi genocide, see Chaudhuri; Habiba; Kamal; Malik.

[5] For instance, Power mentions the Bangladeshi genocide only in one paragraph, and Weitz does not address it at all.

[6] Jahanara Imam's *Ekattorer Dingulee* (1986) is a diary that she kept during the genocide. Jhumpa Lahiri's collection *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) contains a story, "When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine," which addresses the genocide. Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* (2008) is a historical novel set during the genocide.

flows before taps run dry; the struggle to ensure that necessities like milk are administered without being diluted; the fight to board the city's crowded public transport system; the setbacks of middle class families in a tax-heavy economy; the resistance—in the form of a protest march or *morcha*—to municipal ineptitude.

These "wars" on the home front complement the genocide in Bangladesh. The term "Bangladeshi genocide" might seem like a misnomer, as the nation of Bangladesh was born after the genocide ended, but Bangladesh emanated from "East Pakistan," which, together with West Pakistan, were the two discontinuous regions that comprised the nation of Pakistan between 1947 and 1971. East Pakistanis' desire for autonomy was the catalyst for West Pakistan's military intervention, called "Operation Searchlight." Hostilities immediately became genocidal carnage.

In *Such a Long Journey*, the first reference to the Bangladeshi genocide establishes its terror. Gustad, reading his morning paper, sees a photograph of a "half-naked mother weeping with a dead child in her arms," the caption of which "was about soldiers using Bengali babies for bayonet practice" (7). Another day's newspaper reports "Bengali refugees streaming over the border with tales of terror and bestiality, of torture and killings and mutilations; of women in ditches with their breasts sliced off, babies impaled on bayonets, charred bodies everywhere, whole villages razed" (12). These are references to the rape of Bengali women and the mutilation of children by West Pakistani soldiers and commanders during the genocide. Dinshawji, Gustad's friend, comments, "Bloody butchers, slaughtering left and right" (76). Gustad's other friend Jimmy Bilimoria, who as an agent for RAW (India's Secret Service) trains an East Pakistani guerilla force called the Mukti Bahini, condemns the "atrocities" by "Pakistani butchers" (91).

Peerbhoy Paanwalla's allegorical rendering of the genocide reveals the racist elements of the conflict. At one point in his epic, Paanwalla narrates that the "Drunkard" (Yahya Khan, the President of Pakistan from 1969-1971) gives a direct order to his general, the "Butcher" (Tikka Khan, appointed military governor of East Pakistan in 1971 and known as the "Butcher of Baluchistan" for his suppression of an uprising in the 1960s) and commands, "The Bengalis are forgetting their place. Those dark-skinned shorties are using big-big words like justice and equality and self-determination, which makes them feel tall and fair and powerful like us. Go there and sort them out" (307). The slur "dark-skinned shorties" accompanies the xenophobic conviction that people of color are undeserving of democratic self-rule, that "whites" should be administrators, so genocide was the

response to the disruption of this "natural order."[7] For the Pakistani army—a mostly hegemonic corps after its Bengali officers deserted en masse in 1971—"the enemy" (the Bengali) was not a political entity but a "racial other"—seemingly identifiable by a darker complexion and shorter stature. According to Pranay Gupte, the army's prejudices reflect racial myths of the subcontinent's northwestern peoples, who claimed undiluted "Aryan" blood compared to the supposed indigenousness of other South Asians, including Bengalis (397).

Indeed, by committing a genocide, the army hoped to compromise Bengali identity, culture, language, and literature, all thought to be influenced by Hinduism (Jahan 292), an assessment made on the basis that East Pakistan shared the bulk of its borders with India, whereas West Pakistan's placement at the eastern edge of a continuum of Muslim nations made it more consistently "Islamic" than "Indian."[8] In 1971, Hindus formed 18% of East Pakistan's total population of 60.8 million. One of Operation Searchlight's primary missions was to seek and destroy Hindu neighborhoods ("The Bengali Refugees" 25). Also, as Mohammed Ayoob and K. Subrahmanyam point out, there existed the belief that most of the teachers in East Pakistan were Hindus whose inclination would be to promote Bengali culture over Pakistani identity, Hindu intellectuals were assassinated (175). To find Hindus, the Pakistani army would strip-search civilians seeking signs of circumcision. Banks were ordered to freeze Hindu accounts, the army painted yellow "H" signs on Hindu houses and businesses, and the army proclaimed via loud-speaker that it would pay 25 rupees for every Hindu turned in, which prompted Muslims to paint "All Muslim House" on their domiciles and Christians to stitch red crosses into their clothes (Kennedy 48). Kennedy compares the singling out of Bengali Hindus to the oppression of Jews during the Third Reich: "Not since Nazi Germany were so many citizens of a country publicly marked with religious labels and symbols" (48).[9]

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[7] Jahan elaborates, "There were elements of racism in this act of genocide. The Pakistani army, consisting of mainly Punjabis and Pathans [Pashtuns], had always looked upon the Bengalis as racially inferior—a non-martial, physically weak race, not interested or able to serve in the army" (296).

[8] Anthony Mascarenhas claims that West Pakistan always "consider[ed] itself as part of the Middle East" and that in 1958, it sought a "confederation" with Iran and Afghanistan (10). Mohammed Ayoob and K. Subrahmanyam paraphrase comments in West Pakistani journals from the time: "The Bengali Muslim was not sufficiently Islamic because he was influenced to a large extent by the Hindu Bengali culture" (174).

[9] Although West and East Pakistanis were co-religionists, the former regarded the latter as spurious Muslims on account of history and geography (Mascarenhas 18). Yahya Khan is reported to have declared, "'First and foremost, make these *Bengalis* Muslim'" (qtd. in D'Costa 14). Since East Pakistanis received Islam in the

In *Such a Long Journey*, Mistry aligns the "despotic" beliefs and practices of various "democratic" individuals and institutions: from Yahya Khan and American President Richard Nixon (an ally of Pakistan) to Indira Gandhi and Bal Thackeray, leader of the Bombay-based Shiv Sena party. Raising these comparisons proposes that although democracies might claim distance from absolutism, they can also breed despots who commit or support "genocide" in various forms. When Sohrab lists the accusations of corruption leveled at Indira Gandhi —"'She made a real mockery of democracy'" (93)—Gustad describes Sohrab's views as "'rumours'" (93) and unsubstantiated "rubbish about the Prime Minister" (93). "'Be grateful this is a democracy,'" he reminds Sohrab. To Ghulam Mohammed's prediction that Jimmy will be killed for defying Indira Gandhi, Gustad's naïve response—"'This is not Russia or China'" (234)—shows that for the ordinary citizen, democracy's reputation and leadership appear comparatively positive. Gustad does not realize, however, that his hard life in India under Indira Gandhi is the result of her silencing of oppositional views and her appropriation of government funds for personal projects rather than community development. Gustad and his friends have as little freedom as the "dogwallah idiot" Mr. Rabadi's yapping canine: they are all on a short leash, despite living in a democracy.

Mistry's novel holds Yahya Khan directly responsible for the Bangladeshi genocide. Although Khan permitted a national election to take place on December 7, 1970 (after several delays), his legacy is that of a "military dictator" (Brown 211-212), the appointee of a nepotistic predecessor (Heitzman and Worden 28), and "unscrupulous despot" (Anderson and Clifford 218) due to his refusal to accept the election results, which would have put Mujibur Rahman in power. Mistry places Khan in the category of "fanatics and dictators" (12). When describing Khan's administrative practices, the condemnation is taken further: "The debauched and alcoholic president of the enemy was said to be organizing unceasing bacchanals to keep his minister and general occupied: He feared an ouster if they regained their senses for too long. Thus did the crazed syphilitic cling to power, growing ever more desperate as he saw, though his haze of liquor,

twelfth-century, several hundred years after the invasion of Sind in the eighth-century, a date most often but incorrectly cited as the introduction of the faith to India, Bengali Muslims were considered latecomers to Islam and therefore less legitimate in their religious lineage and commitment, a debatable position given the unbroken string of Turks, Afghans, and Mughals who ruled the East. The Mappilas of Kerala are the "first Muslims" of India. Islam was introduced in Kerala, India's southwestern state, by Arab missionaries during the Prophet's lifetime or immediately after his death (Miller 39).

the unyielding worm gnawing contentedly at his brain" (297). Khan's stereotyping as an intoxicated, promiscuous, and paranoid despot whose physical decay precedes his death suggests that his hold on power, while absolute enough to pursue a genocide, is also tenuous. Indeed, Yahya Khan was forced to relinquish his post to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, father of the recently assassinated Benazir Bhutto, soon after the storm.

No such weaknesses, physical or political, are visible in Mistry's rendering of Indira Gandhi. Yahya Khan is satirized, but Indira Gandhi is a complicated, Machiavellian character, the source for the statements "'My feeling is, when government wants something, it gets it, one way or another'" (126); "'Age of honour and trust is gone for ever now'" (145); and "In this country, laws don't apply to the ones at the top" (204). While Gandhi's legacy is mixed, in *Such a Long Journey*, she is unquestionably dishonorable, the embodiment of "[c]rookedness" (271). Mistry lists Indira Gandhi's crimes as the nationalization of banks and widespread unemployment it caused (38); the avoidance of due process in awarding her son, Sanjay, the Maruti car project (68); ballot-tampering and the transfer of judges to avoid criminal prosecution (93). Sohrab, a staunch critic of Indira Gandhi, claims, "'Our wonderful Prime Minister uses RAW like a private police force, to do all her dirty work'" (93) and "'to spy on opposition parties, create trouble, start violence so the police can interfere. It's a well-known fact'" (93). The broken Jimmy Bilimoria, a direct victim of Gandhi's manipulation and betrayal, elucidates upon her corruption in his dying statement to Gustad: "'she was using RAW like her own private agency. Spying on opposition parties, ministers . . . anyone. For blackmail. Made me sick'" (270). He adds, "'Bribes, thievery . . . so much going on, Gustad. RAW kept dossiers. On friends and enemies. Where they went, who they met, what they said, what they ate, what they drank [. . . .] Her friends become enemies and her enemies become friends . . . so quickly. So often. Blackmail is the only way she can keep control . . . keep them all in line. Disgusting'" (270).

Jimmy's scathing indictment of Indira Gandhi nonetheless acknowledges her talent for retaining power: "'Strong woman, Gustad, very strong woman . . . very intelligent'" (270). Jimmy's close association with Gandhi causes his downfall when he becomes a pawn in her embezzlement scheme. Jimmy admits that he was tricked by the Prime Minister because he so "'trusted her completely'" (277) that she finagled him into signing a false confession admitting to his involvement in the plot (277). When Jimmy realizes the magnitude of her deceit, which he never suspected, he has a revelation about Gandhi's despotism and its consequences on the average Indian:

"'What hope for the country? With such crooked leaders? [. . . .] I sat thinking of all the people I had come across in my life . . . men in the army, good men. And my Ghulam Mohammed. Khodadad Building . . . the families living there. You and Dilnavaz, the children, the ambitions you have for them. And those bastards, those ministers and politicians, those ugly buffaloes and pigs . . . getting fatter and fatter, sucking our blood'" (279). Jimmy's statement explains that Indira Gandhi and other officials in India's democracy, while chosen by the people to lead them and improve the conditions of the country, in fact do the opposite: exploitation is the norm. Since the poorest and least influential are calamitously affected by such politics, how different are these particular democracies from oppressive regimes? If Indians writhe under their own bureaucrats in the same way that Sohrab impaled insects to create a display case or the Pakistani army bayoneted Bengalis during its rampage, is Indira Gandhi's rule a "genocide"?

Similarly, "fascism" might describe the philosophy of the Shiv Sena ("army of Shiva"), the Hindu fundamentalist party led by the despotic Bal Thackeray, but is "genocide" the correct term for the faction's activities since its formation in 1966? In *Such a Long Journey*, Mistry does not mince words in his condemnation of Thackeray, "that bastard Shiv Sena leader who worships Hitler and Mussolini" (73), and when criticizing the ideology of the Shiv Sena: "No future for minorities [in Bombay], with all these fascist Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense. It was going to be like the black people in America—twice as good as the white man to get half as much" (55). Thackeray, who has publicly proclaimed his admiration of Hitler, says that the Shiv Sena's explicit aim is the expulsion of "minorities"—anyone of non-Marathi ethnicity—from Bombay. Traditionally, Muslims and south Indians have been the Shiv Sena's targets. More recently, the Shiv Sena has singled out Bangladeshi immigrants in Bombay (now re-christened "Mumbai" by the Shiv Sena) in part because the émigrés are mostly Muslims. "Enemies" of the Shiv Sena have been the frequent recipients of lynchings and intimidation, irrespective of age or gender.[10] As *Such a Long Journey* explains, once the India-Pakistan war begins in 1971, "Shiv Sena patrols and motley fascists" pelt houses not properly "blacked-out" (288), not to caution fellow Bombayites but to condemn perceived supporters of Pakistan.

The Shiv Sena recruits Tehmul-Lungraa, Gustad's crippled and mentally disabled neighbor, to distribute "racist pamphlets aimed

[10] For more on Bal Thackeray and the Shiv Sena, see MacFarquhar and Mehta.

against minorities in Bombay" (86). Tehmul's child-like innocence contrasts with the despotism of Yahya Khan, Indira Gandhi, Bal Thackeray, and even Gustad's wife, Dilnavaz, who makes Tehmul the recipient of Sohrab and daughter Roshan's negative energy. Tehmul dies following the successful completion of Dilnavaz's "necromantic" (69) machinations to mend the family. Although the intellectually-limited Tehmul has superior morals compared to "healthy" characters who are calculating imbeciles, Tehmul's broken mind and body signify distorted politics, from the Bangladeshi genocide and Indira Gandhi's designs to Dilnavaz's superstitions and the Shiv Sena's racism.

Tehmul is a key figure in *Such a Long Journey* for being Gustad's less-fortunate doppelganger. Both men have a limp, a reminder of their respective accidents. Both men carry the distress inflicted by their "falls," Tehmul from anguish he feels when rejected by women and Gustad through his disappointment with Sohrab, who refuses to respect his father's wishes and join the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology (IIT). Instead, Sohrab wants to earn a BA at his present college. Gustad opposes Sohrab's desire because he believes that an engineering degree is the ticket to guaranteed prosperity, whereas opportunities for graduates of liberal studies can be as limited as the pavement artist's prospects (the pavement artist has two BAs, one in World Religions and another in Art). Gustad's disagreement with Sohrab, however, is not merely a matter of the practical application of specific degrees. Sohrab's pursuit of his academic interests instead of following his father's plans is, in Gustad's mind, inexcusable insubordination and ungranted sovereignty. Gustad's despotism is further inflamed when Sohrab expresses criticism of Indira Gandhi and the government, views that Gustad, with his unquestioning faith in the Prime Minister and in democracy, finds outrageous. Gustad's attitudes will later change when he learns from Jimmy of Gandhi's corruption. Before he does, Sohrab's dismissal of both IIT and the Indian government suggests to Gustad disrespect for his authority in the same way that East Pakistan's efforts at greater freedom from West Pakistan were opposed. Gustad responds violently to Sohrab's perspectives. He speaks sarcastically and cruelly to his son. He attempts to slap Sohrab and to flay him with a belt. He concludes, "'My son is dead'" (52). He recommends that Sohrab move "'Out of my house, out of my life!'" (52). Upon Tehmul's death, Gustad and Sohrab are reunited, but their separation reflects the Bangladeshi genocide's motifs of absolutism, autonomy, and victimization. The difference between the Bangladeshi genocide and the Gustad-Sohrab confrontation is that while the former's resolution was the permanent fracture of Pakistan, the latter was settled through reconciliation.

Gustad and Sohrab's hug at the conclusion of *Such a Long Journey* is a happy ending for two of its important characters and reveals that Gustad has "made peace" with his troubles. No such warm embrace occurs to end the Bangladeshi genocide; rather, tensions escalate to the level of war between India and Pakistan and the threat of a nuclear incident between the United States and the Soviet Union. The India-Pakistan War of 1971 commences near the conclusion of *Such a Long Journey*, but from the beginning of the novel, memories of India's previous wars are still fresh in characters' memories. Gustad recalls Jimmy holding forth about his exploits during the India-Pakistan War of 1948: "His stories, as he described the various episodes—the crossing of Banihal Pass, the battle for Baramullah, the siege of Srinagar—were so fascinating" (13). Jimmy also noted the "wild and ferocious tribesmen" of Pakistan's "North-West Frontier" who in Kashmir, "hacked up their victims and went from house to house in search of money and jewels and women" (13). Gustad remembers India's "humiliating defeat" (9) in the China war of 1962, then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's "betrayal" by Chinese Premier Chou En-lai (10), Nehru's subsequent "tyrannical ill temper and petulance" (11), and his "monomaniacal fixation" (11) to entrench Indira as his successor. Dr. Paymaster praises Lal Bahadur Shastri, India's Prime Minister during the war of 1965, in which India defeated Pakistan in twenty-one days: "'Short in height but tall in brains is our Lal Bahadur'" (114). References to the wars of 1948, 1962, and 1965 are not strict historical accounts but dramatic epics with patriots, traitors, adventures, misfortunes, and triumphs. Up to a point, the India-Pakistan War of 1971 is told along these lines as well, in particular through Dr. Paymaster's and Peerbhoy Paanwalla's sagas, reminiscent of Jimmy tales. The storytellers conjure suspenseful plots, engrossing characterization, and a partially comic depiction of the hostilities (Paanwalla's "The Drunkard" and "The Butcher" are menacing but humorous), but they don't dwell upon the gritty reality of war.

Despotism and genocide were elements of India's wars prior to 1971 (the northwest mercenaries' pillage, Nehru's cantankerousness, Chou En-lai's duplicity), but the India-Pakistan War of 1971 differed from previous engagements. *Such a Long Journey* argues that war was necessary to terminate the chaos of the genocide and to resuscitate India, drowning under a deluge of Bengali refugees. Gustad reads that refugees from East Pakistan number four to seven million and that a total of ten million refugees are predicted (128). Although Pakistani sources claimed only two million refugees in India (Ayoob and Subrahmanyam 166), ten million is the more acceptable figure.

India accepted approximately 100,000 refugees every day in June ("The Bengali Refugees" 25). Conditions were poor in refugee camps. India reputedly spent $1,330,000 per day on refugees ("The Bengali Refugees" 26), but inadequate shelter, sanitation, food, and water, as well as cholera outbreaks were common (Kennedy 15). Gustad concludes, about India's commitment, "Too many to feed, in a country that cannot feed its own" (128).

To alleviate the financial burden, a refugee relief tax—increase of the sales tax, tax on public transport, entertainment, and the like—was instituted in seven states, including Maharashtra, where Bombay is located (Rizvi 139). Although created to help the Indian government sustain East Pakistani refugees, the refugee relief tax ends up becoming a hardship on those paying the tax. Malcolm Saldanha, Gustad's musician friend, complains that he cannot teach as often as he wishes: "'[W]ho can afford pianos and lessons these days? With the refugee tax and all?'" (220). Gustad and Dilnavaz live on a tight budget. Every purchase, even something as basic as mosquito repellent, can be a strain on their finances when inflation is high. When Darius (Gustad's second son) and Roshan's schools request old newspapers to sell so that the money can increase a refugee relief fund, Gustad and Dilnavaz must explain that the family can afford new subscriptions only by recycling preceding issues. Gustad's comment, "'This refugee relief tax [. . .] is going to make us all refugees'" (83), reveals that he will benefit from a war that, in eliminating the refugee crisis, will rescue his finances. Even the prostitutes of the House of Cages charge extra to compensate for the refugee relief tax (308).

Gustad's children are cognizant of the refugees' predicament. Roshan, whose "chronic diarrhoea" (110) coincides with cholera epidemics in refugee camps (and generally the "sickness" that is genocide), explains, "'They are people who ran away from East Pakistan and came to India because the people from West Pakistan are killing them and burning all their homes'" (80). "Killing" and "burning" are a far cry from Gustad's treatment of Sohrab, but parallels exist nonetheless. When Sohrab moves out, he becomes a refugee who finds shelter at a friend's house. The latter environment, like his college, is less oppressive than home. Sohrab doesn't hesitate to visit his parents and siblings, but he appears to be happy under his friend's roof. There, Sohrab can cultivate those artistic interests he exhibited as a child, talents that Gustad tolerated but never entertained as viable career options. Ironically, as a refugee, Sohrab has the opportunity to retain his identity and chosen discipline. In Gustad's midst, Sohrab would have had to compromise his life. Sohrab's fracture from Gustad is similar to the pavement artist's abandonment of the wall of all

religions. Previously, the pavement artist had been nomadic, but after Gustad invites him to work on the wall and when the wall becomes a place of pilgrimage, the pavement artist makes plans to permanently reside near his masterpiece. The municipality's decision to destroy the wall to widen the road represents the death of multiculturalism (the wall depicts the saints and the significance of all religions) for the kind of hegemony espoused by the Shiv Sena. The wall's fall finds the pavement artist "homeless" once again. Like Sohrab, the refugee status is forced upon the pavement artist because he becomes a victim of despotism and genocide, systems that expunge professionals and professors (similar to way that the Pakistani army made it a point to exterminate Bengali "intellectuals").

What is the solution to a refugee crisis, Sohrab's split from Gustad, and the pavement artist's expulsion? In a conversation with Malcolm on "the state of the nation" (230), Gustad justifies why India should support East Pakistan: "'Indira has visited every country in Europe, they all say they sympathize. But nobody does a damn thing to make Pakistan behave decently. What is left but war?'" (230). Indeed, from October 16 to November 13, Indira Gandhi visited the United States and Europe seeking assistance for refugees and international condemnation of Pakistan (Ayoob and Subrahmanyam 206). The western hemisphere's disinclination to enter the fray strengthened the possibility of an India-Pakistan war. On December 3, after both Pakistan and India attacked each other's military installations, war was declared (Ghosh 221). India began major assaults by land, air, and sea, and stepped up its activities with the Mukti Bahini (Ghosh 222). The India-Pakistan War lasted from December 3 to December 16, a mere fourteen days, during which the Indian army's effortless capture of Dacca and other parts of East Pakistan forced the Pakistani army to surrender. Similarly, to foster a ceasefire between Gustad and Sohrab, Dilnavaz battles the bad karma between father and son. She gives Tehmul the juice of limes that have been used to extract Sohrab's willfulness. She sets fire to a lizard and forces Tehmul to watch the creature die. As for the dismantling of the wall of all religions, the municipality faces unexpected opposition from a *morcha* protesting the government's neglect of civic amenities. The *morcha* spontaneously takes the side of Khodadad Building's residents who, with the wall's demolition, would lose their privacy and peace.[11]

[11] In these cases, war is seen as the necessary solution to a pressing problem, but the destruction of governments, civic infrastructure, cultural artifacts, communities, the death of civilians, the creation of orphans, and the infliction of lifelong disabilities are the inevitable fallout of any war. The India-Pakistan War of 1971 might have saved the Bengalis of East Pakistan from genocide and may have lasted only a fortnight,

In *Such a Long Journey*, the Bangladeshi genocide is portrayed as a horrific event, but Mistry finds equally appalling the US's reluctance to halt it. Dr. Paymaster argues that the US is an accomplice in the genocide: "Worse, Dr. America is Helping the Virus" (164). Characters routinely deride the US's role in the geopolitical landscape. "'What a world of wickedness it has become'" (142), they point out, since the Cold War had created alliances that sacrificed human life for strategic advantages. "*[M]aader chod* America" (76), decides Dinshawji, who also criticizes the US President, "*chootia* Nixon, licking his way up into Pakistan's arsehole" (76). According to the characters, the US's hatred of the USSR (and passion for its new relationship with China) makes for favoritism towards Pakistan, disregard of India, and discounting of the Bangladeshi genocide. Dinshawji accuses Nixon of ignoring six million Bengalis to appease Pakistan (76). Nixon made no public statements about the genocide, and Joseph Sisco, Assistant Secretary of State, dismissed it as an "'internal matter'" (qtd. in Ayoob and Subrahmanyam 168). Of the US's "unconscionably silent" response, Kennedy writes, "Our national leadership has yet to express one word that would suggest that we do not approve of the genocidal consequences of [Pakistan's] policy" (55). While Mistry does not critique Nixon as extensively as Yahya Khan, Indira Gandhi, and Bal Thackeray and although Watergate is not mentioned, Nixon matches the "crooked leaders" (279) whom Bilimoria complains about.

The US did not consider the Bangladeshi genocide a priority, but it was willing to support West Pakistan and curtail India's defense of East Pakistan. As Dinshawji explains using a "testicular metaphor" (and exaggerated statistics), "'To protect their soft *golaas*, they don't care if six million Bengalis are murdered, long as Pakistan is kept happy'" (Mistry 76). On December 10, as the India-Pakistan war was in full-swing, Major General Rao Farman Ali Khan of Pakistan asked the United Nations to support a ceasefire, but the request was rescinded when Nixon promised Yahya Khan that the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier the *Enterprise*, commanded by Admiral John S. McCain (father of the present Arizona Senator and Presidential candidate John McCain), would be sent to the Bay of Bengal (Anderson and Clifford 225). Mistry's sarcastic rendition of the *Enterprise*'s offensive condemns the US's vanity, hypocrisy, and bullying: "Its glorious mission: to frighten a cyclone-ravaged, war-torn province into submission.

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but it is inconceivable that noncombatants were spared the Indian army's air strikes and ground offensives. Just because accounts of the war are silent vis-à-vis fatalities does not mean that they were nonexistent. In her battle with the "evil eye," Dilnavaz salvages her family but sacrifices Tehmul, who is in the line of fire when the confrontation between the municipality and the *morcha* turns violent.

No one was greatly surprised by this, for mighty America always did like having military dictators for buddies" (298). The arrival of "an armada of Soviet cruisers and destroyers, sailing earnestly from the pages of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship" (299), forced the *Enterprise* to withdraw. *Such a Long Journey* conjectures that "the Soviets merely wanted to remind the Americans of the roles and identities which they had rehearsed for so long on all the important international stages: that Americans were a kind a friendly people, champions of justice and liberty, supporters of freedom struggles and democracies everywhere" (299). Here, the irony is that the US had to be reacquainted with democratic values by Communist USSR. Mistry's subsequent commentary on the standoff appropriates the American National Anthem, which he renders as a sentimentalized rallying cry: "There, in the Bay of Bengal, by the dawn's early light, as the sun's rays made the rippling blue sea to shimmer and the December sky to turn a perfect pink, they remembered every single one of their globally-famous, ever-sparkling virtues. With patriotic tears in their eyes, they put the dust-covers back on their mighty American guns and cannons" (299). The US's reaction reveals the anxiety to maintain its alignment in the Cold War and avoid engaging in activities that might create comparisons with the USSR.

Despite the Bangladeshi genocide's staggering death toll and innumerable sexual assaults, charges were brought against only 193 soldiers, and a war crimes tribunal never took place, due to a deal brokered between India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan concerning the exchange of prisoners and other matters (Jahan 300). The lack of compensation forced victims to cope with their trauma and injuries. How did they thrive, knowing that their attackers had escaped punishment? In *Such a Long Journey*, Cavasji is the elderly, unstable, and outspoken father of Gustad's neighbor. Cavasji regularly rages at God, "register[ing] his displeasure with the Almighty's grossly inequitable way of running the universe" (87). Those affected by the Bangladeshi genocide probably shared Cavasji's sense of victimization. In one of his tirades during the India-Pakistan War, Cavasji asks God to ensure that air strikes equally target the fortunate and the unfortunate: "'I am warning You now only! If You let a bomb fall here, let one fall on Birlas and Mafatlals also! *Bas*! Too much injustice from You! Too much!'" (299). Cavasji's speeches remind of Tehmul's dialogues, Jimmy's confession, and Dinshawji's comedy routines in that they are delivered by the "ill," but Cavasji's raving outlines that discrimination, enforced by the powerful on earth or in heaven, dictates disparate fates. If life and death are predetermined for the powerless, what is left but to rant?

Cavasji's outbursts are balanced by Madhiwalla Bonesetter's quiet healing. Gustad is introduced to Bonesetter by Jimmy, who carries Gustad to Bonesetter to repair his hip, injured while saving Sohrab's life. Gustad's broken body is his shattered youth; his love-hate relationship with friends and Sohrab; and his despair, aka Cavasji, brought on by an overwhelming feeling of misfortune. Unlike Dr. Paymaster's ineffective allopathic medicines for Roshan's diarrhoea but akin to Peerbhoy Paanwalla's *palung-tode*, Bonesetter's cures are infallible, even for the worst orthopedic cases. As a result, Bonesetter is Bombay's living god, "revered like a saint for his miraculous cures" (130), whose patients "awaited deliverance" (131). At Bonesetter's clinic, where the cries of the waiting tear the air, Gustad "detected a strain of hope, hope such as had never been expressed in the words of the most eloquent. Hope pure and primal, that sprang unattended and uncluttered from the very blood of the patients, telling Gustad that redemption was now at hand" (131). In this respect, Bonesetter's effect matches the optimism held by Mount Mary's pilgrims, Gustad among them, praying for succor over candles shaped like body parts. Gustad learns from Malcolm that people of every religion are welcome at Mount Mary Church because "She made no religious distinctions" (222). Bonesetter too accepts everyone and provides his services for free. Honest, humble, and tolerant, Bonesetter is the antithesis of the "crooked."

How are despotism, racism, and genocide, extreme cases of psychological and physiological rupture to be cured? Are intuition, talent, and hope sufficient antidotes? The split between West and East Pakistan coincides with the fractures, illnesses, and breakdowns, caused by repression, that recur throughout *Such a Long Journey*. With a twist of the leg and a prescription for an herbal poultice, Bonesetter mends Gustad's fracture and shows that reconnecting rifts, whether of the bone or in the mind, are achieved with understanding, acceptance, and "treatment," the last being an elastic category that includes medicine, prayer, negotiation, and mildly invasive measures, only when certain of their necessity and upon commitment to restricted engagement. Although *Such a Long Journey* references events that took place more than thirty-five years ago, the circumstances of genocide still resonate in today's world.

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RETHINKING MASCULINITY: CHANGING MEN AND THE DECLINE OF PATRIARCHY IN TIM WINTON'S SHORT STORIES

Sarah Zapata

Tim Winton is considered one of Australia's finest contemporary writers. His prolific work as novelist and short story writer has won him enormous popular and critical acclaim especially in his own country but also in other parts of the world, like the United Kingdom, where his novels *The Riders* (1994) and *Dirt Music* (2001) were short-listed for the prestigious Booker Prize. He wrote his first novel, *An Open Swimmer* (1982), at age 20 and was awarded the Vogel for it. Some of his novels have been made into feature films and adapted for the theatre. *Dirt Music* (2001), his latest novel, won Winton his third Miles Franklin Award.

The subject of masculinity is a recurrent topic in Winton's fictional work as it informs most of his novels and many of his short stories. "Much of his early work," notes Lekkie Hopkins (46), "is concerned with an exploration of what it is to be a son, a father, a husband, a male friend." Critics have often attributed Winton's interest in offering unorthodox versions of masculinity to his unconventional upbringing and the atypical structure of his family. Winton describes his father, who worked as a policeman, in the following way: "my father was a gentle man who did the ironing, the washing, and was, I guess, not very manly by Australian standards" (Watchel 68). Also, in the documentary *The Edge of the World*, he recalls his father's sensitivity: "I still remember seeing my father weep for the first time […] I was kind of gratified because I realised he was human and I loved him more for it." Similarly, women in his family do not embody conventional role models. Winton reckons the men of his family as being weak and sensitive, while women were ambitious and the driving force:

> it was a matriarchal family. All the women were strong and all the men were feckless at best […] I didn't know about the whole patriarchal model until I went to university. I didn't understand about all that stuff, because in my family you got a flogging from the women, and the weak link would always be the man. (Watchel70)

This way Winton's work reflects his unconventional personal experience. While traditional literary texts often uphold traditional concepts of gender roles, new attitudes towards life, such as Winton's, demand new modes of writing, new narratives redefining gender configurations. Broadly speaking, the main concern of Winton's short stories is to explore social changes in relation to gender roles inscribing new models of masculinity and femininity that deflate traditional gender constructions and foster women's equality towards men. These new representations of masculine and feminine identity have to be examined within the larger context of the profound transformations of gender issues during the last decades of the twentieth century, and specially within the current questioning of Australian identity traits.

Nowadays masculinity is becoming a subject of discussion in very different fields such as sociology, anthropology, literature and film. Influenced by the interrogation of gender questions on the part of feminist critics, the starting point for the ongoing preoccupation with masculinity was the questioning of the universal and unproblematic nature of male identity. The fact that masculinity has become a visible and academic object of study "attests, if nothing else," as Abigail Solomon-Godeau observes, "to a destabilization of the notion of masculinity such that it forfeits its previous transparency, its taken-for-grantedness, its normalcy" (70). Over the latter half of the twentieth century, scholars in the fields of feminist and gender studies have strived to challenge dominant gender roles and debunk traditional norms of masculinity inherent in the ideological structure of patriarchy.

Traditional hegemonic constructions of masculinity have more often than not implied repression, alienation and denial of women and of other forms of being a male. As the Australian sociologist Robert Connell puts it in *Gender and Power* (1987), the hegemonic construction of masculinity is "constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women" (183). This configuration of the masculine gender conveys a definition of masculinity based on a series of oppositions which favour male over female, activity over passivity, reason over emotion, the public over the private. In *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir claims that woman in the patriarchal system is constituted as 'other' to the male subject: "She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other" (16). This version of masculinity has been problematized and left open to redefinition through discourse. It was this sense of existential crisis that masculinity faces that prompted the inter-

rogation of the nature of masculine identity. As Kobena Mercer (43) observes, "identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and certainty." Having lost the privilege of invisibility and universality, scholars contend that masculinity should be regarded not as a monolithic entity but as a complex term, which depends on different social and cultural factors such as race, sexuality, age or class. "Since the role norms are social facts," Connell (23) states, "they can be changed by social processes. This will happen whenever the agencies of socialization—family, school, mass media, etc.—transmit new expectations." This argument stresses that gender is articulated through a variety of institutions, apparatuses, discourses and subject positions, while it also questions the biological and 'natural' imperatives as the sole constitutive basis of gender identity construction.

Following this line of thought sociologists suggest replacing the singular constitutive quality of masculinity by the plural, bringing to the fore the existence of multiple masculinities in which rigid boundaries of gender representation are blurred. "[T]he term 'masculinities' is," as David Morgan argues, "a theoretical and political strategy designed to deconstruct conventional stereotypes which may get in the way of understanding the workings of patriarchy" (Horrocks 5). Nowadays, society, cultural practices and the mass media provide us with very different images of feminized masculinities and masculinised femininities so far subordinated to the cultural norm. On her study of the appearance of new unconventional mass-cultural images representing masculinity, Solomon-Godeau explains that "it seems equally clear that these new, 'feminized' iconographies of masculinity in the mass media may presage or reflect tidal shifts in the articulation and, by implication, the lived subjectivity of contemporary men" (70). It is not surprising then that there has been a gradually increasing awareness of gender changes among men and some of them seem to adopt new individual masculine attitudes. As Connell observes: "we should not be surprised to find among the men of the rich countries a widespread awareness of change in gender arrangements" (201).

Critics argue that some men feel at ease with the erosion of traditional constructions of male identity, since they seem to suffer from the obligations placed on them by patriarchy. Horrocks claims "patriarchal masculinity cripples men," since traditional manhood "requires such a self-destructive identity, a deeply masochistic self-denial, a shrinkage of the self, a turning away from whole areas of life, that the man who obeys the demands of masculinity has become only half-human" (25). On the one hand, this new consciousness brought

about several kinds of movements such as gay liberation and the emergence of new discourses on masculinity politics that seek greater balance towards gender equity. On the other hand, some other men feel frustrated and hope for a return to the old gender division system by joining various men's movements such as the mythopoetic or 'masculinity therapy,' led by poet Robert Bly, which addresses the anxiety and uncertainty men suffer about gender relations.

The crisis of masculinity and the reconfiguration of gender roles previously discussed are even more disturbing in a culture such as the Australian, which has built its national identity upon several popular and cultural myths which extol the concept of virility:

> the image of the ideal or typical Australian associated with the new nationalism of the 1890s was a decidedly masculine one, whether conceived as a pioneer, gold-miner, or bushman. The figure of the soldier or digger was added to this list by the coming of World War I, and particularly events at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915, subsequently enshrined in the Australian calendar as Anzac Day. (Webby 9)

These national myths of the pioneer, the larrikin, the bushranger, and the soldier embodied and promoted an hegemonic version of masculinity. In her book *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in an Australian Cultural Tradition* (1988), Kay Schaffer points out that "the dominant norms of Australian culture are masculine, White, Anglo-Irish and heterosexual" (12). Russel Ward's study on the typical national character strikingly illustrates the way in which discourses on national identity favour specific concepts of masculinity. In *The Australian Legend*, Russel Ward acknowledges certain features ascribed to the myth of the typical Australian. According to him, this character is

> a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others. He is a great improviser, ever willing to "have a go" at anything […]. He is a "hard case," sceptical about the value of religion and of intellectual and cultural pursuits generally […] above all [he] will stick to his mates through thick and thin […]. He swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often, and drinks deeply on occasion. (Schaffer 19)

Popular notions of Australian identity and the ideal national character are predicated upon the exclusion of women and the supremacy of men, exuding, thus, a masculinist bias. Despite the fact that the myth still has "wide and valued cultural currency" (Schaffer 20), it has notably been affected not only by new social and gender discourses but by the ongoing deconstruction of Australian national identity. Current debates on national identity have led Australia to seek and reinvent a more inclusive, plural and multicultural concept of the nation. Therefore, it must be regarded that the challenge to traditional

assumptions on gender and the consequent crisis of masculinity it implies has deeply affected the Australian culture.

Many of Winton's male characters seem to move away from these stereotypical masculine conventions and display new models of masculine identity. In offering such novel male representations, Winton challenges the dominant patriarchal practices and discourses prevailing in the Australian culture and society.

In his short stories Winton writes about the dissolution of patriarchy and the deconstruction of masculinity bringing to the fore the blurred boundaries of gender constructions and portraying masculinity from an unorthodox, novel position. Winton questions the currency of the dichotomy that constitutes masculinity as opposed to femininity by endowing his male characters with certain features so far regarded as feminine such as vulnerability, sensitivity and human frailty. His male characters are often emotional, sensitive and intuitive. This way Winton exposes the arbitrariness of patriarchal ideologies. What is disturbing, as Lekkie Hopkins states, is that

> these male characters are positioned as odd and different precisely because of their 'feminine' qualities (their abilities to love, to relate emotionally, to be intuitive, to nurture, to cry, to be hurt) and the consequent lessening of their typically masculine qualities (their lack of desire to exploit, or to dominate, or to be separate or to be competitive). (Rossiter and Jacobs 47)

In the story "Nilsam's Friend," from the collection *Minimum of Two* (1987), Nilsam is not a conventional male and has reversed roles with his wife Rachel being full-time parent to his son. When he compares himself with his adventurous and much-travelled friend, he feels "dowdy": "He was a man and he felt dowdy" (45). In several stories Winton foregrounds the feminine in his male characters associating it with an inner space, like a hole. In so doing, Winton is placing his male characters as vulnerable and wounded beings. In "Wake" he describes the main character possessing this hole: "There is a hollowness in him" (38). This is also the case of Jerra in "Forest Winter": "Late in the evening the young man sat in the darkness and drank the coarse volatile claret the locals called Kirup Syrup. The stuff found a big emptiness in him. Relief has consumed everything inside" (159). In "Gravity," as well, Jerra feels like an amputee when his father dies: "There was a hole in him. Something was lost" (174). In "No Memory Comes" the narrator "feels a hole open in him" (166). For Lekkie Hopkins Winton "transfers the conventional psychological reading of the female body as a wound, as violable and penetrable, to the vulnerable male" (48).

In presenting male characters that are in close contact with their

feminine side, Winton challenges and reverses the powerful masculine bias fostered and embedded in the cultural myth of the typical Australian. As he points out in an interview: "I'm writing from an orthodox female point of view" (Guy 129). Winton seeks to undermine and subvert some of the stereotypical conventions endorsed to the masculine gender by giving his males the right to show their emotions and free themselves from the burdens of patriarchy.

In his short stories Winton transcends one of the most deeply entrenched assumptions about masculinity: the total control of emotions. The emotional restraint demanded by patriarchal ideologies leads men to emotional isolation. As Stanley Aronowitz argues: "men have become 'victims of the emotional plague by the imperative of having to be always in control […]. Male power comes at the price of emotional isolation'" (Shamir and Travis 5). In "Wake" a father asks his adult son: "Have you ever wept? Cried, I mean" (41). Winton here is demanding the right to cry for men, to stop restraining themselves and let emotions flow naturally. Winton highlights in his male characters their ability to show emotions and to cry, to show themselves as human beings that can be hurt and are vulnerable too. In the story "My Father's Axe" the narrator recalls his father as a sensitive man: "Another time my father, leaving again for a long trip, began softly to weep on our front step […]. I saw my father ball his handkerchief up and bite on it to muffle his sobs" (29). In "Neighbours," the protagonist, a PhD student of literature, cries when his son is born: "the young man began to weep. The twentieth-century novel had not prepared him for this" (83). Jerra's nostalgia for his dead father marks him as a vulnerable, wounded man, as is stated in "Gravity":

> There was a hole in him. Something was lost. The tall man in loose grey trousers with that stooped, expectant stance. The big hands so often hairy with pollard. Only a memory now. He was dead. Actually, finally, dead. And now there was nothing for Jerra Nilsam to fall against. He thought about the ride home. His heart beating. It was riding down the street, as though he had been balancing a bicycle for the first time. There was no exhilaration in it, only a terrible sense of gravity. (174)

As Arizti has noted in "Fathercare in Tim Winton's Fiction" (forthcoming), several male figures in Winton's short stories are endowed with the capacity of being affected by the suffering of others. These characters show a generous openness to the suffering of others, a special disposition to emotions, feelings and compassion. Significantly enough, his first collection of short stories, *Scission*, opens with a quotation from *The Book of Job*, the most remarkable patient sufferer in the Old Testament. Winton's males are guided by their heart rather than by their intellect, enhancing their sensitivity and

emotional dimension not only as feminine qualities but also as inherent in the masculine identity. According to Bruce Bennett "the central figure in Winton's stories typically rejects intellectual sophistication and turns to 'flesh and blood'" (69). In "Holding," the male narrator, Hart, describes his friend Clive Genders as "the most generous, compassionate man Hart had ever known, someone who wasn't afraid to admit ignorance or weakness" (229) and he adds that "Clive Genders was worth holding on to" (229). In "Damage Goods," a story from *The Turning*, Gail associates Vic's open and dedicated nature with an adolescent fixation: "In any dispute Vic will instinctively seek out a victim to defend. That's his nature and it's become his work as a labour lawyer, but I wonder if this impulse can account for his adolescent attraction to the flawed and imperfect" (58).

The traditional association of masculinity with power and femininity with powerlessness is not allowed to function in Winton's short stories. Some of his male characters are rendered powerless and lost. For instance, in the story "A Blow, A Kiss," "Albie's father looked helpless, did not move" (17) when he saw a man beat his hurt son. In the story "On Her Knees," from *The Turning*, Vic is an adolescent who wants to defend his mother after being accused of having stolen a pair of earrings in the house she works as a cleaner: "I was powerless to defend her. It was the lowest feeling." (111). This sense of powerlessness is also felt in another story from the same collection, "Defender," where Vic suffers from the burden of the past and the recent death of his parents: "He was forty-four years old but he felt just as helpless. […] even at this age, he still didn't know the first thing about saving himself" (309).

Another distinctive feature that contributes to seeing Winton's male characters as embodying unorthodox sorts of masculinity is their constant pursuit of the meaning of life, their search for identity and their ongoing questioning of who they are and where they go. As Winton explains in an interview: "All my books are about people trying to make sense of things, about the search for meaning […] My work is ultimately about people who are possessed by a vision" (Ferrier 3, 4). Portrayed as lost and confused, Winton's male working-class characters have to come to terms with their own inner turmoil, their own identity and their relationships with others, namely, women and family. One of the most relevant characters in his short story collection *Minimum of Two* is Jerra Nilsam, who previously appeared in his first novel, *An Open Swimmer*. An adolescent in the novel, Jerra displays his problematic nature by wandering about the beaches of Western Australia looking for an identity he doesn't have. He lives and works with his family in the city but his inner conflict is to find his own 'place'

within society: "He still looked for hideouts despite his age" (17). Pressured by his family who constantly asks him what he is going to do with himself, he starts a trip to the bush with his friend Sean. In so doing, Winton shows Jerra trying to negotiate his male identity in terms of Australian codes of masculinity. Since the masculine identity has traditionally been located in the bush, Jerra's trip must be seen as an attempt to locate some sense of meaning and find his identity. This is also the case with Bob Lang, Vic's father in *The Turning*, who quits his job as a cop and abandons his family to go bush. There, he embraces a new way of life: he tries to mend his damaged identity by giving up alcohol and calm down his inner conflicts by helping others. In his own words: "[he] woke up one morning, it was winter, and the sun was on this fallen tree, this dead grey tree, and there was steam rising off the dead wood. And I felt … new. Had this feeling that the world was inviting me in … like, luring me towards something. Life, I dunno" (232). Taking the bush as a place of refuge and escape but also of tension, Winton uses Nature and the landscape as the site where characters must confront their internal conflicts and tensions. Some West Australian writers show "an awareness of the tensions between landscape and consciousness of that landscape" (Rossiter and Jacobs 20).[1] The vivid interaction between some specific places of Western Australia and his characters pervades Winton's short stories influencing and shaping his characters' identity.

The achievement of maturity is evoked as a threat and is featured as a self-discovery journey for Winton's males. It seems that male characters in the short stories try to avoid or ignore the passing of time and the consequent responsibilities of growing up and becoming an adult, a husband, a father. The image of men as lost or suffering an identity crisis recurs in many of his short stories. The young men must undergo a rite of initiation into manhood. In *Minimum of Two*, Jerra, married and with a son, is depicted as "[n]ot mature enough" (241) and travelling the difficult road to self-discovery. Much of his quest depends on his ability to take a decision about what he wants to do in life, to free himself from the burdens of the past and to be at ease with his new responsibilities as a husband and as a father. In "The Strong One," his wife Rachel is determined to pursue her career as a social worker and Jerra is confronted with his responsibility as a father when he asks Rachel what he will do if she studies and she answers "Look after Sam" (224). First, he is afraid and doesn't see himself capable of taking care of the child because he's a man: "I'm

[1] See Beth Watzke, "Writing the West: Regionalism and Western Australia," *Westerly*, No. 1, Autumn 1992, pp. 21-29.

scared, that's all. That I won't be able to do it properly" (224). At the beginning he lived with his family in a remote village in the forest as is depicted in "Forest Winter." Living in the mountain far away from society and the city is for Jerra a way of evading the responsibilities of his status as father and husband and perpetuating his desire for adventure and independence. Although he previously rejected society and the city, his new-found identity as father and husband makes him widen his perspective and change the country for the city. In "Gravity," his personal growth leads him to acknowledge "he has come to love the city. It was no capitulation on his part; merely a gradual awareness of new beauties. He was older now, he felt it" (170). His family role seems to have helped Jerra find his place in society.

One of the obstacles in the personal growth of Winton's male figures is the recurrence of the past. Constant references throughout the short story collections reveal that Jerra in *Minimum of Two* and Vic in *The Turning* are to some extent haunted by memories from the past that prevent them from growing up and going on with their lives. The constant remembering of the past in most stories brings about a kind of paralysis. The past functions as an obstacle for Winton's male characters, something that prevents them from developing their identities. As Jerra's wife observes: "Jerra seemed to bear weights from the past as though they were treasures he had to take with him […] he enjoyed bearing it all, as though the past, as well as being his source of pain, might also be his only source of comfort" (222). Every time he clings to the past he does it "like an old man who can't handle the present" (226). In the story "No Memory Comes," the young boy is similarly stuck in the past, when his parents weren't divorced and everything seemed to be all right. He recalls the last New Year's Eve he spent with both of his parents:

> That night he climbs into bed between his parents. His father muffles a weedy fart. His mother sleeps with a glick in her throat. The boy worms in and gets ready to dream that the new year will never come. Everything is fine right now. He has no need of it. (162)

Similarly, Vic in *The Turning* is presented as a man unable to come to terms with his past. Vic's wife seems to be overwhelmed with "the way his past seemed to assail him" (307). As she explains, her own distorted personal experience helps her to understand and love him: "If it wasn't for my sister's own fixation I'd be less forgiving about Vic and the weight of his past. I wouldn't understand at all. I'd be long gone" (56). Vic's constant drawing on his memories in most of the short stories where he appears gives the collection that sense of coherence and unity previously mentioned. In "Damaged Goods," Gail talks about her husband's adolescent fixation with a girl that has a

birthmark on her face. Vic has told the story so many times that Gail says: "I feel like I was there, that I lived it with him" (55). One day Gail realised that the adolescent memories about this girl still take hold of Vic: "last week I found him in the workshop, weeping over an old photograph and a poem and it gave me a chill" (54). Once Gail told Vic: "You're like someone under siege" (302), a sentence that describes him perfectly. Winton's males reveal to what extent individuals are shaped by past experiences and how at times they can be trapped by them: "[Vic] was preoccupied with memories. After three weeks in a darkened room, they were a swarm he could neither evade nor disperse" (299).

Winton constantly plays with the symbol of water in his stories to associate it with renewal and liberation from the weight of the past. In Winton's stories, rivers or the sea become the site where male characters can regenerate themselves and forge their new identities. As Jerra says in "Bay of Angels": "We always come back to water. When things happen" (219). The sea features prominently in the lives of these characters as is stated in "The Strong One": "It wasn't hot enough for a swim, but even when it was cool these days they walked down to the rivermouth to sit and watch the sea move and sigh and disguise itself in the glitter of sunlight; it gave shape to the day" (225). Jerra constantly resorts to the sea when he is confused or angry, such as after having argued with Rachel in "More": "He lay back in the water, shifting on the tide-ribbed bottom, until only his mouth and nose were above the surface, and with his eyes open he saw the sky through a shifting filter of river water. He stayed there" (241). Likewise, in "Family," Frank "knew a surf would do him good" (173). He needed the contact with water to calm down all the confusion and tension that had settled inside his mind after having quit football: "Leaper sat up in the channel to watch the rider come on in short, brutal signature turns until he slewed off the wave to settle in the quiet water beside him" (176). Once again, metaphors of swimming or being in the water recur to signify a sort of liberation for Winton's male characters, the possibilities of freeing themselves from the constraints in their lives. The symbolic connections and a sequential progression arising from the common themes of the search for identity and the recurrence of the past as an obstacle are prominent in Winton's short story cycles *Minimum of Two* and *The Turning*.

Not all of Winton's representations of masculinity are depicted in a positive way. It is my contention that by portraying negative images of masculine identity, Winton seeks to debunk and subvert the deplorable and reduced sort of masculinity enshrined and privileged by patriarchal discourse on gender. In his short stories, there are nu-

merous examples of men abandoning their families ("Secrets," "The Water Was Dark And It Went Forever Down," "Cockleshell," "Long, Clear View"), alcoholic and violent men ("The Turning," "Damaged Goods," "Commission," "Cockleshell," "Sand," "Family"), misogynist men ("Family," "Sand," "The Turning") and even murderers ("A Minimum of Two").

In *The Turning* Winton offers a wide range of traditional normative constructions of masculinity. The short stories "Sand," "Family" and "The Turning" deal with the lives of two very different brothers, Max and Frank. In these stories Winton attempts to highlight his unorthodox male figures by putting them together with some more hegemonic images of masculinity in the same narrative frame. Max, a fisherman, is drawn in opposition to his brother Frank, a football player star. When they were children their mother abandoned them with their father, and since then Frank has shown an emotional need that Max completely lacks: "Now and then Max darted ahead to walk amongst their father's mates. He said things that made them laugh. He was ten already and could make men laugh. He didn't miss their mother. Frank knew he should shut up about her" (164). Frank always tried to follow his brother but he also feared him: "He had side teeth like a dog and a way of looking at you that you could feel in the dark" (165). Frank was "without doubt, naïve" (178) instead and "blind to the fact that Max was contemptuous of him and had been from the moment he was born" (178). Later on, despite being a football star, Max constantly calls his brother "a fairy, a retard, a waste of skin" (138). While Max, embodying a traditional sort of hegemonic masculinity, is tough, cold, and rude and spends his spare time drinking in the pub, Frank is vulnerable, human and sensitive. Although he was considered a "prodigy" (181), Frank quits his career due to an identity crisis. When Max finds out about it he despises his brother even more than before, and tells him that "[s]ome things are best left to the men" (180). Overcome with anger he also adds: "You were soft […] you were a fuckin coward" (180). Thus, here Frank is positioned as the fragile, vulnerable male character offering an alternative, previously marginalized, masculine identity.

Similarly, in the story that gives the title to the collection, "The Turning," Max is also characterised in opposition to another male figure, Dan. The story, set in the small fishing village of White Point, tackles the different lives of two families: Max and Raelene, who live with their two little daughters in a trailer park, and a middle-class couple new to the town, Sherry and Dan. Dan is presented as a kind, polite man recovering from his alcoholism, a human being who tries to reconstruct his identity as a male by embracing the Christian faith

together with his wife rather than repressing his emotions and hiding his weaknesses. As Raelene says, Dan is "attentive without staring at your tits the whole time […] comfortable with himself" (136). In contrast, she admits that Max was a "slob" who "often came bloody and sore, especially after a live game on the big screen" (137). Max's depiction is based on a construction of masculinity that remains dominant in Australian culture, a version that synthesises the long-established premise that men are not allowed to express their emotions and weaknesses, they should be rough and behave like men. It is precisely the way Max is emotionally repressed that leads him to engage in violent behaviour and attitudes. There is evidence of this when Raelene gets home after having helped Sherry move in her new house: "the caravan was a mess and so was Max. He'd kicked the mirror out and there was blood all over the floor. […] he clouted her in front of the kids" (139). He beats his wife so many times she does not feel the bruises any more. Once, he slammed "her head against the metal so hard she saw sparks rise between them, sparks and winged spots that floated and fell" (155, 156) and then he "grabbed her hair and jabbed her back harder, once, twice, and the pain brought a sudden rage upon her" (156). Sometimes he comes home drunk and forces her sexually:

> She woke with him on top of her. He had her sore arms pinned and his pants were off. She struggled but the bruises made it hard. He grabbed her in the dark and slapped her. He shoved himself in her face, half smothered her until she got loose a moment and was halfway off the bed, her elbow snagged in the curtain, before he caught her and shoved her face down and hit the back of her head so hard she felt the gash open up. (160)

This type of masculinity embodied by Max enhances women's subordination to men and male violence against women. However, Max's image of macho man is reinforced and applauded by his wife, who later on will realise the nightmare her life has become. Instead of rejecting and condemning her husband's misogynist attitudes, Raelene supports his hegemonic masculine traits by favouring him over novel sorts of masculine identities: "She was a bit suss about tv men who talked about their feelings all the time and men who cried gave her the screaming creeps" (137). Moreover, she acknowledges that Max "[had] always been [her] kind of bloke, the sort of man her sisters always had, the kind their mother flirted with, […] Rae didn't go men who dressed fancy or slapped on aftershave" (136). In portraying Max as an aggressive beast, Winton underscores the negative, oppressive and destructive connotations underlying patriarchal ideologies and deep-seated cultural myths embedded in previously accepted gender discourses.

The transgression of fixed gender boundaries, as the analysis has shown, is a pervasive trait in Winton's short stories. By revising and deconstructing traditional long-established premises on gender issues, Winton devises new forms of representation of masculinity. In his short story collections Winton intends to enhance his male figures as unorthodox, sensitive men in order to accommodate current discourses on gender. Winton finds ways of reconfiguring traditional social and ideological definitions of gender by inscribing challenging male figures in his narratives. The emphasis lies most conspicuously on the portrayal of male figures that subvert stereotyped conceptions of masculinity and once this subversion takes place they enjoy a newly acquired sense of identity, feeling liberated from previous fears and burdens. Winton uses deconstruction to criticise the dominant patriarchal structure and contests fixed gender patterns by foregrounding feminine qualities in his male figures.

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PERFORMING FEMINIST AFFINITY
Interviewing Feminist Men In Sweden

Linn Egeberg Holmgren

INTRODUCTION

Feminist studies have come to include a focus on the issue of men and masculinities. This also includes methodological aspects of conducting such studies. When making an inventory of the feminist literature on *women interviewing men*, issues of risk, safety, vulnerability and the way to avoid, for instance, sexual harassment were prominent themes (Lee; Schwalbe and Wolkomir). One crucial difference from the literature on gender relations in interviews I have found so far is that in this study the men are being interviewed on their commitment to feminism. To put it bluntly, they were not considered likely to express sexism during the interviews or in any way harass the woman researcher. Looking for literature on the construction of gender and sexuality in interview contexts then made awkward results. Interviewing (pro)feminist men on issues of identity, positions and practices did not contain that many traces of overt sexism or threat. The gender and power relations seemed to be more complex and intrinsically built in to the very act of interviewing as well as the social affiliations of interviewer/interviewee(s).

Conducting interviews involves a strong element of intersubjective identity construction. Interviewing is an interactive method where both researcher and researched take part. The researcher influences too, for example through the questions posed, different responses to what is said, but also through her very presence. Narratives can hereby be seen as co-constructed at the very moment of the interview. This essay explores the performance of women interviewing men on issues where the positions of interviewer and interviewee are close and participants well-informed on the subject matter. The focus of this essay is how negotiation and control emerge from interviewees motivating and explaining their participation. I also provide empirical

examples of how the intentions may mirror interviewees' feelings of (dis)content after the interview. The aim of this essay is to discuss issues of gender, negotiation and control in qualitative interviews. This analytic theme proved to be found to a large extent in the meta-information of the interviews, pronounced as expectations on the outcome and content of the interview as well as on interview performance. In order to illustrate the findings I also present empirical examples of 'failing' interviews.

A study of feminist men in Sweden

The empirical material consists of interviews with 28 (pro)feminist men aged 20-34:[1] 17 individual and 11 participating in pair- and group interviews carried out during the autumn and winter of 2005/2006.

Important themes in the study are the formation of a feminist subject position and the embodiment of feminist or profeminist norms and practices in young men who describe themselves as feminist. The interviews comprise themes such as norms, consequences, change and feminist commitment in relation to personal/private relations; sexual practices; masculinity and gendered experiences from feminist and non-feminist contexts. Inquiries that I brought to the interviews have included what it actually means to call oneself feminist and how feminism is 'done.' Theoretical foci are issues of gender, masculinity and the significance of the feminist perspective for the subject position in a national context where state feminism and debates on gender equality are highly present.

In Sweden, where support for gender equality is broad and thought of as something that will also emancipate men, it is not unusual for men to call themselves feminists. In this study the men interviewed for the most part tried to position themselves as more 'for real,' radical, serious and well-informed compared to Swedish men in general (Hearn and Holmgren). This is reflected through themes of rebelliousness, degendering ideals and different strategies of passing by open criticism towards men's inabilities to act feminist—interviewees themselves reflexively included (Egeberg Holmgren).

[1] The interviewees form a varied sample concerning social and ethnic backgrounds (although interviewees born outside Sweden have spent at least part of childhood or adolescence in Sweden), sexual identity, place of birth, current occupation, organization of living and intimate relations. Although class has not been clarified in all cases, most of them have some kind of academic degree and/or are identified as middle-class. In common they have an engagement in feminist issues although influences, ideologies and identity markers differ. None of them is a parent.

The analysis of the empirical material in the overall study is thematic. In this essay I focus on the performative, interactional and constructing processes of interviewing, especially where gender and power relations emerge, not always visible as themes from the mere transcript.

THE GENDER(ED) POWER RELATIONS OF INTERVIEWS

From a social constructionist perspective, women and men can be seen as active agents in constructing and doing gender identities and gendered positions in an ongoing process.[2] From a post-structural understanding this comprises of taking up different discourses of masculinity and femininity (Pini 202). Placing this line of argument into conducting interviews we can conclude that they too are both situated and processed. Norman Denzin succinctly formulates this when writing that "Interviews arise out of performance events. They transform information into shared experience" (Denzin 24). However, in this sense "shared" is not necessarily the same as common or concordant.

In the research project on which this essay is based, the issue of definition and control of the situation is not definite or one-way authoritative. Rather I argue that the exercise of power and control seems to be flowing between interviewer and interviewee, or as Enosh & Buchbinder eloquently put it, "we may say that power in the interview process is a paradoxical phenomenon, where each of the participants is dominant, trying to steer the interview, but at the same time each is also submissive, being steered by the other" (Enosh and Buchbinder 590). One important aspect of this negotiated power and control is gender.

When women interview men patriarchal gender relations are often reinforced due to the verbal interaction of interviews (Winchester 123) where the interviewer is to be helping, attentive, understanding, agreeable and so forth (see also Pini). What I want to point to in this gender(ed) setting is that the researcher's role per se becomes a situated position of doing femininity due to the gendered structure of interaction and language.

[2] Since gender performance in this case refers to a situated interactional setting I use the concept of *doing* gender. For a more thorough account of gender as an interactional and micro-political activity, see West and Zimmerman (1987). However, I do not use this more ethnomethodological perspective as if it were incompatible with post-structural lines of argument.

In my study the constructions and performances varied between different interviews pointing in the direction of an interactive and mutual process where one of the remaining impressions was that of *adaptation and negotiation*. This mainly surfaced in different strategies of trying to maneuver and control the content of the interview as well as the performance of the interviewer, affecting her performativity. This can be thought of as an outcome of an exercise of power, flowing between interviewer and interviewee.

The space and place of meta-information

The performance and performativity of interviews are to be found in both transcripts and in reflexively experiencing conducting them. A common critique of the modern perspective of interviews is that they are conceptualized as techniques and tools for getting true, clear and consistent statements (Alvesson 126). Barbara Pini is right in arguing that reflexive analyses of gender issues in qualitative interviews need to go beyond the mere gender of interviewer and interviewee. The place and space of the interview can play an important part of the data produced. In her case, not only the research environment was gendered but also the research topic itself. In order to go beyond the subject positions and social belongings of researcher and researched, qualitative researchers need to question "the broader field or context in which the research is taking place" (Pini 202, 204). One way of achieving Pini's suggestion is to simply include the subject matter. Moreover, this broader field or context ought to have an effect on the presentation of the self and impression management (Goffman).

Elements found in the whereabouts of interviews are often left as an "internal methodology knowledge" and personal experience for each individual researcher or research group. This sort of surrounding and social aspects forms important so called meta-information of qualitative interviewing (Näsman 209). Following the well-known quotation "everything is data" (Glaser), I argue that such aspects should not automatically be left out of analysis.

In this study, the expectations on and conceptualization of being interviewed turned out to be valuable data. The expectations on the interview and interviewer were not only made explicit, but were implicitly to be found in the space of meta-information. We now turn to this subject matter.

EXPECTATIONS ON INTERVIEWER PERFORMANCE

One 'chatty' introductory question that proved to be valuable data was the reasons for participating in the study. I sum up these motives for participation as a way of pointing to the expectations of the performing researcher, the most common being fun, interesting and identifying with the group advertised for. But there were also motives of more specific, sometimes unexpected character. Taken together these proved not only to be noteworthy but also altered my view of what the study had been about and who had actually been performing and that some performance was still to be done. Here is the echo of voices:[3]

> Get the chance to think another lap; Likes to talk about oneself; Getting the chance to talk on the subject matter without prestige; Doesn't get those questions that often, to really think about them; Be fun to hear what one has to say; Done interviews earlier but felt not really talking about oneself; Will work with interviews myself; Get back on track/restart feminist engagement; Coming in contact with issues of feminism again felt natural; Learn something, test myself a little; One way of making a contribution to gender research; One of the things one can actually do to make change; Helping out knowing how hard it is to get informants; Wanting to speak up after the debate that followed the Gender War;[4] Interesting since those men working with feminism are a mystery, very few of them seem to know what they're actually doing; Been arguing with feminist men and don't like them; Show another side of the matter, worrying others will take the chance to promote themselves as good guys/feminists.

I consider some of these as rather well-reasoned motives, where there's something put to test. Some interviewees expressed the wish to give me something. There is an element of wanting to learn more about oneself and to try out some thoughts that had not yet become explicit in a "safe" environment. This first section ought to be common in all kinds of interview research. Several interviewees are using the male feminist strategy of shutting up as a way of listening to and confirming women, so being interviewed can also be a way to finally

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[3] Describing the motives in terms of "an echo of expectations" is of course to be found in the mind of the researcher and can be thought of as an 'aggregated result' not visible to the participants. Interviewees sometimes even forget they have participated in a study and/or are not that interested in following the research or notified on results.

[4] A reference to the specific context regarding time and place is important to understand this motive. In the spring of 2005 the feminist chairperson of the Swedish national organization for women's crisis centers (ROKS) expressed support for the statement that 'men are animals' in a state television documentary, 'the Gender War.' A heated debate over the feminist movement and the role of men followed in the media for about a year. For a more detailed account of the debate see http://www.alternet.org/story/24655/

be the one to talk in a feminist context. At the same time there is a sense of being trialed, a personal challenge.

Several interviewees expressed the wish to give something i.e. to contribute to gender research or support feminism. Several expressed anger over how feminists were treated by the media and what they described as misconceptions of feminism in the public debate. Another way of "giving" was to save the researcher from having only "fake feminists" in the study and the outcome of the project prevented from becoming an uncritical depiction of "good men." One interviewee's motive for participating was that he was a former student in sociology and knew how difficult it was to get informants and therefore felt obliged to help me, unaware that I was forced to make a selection due to the massive interest. The image of the researcher as an ally becomes more evident, which also demands the researcher to confirm this affinity.

While some wanted to contribute, others wanted something from the researcher, such as being politically activated, learning something about oneself or about research on men. Some interviewees even stated that they volunteered for the project to allow themselves to follow the research from its very beginning (and from the inside), wanting me to recount my results so far and to report continually about the results. But there were also motives of wanting to be put to a personal challenge. Perhaps Melker best illustrated these motives when, my asking attendant questions having unintentionally led him to contradictory answers, after some thought he nodded approvingly and cheerfully replied, *"Touché!"* The researcher in this matter is being perceived as a challenger as well as a source of usable knowledge.

Even more remarkable for the researcher among the learning-motives: the participation of interviewees as observers set out to study her interview-technique in order to conduct a study oneself. I do not find most of the motives for participating interesting *per se*. The interesting thing is that interviewees share them in this way, but being a very 'reflexive sample' the confessional character even when it comes to the aim of studying the researcher might not be surprising. Considering the abovementioned reasons, it becomes evident that fieldwork also is a matter of performance that must be somehow reliable. When given information of this kind in the beginning of an interview it became apparent that I was up for a challenge to perform as a credible qualitative feminist researcher, and moreover, was being observed and studied. Although interviewing always is a matter of performance, when put forward this bluntly, performing the interview has a clear analogy with being on stage (cf. Goffman). Thus both

interviewer and interviewee enter the stage and at the same time sit in the audience as well as on a director's chair. The interest in and curiosity for qualitative interviewing was expressed by several interviewees and I found it intriguing and encouraging when starting the interview. It also made me feel like a gasping ski jumper just before the final signal.

Assumed affinity – the researcher as an ally

Most of the interviewees assumed that I myself was feminist.[5] The assumption of my being a feminist sometimes seemed to be enough to create rapport. This can also be related to interviewees expecting the researcher to be a spokesperson for the group researched (Pripp). Nevertheless, expectations were more complex and expressed in different forms of meta-information. The gendered structure of language in interviewing, where the female researcher enhances the speech act of the male interviewee, has been identified as particularly complicated when the interviewer is assumed to share a set of political beliefs with the interviewee (Winchester 123).

It is made explicitly clear that the feminist perspectives of the interviewees are not to be "tested" during the interviews, which can be a relief enabling interviewees to be frank and feel secure. Nevertheless, being too cautious as an interviewer sometimes meant running the risk of creating an undesired position for interviewees, encouraging passing too easily as a "good man" or a "real feminist." After the interview some, seemingly disappointed or surprised, expressed the view that they would have expected the researcher to be more "critical" or in other ways "tricky" in her inquiries. This put demands on the researcher to perform skepticism and simultaneously confirm affinity. The recognition from feminist women seemed fundamental and the conception of the researcher as an ally becomes evident.

The themes and questions of the interview guide ranged from general to personal. If an interviewee used general level interviewer probes in order to get him to relate to personal settings. I avoided arguing or questioning the credibility of the interviewees' narratives, although probing them to develop different statements and standpoints.[6] This conversational style also had consequences in

[5] Although I asked them whether they thought of themselves as belonging to a special perspective of feminism (such as radical, queer, liberal, socialist etc.), this was not a question interviewees asked in return.

[6] This is due to my not being mainly interested in whether the interviewees told me 'the truth,' whether my interviewees were 'real feminists.' This remark has the background of feminists and research colleagues reacting to the description of the study by considering whether my interviewees are serious or 'for real.'

cases where interviewees expected something else from me and the interview. Some thought me too abstract, others thought me too detailed and yet others thought I missed out on some levels, others that there were too many levels. Some expressed the wish to help me, or guide me into how I should change my technique or my interview guide. These different reactions varied and were not present at all in others.

There was an overall interest and concern about the sample; about what kind of analysis I was to make; what feminist issues should be given more space in the interviews and about my style and technique. All this mainly friendly enthusiasm and engagement was most of the time encouraging. But from another perspective, once summed up, it also took the shape of a need to maneuver and control me as a researcher and my project—with one interpretation that the conventional power position of the researcher is challenged.

NEGOTIATION, CONTROL AND FAILURE

As a social group, the men interviewed do not constitute a vulnerable one, although individuals might be. When it comes to *ethics* I find myself caught up in a stalemate. Given the co-constructive character of interviewing, there are 29 persons participating in my study—28 men and one woman (myself). As a researcher, having the final word of conversation, I am in a power position. In my writing, the borders are blurred when it comes to writing from a critical stance and risking violating the narratives of the informants. Being positive and critical at the same time, on the one hand we are on the same 'team,' on the other the aim and result of the study, and the presupposed outcome and expectations from the interviewees might differ, also between them. As Oscar Pripp points out, interviewing some groups can also mean being perceived as a mouthpiece for the group by the interviewees (Pripp 49), which often seemed to be the case in this study. The foci of the research project being a political issue for the participants at the same time as it is an academic one for me will inevitably make some disagree and others even disappointed.

Given this specific gender setting, the subject matter and the competence of informants, the gender, power and ethical relations of these interviews are not unilaterally authoritative. I will proceed by exemplifying how issues of power and control became visible in interviews where interviewees seemed somewhat discontent.

"You ought to be more aggressive"

At the end of each interview interviewees were asked if they wanted to add something to the interview, if there were topics missed out and if they had any questions they wanted to ask me. Adding could mean clarifying something said earlier on and often there were comments on that it had been interesting or inspiring to participate. There were also questions regarding when and where to be notified of results from the study and if there was possibilities of reading on forehand. Comments and feedback during the last minutes of interviews, when the actual interviewing had turned into a more ordinary conversation, also turned out to be valuable data.

The expectations of the researcher to enable a desired mode of presentation, performance or reflexivity were unfulfilled in some interviews. I would like to illustrate the demands put on the researcher's performance with an excerpt from the interview with Fadi, an interview I did not regard as an entirely successful one. Fadi wanted to participate to contrast the current media debates and linked feminism to his political engagement and his open-mindedness, but we did not establish good rapport and although being very determined about what to tell me, he kept feeling insecure throughout our meeting. He found several of my questions difficult to answer (and indeed some of them were if one has not considered them before); moreover he was reluctant to answer the less complicated ones, for example if he had a partner. Several times he chose to answer to something similar or something completely different.

I have interpreted this as Fadi's finding my questions irrelevant, or even deleterious, to the way he wanted to present himself to me. He kept coming back to narratives on being open-minded, fighting against intolerance and believing that everyone is entitled to their opinion as long as they are willing to discuss it. After the interview he wanted to play music for me. At the end of the interview Fadi himself was not convinced I got anything substantial from him; he had expected me to "talk more about prejudices, but it's OK." He then wants to give me advice:

> LINN: Is there something you would like to add or something you thought I would ask that hasn't come up?
>
> FADI: Ehm, well…If I'm to be honest I thought from the beginning that I wouldn't sit and, like try to muddle around what you might ask and don't ask, because it's such a broad issue, you know […]. No, you brought up basically what I had expected without having [laughs] any thoughts about what you would ask. Maybe prejudices, but it's alright.

LINN: Good.

FADI: One thing I can tell you, though

LINN: Yes?

FADI: Maybe you ought to be a little bit more aggressive towards me, that might-

LINN: Why?

FADI: I don't know, I wanted to, it might have, that it helps sometimes if people don't agree with your opinions, or maybe… 'challenge you,' in English. I can't remember the Swedish word now.

LINN: To be defied or challenged?

FADI: Exactly. You know, I think it helps to make nuances and to go deeper. You know, because it's easy to put forward an opinion or thought about something if you *yourself* sit and analyse, because you have the facts in front of you and draw your conclusions from that. But if someone else comes along with totally different perspectives, you know. It doesn't necessarily change your opinion but it can make you put it into a more complex context, which you can build from. And I think it's a strength to be able to develop it from there.

LINN: I see your point. One could say it's two different methods [F giggles]. Would you have liked me to challenge you more?

FADI: Yes...As I said, I'm very open-minded when it comes to questions [laughs]

LINN: Yes, no, exactly. That's...I can understand that.

FADI: But hey, it depends on how you want to do research about this. Sorry I even brought it up.

LINN: No, absolutely not, it's great. That was pretty much about it. Are you doing alright?

In Fadi's opinion, my interview technique didn't make him look his best. To deliver really good answers he needed to be more challenged and called in to question. He then instructed me, or advised me how to achieve better data—I needed to be more aggressive. Integrated in this is Fadi's view of what the interviews ought to be about; his opinions rather than his experiences and 'identity talk.' This can also be traced in his ways of answering my questions earlier in the interview;

LINN: How does your life look otherwise, do you have a girlfriend, boyfriend?

FADI: I do music. It's an important thing for me to express myself, a little bit more about my thoughts and such. Otherwise...I'm engaged in different organizations and committees.

When considering the meta-information, this was not just a result

of bad interviewing[7] but also attempts to maneuver the contents of the interview by avoiding answering some of my questions.

'Getting angry'

Klas expressed an interest to follow the research from its very beginning. He also would have liked to be in a group interview in order to learn more about himself when reflected in the experiences of other men. I use this interview here since in different ways it displays frustration and restrained dissatisfaction with the contents of the interview as well as the performance of interviewer and interviewee.

Sometimes interviews get emotional although in different ways. Narratives can deal with issues of sensitive character, for instance experiences of being shamed for sexual behavior as a child or discovering that domination is a source of sexual excitement, completely contrary to feminist beliefs and identity.

When transcribing an interview where I strangely enough did not remember what the interviewee looked like I came to notice how uncomfortable I sounded on the tape; I stumble through questions, have a soft and almost therapeutic tone of voice in some sections and laugh a lot on my own. It also happens that I 'check' with the interviewee whether he is ok and whether he wants to continue. I sense that the interviewee perhaps wants to leave the interview, that there is something I am not doing right. After one longer pause he asks me in an irritated tone of voice; "was that a bad answer or what?!" Later on I ask whether his being a man and a feminist poses some problems for him different from those of feminist women. "Problems?!" he spits out. I then reformulate "problems" to "challenges." These questions were asked at all interviews without leading to such reactions and were sometimes even brought up by interviewees themselves. To another topic Klas asks in response, after a while, "does it really matter?!" There is something else causing the lack of rapport and turning the interview to a less than pleasant experience for both of us.

This excerpt is to be read in a tone of voice to be understandable and make the gendered structure of language discussed earlier come through. The male interviewee's voice ranges from resignation to irritation, almost aggressive when asking questions. The female

[7] This structure in asking questions is not preferable, since the formulation of two questions in one enables the answer "I do music." Still, a more common reply to double questions is that the interviewer only gets an answer to the last one. The interviewee in this case performed this way to avoid answering even more direct questions throughout the interview.

interviewer becomes friendlier and friendlier, smiling and softening or calming her voice each time she needs to ask a new question:

> LINN: Is there something you think I haven't asked about that you would like to add or develop?
>
> KLAS: Of course there is a lot of stuff if you think about it, because it's an interesting topic to discuss. I actually would like to hear what your thesis is.
>
> LINN: Hmm, if I have a thesis-
>
> KLAS: -yes, *if* you have a thesis. Because you have asked questions on pretty many, different levels, I must say!
>
> LINN: Well, that's intended.
>
> KLAS: Yes, I understand that. But the question, kind of; what is this going to boil down to? And will there be [inaudible, something there?] that, if I get to know about it [inaudible] as well?

At this point I start to explain the sociological perspectives of the individual vs. structure, that the sample is very diverse and that I don't come from a research tradition where one talks about theses, don't think it's fair to 'test' my interviewees against a presupposed thesis, and that the conversation we create together also can be understood discursively. The interviewee continues to say that he talks about issues of behaviour as important and asks if that is something I take an interest in. I answer by counting different topics from interviews (including the one we have just finished) ending with the comment:

> LINN: So yes, sociology could be considered a kind of behavioural science…as you might notice my answer is very floating here [laughs].
>
> KLAS: Yes, well that's ok.
>
> LINN: [explaining even more about not wanting to turn the sample into an ideal type and being interested in the different ways that interviewees implement their feminism]
>
> KLAS: Ok. No, I don't know if there's anything I think you've forgotten to ask about.
>
> LINN: Well, the question might be phrased incorrectly; if there is something you want to add?
>
> KLAS: Yes…I don't know if it's; a discussion that I would find interesting to hear what others have to say about, is if one experiences oneself a gender equal or not, especially within love relations […]. I don't have any good answers and maybe we shouldn't go into that either. But I think it would be interesting anyway to hear what others say and what their reflections are.
>
> LINN: Why do you say that you don't have anything to say about it?
>
> KLAS: Well, it's so difficult. Because it's one of those really hard ques-

> tions, because I would like to…I would like to have someone looking at me from outside and sees more what I do.

Interestingly, we have talked about behavior and love relations during the interview. When probed by asking how feminism concretely affects his relationship, how they behave towards each other, he gets stuck; these are questions difficult to answer in specific ways. Rather, the interviewee seems dissatisfied with the way the interview is performed and the issues addressed. Expressing this also affects the form and content of the interview.

This excerpt can moreover be interpreted as my performance of intersected femininity/researcher being enhanced and then caving in when bringing the interviewee backstage of the project.

DISCUSSION

The analysis presented in this essay can be formulated as the observing outsider position of the researcher being challenged and negotiated. In the interviews of the study of feminist men, interviewees make themselves into observers, looking at their own narratives from an outside position. The researcher is no longer allowed to be an absolute ruler in constructing the framework of the study. Hence the issue of power and control is negotiated in a subtle manner. The interviewee's feminist project *per se* is comprised of engaging in reflection concerning the interviewee's own subject position as a man and as feminist in which self-understanding is central. For some this is also the only motive for participating in the study at all. The expectation of the interview to offer reflection and enhanced self-analysis is hereby formulated almost as a demand; the interviewer ought to challenge and call the interviewee into question. When this fundamental demand is not fulfilled because of ethical reasons or the purpose of the overall project, some interviewees got disappointed, frustrated, and even angry. Feminist social science need to do further research on reflective interviewees and gendered interview relations.

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'AIN'T NO FRIEND OF MINE': IMMIGRATION POLICY, THE GATED COMMUNITY, AND THE PROBLEM WITH THE DISPOSABLE WORKER IN T.C. BOYLE'S *TORTILLA CURTAIN*

Kathy Knapp

T.C. Boyle's novel, *Tortilla Curtain* (1995) begins with an epigraph from John Steinbeck's novel, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939): "They ain't human. . . a human being couldn't stand it to be so dirty and miserable." On the one hand, the epigraph is obviously fitting: Boyle's novel, like Steinbeck's, is concerned with a migrant worker who comes to California in search of the opportunity to earn for himself and his family a meager portion of the American Dream (Cándido Rincón has come with his pregnant wife, América, recalling Steinbeck's luckless heroine, Rose of Sharon). On the other hand, Boyle's allusion to *The Grapes of Wrath* and the Joads is deeply ironic. The Great Depression, which made itinerant workers out of American families such as the Joads, also marked a time in American history that Mexican immigrants like Boyle's Cándido were decidedly unwelcome since they were considered contributors to the country's economic woes; as many as 750,000 Mexicans and their American-born children either voluntarily repatriated or were involuntarily deported during the 1930s (Waters and Ueda 508).

America's immigration policy in general has been erratic to say the least, shaped as it has been by shifting political concerns and varying attitudes towards race and ethnicity. Yet an examination of the history of Mexican immigration in particular reveals a somewhat different picture. Though this immigration policy has also been wildly inconsistent, the logic behind it has been unswerving: it has been determined exclusively by economic interests. Thus, depending on the vicissitudes of the economy, Mexican workers have variously been considered pests who steal jobs, bring crime, and drain tax dollars from deserving Americans or as hard-working immigrants who have provided necessary agricultural, industrial, and domestic labor. In his book *Mexifornia: A State of Becoming* (2003), Victor Davis Hanson

blithely calls Mexican immigrants "human cargo" (10). According to our needs, this "human cargo" can be transported from one side of the border to the next. This sentiment was first formalized into public policy in the Dillingham Commission's 42-page report, completed in 1911, which concluded that "Mexicans were desirable as workers, but not as citizens" (cited in Cardenas). To be sure: a scant few years after the expulsion of Mexicans during the Depression, the huge vacuum in agricultural labor during World War II (thanks not only to the deployment of troops but to the removal and incarceration of the Japanese) gave birth to the "Bracero" program in which the U.S. government formed an agreement with the Mexican government to import temporary laborers. By the time the program ceased in 1964, some 5 million Braceros had entered the U.S. as temporary workers (Waters and Ueda 508).

As Boyle's novel *The Tortilla Curtain* further illustrates, this same logic of expedience defines the gated community, especially prevalent in California but spreading across the nation, which depends on immigrant labor at the same time that it seeks to exclude these people from its borders. The gated community embodies in miniature the nation's schizophrenic relationship with its undocumented immigrants since homeowner associations typically hire immigrants to maintain shared amenities such as pools, tennis courts, and playgrounds and individual homeowners require personal gardeners, house-cleaners, and nannies. Boyle depicts the members of the gated community in his novel, fittingly called Arroyo Blanco ("White Stream"), hiring illegal immigrants to polish their brass, clean their houses, and even build the wall that is meant to keep them out, all for wages so low as to be exploitative. Yet these same citizens balk at the labor exchange located at the bottom of the hill below their subdivision, since, as one character puts it, "I resent having to wade through them all every time I go to the post office. No offense, but it's beginning to look like fucking Guadalajara or something down there" (192). Though this flagrant hypocrisy may seem to be part and parcel of Boyle's broad, biting satire, it is sadly an accurate portrait of the attitudes shared among members of such communities.

In an ethnographic study of a gated community in Irvine, California, "Borders and Social Distinction in the Global Suburb," Kristin Hill Maher points out that in Orange County, services provided by Latino immigrants account for the fastest growing sector of the economy (283). Yet despite the interdependence of these two populations, the residents of affluent communities install gates and guards to insure that the workers with whom they entrust the care of their homes, their children, and their elderly parents, are effectively barred from

entering when their work is done. With her study of a gated community of 246 homes she calls "Ridgewood," Maher asks the same question that Boyle's novel, *Tortilla Curtain*, likewise poses: "Is there potential for pluralist integration across divisions of class, race, and migrant status, or do new patterns of segregation emerge?" (284). Apparently, segregation reigns. Maher notes that in Ridgewood and all of Orange County, wealthy white homeowners and poor migrant workers are utterly dependent upon each other, yet they live as separately as if the Rio Grande still divided them (287-288). Maher further illuminates the paradoxical relationship between these two groups: though these homeowners feel secure enough to hire Latinos to care for their children and their aging parents and to clean their homes, inside and out, they have actively fought to install a gate and a wall in order to protect themselves from crime. Yet Maher argues that such "crime talk" is not based in reality. For instance, throughout the 1990s, the FBI designated Irvine as one of the "safest cities in the country" (285) and both local law enforcement and community leaders have acknowledged that the negligible crime rate is largely perpetrated by local teens (289).

As Maher asserts and we shall see, the impetus for such determined segregation is driven by the desire to protect personal wealth and property values. The gates and walls function symbolically to maintain the class distinctions that determine the neighborhood's perceived prestige. Just as American policy toward Mexican immigration is driven by economic interests, so, too, the relationship between residents of gated communities and the immigrants they employ is similarly dictated by economic interest. It is precisely this dynamic that Boyle critiques in his novel, and which informs my own argument that such unjustified, anxiety-ridden "crime talk" is meant to mask these residents' desire to render such workers invisible. The residents of such communities or "Common Interest Developments" (CIDs) depend upon the Latino labor that sustain them to disappear when their work is done, and it is conveniently in the best interest of undocumented workers to operate "under the radar." Maher notes that in Ridgewood, "Gardeners stayed close to their trucks and tools. Childcare providers were generally visible only when in the company of their employers' children. Housekeepers were rarely visible." Indeed, the only point during which workers became visible was at the end of their work day, when day laborers made a mass exodus for the bus stop that would transport them out of sight and out of mind until the next morning (288-289).

Until recently, the system has worked reasonably well for residents of such communities. The problem now, as one resident of

Boyle's Arroyo Blanco articulates it, is that "there's just so many of them, they've overwhelmed us, the schools, welfare, the prisons, and now the streets" (185). In other words, the invisible have become inconveniently visible. As Maher points out, in a liberal society where it is no longer legally or socially acceptable to discriminate based on race, it is still permissible to discriminate based on legal status (306). When Boyle's self-proclaimed "liberal humanist" protagonist Delaney hits the unemployed Cándido with his car, his watered-down concern immediately turns to rage when he assumes that his victim must be camping illegally in the canyon below and thinks to himself, "it was people like this Mexican or whatever he was who were responsible, thoughtless people, stupid people, people who wanted to turn the whole world into a garbage dump, a little Tijuana" (11). He self-righteously sends Cándido on his way with nothing more than a twenty-dollar bill, later justifying his behavior to his wife: "I told you, he was *Mexican*" (15). Delaney's crass, cruel dismissal of Cándido and his conflation of his victim's ethnicity with his legal status suggest what is often hidden: Delaney only manages to get away with his crime easily and cheaply because his victim happens to be Mexican, not white. Thus, he quite literally dispenses with Cándido.

In a similar vein, the assumption that workers doing "immigrant" labor are illegal whether they are or not legitimates our determination that they have become a burden on our school and healthcare systems, a bottomless drain of our tax dollars, and must be sent back whence they came. Thus, I further argue that the Common Interest Development or gated community, like the United States' erratic immigration policy, depends upon a labor force that is disposable in order to preserve its false sense of itself as a democratic community, which can be defined as a group that allows for a broadly shared opportunity to participate, a broadly felt responsibility for its members, and a genuine sense of belonging. The construction of gates and walls and the formation of private homeowners' associations effectively insure that although gardeners, housekeepers, nannies, and elder-caregivers may live nearby and oftentimes *live-in*, they are not really members of the community.

Both locally and globally, in other words, Americans have regarded their neighbors not as neighbors, but as mere disposable commodities. In an article entitled "The Figure of the Neighbor: Los Angeles Past and Future," Dana Cuff asserts that the neighbor is a "mediation between self and other: one must be one to have one" (62). The Self, in this sense, cannot exist without the Other. The willful disposal of our neighbor is nothing less than the willing sacrifice of our own humanity.

When Worlds Collide: Suburban Nation Meets Immigration Nation

Since the official end of the Bracero program in 1964, the Mexican population has increased steadily, from about 4.5 million in 1970 to over 25 million in 2005 (Waters and Ueda 509), and the debate over immigration has reached a fever pitch. The headline on the cover of a recent issue of the *New York Times Magazine* describes well the current state of the debate: "All Immigration Politics is Local" (August 5, 2007). While the immigration issue may dominate debate on the floor of the Senate and the House and stir up anger over the hiring practices at Walmart, the issue is most dramatically on display in our neighborhoods and towns, where the very definition of community is at stake.

When one considers that the majority of Americans now live in the suburbs, it should come as no surprise that the battle over immigration is being waged not in the city but in the nation's suburbs. The 2000 census data indicates that immigrants are now bypassing the central cities and moving directly to the suburbs; more than half of the nation's Latino immigrants now live in the suburbs, having followed the jobs created by the suburban population explosion of the last thirty years, filling low-paying service jobs in lawn care, housecleaning, child and elderly care, etc. (Berube and Kneebone).

In other words, the notion of the suburbs as belonging exclusively to the white middle class no longer applies. Maher's label for these former bedroom communities, "global suburb," is apt indeed. The rapid influx of immigrants to the suburbs is captured well by Boyle in *Tortilla Curtain* when his protagonist, Delaney, suddenly, inconveniently attuned thanks to his collision with the luckless Cándido, notes with wonder that "they were everywhere, these men, ubiquitous, . . . whether it be mopping up the floors at McDonald's, inverting trash cans in the alley out back or Emilio's, or moving purposively behind the rake and blowers that combed the pristine lawns of Arroyo Blanco Estates twice a week. Where had they all come from? What did they all want?" (12). Of course, the reader, if not Delaney himself, recognizes that he has answered his own question: they want work, and have for the most part found it by taking on the tasks of keeping the lawns, households, restaurants, and shops "pristine" for his—and his neighbors'—satisfaction. As Maher further argues, pristine lawns aside, the response to such diversity has been less than welcoming, and in *Tortilla Curtain*, T.C. Boyle chronicles an increasingly typical reaction to these new demographics: the gated community.

The gated community is the unfortunate, logical conclusion of

suburbanization, middle-class fear and resentment, and so-called White Flight. Not surprisingly, the states where gated communities first took root, California and Florida, are also those where foreign immigration has been the highest (Blakely and Snyder 152). As Boyle's protagonist Delaney admits, "The Salvadorans, the Mexicans, the blacks, the gangbangers and taggers and carjackers they read about in the Metro section over their bran toast and coffee. That's why they'd abandoned the flatlands of the Valley and the hills of the Westside to live up here, outside the city limits, in the midst of all this scenic splendor" (39). Boyle captures the ethos of the gated community. In their book, *Fortress America* (1999), Edward Blakely and Mary Snyder note that in Los Angeles, for instance, a resident of the exclusive Brentwood Circle neighborhood described why residents felt it was necessary to privatize their streets, gate their neighborhood, and install a 24-hour guard: "The guards and the gate will keep out the riffraff" (Blakely and Snyder 110). The gated community represents the last frontier for white suburbia.

While white exclusivity in the suburbs was once all but guaranteed with race-restrictive lending practices,[1] the Supreme Court ruling in 1948 outlawed racially restrictive covenants. Thus, homeowner associations quickly learned to rely on covenants that targeted specific behaviors in order to exclude people of color and to protect their all-important property values. Ironically, this approach may have grown out of a proposal from Robert Weaver, the first African American to hold a cabinet position, who suggested replacing restrictive racial covenants with those that targeted instead certain objectionable practices in order to preserve property values (McKenzie 77). As Evan McKenzie points out in *Privatopia* (1994), developers and homeowner associations latched onto Weaver's idea as the next best thing to racially restrictive covenants, and have practiced this underhanded mode of racial discrimination ever since (77). To be sure, Gated communities rely not merely on gates but on restrictive covenants or CC & R's (Codes, Covenants, and Regulations) to maintain class distinctions. Boyle's depiction of Arroyo Blanco Estates, an eerily

[1] Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton argue in *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Boston: Harvard UP, 1993) that the homogeneity of suburban populations was originally the result of the extent to which nonwhites were denied access to the means of suburban home purchase. Taking its cue from the earlier Home Owner's Loan Corporation (HOLC), the FHA maintained the practice of "redlining," a color-coded ratings system that evaluated the risks associated with loans made to specific urban neighborhoods. Those central-city neighborhoods that were racially and ethnically mixed were color-coded red and virtually never received loans (51-54).

vacuum-sealed upper-middle-class subdivision, is scathing but all too accurate. It is

> a private community, comprising a golf course, ten tennis courts, a community center and some two hundred and fifty homes, each set on one-point-five acres and strictly conforming to the covenants, conditions, and restrictions set forth in the 1973 articles of incorporation. The houses were all of the Spanish Mission style, painted in one of three prescribed shades of white, with orange tile roofs. (30)

In other words, if you live in Arroyo Blanco Estates, you are either White, White, or White. Difference is simply not tolerated. As much of an exaggeration as this may seem, if anything, the "real-life" gated community that Maher describes is even more restrictive. Among the formal and informal rules and regulations meant to distinguish Ridgewood from lower class, non-white neighborhoods: residents cannot hang laundry nor can they park pick-up trucks that they use for business on the streets. Residents consciously opted not to relegate space for a basketball court since, according to one resident, basketball courts "would attract unsavory people from other places," laying bare the racial subtext to their decision (296).

Paradoxically, the same "unsavory" "riffraff" that these residents seek to exclude with gates, guards, and CC & Rs have the power to confer status when working in the service of these residents. Maher notes that as long as these workers' status was immediately "legible," residents looked upon these workers favorably since they contributed to the community's "aesthetics of prestige" (298). Residents of Maher's Ridgewood noted that such workers were "hard-working, sweet people" who only "want a better life for themselves" (297).

Yet it is also clear that such positive sentiments were dependent upon their clear "legibility" as service workers. As long as they were operating a lawn mower or accompanying their "charges" to the community pool, these workers were welcome. When Maher interviewed several residents about their feelings concerning live-in workers using the community facilities during their time off and without their "charges" and perhaps with family members of their own living outside the community, the residents were clearly discomfited. One resident allowed that "[i]t wouldn't bother me personally, unless people were getting out of hand. Or—now this isn't very nice—but unless it was attracting some sort of riffraff into the community" (300). Conveniently for these concerned residents, live-in workers, though technically residents, were not inclined to step over the invisible boundaries drawn for them. A Ridgewood resident acknowledges that the live-in workers in the neighborhood are "probably better about not abusing [the use of common facilities] than some of the residents that used to

[live here]. . . legal residents that aren't here anymore . . . they have much more respect for the whole system" (299). "The whole system," as this woman implicitly defines it, is one that assumes that these live-in workers, who are technically residents, nevertheless should not enjoy the same privileges as "legal residents." Another resident spells out the formula that has come to work so well for the residents: "Because most of the workers here are very illegal, they don't want to attract a lot of attention anyway, I don't think" (300).

While the battle over immigration across the country, such as that being waged in Carpentersville, Illinois, in which town counsel members are seeking to make English the official language (Kotlowitz), ostensibly rests on Hispanics' 'refusal' to properly assimilate, U.S. immigration policy toward Mexico has depended on these workers' willingness *not* to assimilate, to do the work that aspiring Americans will not. This same logic is at work in communities like Ridgewood, where residents depend on their labor force to recognize their place as outsiders, unentitled to the privileges of those who belong. Research indicates that the gates around affluent communities work literally and symbolically to isolate the poor from meaningful contact with the individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society, making it that much more difficult for those looking to improve their situation by entering the job network (Blakely and Snyder 153). These communities maintain their supply of inexpensive labor by curtailing their advancement.

Boyle exposes the flagrant hypocrisy of such thinking in his novel: the residents of Boyle's Arroyo Blanco "tolerate" a labor exchange at the 7-11 convenience store at the bottom of their development; here, the residents and their contractors hire help for cleaning, yard work, construction projects and any other work they want done cheaply. However, when the exchange grows too crowded, Kyra, Delaney's wife, determines that such unsightliness will surely affect the development's property values and moves promptly to shut it down. The beauty of disposable labor is just that: when they are no longer convenient, they can be disposed of like so many of the goods purchased at the 7-11 convenience store.

What's Mine is Mine: The Privatization of "Community"

T.C. Boyle wrote *Tortilla Curtain* in the wake of California's passage in 1994 (by a full 60 percent of voters) of Proposition 187, a bill—ultimately deemed unconstitutional—intended to deny medical care, schooling, and other services from illegal immigrants and their children" (Mailman 3). Boyle captures the national mood, especially

prevalent in California, through Delaney's neighbor Jack Jardine, who rails, "The ones coming in through the Tortilla Curtain down there, those are the ones that are killing us. They're peasants, my friend. No education, no resources, no skills. . . The illegals in San Diego County contributed seventy million in tax revenues and at the same time, they used up two hundred and forty million in services—welfare, emergency care, schooling and the like. You want to pay for that? And for the crime that comes with it?" (101-102).

Whether discussing immigration policy or the decision to gate a community, both are dictated by the desire to control one's environment and protect one's economic interests. Blakely and Snyder note the various reasons that people may be drawn to a gated community: they "want control—over their homes, their streets, their neighborhoods. Through gates, guards, and walls they seek this control in the ability to exclude outsiders from their territory" (125). The need to control is so fierce that it trumps longstanding political and social convictions. Boyle captures well the rub when, at a "community" meeting to discuss the installation of a gate, Jack Cherrystone, an Arroyo Blanco resident, protests,

> I'm as liberal as anybody in this room—my father chaired Adlai Stevenson's campaign committee, for christsakes—but I say we've got to put an end to this. . . I'd like to open my arms to everybody in the world, no matter how poor they are or what country they come from; . . .but you know as well as I do that those days are past. . . You want to save the world, go to Calcutta and sign on with Mother Teresa. (44)

In laying claim to a liberal heritage that stretches back to the (failed) presidential bid of that paradigm of elite, effete liberalism, Adlai Stevenson, while defending his current muscular position against "the ones coming in through the Tortilla Curtain," Cherrystone embodies the trajectory that has taken liberal guilt from its sympathy with radical causes to its current apostasy. In her essay, "A Short History of Liberal Guilt," Julie Ellison provides a diagnosis for the moral quandary in which card-carrying "liberals" such as Cherrystone find themselves: "Liberal guilt signifies a loss of control. Increasingly, too, it signifies a loss of money, as though the donor individual or class cannot afford to give anything away without impoverishing itself" (353). Blakely and Snyder quote one angry resident of a gated community outside of San Francisco who says, "People are tired of the way the government has managed the issues and the freedom the voters have given them to do things. Because it's been so mismanaged, and because you don't really have control over how the money is spent. . . . I'm going to put myself in a situation where I feel I have a little more control over how I live my life" (60-61).

The gated community is part of a national trend toward privatization in everything from schools and hospitals to prisons. Like Maher, the liberal economist Robert Reich sees the rise of the gated community as the function of the new global economy, in which upper-middle class people "are quietly seceding from the large and diverse publics of America into homogenous enclaves, within which their earnings need not be redistributed to people less fortunate than themselves" (cited in Wolfe 12). He calls the phenomenon the "secession of the successful," whereby residents pay privately for services traditionally subsidized publicly—everything from repairing roads and hauling garbage to cleaning swimming pools and maintaining parks— thereby gaining the control they seek while rendering themselves immune from the blight just beyond their periphery (Reich).

Though he might well have been echoing Robert Reich and describing the residents of today's gated communities, Alexis de Tocqueville observed in 1830, "[T]here are more and more people who, though neither rich nor powerful enough to have much hold over others, have gained or kept enough wealth and enough understanding to look after their own needs. . . They form the habit of thinking of themselves in isolation and imagine that their whole destiny is in their hands" (208). Nevertheless, the social landscape Tocqueville would have encountered in the early 1800s would have been an agrarian society, where community would have been paramount, and economic self-interest would have been tempered by Protestant Christianity, personal ties, and a practical, egalitarian sense of community responsibility.

The gated community embodies Tocqueville's observations of this peculiar American brand of individualism, now untempered by religious or civic concerns or any sense of responsibity to the community at large. Though these enclaves ostensibly operate as "communities," residents hardly seem bound by "custom or personal ties," but instead are guided purely by self-interest. Blakely and Snyder note, for instance, that within the affluent gated community of Blackhawk, residents do not feel compelled to get involved with the messy politics of the adjacent city, Danville. At the time of Blakely and Snyder's interviews, a tax or bond issue was proposed to benefit the county of which Blackhawk is a part. Residents defended their right not to vote in favor of such a proposal. As one resident explained, whatever the reasons were for such a tax hike, chances were that Blackhawk already provided these services for its residents: "The gate gives you an option, and you don't have to feel guilty either way" (60). Thus, gates not only serve to preserve property values, but also a carefully constructed if fragile sense of self-righteousness

among its residents.

Altogether Out of the Sphere': The Invisible Men and Women in Our Midst

It is precisely this sort of blithe dismissal of those beyond the privileged boundaries of affluent communities such as Blackhawk that has provided fodder for critics of the suburbs and their even more exclusive child, the gated community, who have noted that as American cities filled up with immigrants and the very poor, the choice to live in the suburbs began to seem more particularly a choice to live in exclusively wealthy, white enclaves. As Alan Wolfe puts it, "Suburbanization, from this point of view, represents the retreat from community, not the desire to embrace it, if community is understood to include the dependent, the needy, and the less fortunate" (182). By removing themselves from "the dependent, the needy, and the less fortunate," the residents of such "communities" not only strive to escape crime and poverty, but the bothersome guilt associated with witnessing those less fortunate than oneself.

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith reasons that while it may be worthy to take the imaginative leap to understand the suffering of "our brother on the rack," there is nothing but anxiety to be gained from imagining the misfortunes of those "placed altogether out of the sphere of our activity." After all, he wonders, "To what purpose should we trouble ourselves about the world in the moon?" (140). As Maher notes, the laborers who work in communities such as Boyle's barely fictional Arroyo Blanco may live in proximity, yet once they finish their work and find their way to the bus stops that will carry them to whatever they call home, they are "altogether out of the sphere" of the "community."

In fact, Robert Reich sees the gated community as a final attempt to keep those less fortunate out of sight and beyond the reach of old-fashioned liberal guilt. After all, since most people in these communities are essentially on the same economic plane, there is no cause for a guilty conscience or the anxiety it causes. As the reasoning goes, "'If inhabitants of another area are poorer, let them look to one another. Why should *we* pay for *their* schools?' Through such reasoning, it has become possible to maintain a self-image of generosity toward, and solidarity with, one's 'community' without bearing any responsibility to 'them'—the other 'community'" (Reich).

Boyle's novel imagines what happens to such residents when the immigrants in their midst—"the other 'community'"— cease to

be invisible. On the one hand, such sudden recognition can inspire rage. In a hideous burlesque of community spirit, Delaney and his neighbors gather together after being evacuated because of fire, and when they see two Hispanic men approaching, they erupt as an angry mob, spitting racist epithets: "'Arsonist!' somebody shouted. 'Spic!' . . . They were out here in the night, outside the walls, forced out of their shells, and there was nothing to restrain them" (288). Delaney, the self-proclaimed liberal humanist, has been reduced to something that "ain't human." On the other hand, such recognition has redemptive power. Having hit and wounded Cándido, Delaney is haunted by him, and when he sees him again, he is pierced by "the look of him, the face layered with scab like old paint" which "brought all Delaney's guilt back to the surface, a wound that refused to heal" (105). Similarly, while negotiating the price of building a fence in her backyard, Kyra inconveniently recognizes Cándido as the man her husband had hit with his car: "[S]he felt a space open up inside her, a great sad empty space that made her feel as if she'd given birth to something weak and unformed. And as he passed by her again, jaunty on his bad leg, the space opened so wide it could have sucked in the whole universe" (161).

Echoing Dana Cuff's existentialist assertion, noted earlier in this essay, that a neighbor is a "mediation between self and other: one must be one to have one," Delaney's and Kyra's very humanity is dependent upon their ability to *see* the people they have conveniently rendered invisible. In the apocalyptic conclusion to his novel, Boyle amplifies this argument. Wreaking havoc on the gated community he has created with both a fire and a flood, Boyle nevertheless offers the possibility of a reimagined, redeemed community. And ultimately, it is Cándido who offers salvation when he extends his hand to the drowning Delaney. The gesture echoes Rose of Sharon's offer of her breast to a complete stranger at the end of *The Grapes of Wrath*, but in this case, it is crucial that the two men are *not* strangers: indeed, though Delaney may fear Cándido as "one of them," the two men have become oddly intimate, their lives, though wildly different, quite literally on parallel crash courses. Despite Delaney's wealth, he is washing away on the same current as the luckless Cándido. Cándido is the man on the moon whom Adam Smith had so casually dismissed, and he is not only altogether *in* Delaney's sphere but availing himself at just the right moment. It is Cándido, whom Delaney had earlier considered "some feral thing, like a stray dog," (4), who reveals the depth of his compassion: "[W]hen he saw the white face surge up out of the black swirl of the current and the white hand grasping at the tiles, he reached down and took hold of it" (355). If all immigration politics

are local, their formulation starts here, with Cándido's outstretched hand and a recognition of our common humanity.

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MIMETIC PATTERNS OF MASCULINITY OR JUST ANOTHER FANTASY BOOK

Beatriz Domínguez Ruiz

When *The Lord of the Rings* was published in the fifties, it was seen as merely "another" fantasy book. Against all expectations, it was chosen the book of the century after a poll carried out by the book chain Waterstones and Channel 4 in 1997. Since then, despite the fact that fantasy or science fiction books have always been considered to belong to a secondary genre, Tolkien's masterpiece has been analysed in detail from all points of view: mythology, linguistics, ecocriticism… and also recently, gender.

Whereas within gender studies, scholars and critics have mainly focused on the female characters, I focus on male characters in this essay, in order to analyse the different representations of masculinity in Tolkien's work, dividing my focus on three main sections: the subject of masculinity and gender, Tolkien's biography and his participation in the First World War, and the characteristics of the different races of Middle-earth.

The first section of this essay deals with the search for theoretical basics to work on the subject of gender, and more concretely, masculinity. Looking at Tolkien through the theoretical framework of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, we note that Foucault's *History of Sexuality* claims that the concept of sexuality has fluctuated through history. Therefore, sexuality is a social construct, different depending on the historical and cultural period. Also a constructivist Judith Butler states that "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler 179). We are biologically marked by our genitalia at birth; however, our behaviour is influenced by the socio-cultural and historical moment we live in, it is what you *do* that matters and not *who you are*. We live in a society, though, that erroneously marks our behaviour and therefore our gender identity depending on whether we are born with male or female genitalia, i.e. our behaviour and gender performance are clearly influenced by our context, our relationships

and interactions... According to Butler's and Foucault's theories, each person performs a different type of femininity or masculinity as each person's circumstances are unique (Harris 10), therefore it is more appropriate to talk about "masculinities" in general.

The construction of the divisions between men and women can be regarded nowadays as "primitive"; unfortunately, it is clear they are still existent in Western patriarchal society where "males are seen as logical, rational, aggressive, exploitative, strategic, independent and competitive. Females are thought to be intuitive, emotional, submissive, empathic, spontaneous, nurturing and co-operative" (Goddard 32). We are not a hundred per cent masculine or feminine, though, so in our society these characteristics fluctuate in each of us and either males or females can behave in ways that are patriarchally seen as exclusively meant for women or men.

If we agree that gender is not fixed and is a social construct, it is vital to assess how important it was for Tolkien to have been born in a patriarchal society at the end of the nineteenth century. His life was marked, above all, by three great events: his childhood in a rural area in Northern England, his experience in World War I and his interaction with several literary groups exclusively made up of men from his adolescence to the Inklings of his maturity. Men therefore had a very important role in his life, characterised by his interaction with homosocial groups.

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born in 1892 in Bloemfontain, South Africa, where his father had moved two years before to work for the Bank of Africa. His mother, Mabel Tolkien, gave birth to another child in 1894 and the three of them moved back to England when John Ronald was only 4 years old as the children's health in such an arid place was not very good. We must bear in mind from the very beginning the sociocultural context in which Tolkien was born—a Great Britain that had lost its status of Empire which had spread in the country a feeling of "masculinism" or male domination (Brittan 53). Boys' representative figures were eminently male: male soldiers, male conquerors, male Prime Ministers. Gender differences in Tolkien's time made it impossible for men and women alike to trespass society's boundaries such as jobs and family roles, for instance. The social construction of men and women marked their characteristics: women were thought to be "gentle and virginal" (Bourke 12) whereas men were left with what Benyon has seen as the four basic pillars in the formation of young men: "athleticism, stoicism, sexual purity and moral courage" (27).

Although born in South Africa, Tolkien could not have been more

English. His father's death was determinant in his life as his mother stayed with her offspring in England where she was economically helped by her family until her conversion to Catholicism. This important fact would also be essential in Tolkien's life as the family became good friends with the Catholic priest Father Francis Morgan, who became a father figure for him even before and, above all, after Mabel's death in 1904. According to Carpenter's biography, Tolkien thought of his mother as a kind of martyr "who killed herself with labour and trouble to ensure us keeping the faith" (50). Tolkien not only inherited his mother's love for nature and languages but also her devout Catholicism.

When Tolkien was sixteen years old, Father Francis Morgan found a pension for the Tolkien brothers to stay, where John Ronald met Edith Bratt, his future wife. He fell in love with her but his tutor saw her as a "temptation" so did not approve of this relationship. They were consequently separated and Tolkien concentrated on his studies, although he married her later on when he came of age. It was at this time of separation from Edith that he met his best friends Christopher Wiseman, R.Q. Wilson and G.B. Smith, with whom he would create the Tea Club and Barrovian Society. They spent long hours discussing various topics, playing rugby together and soon joined by a male bonding "far from what they perceived to be the damaging influences of 'the feminine'" (Benyon 31). The T.C.B.S. was another homosocial group formed of young men with shared interests who were raised in a patriarchal society. They became what Deslandes calls "elite British manhood" (49), i.e. male undergraduates who had to undergo certain "informal initiations and rites of passage that signified a distinctive stage of life and delineated those masculine traits that distinguished younger from older men" (49.). The T.C.B.S. attended the two most traditional universities in England, Oxford and Cambridge, where the cap and gown were exclusively for men. In short, the public school system marked the identities of several generations in England, transmitting them Victorian values and ideas based on manliness and loyalty.

These same ideas led a great number of youngsters to enlist and fight for their country in the First World War, which meant the sudden growth to maturity for those who survived it. Millions of lives were lost in the attempt "to carry the fate of nations" (Garth 264), and many of them were patriotic young students from Oxford and Cambridge (Deslandes 24). Tolkien wanted to enlist from the very beginning but was advised to stay and finish his studies so he went to war after his marriage in 1916. His T.C.B.S. comrades went to battle as well, with the result that Wilson and Smith died in 1916, leaving the group totally

broken. Their homosocial bond was so strong that Tolkien would always refer to these deaths as a "lifelong sadness."

This homosociality, characteristic of this historical period in the public schools and the war, was seen by some as a "temporary homosexuality" or "homoerotic" relationship (Fussell 272). Although there were some rumours about homosexual relationships at that time, the truth is that most of the friendships born then had nothing to do with sexual tendencies but with an asexual love and closeness among comrades.

Although Tolkien defended the theory that it is not compulsory to know a writer's life to understand his work, in this case Tolkien's biography is illuminating when looking at *The Lord of the Rings* from the point of view of gender. We cannot forget the important fact that he was born at the end of the nineteenth century and was educated in some Victorian values which might seem obsolete nowadays but were fundamental at that time. The end of the Great War was the end of the T.C.B.S. but Tolkien kept on joining homosocial male groups such as the Oxonian literary group the Inklings, whose members were mainly C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams and Owen Barfield. Their meetings were full of discussions not only about literature but also religion and their own writings. Lewis and Tolkien deeply admired each other and shared a friendship beyond limits, although Tolkien always felt jealous of Lewis' friendship with Williams. Living in Oxford, giving lectures in Oxford and meeting in Oxford, it is obvious that they were an important factor in the city of spires in the 30s. They were the product of the public school system during their childhood, their adolescence and, later, their maturity. The university and college atmosphere was deeply influenced by the patriarchal tradition and society which kept women out, relegated to a mere secondary role of nurturers and wives.

Tolkien's personal and professional life full of homosocial relationships, his interests in ancient literature and all his personal experiences are a key point to understand why he created Rohan, Gondor, the Elves, the hobbits, etc., as he did. All the groups of men in Middle-earth represent different patterns of masculine behaviour that Tolkien develops in a sort of mimetic work as each race is a reflection of a particular society, such as Tolkien's own Oxford or the context of *Beowulf*.

A reflection of the Old English heroic codes found in *Beowulf*, the Men of Rohan are said to have "their real-life counterparts" in the "Anglo-Saxons of early medieval England" (Stanton 54). The Rohirrim share a primitive heroic code based on the cornerstone of the Old

English one of the *comitatus* that joins them together to protect their King Théoden even with their lives, something they share with *The Battle of Maldon*'s warriors. Physically strong and mentally fearless, these warriors are always ready for battle, where they seek to perform their loyal and courageous attitudes. Their masculinity is thus based on making heroic deeds, no matter how dangerous they are.

The image we have about the Anglo-Saxon period is certainly influenced by the literary accounts of this historical time. Although *Beowulf*, *The Wanderer* and *The Battle of Maldon* are three of the most important texts that have survived the passage of time, they have not survived the damage of generations of translators that have left us the arduous task of discerning what should be regarded as historical truth and what a deliberate change of meaning. Although there are various hypotheses about the "beginning" of patriarchy, society in the 5th and 6th centuries was eminently patriarchal and this is therefore what we find in Rohan. However, there is a very interesting case in this heroic society that makes it differ from the essentially masculine patriarchal society portrayed in *Beowulf*; it is the character of Éowyn, who resembles more a kind of Scandinavian shieldmaiden or valkyrie rather than a mere hostess. During the War of the Ring in the third volume she becomes "the lord to the Eorlingas" (151) and is given "a sword and a fair corslet" – she becomes the perfect example of a woman confined in a heroic society who becomes a warrior herself, proving she has the same qualities for battle of the Rohirrim. Dwarves can be included to a certain extent here with the Men of Rohan as they are stout-hearted and strong warriors so they share with them similar characteristics in the pattern of masculinity they have been built on.

Gondor, the White Tower place, bastion of the King of Gondor's stewards until the return of the King, is a society whose codes of behaviour are more sophisticated than Rohan's. Gondor's warriors seem to belong to a feudal society of the later Middle Ages, whose main goal is not recognition and praise in war but the defence of a clear ideal. As in the chivalric romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, heroes embark on a quest at the end of which they will prove themselves worthy of something, such as Aragorn, who proves to deserve Arwen's love. The pattern of masculinity portrayed by the Rohirrims is therefore different from the people from Gondor. The most important example is the differences between Boromir and Faramir, two brothers who grow up together in Gondor but who represent different patterns of masculinity. Whereas Boromir can be seen as a hypermasculine hero who seems to be nearer the Rohirrim in his ideas of war as a means to achieve glory, Faramir is a truer representative of the late medieval society of Gondor. For Faramir, war is the

last option to defend something, not something compulsory:

> 'For myself,' said Faramir, 'I would see the White Tree in flower again in the courts of the kings, and the Silver Crown return, and Minas Tirith in peace: Minas Anor again as of old, full of light, high and fair, beautiful as a queen among other queens: not a mistress of many slaves, nay, not even a kind mistress of willing slaves. War must be, while we defend our lives against a destroyer who would devour all; but I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his glory. I love only that which they defend: the city of the Men of Númenor; and I would have her loved for her memory, her ancientry, her beauty, and her present wisdom. Not feared, save as men may fear the dignity of a man, old and wise.' (*Tolkien* 346).

Therefore, when compared to his brother, Faramir can be thought to be like a thoughtful and "feminized" hero in contrast to his brother's "hypermasculinity." Aragorn, the future king of Gondor, shares with Faramir this thoughtfulness and spiritual concept of war as the only means to save his people, so different from the epic hero. More than anything, they are human heroes—Aragorn shows his most human side in *The Fellowship of the Ring*: "Aragorn sat with his head bowed to his knees; only Elrond knew fully what this hour meant to him. The others could be seen as grey shapes in the darkness" (Tolkien 367). When Gandalf dies, he suffers: "'Alas! I fear we cannot stay here longer,' said Aragorn. He looked towards the mountains and held up his sword. 'Farewell, Gandalf!' he cried. 'Did I not say to you: *if you pass the doors of Moria, beware*? Alas that I spoke true! What hope have we without you?'" (Tolkien 436).

In contrast to Victorian stories, in which they are presented as tiny, pointy-eared creatures, the Elves of Tolkien are a fair people composed of a mixture of characteristics, combining Celtic influences with Tolkien's own religious views regarding death and immortality. As in the case of *Beowulf*, pure Celtic texts are rare and most of them have been "touched" by the human hand so the information we get from them is not a hundred per cent accurate. Nevertheless, Tolkien's Elves have inherited the importance of the female figure in the Celtic society. They share their warrior side with the Tuatha Dé Danann:

> They [Elves] are a powerful, full-blooded people who closely resemble the pre-human Irish race of immortals called the Tuatha Dé Danann. Like the Tuatha Dé Danann, Tolkien's Elves are taller and stronger than mortals, are incapable of suffering sickness, are possessed of more than human beauty, and are filled with greater wisdom in all things. They possess talismans, jewels and weapons that humans might consider magical in their powers. They ride supernatural horses and understand the languages of animals. They love song, poetry and music—all of which they compose and perform perfectly. (Day 80)

Tolkien introduces Elves as ageless and spiritual creatures, similar to angels, with hardly any reference to their sex; they share similar attitudes regardless their biological sex and are all presented as androgynous beings without what Western society has categorized as feminine nurturing characteristics for females and masculine strong attitudes for males. Thus, their roles in their society are not fixed: female Elves can fight (Galadriel) and male Elves can heal (Glorfindel). In this mixture of spirituality and warrior features, we could include Gandalf, the hobbit-lover wizard who is always there when needed, the old-looking man who turns out to be more powerful than Saruman.

Finally, *The Lord of the Rings* is actually told from a hobbito-centric point of view, The hobbits are clearly a reflection of Tolkien's own time and friends and the Shire is a true image of Sarehole, the place where Tolkien spent some of his happiest times in his childhood. Tolkien always thought of himself as a hobbit, he liked smoking tobacco, nature and the countryside, and disliked technology. He was a peace-lover who enjoyed the company of his friends, of his own fellowship, either in the T.C.B.S. or the Inklings.

Hobbits are based on Tolkien's own friends and their experience in the War of the Ring is the T.C.B.S.'s experience in the Great War. They are ordinary plain people, "the essence of human strength and human frailty" (O'Neill 53), and in Tolkien's own words, "my 'Sam Gamgee' is indeed a reflexion of the English soldier, of the privates and batmen I knew in the 1914 war, and recognised as so far superior to myself" (Carpenter 114). As we have seen so far, it is safe to refer to "masculinities" in general when talking about the characters of *The Lord of the Rings*, and even within the same race, as we have seen in the case of Boromir and Faramir, there are differences. Although they share some characteristics such as their innocence and altruistic friendship, each hobbit is different and, at the end of their quest, their differences are more obvious than at the beginning of their journey—they end up acquiring some of the characteristics of the societies they spend some time with. Like the young soldiers in the Great War, the hobbits face perils they could not have dreamt of in their beloved Shire—their bonds are similar to the comradeship that arose in the trenches during WWI, and it is especially in the case of Frodo and Sam where we can see this intimacy and close friendship which entirely transcends the sexual.

> Frodo's face was peaceful, the marks of fear and care had left it; but it looked old, old and beautiful, as if the chiselling of the shaping years was now revealed in many fine lines that had before been hidden, though the identity of the face was not changed. Not that Sam Gamgee put it that way to himself. He shook his head, as if finding words

> useless, and murmured: "I love him. He's like that, and sometimes it shines through, somehow. But I love him, whether or no." (Tolkien 321)

They could not have achieved what they did if they did not have trusted each other and felt they were a true fellowship. Like a Christ figure, Frodo sacrifices himself for the general welfare of the community—he will never be the same again after being the Ring-bearer so he goes back home with a "posttraumatic stress disorder" (Brennan 135) and lives what Shippey has called "disillusionment of the returned veteran" (156). The quest that the hobbits had to leave did not just take them to Mount Doom, their journey in Middle-earth is Tolkien's journey in 1916: a journey to maturity.

Due to Tolkien's admiration for ancient literary works as important as *Beowulf*, for example, it was inevitable not to think that Tolkien might have included some of these characteristics in his own writings. Thus, to analyse the main races in Middle-earth: men, elves and hobbits, I have in mind the idea that in the creation of each of them, Tolkien tried to imitate historical moments as varied as the Middle Ages or the first half of the twentieth century. Despite the fact that these races are part of a certain society which exists in the history of the human beings, not all the characters in the trilogy are representatives of *their* society. Tolkien's task to create a mythology is also meant to set up a believable and human history, more than just a mere representation of reality.

Generations of critics have seen in Tolkien's masterpiece a type of mass literature that does not deserve to be considered one of the great books of the world. Time and research are proving this judgment to be less than fair, and with the release of Jackson's films, *The Lord of the Rings* seems to be "fashionable" again. Éowyn, Arwen and Galadriel have been analysed in detail since the fifties—it is time now to turn our eyes to the different patterns of masculinity in general and try to discern if twenty-first century writers such as Christopher Paolini and his *Eragon* series or Anselm Audley's trilogy *Acquasilva* are true heirs of the father of epic fantasy and how the various patterns of masculinity created by Tolkien have influenced male and female fantasy writers alike.

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TANSI'S RADIO PARENTHESIS

Servanne Woodward

Upon sending some poems to Léopold Sédar Senghor, Sony Labou Tansi consequently became the protégé of Henri Lopez, also a poet, and then first minister in Brazzaville. Tansi was thus moved out of his remote assignments in villages to the capital (Devésa, *Kongo* 17, 21). There he founded the Rocado Zulu theater with the sponsorship of the French Cultural Center, and he traveled with his troop to France, a trip financed by Elf Congo. His playwright's activities secured him an international network for his publications in poetry, novels, and theater. This, however, did not prevent him from attacking the oil companies, France, the "Guide of the People" at home, and Negritude probably because of his reservations about Existentialism, as well as Marxism—attacks that led to his submissions being declined by the Présence Africaine publishing house, while his novels were published by the Seuil press. Since 1967, Radio France Internationale had organized a competition with 20 countries in Africa and in the Indian Ocean, and after being selected for radio broadcasting, Tansi turned successfully to this new genre. He obtained prizes and gained considerable visibility. *La Parenthèse de sang* (The Parenthesis of Blood 1981) is characteristic of the plays he produced while gathering radio momentum. It is representative of what made him famous.

Envious detractors mocked his political stance, calling him "La voix de la France" ("The voice of France") while he was deemed ungrateful by his sponsors and supporters (Devésa, *Kongo* 22). Further examination shows that Tansi might have shared J.B. Tati-Loutard's "absence of dogmatism" (Makward, "Poetry" 220). Tati-Loutard was an established poet, also one of Tansi's mentors early on. Tansi's disloyalties might have been caused by another type of political priority, "revolt" (as stated on his business card), which does not agree with programmatic revolution or construction. Rather, it seems that Tansi was eager to affirm his independence of critical thought, his ability to answer, protest and expose, in his own effort to remain an ever

alert "consciousness."

Radio media is commented upon in *La vie et demie*: "mouches-radio qui pouvaient diffuser un rayon mortel à plusieurs millions de kilomètres de distance...." ("radio-flies that could kill by emitting lethal waves in a radius of several millions of kilometers" *Vie* 183). The radio and the presses are weapons. In *La Parenthèse*, Cavacha invites his soldiers to follow him in his attack against the "radio nationale" which used its medium to announce that "Libertashio is dead," the very sentence that was absolutely forbidden previously and the declaration that caused the death of all the previous sergeants up to Cavacha. Just as the previous guards were shot for having said that Libertashio was dead, Cavacha now proposes to go shoot the radio and the capital: "Nous allons fusiller la radio nationale. Nous allons fusiller la capitale" ("We will shoot the national radio. We will shoot the capital," *La Parenthèse* 71, translation mine). Apparently the political order has changed, and the public enemy has become the national hero. Cavachio uses an intriguing image to convey his disappointment with the new state of affairs that threatens his status as sergeant: "Ils nous ont pissé dans la peau" ("They pissed in our skin" *La Parenthèse* 71). The scatological image recalls the voting process according to sergeant Marc Fonsinacio. For Sergeant Pueblo, "les urines d'Europe" ("European urines" *Parenthèse* 25)[1]

[1] Tansi writes in French, the language imposed on him in childhood with vexations that included the carrying of a necklace he calls "symbol" and he refers to it as "shit" (Devésa, Kongo 60). In this manner, the French Catholic school punished the students who spoke their national language instead of French. In "La coutûme d'être fou" ("The custom of being insane" 1979) published in Devésa's volume, Tansi explains his feeling of cultural alienation: "Nos enfants ne sont plus nos enfants. Nos propres entrailles nous trahissent. Ils mangent blanc, boivent blanc et pensent blanc" ("Our children are no longer ours. Our own entrails betray us. They eat white, drink white and think white," Devésa, Kongo 327, translation mine).

Likewise, African nationals may feel that colonial invasion has rerouted the governing body of Africa. At the linguistic level, a French written heritage has taken over an oral tradition; a written French verb has taken possession of African languages, spirituality, and socio-political structures, dispossessing Africans of their "native tongue" and "mother-father land." Purloinment may structure the relation to language, whether African or French in this colonized context. French is cast as a ghost, present *in absentia*, and barring the Africans from their specific identity (a dispossessing possession of either French or African culture with one canceling the other). The simultaneous acceptance and rejection of French possibly represents an irremissibly breached schism, or a treacherous self-abjuring conversion for the "writer." For the African writer, the language of expression is also the language of the colonizer or ex-colonizer. Albert Memmi has represented the ambiguous relation to French culture in *Portrait du colonisé, précédé du portrait du colonisateur* (*The colonizer and the colonized)* 1957. So have Césaire and Senghor, among others, in four stages

designated wine, which is also a symbolical equivalent of blood in Christian terms. There may be continuity to the images leading to a synthesis between Christian and Lembe myths where blood is a symbol of rebirth, perhaps after death. Tansi also brings forth one of the five forms of traditional theater, the kingizila as "cure." Perhaps all cure intends to free the mind and repair the body. However, liberty is the political theme associated with the radio, controlled by or controlling armies.

"La Radio nationale s'appelle maintenant 'la voix de la démocratie'" ("The national radio is now called 'the voice of democracy'" *La Parenthèse* 71). The republican label cannot be trusted. When Cavacha wants to shoot the capital and the radio voice "of democracy" it is not certain that he opposes state freedom. Certainly, as Jean-Pierre Karegeye Sadi concludes about *L'Etat honteux* 1981, for Cavacha and for all totalitarian governors, "la crainte du changement ou d'alternance politique crée un malaise psychique" ("the fear of change or of political alternation creates a psychic discomfort") regulated by torture and murder (Sadi, "Pouvoir" 214). Yet the words of the "guide" or "friend of the people" guarantee very little in *L'Etat honteux* where "le Guide providentiel et le colonel Martillimi Lopez massacrent la population pour garder le pouvoir" ("the providential Guide and the colonel Martillimi Lopez massacre the people in order to maintain their control of power" Sadi, "Pouvoir" 216, translation mine). Likewise, Josias Semujanga notes Tansi's ironical use of names in *La Vie et demie* ("Du stéréotype" 197).

In *La Parenthèse*, Martial admits to being cowardly. He feels that he crumbles under the military men's iron gaze (perhaps their "canons" are the iron eyes since Aleyo feels "looked at" by the guns, *La Parenthèse* 69). Ironically, in French the word "martial" is supposed to stem from the root "fer" meaning "iron" (*Larousse*). In addition, Martial is also the name of the character opposing dictatorship in *La Vie et demie*: he is the one bold and strong enough to fight the "Providential Guide." So Martial is not named properly. Words are double edged or related by oxymoron: when the "soldier of peace" ("soldat de la paix") declares that "le temps de mourir est passé" ("the time of dying is obsolete") it could reassure us, unless we consider that in the words of the death row characters, this sentence meant that they were already detached from life. Indeed, the "soldier of peace" proves unable to stay the execution of the eight civilians, nor can he

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often mingled according to Edris Makward, the latest being the "determined involvement in the reconstruction of the national continent" ("Poetry" 220). Tansi certainly shares in this effort.

save his own life.

Sadi assesses that in the relation of "Sony Labou Tansi et la pathologie du pouvoir en Afrique" ("Sony Labou Tansi and the pathology of power in Africa") it is possible to relate the country to a body metaphor: "un Etat dictatorial est habité et possédé par le destin et le drame d'un corps qui commande" ("a dictatorial state is inhabited and possessed by the destiny and drama of the body that governs it" Sadi, "Pouvoir" 205, translation mine). If we follow his investigation of pathologies revealed by power (Sadi, "Pouvoir" 212), the play contrasts a series of "chiefs" or "heads" among which are the "capita" of the "capital" and Libertashio's "head." At the beginning of the play, both are antagonistic, and at the end they merge, declaring the decapitated man the national hero and declaring that he lives: "Long live Libertashio" ("Vive Libertashio"). The leaders and heads are cut up: "La capitale n'a pas d'oreilles" ("The capital has no ears" *La Parenthèse* 21, translation mine). The capital with its radio voice seems to characterize power—a deadly verbal power. Yet its body is out of reach. Power has palpable effects on "bodies" such as the victims of the successive sergeants; it affects the sergeants themselves. Cavacha affirmed his destiny tied to his blood and race. Pueblo also seeks it in his flesh, as if his newly found function could help embody him: "J'ai une chair de sergent, j'ai un estomac de sergent" ("I have a sergeant's flesh, I have a sergeant's stomach" *La Parenthèse* 26, translation mine).

On the other hand, the radio has unidirectional power aimed at the listeners' brains. Like a bullet, it reaches each target, but it has no obvious ears for replies. The audience is parenthetical: *La Parenthèse de sang* defines the "parenthesis" as the flesh wound created by the executioner's bullet that opens the forehead while God closes it (*La Parenthèse* 39-40). Such diacritics time the breath, silences, and separations within language, its inner borders: the diacritical marks prevent linguistic ambiguities and indicate the tone, the voice, the pauses to be respected—they are the oral component of writing. Tansi's parenthesis is drawn of "blood" as the functioning of leadership over populations is considered in relation to language.

The difficulties of embodiment expressed in those plays echo oddly with their diffusion as their original genres as radio plays. As such they are but voices. Such considerations add to the numerous references to disembodiment and mutilations experienced either by the "governing bodies" or by the characters in the radio play. Likewise *La Parenthèse* is evasive about Africa. It is but a soccer field of abstract location, always the same in any field, under any sky whether it be geographical or metaphysical. The realm of the play is situated

in "mathematics," "language," and "metaphysics," before "Africa." Furthermore, Existentialism, Christian gospel and Lembe theater, as well as other domains of references, are not pursued and cannot be because of the baroque literal mode of expression.

When there is an embodiment of power, it is a revealing attribute held by a series of different persons. Hence the psychosomatic dimension of power may also be analyzed in the psychologies of the successive sergeants in *La Parenthèse*. The first one accepts power as a mark of privilege that allows him to eat and drink before his soldiers and perhaps to compliment his hostess, while the troops tend to the details of work for him. He is a "good guy" ("brave garçon") who is mainly tired, and he trusts his second in the smooth running of the operations. He wants an end to useless searches because he does not understand their political implications—which renders him vulnerable. The second sergeant, Marc Fonsinacio, is cynical and analytical. His criticism of civilians for their mindless votes makes him indifferent to the victims whom he holds responsible for the state of affairs. But sergeant Fonsinacio knows too much and speaks too much. In a moment of absentmindedness he speaks aloud, recognizing that Libertashio is dead, and that therefore he kills people under false pretexts. He is summarily executed. The third sergeant is too narrow-minded to be truly dangerous politically, nor to last very long. He spends his short-lived position of authority in satisfying immediate whims: a waltz and some local alcohol. His attitude demonstrates that he respects the army power too much to have an understanding of it. His idea of hierarchy is that a soldier should kill only people:

> Mes soldats ne sont pas des tueurs de vaches. C'est dégradant. C'est même lâche. Tuer une vache pour un soldat, c'est le sommet de l'ignominie. L'opprobe! Vous comprenez? (*La Parenthèse* 26)
>
> My soldiers are not cow killers. It is degrading. It is even cowardly. To kill a cow for a soldier, it is the summit of ignominy. Opprobrium! Do you understand? (translation mine)

Pueblo's thought definitely lacks nuances. The accelerated succession of sergeants seems to indicate that out of all of them, such a man as Cavacha is bound to appear.

Up to then, the obedient and hardly noticeable Cavacha was "nobody." We never heard his name. He was created by the circumstances. His psychology is rigid. He likes decisive conclusions: he is the one who will carry out the death sentences. He feels predestined retroactively. He recognizes that he has the "forehead" ("front") of a sergeant. He accumulates "spiritual" functions: he hoards spiritual powers when the priest refuses to carry out his orders. This capitalization on the forehead may come from his previous school-instruc-

tor carrier. He also seems to believe in military-colonial discipline. Sometimes poetical, he is sensual, remembering the smell of chalk, moved by women but yet he never had relations with them (*La Parenthèse* 53). His idea of order does not admit reversals. Not only does he intend to keep his recent promotion, based on the hunt of Libertashio, he cannot renounce the kinetic of the action. He seeks a unity of direction, action, meaning, and place that resembles classic theater.

Time is an issue of power according to sergeant Cavacha: "Ça dépend de nous. On peut même tout remettre à demain. Le temps! Oui, le temps. Vous êtes dans notre temps" ("It depends on us. We can even report everything for tomorrow. Time! yes, time. You are in our time," *La Parenthèse* 69, translation mine). This control of time also belongs to the aesthetics of theater. Indeed, the unity of time is delayed here, distanced and subjected to the control of opposite factions. The aesthetics of representation are at the command of the one who determines the moment of death and its fashion.

Unity is orchestrated by Cavacha as well. He wants a unified order in synchrony with his new promotion. The nation unified insures his permanence. Consequently, conflicting orders, delays, and indeterminacies do not agree with him unless he initiates them. Marc Fonsinacio's interpretation of the army as an "executive" force is somewhat literal. The army is thus described as a corpus impermeable to ideologies. Fonsinacio applied the orders delivered by superiors as his primal duty. Such an order is not only impersonal, relayed by the radio, or obedient messengers, it is anti-personal, best served in a void.

Sergeant Cavacha is not satisfied with obeying the "guide du peuple." This time the metaphoric substitutive word order is no longer enough to convey the idea of language. Now that Cavacha became sergeant, he wants to impact on language's referential power to serve his ego as in his fantasy etymology. Otherwise, he is fully aware that metaphors can obfuscate reality: "Quel guide?" ("What guide?"), he asks, ready to seize in the backdrop the machinist who engineers a change of set by issuing counter commands without his approval, thereby threatening Cavacha's authority and the play's unity of action. Thus, Cavacha maintains the three unities and the gravity of tragedy. Yet he tampers with the definition of words and controls theology. Tansi shares some of Cavacha's tempering with language, yet unlike his character, he seems to favor multiple connections over a unified message. However rather than psychoanalysis (Devésa, *Kongo* 353), Tansi insists on restituting Africa to itself by means of a kingizila cure—not an Africa of the past, not an Africa of the future,

but a present self-evaluation necessary to determine the next pass:

> Et ce type qui demande une passe, c'est déjà "l'autre-vous." Et la place où nous gardons les "autres-nous" s'appelle la parenthèse. L'infernale parenthèse, qui nous laisse aux mains de l'écœurement, et qui se ferme, qui se ferme....la passe de peur... la passe de honte... la passe de lâcheté. (*La Parenthèse* 44)

> And this guy who asks for the ball, it is already "the other-you." And the place where we keep the "other-us" is called the parenthesis. The infernal parenthesis, that leave nausea to your hands, and that closes and closes....the passing of fear... the passing of shame... the passing of cowardice. (translation mine)

Tansi may be reluctant to determine a "content" to be passed on through descendants, inheritance, perhaps caused by a distrust of humanity—his own included? According to Devésa, Tansi did resent his birth from a second bed, which he considered disadvantageous and humiliating. The particular form of his invention may bear traces of this psychological pain, as his theater contains autobiographical elements, carrying with them a will to redeem a damaged lineage. Oddly enough, this project resounds with French eighteenth-century concerns to leave something behind for humanity to inherit and to construct upon. The "no exit" or "huis clos" is evoked but also countered. As for the game metaphor, Tansi's soccer is perhaps close to Arthur Adamov's ping-pong, although it may be less punctually relational as a team play that does not exclude individual face offs, nor fluid pairings when all the players feel covered.

The game metaphor reappears in Michael G. Schatzberg's book on Zaire, when he tries describing the state as an arena:

> ....but a special kind of arena....It is without fixed or constant shape, exists in flux, and may be transformed according to the context of the moment. Perhaps it would be best to envisage the state as an ice hockey arena. Normally the ice is level, the goals are equidistant from the center-ice line, and both goals have the same width. But the state in Africa, unlike this normal hockey arena, does not maintain its size and shape. (*Oppression* 17)

It is rather troubling that in a book describing the socio-political structure of Zaire in the 1970s, Schatzberg resorts to a playing field with unstable rules and protean configuration. Tansi would indeed be very close to the depiction of Zairian realities in his seeming "theater of the absurd." In his conclusion to his study of Zairian state under Mobutu, Schatzberg alludes to Goran Hyden's depiction of African states as an abstract structure that cannot claim any roots in society: "many African states seem suspended in midair without firm roots in society" (Hyden, *Shortcuts* 19, 195; qtd. *Oppression* 141).

The soldiers are made for killing people, the people to feed them,

provide them with feasts, money, dowries, marriages or rape, and just as Mobutu made sure to never maintain anyone in a post of power for long, the sergeants of Tansi keep rotating at great speed. Speaking of men in position of authority in Zaire, Schatzberg comments: "Their positions [of authority] are so insecure, and Mobutu's favor so fickle, that even the president's closest collaborators must assume that a similar opportunity to convert power into wealth might not reappear. Power is quickly gained, and rapidly lost" (*Oppression* 3). In terms of action, Tansi's play demonstrates precisely this race to convert the newly acquired rank into meals and even dowry. The successive sergeants all demand foods and alcohol. Also, as the military group in the play, the armed forces of Zaire (FAZ) and the national police (GDN) "regularly kill and torture their fellow citizens" (*Oppression* 59). To legitimate exploitative domination, the state offers an ideological discourse depicting the state as a family and Mobutu as a father (*Oppression* 72). Favor and disfavors are reversible under this paternalistic rule. Schatzberg quotes Sakombi Inongo, defending Mobutu's politics in a letter addressed to "the once-exiled opposition leader, former prime minister, and now Zaire's ambassador to the United States, Nguza Karl-i-Bond...: 'It is you, Nguza, who were accused, judged, condemned, then pardoned—thank God!—according to the logic of the social Order to which you belonged'" (*Oppression* 3). Certainly the reversal of Libertashio's favor—pursued killed, hunted down in all the people that could resemble him, and in the end declared national hero—is representative of Zairian political realities. The case of the thirteen members of parliament from the Kasai region (Tansi's) also shows the same balance of imprisonment and promotion (*Oppression* 95-97). As such, it appears that Tansi's play concerns a common occurrence, a segment of daily life in a corner of Zairian Africa, during one of the folds or shape-shifting events of the ever varying state, but with a permanent cast of characters. *La Parenthèse* has the power of current event newsbriefs. However, its open ideology may augment its philosophical aspect and hinder its politics—enough to evade censorship in Zaire, and approval in a Republic.

Semujanga estimates that in *La Vie et demie*, Tansi charms the reader "en déplaçant les certitudes de la Négritude....car au lieu d'affirmer une idéologie, il est une interrogation sur le monde" ("by displacing the certainties of Negritude.... because instead of affirming an ideology, it is an interrogation of the world" I translate "Stéréotype"199). This charm is akin to Greek oracles: it is an inspired sacred verb confided to the audience, now free to apply words to individual destinies. It is also a characteristic of the folktale as didactic or evasive comment. Ideological certainties are swept before relativ-

isms, and narrative configurations with impersonal origins are given as one would extend a currency of uncertain value, to be confirmed by a vote of some kind.

Yet voting does not warrant legitimacy in the case of Sergeant Marc Fonsinacio, who will apply the law, whatever it is, depending on the civilians' ballot. He will not shirk his duty as a soldier and he will defend the power in place, the power democratically elected by the citizens, who must have done their civic duty, and, therefore, must have chosen their leader whom the army now serves. In his logic it is too bad for the people if the elected "boss, chief, president" is murderous because the army does not vote (*La Parenthèse* 22). In fact, Fonsinacio is so foreign to the voting process that he cannot pronounce the word "urnes" ("urns" or polling booth) which he mixes up with the word "urinoirs," or urinals.

The polling booth equated with the urinal is an example of the scatological jokes with which Tansi infuses his play. Bodily waste and votes are disrespectfully mistaken for one another. It is difficult to discern the extent of criticism involved: the wordplay casts doubt on the voting process as a French practice, either because the French export that does not graft properly to the new country, as the "urines" or wines from Europe, or because such votes carried out according to French custom do not benefit African politics. Meanwhile, democracy is criticized as a voting process that lets the constituents make aberrant choices:

> Comme le... général... comme mon copain-là qui n'est jamais arrivé à dire gendarmerie. Il dit toujours "gendadmairie"....Vous nommez des patrons qui... qui ne savent pas dire le mot gendarmerie. (*La Parenthèse* 23)
>
> Like the... the general... like my friend there that could never say the police force. He always says "peopleadcityhall" ....You name bosses who... who do not know how to say the word police force. (translation mine)

Marc's criticism is multifaceted. In order to have a true democracy, educated voters who know what and for whom they are voting are needed. And they have to vote for people who are aware, informed and knowledgeable. Included in the qualities of political leadership would be the ability to designate properly the institutions that one governs. It is odd nevertheless that the police force would be designated by a French word, or that he would call a public leader "boss," like a mafia leader, or like an industrial or administrative manager. "Patron" is an unexpected word in the mouth of a sergeant. The name of an army leader would have been less striking. Instead of choosing the word "general" for instance, he evokes the economic world, pointing

out to a potential improper collusion of the police and city hall with the world of finances.

Perhaps we should act strictly within the boundaries of truism, such as Yavilla's declaration: "Tant qu'on n'est pas mort, il faut rester vivant" ("As long as one is not dead, one must remain alive" *La Parenthèse* 41, translation mine). The silliness of the declaration does not overshadow its deeper meaning that one is not to wait for death, that as long as one is not dead one must live it up. Torture and executions lend themselves to metaphysics and to literal puns: thus "Il faut mourir comme un i" ("one is to die like an i") is derived from the French expression "straight like an i" (*La Parenthèse* 69)— hence, Doctor Portès' refusal to die lying down in the last scene. This absurd refusal eventually spares his life, since the sergeant orders that he be laid flat on the ground which saves him from the line of fire of the firing squad. The slapstick comedy derives from the colloquial French expression that stands out in a text insisting on linguistics and literal effects. Thus the literal order motivates the action. The parenthesis becomes a symbol for the border between live breath and dead script, the breath of the written—a ghost effect. The tautological and literal poetics of the play allude to several codes at once in a "dévoyure" that Devésa finds essential to Tansi (*Kongo* 147). The term "dévoyure" evokes banditries, deviance from moral behavior, and illegal or unintended rerouting.

From its opening, *La Parenthèse de sang* is relatively cryptic at the level of message. The reception of the radio-play is destined to various francophone countries relayed by French programming outside of France. The "locus" of the stage is intensely personal (the radio being an electronic device that belongs to private space). The play also depends on the variable context of the listeners: it is definitely less controlled than that of a staged play. It is not exactly the context of reading, since the radio may accompany the activities of some people otherwise occupied. Yet the private sphere—the home or the nation—does not quite define the targeted audience, which is decisively transnational within and yet outside of "Africa." The national radio is the instrument of power as we know it internationally under the form of "news."

Nevertheless, the disembodiment of the radio could operate the "mathematics of the soul" ("la mathématique de l'âme") to the Cartesian gesture emptying the world in order to conclude on the inner conviction "I think therefore I am": "Tu voulais vider le vide. *(Silence.)* Ces quelques heures qui te restent, il faut les dépenser à regarder dans ta peau" ("You wanted to empty emptyness. *[Silence.]* These few hours you have left, you have to spend them looking inside your

skin" *Soussigné* 79-80, translation mine). The *tabula rasa* associated with this inner inspection evokes the opening to the *Discourse on Method*. In *La Parenthèse*, the priest "knows" that he is alive as an "act of faith" or so he is told by his companions of misfortune who doubt that they are alive (La *Parenthèse* 64). Thinking or speaking do not guarantee that one is alive according to the prisoners on death row.

Tansi's *Je soussigné cardiaque* also comments on Existentialism. Mallot has been condemned to death after pursuing an existential rebellion. His last speech before death juxtaposes a verbal self-affirmation which may evoke Sartre. Self-affirmation in absolute "existential" terms led him to a premature death, to *metaphysics* rather than to physical life. Mallot ends with an expansion of his inner life described in terms of vital organs, not metaphysics:

> En sortant volontairement de la merde, je casse le néant; je refuse d'exister sur commande. J'ai voulu, je veux. L'homme n'a jamais eu lieu, je l'invente. J'exige une viande métaphysique. Je suis, je reste, je meurs debout....La mort a capitulé devant ma délicieuse hantise de respirer. (Silence.)....Tu n'as pas existé. Tu meurs grossesse. Tu fêtes le néant. Tu te fais des phrases....j'ai accouché de ce moi métaphysique qui bouscule ma viande et mes os....J'électrise ma chair de cette fougue de respirer. J'aggrave tous les bruits de ma viande indocile, j'élargis mon sang, j'élargis mes os....(*Soussigné* 80-81)

> Coming out voluntarily from shit, I break nothingness; I refuse to exist upon request. I wanted, I want. Man never existed, I invent him. I demand metaphysical meat. I am, I remain, I die standing....Death capitulated before my delicious hatred of breathing. *(Silence.)*....You never existed. You die pregnant. You celebrate nothingness. You fib yourself....I gave birth to this metaphysical me which shoves my meat and bones....I electrify my flesh with this eagerness to breathe. I aggravate all the noises of my indocile meat, I enlarge my blood, I enlarge my bones.... (translation mine)

The metaphysics of Existentialism negate the body in *Je soussigné cardiaque*. To exist becomes synonymous with nothingness in a birth villifying the body as scatological. Birth is severance from oneself. Tansi might indicte an idealism more philosophical than political, which creates dead heroes whose children will be spared the truth about their "papa casse-monde" ("daddy break-world" *Soussigné* 80), and whose victory is embracing self-annihilation. It may or may not concur with the idea of Lembe drama as authorial sacrifice.

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CYBORGS, POSTHUMANISM AND SHORT FICTION

William S. Haney II

Attempts to theorize the short story—as in the collections edited by Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey (1989) and Charles E. May (1994)—deal primarily with early, modern, or contemporary stories that feature ordinary human characters. Charles May cites several theorists who describe the short story as an impressionistic representation of sacred experience. Unlike the novel, a public form that springs from encounters with the everyday, the short story depicts "the immaterial reality of the inner world of the self in its relation to eternal rather than temporal reality" (May 133). But if the short story depicts momentary mythic encounters with the sacred, then what happens when the protagonist is no longer human in the traditional sense, or even postmodern—the two for all practical purposes being physiologically identical—but rather posthuman—a cyborg? A cyborg is any human with a technophilic body, defined as a human/machine symbiosis (Hayles 84-112). As the body becomes technophilic, whether through the modification of functional organic structures or through genetic engineering, the quality of subjective experience mediated by this body is bound to undergo significant change. As we move from the contemporary/postmodern to the posthuman as a cultural construct, stories depicting posthuman experience will no longer be confined to the subgenre of science fiction but will increasingly extend to all types of short fiction.

As Katherine Hayles notes in *How We Became Posthuman*, "Although in many ways the posthuman deconstructs the liberal humanist subject, it . . . shares with its predecessor an emphasis on cognition rather than embodiment. William Gibson makes the point vividly in *Neuromancer* when the narrator characterizes the posthuman body as 'data made flesh'" (5). Generally speaking, while the liberal humanist subject tends to experience the world conceptually in novels and emotionally or mythically in short fiction, the posthuman subject, according to Hayles and others, will increasingly experience reality computationally in terms of data, or thought/information. This

emphasis on cognition rather than emotional embodiment, I will argue, may result from the possibility that the artificial (e.g. genetic) modification of the human body will end up modifying, or rather diminishing, the capacity of the human species to sustain the quality of consciousness necessary for sacred experience. Francis Fukuyama in *Our Posthuman Condition* argues that the biotechnology revolution may not only undermine human nature but also have terrible consequences for our political order. As represented by short fiction, the human capacity for mythic encounters with sacred experience may also suffer adverse consequences. Through the example of selected short stories, including science fiction, as well as a brief consideration of the nature of consciousness, I will demonstrate that posthuman encounters may indeed preclude sacred experience as we know it today.

In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, Donna Haraway signals three crucial breakdowns in the boundary between machine and organism: first, nothing enforces the human and animal separation, including tool use, social behavior, language, and reason; second, the distinction between animal-human organism and machine is leaky because of the ambiguous difference between the natural and the artificial; and third, as a subset to the second, the "boundary between physical and non-physical is very imprecise" (149-181). In her feminist approach to cyberculture, Haraway claims that "No objects, spaces or bodies are sacred in themselves; any component can be interfaced with any other if the proper standard, the proper code, can be constructed for processing signals in common language" (163). Her definition of cyborg, however, does not take into account consciousness as-such, but only the temporal self: "The cyborg is a kind of dissembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code" (163). For codifying the self and redesigning the body, bio- and communication technologies become the essential tools. Haraway defines cyborg writing as not about the fall from an earlier pre-linguistic wholeness, but about survival by means of tools as prosthetic devices. Cyborg writing also rejects perfect communication through a master code, "the central dogma of phallogocentrism" (176).

Throughout "A Cyborg Manifesto" Haraway problematizes the distinction between unity and diversity. She argues that dualisms such as self/other, mind/body, culture/nature lead to the domination of women, and that the idea of the self as One who is not dominated is an illusion, given that the self cannot escape a dialectic with the other. Ultimately, Haraway thinks that we'll be saved only by destroying duality and the organic, not through deconstruction but through

the "liminal transformation" of a machine-organism symbiosis (177). From a feminist view point, a cyborg, which is short for "cybernetic organism," comprises not an impermeable organic wholeness, but symbiosis, prosthetic devices, hybrids, chimeras and mosaics: "Biological organisms have become biotic systems, communications devices like others. There is no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic. The replicant Rachel in the Ridley Scott film *Blade Runner* stands as the image of a cyborg culture's fear, love and confusion" (177-178). One difference between machine and organism noted by the physicist Jean Burns, however, is that humans have volition or free will, which is associated with consciousness, while machines do not; indeed, the physical effects of volition are not explainable "by presently known physical laws because these laws encompass only determinism and quantum randomness" (32), which are not what are indicated by consciousness or volition.

The posthuman, however, is not a homogenous construct. At least two distinct definitions of the posthuman exist, as suggested by Andy Clark in *Natural-Born Cyborgs*. The cyborg can be understood either as a physical merging of the human and machine through wire implants or genetic modification, or, as Clark proposes, a merging "consummated without the intrusion of silicon and wire into flesh and blood, as anyone who has felt himself thinking *via* the act of writing already knows" (5). In this friendly version of posthumanism, tools such as pen or computer are not just external aids but integral aspects of the problem-solving systems that civilizations have developed over the ages. Clark considers the notion of "post-human" to be a misnomer for a thoroughly human tendency to "merge our mental activities with the operations of pen, paper, and electronics" (6). We are already natural-born cyborgs: "*creatures whose minds are special precisely because they are tailor-made for multiple mergers and coalitions*" (7, Clark's emphasis). In this definition, technology has always been geared toward self-transformation. The mind is not confined to its biological "skin bag" but has the potential to extend into and manipulate the physical environment.

The posthuman notion that the mind extends beyond the body, while hardly a novelty, is here understood primarily as a material rather than the spiritual phenomenon of the world's contemplative traditions. For Clark, self-transformation has become a "snowballing/bootstrapping process of computational and representational growth" (8). He argues that the mind-body problem is really a "mind-body-*scaffolding* problem," a problem of understanding "how human thought and reason is born out of looping interactions between mate-

rial brains, material bodies, and complex cultural and technological environments" (11, Clark's emphasis). What this friendlier definition of the human-machine merger suggests is that the posthuman intensifies and extends the postmodern condition of materialism, relativism, and computation, thereby aspiring not only to supercede but also to repress the transcendentality, mythical oneness and consciousness associated with traditional short fiction and perennial psychology. In both versions of the posthuman—invasive and noninvasive—the traditional notion of human nature comes under threat. In the posthuman condition, cognitive machinery and technological skills in manipulating nature take precedence over the powers of consciousness that accomplish similar ends in a natural, spontaneous, and environmentally friendly manner. The posthuman, therefore, emphasizes computation and technological expertise in an outward, physical domination of the natural world. But as understood by the world's contemplative traditions, as well as by artists and writers, this outward approach, conducted at the expense of innate qualities of human nature, can be made redundant by methods of accomplishing the same ends inwardly on the level of consciousness, as described for example in the Vedic tradition, notably the Upanishads and Yoga Sutras, and exemplified by the mythic encounters of short fiction.

Some believe that human nature began to change in modernism and continued to change with a vengeance in postmodernism. According to Virginia Woolf, "In or about December 1910, human character [read nature] changed" ("Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," qtd. Pinker 404). But Steven Pinker, who questions the notion that the mind is a blank slate subject to radical modification through external influence, argues that modern science has no conclusive evidence that human nature has changed in recorded history: "The modern sciences of mind, brain, genes, and evolution are increasingly showing that . . . [the blank slate] is not true" (421). This, however, does not mean that human nature cannot be changed inadvertently through human-computer interaction, as in tampering with the spinal cord through medical implants to enhance sensory experience. Indeed, as Katherine Hayles, Elaine Graham, and Robert Pepperell note, through the proliferation of bio-engineered prosthetics that integrates humans and machines, "the practical distinction between machine and organism is receding" (Pepperell 7).

The posthuman science of mind thus tends to promote cognitive activity and intensify the computational response of the human nervous system; short fiction in contrast tends to promote cognitive stasis or disinterestedness through aesthetic contemplation. Pinker calls art a pleasure technology (405), but while an aesthetic object,

like short fiction, may organize pleasurable stimuli and direct them to the emotions, pleasure itself can be said to have its source not in external objects but in witnessing consciousness. Borrowing from Asian dramaturgy, Antonin Artaud in *Theatre and Its Double* calls the witnessing or pure state of consciousness a "void in thought" (71), that screen of qualityless awareness which is non-changing in itself but which mirrors all mental activity or qualia: thought, sensation, memory, emotion, and mood. If we examine representative modern short fiction by James Joyce, Raymond Carver, Kate Chopin, Jorge Luis Borges, and others, we find that epiphanic moments experienced by characters or the preclosural points experienced by the reader derive from a level of consciousness associated with a transcendence of time, place, and culture. Posthuman technology attempts to simulate these experiences on a mechanical/electronic basis through "telepresence," or virtual presence in cyberspace. Arguably, the transcendence of spatial/temporal boundaries constitutes the core of human nature, as described for instance by Vedic literature and Indian literary theory.

Yohanan Grinshpon in *Crisis and Knowledge* describes the heart of storytelling in terms of "the healing potency of 'knowledge of the better self'" (viii). As opposed to the "lesser self," the better self is defined as Atman or witnessing consciousness, which Grinshpon refers to as "Vedic otherness" (5). The experience of the better self does not involve thought or computation, the hallmark of the posthuman lesser self with its emphasis on a heightened conceptuality; rather it involves a state of Being, or a void in thought. As May and Lohafer suggest, short fiction leads to these ineffable trans-conceptual, trans-linguistic moments of Being—thereby invoking a taste of the core of human nature. In contrast, the posthuman by definition militates against the better self in its quest for the empirical advantages of "knowledge-based electronics" (Clark 34)—extreme forms of cognitive activity enhanced by technological mergers. In short prose narratives, the knowledge and skill in action associated with the lesser self serve as the necessary context through which awareness transcends conceptuality in attaining the better self as a state of Being.

The computational responses of the mind also frustrate the attempt to overcome solipsism and experience a transcendental intersubjectivity—a move from the lesser to the better self. Patrick C. Hogan argues that "a great deal of culture—especially aspects of culture that overlap religion—operates to help us cope with, or 'manage' (as Norman Holland might put it), the pain that is a necessary result of consciousness, or more exactly, the isolation that is part of consciousness and the pain that results from self-consciousness.

Literature has a particularly prominent place in this 'management'" (119). Hogan uses the term consciousness as if it were synonymous with what in eastern thought is identified with the mind and its conceptual content, not with pure consciousness or consciousness being aware of itself in the sense that I'm using it here. Because of the mind's subject/object duality, Hogan claims that we cannot disprove solipsism, that "we can never experience anything except our own, utterly private self and that, no matter how much we would like to share that self, we cannot" (121). In other words, we can never have a transpersonal, transcendental experience. Again, from an Advaitan perspective this is true only for the computational mind and not for consciousness itself. Indeed, as Hogan points out, "In Vedantism, the ideal is not simply heaven, but moksa, release from the cycle of birth and death. This release is a realization that material particularity is maya or illusion and that all individual souls are one with Brahman or godhead. Suffering, in this view, is the result of attachment to maya, to the illusion of particularity, prominently the particularity of the self [or mind]" (136). As posthumanism expands, our technological emphasis on the discriminating powers of the mind will reinforce solipsism and make it increasingly difficult for cyborgs to escape their unbearable solitude.

As Lohafer, May, Hogan and others have noted, literature, and especially short fiction, helps us to "manage" solitude and even to transcend the mind into the better self. Fiction can achieve this because of the close connection between the emotional effects of perception and imagination. While fiction consists only of words, these words stimulate the imagination. Neurobiological research tells us that the same kind of brain activity occurs in both the imagination and ordinary perception (see Kosslyn 295, 301, 325; and Rubin 41-46, 57-59). Because of this neurological link, we can experience a powerful intimacy with others through the art of fiction. According to Hogan, "consciousness is not an objectal part of a causal sequence involving the brain. It is, rather, an existential experience—an existential experience that is, I suspect, inseparable from particular brain states, an existential experience that is correlated with neurological patterns in every particular, but which still is not those neurological patterns" (140). Nevertheless, existential experience depends on the delicate balance of our neurological patterns that show alarming signs of being disrupted by posthuman interference. If the technologically enhanced particularity of the computational mind supplants the unifying power of our emotional makeup, then the epiphanic moments of short fiction, as in James Joyce, may one day disappear.

In Joyce's story "The Dead," Gabriel Conroy intuits his better self

as a result of a new sense of inferiority regarding his lesser self when he awakens from his conventional knowledge of marriage and the limitations of his relationship to his wife, Gretta. After hearing Gretta's story of her dead love, Michael Furey, Gabriel realizes that what he took for real is only a cognitive illusion, and that a much wider reality lies beyond his conceptions of the world. In what Susan Lohafer would call the final closure of the story (307), Gabriel's awakening is suggested by falling snow that covers not only the known world outside their hotel window but also extends to encompass everything else in the mind's eye: "His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end upon all the living and the dead" ("The Dead" 59). The homogeneous blanket of snow symbolizes the unity of Being after the discriminating activity of thought has run its course. At this point in the story, Gabriel and the reader experience a final moment of contemplation, a suspension of all activity in a simple identity with Being, free of desire, thought, ego, self-contradiction and paradox.

In Lohafer's cognitive approach to short fiction, the "anterior, penultimate, and final closural sentences *as a sequence*" (308, Lohafer's emphasis) can like epiphanies be seen as a series of gaps in cognitive activity through which character and reader experience an opening or clearing of awareness, a flash of truth, a subtle revelation. Unlike knowledge about mental content involving the duality of knower and known, this experience consists of a glimpse of being at one with pure awareness—a unity that has its basis in the void of thought, not in thought itself. Through its structural sequence of closures, short fiction is ideally suited to suspend the activity of thought, revert the eye from the lamented past and anticipated future, and focus attention on the timeless present.

In traditional, modernist and postmodernist short fiction, epiphanic moments and closural points open awareness to the core of human nature. The content of the story combined with the aesthetic structure of its conceptual closures give the reader access to the better self. We see this, for example, in Kate Chopin's early modernist work "The Story of an Hour," in which Mrs. Mallard, described by the narrator as afflicted with heart trouble, dies of an apparent heart attack when her husband suddenly reappears after reportedly having been killed in a train accident.

The final closural sentence—"When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills" (263)—presents a dramatic irony. The reader knows that the cause of Mrs. Mallard's death is not joy but grief: she is shocked and distressed by the loss of her newfound freedom through her husband's unanticipated return.

The revelation here emerges in the implicit gap between the lesser and better selves. That is, our mythic encounter with the better self, implied in Mrs. Mallard's feeling "Free! Body and soul free!" (262), emerges from our common sense of innate unboundedness beyond space, time, and causality. As construed today by the receptive reader, the double irony of Chopin's "Story of an Hour" is that Mrs. Mallard's death has a twin cause: not only is she stricken by the return of her husband and the fetters of marriage; she has also failed to live freely within social boundaries. The story suggests that the materialism of the natural human condition—which unlike the materialism of radical posthumanism is not inevitable or inescapable—poses no physical barrier to psychic freedom. Despite Hogan's emphasis, as noted above, on the unbearable solitude of "consciousness," our sacred and profane selves go hand in hand. In a posthuman age, however, with natural-born cyborgs subjugated to technological mergers invading ever more abstract regions of inner space, to escape materialism in the form of conceptual boundaries will become increasingly problematic. Under these circumstances, as discussed below, we may find it truly difficult to share existential experience beyond the purely physical sensations induced by simulated stimulations, as disturbingly depicted by William Gibson; or we may even find it impossible thanks to a constitutional prohibition against the better self, as described by Kurt Vonnegut Jr.

It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that short fiction with cyborg characters will exhibit a decline in mythic encounters with the sacred. Moreover, as readers in general undergo the transformation of self that Clark prescribes for natural-born cyborgs, they will also suffer a gradually diminished aptitude for aesthetic experience or the sublime. In "Harrison Bergeron," Vonnegut speculates on a future society in which conformity is enforced upon anyone with exceptional abilities by the Handicapper General, Diana Moon Glampers. In this society, "Nobody was better looking than anybody else. Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else" (4)—an equality decreed by Amendments to the Constitution. George and Hazel Bergeron's 14-year-old-son, Harrison, is arrested by agents of the US Handicapper General for being exceptional. Also highly intelligent, George the father has to wear a "handicap radio in his ear" which regularly emits a sharp noise to preclude his brain's ever giving him an unfair advantage. Harrison finally escapes, discards his handicapper impediments and dances with an equally audacious girl on a TV show watched by his parents. Glampers at this moment bursts into the studio and shoots them both dead with her shotgun.

Through an early version of the posthuman, Vonnegut envisions

a society that frustrates any move toward the better self. The same often applies in the short fiction of William Gibson, whose characters are often cyborgs of more invasive mergers. In Gibson's story "Burning Chrome," Bobby Quine and Automatic Jack, two ace hackers, break through the Intrusion Countermeasures Electronics (ICE) of Chrome's data base to steal a fortune. Jack then tries to help Tiger, their cyborg girlfriend, by giving her money so she can stop working at the House of Blue Lights. At the end of the story, Jack speculates on Tiger's posthuman condition:

> working three-hour shifts in an approximation of REM sleep, while her body and a bundle of conditioned reflexes took care of business. The customers never got to complain that she was faking it, because those orgasms were real. But she felt them, if she felt them at all, as faint silver flares somewhere on the edge of sleep. (191)

Tiger's neuroelectronics enable the customers to have it both ways, "needing someone and wanting to be alone at the same time" (191). But at what cost? Tiger and her customers have been reduced to pseudo-sentient posthumans. Rather than wanting to escape the unbearable solitude of their posthuman condition, they relish in the particularity of selfish desires, unaware of what they're missing. Being displaced from the sacredness of existential experience not only precludes genuine fulfillment, but also reinforces solitude and the craving for ever more sensational forms of physical indulgence to intensify the illusion of intimacy. As Gibson's story suggests, they can have physical sensations without conscious awareness, or conscious awareness without emotional contact, but seldom the experience of intersubjective empathy through contact with their better selves. This dimension of human nature has lost its appeal and is in peril of being phased out by electronic replacements.

As suggested by the short fiction discussed here, the experience of an inner space, commensurate with the emergence of the better self, or the core of human nature, does not depend on biological enhancement through electronic mergers. In fact, it is reasonable to assume that any artificial inducement through what Mark Weiser calls "ubiquitous computing" (94-110) would probably result in a transformation of the self away from human nature's innate capacity for transcendence or a void in thought. This assumption is further corroborated by Clark's biased and patently false assertion that the "idea of 'mind as spirit-stuff' is no longer scientifically respectable" (43)—a claim discredited by the vast interdisciplinary field of consciousness studies in which consciousness is increasingly accepted as an autonomous entity (see Chalmers, and Forman). Clark's statement is an example of how technology collapses the subjective, first person

"I" and "We" domains into the materialist, third-person "It" domain (Wilber 67)—apparently the ultimate and possibly posthumous goal of the posthuman condition.

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CUENTOS / *FICTION*

TO SEW OR NOT TO SEW: WHAT'S A WOMAN TO DO?

Kathleen Anderson

I was plunged into existential chaos when one of the most traumatic experiences of my life occurred: my friend gave me a sewing machine.

Who could say no to a gift offered in a spirit of kindness and generosity from an old friend? One has to be polite. One couldn't very well say righteously, "I don't sew" (like saying, "I don't smoke"). Nor could one say, "I'm a modern woman and refuse to reinforce domestic stereotypes, so NO; I do not accept the machine of oppression you seek to impose upon me, o betrayer of female liberation."

So, I accepted this dangerous present. I kept it, encased in styrofoam and tightly closed in its box in the safe obscurity of a closet, and thought that I was safe. It remained there for a long time and the forces of darkness were kept at bay.

Then, the unthinkable happened. My friend Debbie invited me over on a whim to show me how to make a funky handbag out of a placemat. That ambition necessitated teaching me how to use her sewing machine. I had particular difficulty regulating the pedal that caused the needle to work up and down through the fabric. When I pressed too hard, the needle whipped through the cloth, taking it with me and sending my hands and the fabric flying; when I pressed too lightly, the stitches became a messy mass of clumped threads. Debbie would undo my damage and I'd start over.

I know what you're thinking. That pedal was a clear metaphor, a message about the necessity for a balance of self-assertion moderated by patience and precision to produce orderly creativity in a disordered universe.

You're right; I was thinking the exact same thing!

Four hours and minor injuries later, the two of us had jointly made a small handbag.

Woe to that unfortunate day! It was like drinking the elixir of life for the first time. I was transported by the heady glory of the act of creation. I held up the red handbag with yellow ribbon trim and sunflower accent to the sun, as if to declare my victory over space, time and material reality. I had reshaped physical forms and produced something new. This was a discovery with implications for science, for the Arts, for all of humanity.

After this revelation, I removed my own sewing machine from its dreaded closet. During the summer, I set it up in my office at the university where I teach in the English Department. When I needed a break from the cerebral efforts of writing and research, I took up the tool for transforming material reality and engaged in a metaphysical exegesis of it.

In other words, I made another handbag.

And, what that really means is, I repeatedly produced a tangled mass of threads and fabric, which my friend and colleague, Susan, repeatedly returned to my office to undo. She also repeatedly showed me how to put more thread on the spool and reinstall the amazingly complicated metal parts that housed it. If they were not joined together in the precisely correct configuration, they fell apart with a clatter.

Yes, another metaphor. The precariousness of human relationships, the difficulty of building community, the mystery and near-madness involved in striving to join together seemingly disparate elements. It is only with the utmost delicacy that people can be unified, and one suspects that unity is temporary.

Metaphors aside, I confronted a critical ethical problem as the fall semester approached. Should I leave the sewing machine on my desk for all of my students to see, and thus potentially reinforce the status quo? It would be tragic inadvertently to further the oppression of women by seeming to say, “Go back to your household prison, Sally, and remain there for all eternity, wearing your apron of bondage and smiling.”

Susan, who is about twenty years my senior, pointed out that the advent of the sewing machine was liberating to many women who had been making shirts painstakingly by hand; some of them even created home businesses and earned their own money with the help of their sewing machines. Naturally, husbands of the jerky type didn’t want their wives to have sewing machines—it made their lives better and gave them an independent source of income, both objectionable outcomes. Ironically, some men even claimed that sewing machines were “unfeminine” as a coercive means of discouraging their use.

I also realize that an entire tradition of textile and other arts and handicrafts documents women's creative and intellectual genius for generations throughout the world. Some of my babysitters of the '70s could embroider fantastical images onto jean jackets and knit gorgeous ponchos and berets.

However, I have no memory of witnessing any woman enjoying utilitarian sewing pulled up to a trusty machine (as an adult, my brother acquired one and made backpacks, cases for band instruments and other useful things). I never saw my mother use a sewing machine, and she sent me to a friend to learn embroidery.

My mother also hated to cook, using colorful language while banging pans and burning the meat. Or, she would wander off and do other things, forgetting the food entirely. "That smells like fish cooking. Who's cooking fish?" she would ask from her desk in the living room, in perfect sincerity. Then, with a sudden revelation, "Oh! That's my fish!" and make a mad dash for the kitchen. As far as cleaning the house, my parents eventually hired someone else to do it.

For my mother and now for me, domesticity is an unpleasant but inexorable burden that one strives as much as possible to keep at the fringe of one's consciousness as well as daily life. Unless it involves such genteel elegancies as interior design or polishing and arranging silver-plate. Growing up in the '70s and early '80s, I and my girlfriends wanted to be taken seriously as intellectuals, athletes, musicians, eventually professionals, yearning for both worldly success and personal fulfillment, for real equality in a man's world. From a young age, I considered anything that hinted at housewife to be toxic. I avoided anything that connoted traditional femininity and therefore, was likely to be despised. I could hear the sucking noise down the vacuum, eternally droning, eternally waiting to suck me back to the insults, frustrations and alienations all the older women around me had been enduring (and that I began to endure as soon as I acquired language and realized that the genetic fact of being a girl was, in itself, used as an insult).

I wanted a man's privileged life and was determined to get it. In the process, I was robbed of unique forms of enrichment and self-expression.

When I first set up the sewing machine in my office, I was not sure how to interpret people's reactions. Colleagues stopped by and laughed with hysterical surprise that I, of all people, had a sewing machine. Someone actually ran up to my office from the first floor after hearing the news (gossip travels fast at a small, private university), just to see for herself that I really did have one.

Am I the kind of woman that everyone assumes burns the toast and can't sew, just because I focus my energy on offering my humble scholarly theories to the world? Am I not allowed to possess diverse interests?

I do burn the toast, but that's not the point. Do I not have a right to sew as well as to theorize?

Should I remove the sewing machine and return it to its dark hiding place, thus preventing sexist misinterpretations but also losing an opportunity for a profound act of creation?

Or, should I leave the sewing machine on my desk, complicating people's preconceptions of femininity, throwing off their narrow definitions of the working woman, the intellectual, the human being? Allowing for the widest possible combination of qualities and skills for all?

The machine looms on my desk, anticipating a future of yet uncreated masterpieces, of not only handbags but a cornucopia of Fabric Arts: capes, drapes, peasant skirts, throw pillows, fantastical ceiling art, anything the imagination can conjure . . .

When I ask people whether I am helping or hindering the women's movement, most think I'm helping it and urge me to keep the sewing machine on my desk as a radical statement. I still don't know the answer. But I have other pressing issues to consider, like whether or not wearing lip gloss undermines the Movement.

In the meantime, my sewing machine seems to say to the universe, "We all have a right to sew."

Kathleen Anderson
Palm Beach Atlantic University
United States of America

Número Especial - Convocatoria

La junta editorial convoca a la entrega de trabajos relacionados con **tiempo y temporalidad** para la publicación de un número especial (junio 2009) de la revista.

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

- Cronología
- Teleología
- Tiempo y percepción
- Temporalidad y eternidad
- Representaciones y conciencia del tiempo particularmente relacionado con: Historia, Narrativa, Cine, Memoria, (Auto) Biografía, Cultura

Fecha límite para entrega: 10 de enero de 2009. Véase las normas para entrega de manuscritos en http://www.uprm.edu/atenea para información sobre el formato de manuscritos.

Los ensayos críticos (15-18 páginas) deben seguir las guías estipuladas por el MLA. Favor de acompañar todos los materiales para publicar con una hoja de cobertura que indique que el trabajo sometido no ha sido publicado anteriormente, o de lo contrario, provéase detalles sobre la publicación previa. Incluya nombre, dirección, números de teléfono y de fax, dirección electrónica y nombre de la institución a la que pertenece el autor. El manuscrito debe ser sometido en duplicado a la editora para ser evaluado anónimamente.

Se aceptarán consultas por correo electrónico (atenea@uprm.edu) pero no se considerarán trabajos enviados por este medio. De ser aceptado para revisión, se le solicitará al autor una copia del trabajo en MS Word.

Special Issue - Call For Papers

The editorial board invites submissions for publication for a special edition (June 2009) on **Time and Temporality**. Essays may address a wide variety of topics including (but not limited to):

- Chronology
- Teleology
- Time and perception
- Temporality and Eternity
- Representation and consciousness of time particularly in its intersection with History, Narrative, Film, Memory, (Auto) Biography, Culture

Submissions for this issue must be received by 10 January 2009. See submission guidelines at http://www.uprm.edu/atenea for details about the format of manuscripts.

Critical essays (15-18 pages) must follow MLA style. All submissions should be accompanied by a cover page with the author's name, address, phone and fax numbers, email address, institutional affiliation, and a statement that the submitted piece has not been previously published or, if this is not the case, provides details of earlier publication. The typescript should be formatted for blind review and follow the guidelines stipulated by the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) and be mailed in duplicate to the editor.

Email queries are welcome (atenea@uprm.edu), but electronic submissions are not considered. If the submission is accepted for publication, the author will be asked to provide a copy in MS Word.

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Impresos RUM

Universidad de Puerto Rico
Recinto Universitario de Mayagüez, 2002
Diseño y arte portada:
José M. Irizarry, Nandita Batra ©

ISSN: 0885-6079