

LITERATURE'S OTHERNESS AND GLOBAL EAST-WEST MODERNITIES: AN INTRODUCTION TO JET'S SPECIAL ISSUE

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IN THIS SPECIAL literary issue of JET, the featured articles introduce a spectrum of issues and perspectives, but nonetheless share a focus. The authors reflect on how literature, with its otherness and in search of otherness, plays a vital role in shaping the response to the Enlightenment and its systemized modernity. In this broad context the authors raise and pursue questions related to the global East-West. With the charge from JET, I write to attempt a clarification of the relevant contexts, to highlight the issues brought up by these poignant arguments, and to stimulate further discussions.

I. Modernity in Fugue and a Fugue of Modernities

The contemporary tendency to speak of “modernities” in the plural indicates an increasing awareness that contrapuntal and alternative discourses of modernity are historically necessitated responses to the Enlightenment modernity and its concomitant meta-narratives.

Modernity, in the singular, generally refers to a system of values developed from the Enlightenment, consisting of grand narratives that center on key words of full presence such as: rationalism (meaning reason-first, reason-only and instrumental reason), subject (mostly the Cartesian notion), truth (in the Platonic sense), science (associated with scientificism as a new religion), and the magic word “progress.” Incredulity towards these narratives, as expressed by literary authors, philosophers or people in the street, has never ceased since the 18th century, leading to an accumulation of critical strategies that emerged as a more expressive problematization of modernity’s grand narratives in late 20th century. This problematization signals the arrival of a new perception of modernity sometimes called post-modernity and some other times, contrapuntal modernities. As Lyotard succinctly summarized it: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward grand narratives” (1984, xxiv).

After several hundred years, “modernity” is now recognized less as a solo, but more as an ongoing polyphonic fugue in which queries, answers and counterpoints develop along with the first-introduced theme. Modernity in fugue is a fugue of modernities, the result of resonances and dissonances from the past and the desire for continued dialogues, interactions and contacts into the future.

“Modernity,” the singular used to signify the dream for a more just, more affluent, more civilized and more humane world, is now a more complex but still valid concept. The dream continues but the strength of its validity is now tested not only by its earlier assumptions but also by the ever-changing history.

Modern world history mocks the kind of romanticism without sobering critical reflections just as modern experiences defy naïve innocence. Even

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Romantic writers in the 19th century believed that innocence must absorb lessons of experience. Romanticism was an earlier, albeit inadequate, response to what Wordsworth called “outrageous stimulation” in the industrialized world that acts “with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind” (2007, 309). Romanticism is defined in part as a confident belief in imagination and in the value of “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (Wordsworth, 2007, 308). But romanticism devoid of irony and a solid sense of reality becomes foolhardy blindness. When romanticism stands in the way of making appropriate judgment of reality, what then has romanticism become? Thus spoke Gustave Flaubert, through the plights of Emma Bovary.

Bovaryism, a significant 19th-century literary instance in the critical discourse of modernity, thus figuratively announces the arrival of literary modernism and fictively spells out the doom of naïve romanticism in the face of a world governed by Homais like bourgeoisie and their culture of glorified vulgarity.

Thinkers in the European Enlightenment movement, perhaps well meaning and idealistic but limited in their world views, designed a set of values—a system of modernity—for Europe and the rest of the world, in the hope that this system would guarantee historical progress. However, if Enlightenment-inspired optimism of progress is like light (as the word Enlightenment implies), it casts shadows of doubts and anxieties, shadows which, when conceptualized or figured, would question the optimism for automatic progress. History has witnessed that while the Enlightenment modernity continued as a solo of progress around themes of instrumental reason, scientificism and the full presence of a Eurocentric cognitive subject, European capitalism—justified in these terms—also launched colonialist and imperialist projects, and caused poverty, injustice, violence and wars everywhere. This modernity thus accelerated globalization in a manner not at all free of barbarism.

When Michel Foucault, echoing Kant, asked “What is Enlightenment?” in the 20th century, he meant to suggest that the question has to be repeatedly asked and answered, in history and through history. Foucault suggested that if Enlightenment is to remain the dream for human freedom, its positives should be carried on while its negatives—what Foucault calls the “blackmail” of Enlightenment—must be refuted. In that spirit Foucault supplemented Kant and re-defined modernity as an elaborate and ever-changing project in the example of Baudelaire’s *flâneur* (see Foucault, 1984).

Baudelaire, through the re-invented figure of *flâneur*, critically and emotionally observed the modernization of Paris under Napoleon III and Haussmann. With an agonizing awareness that the civil society in old Paris was vanishing with Haussmannization and the ideal beauty was becoming ever more elusive, Baudelaire expressed his yearning for the missing ideal through *spleen*, an emotional mixture of frustration with *ennui*, impotent rage and existentialist angst. It is Baudelaire’s poetic expression of spleen that exposed the severe extent of dehumanization that Haussmannization tended to conceal under the glamour of modernization. Idealistically and spleen-fully, Baudelaire showed his incredulity towards the grand designs and narratives of urban modernization personified by Haussmannization.

As a poet and as a literary critic, Baudelaire, in “The Painter of Modern Life,” argued that modern art must consist of two halves: the transient and fleeting that is contemporary life, and the immutable that is eternity (Baudelaire,

1972, 302). For Baudelaire, a modern sense of the beautiful is to be found in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (translated into English as “the flowers of evil,” somewhat imprecisely) in the modern city.

In 19th century European literature, another powerful critic of the Enlightenment modernity was Dostoevsky. With hindsight, we see more clearly that the polemical debate between Dostoevsky and Chernyshevsky was not just about a utopian vision of society but was one about the Enlightenment tradition of rationalism that Chernyshevsky and many of the 1860s generation in Russia uncritically embraced. Yet another literary instance in mockery of the grand narratives is Dostoevsky's anti-hero character, the underground man who dislikes the Crystal Palace for its totalitarian restrictions on freedom: the underground man protests against this glass-and-steel house because, he says, one cannot stick out one's tongue in it. Through the underground man, Dostoevsky suggested that the problem with rationalism is not so much reason itself as the reason-only and reason-first tradition it has become. Chernyshevsky was a disciple of this tradition; the utopian society he envisioned is based on the kind of reason exclusive of considerations of human desire, impulse, and will; this utopian vision would be translated in the 20th century into a social experiment and would prove to be a totalitarian nightmare. Dostoevsky's critique resonates with that of Nietzsche who traces the roots of this problem further back, to Socrates and Plato. Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* is, therefore, not just a treatise on literary history but has far-reaching significance in intellectual history.

Kafka, another powerful critic of modernity, prophesizes by way of “negative capability.” The apparatus in “In the Penal Colony” is a symbolic index of a modern system of enslavement. The exact locale of the tale is less important than its relentless probing into modern systems justified and sustained in chillingly dehumanizing “reason.” This machine is an allegorical reminder of the horror of instrumental reason gone awry.

The first segment of the issue includes an essay by Samantha Goldasich and Toming Jun Liu on Kafka's art of negativity (which displays a negative capability immersed in negative emotions). In the broad sense, Kafka's art of negativity can be seen as part of his modern allegory meant to expose the modern conditions of unfreedom. With combined insights from Lacan (those related to the Name-of-the-Father and the analysis of psychosis) and from Derrida (regarding the logo centric structure), Goldasich and Liu examine one specific story, “The Judgment,” to understand how Kafka exposes conditions of unfreedom and why that exposition through an art of negativity in fact reflects Kafka's passionate desire for the freedom which has been restricted or denied under certain modern condition. The more shocking and also more sobering part of Kafka's prophecy is this revelation: the victim of repressive power, often in the image of a “son,” is victimized partly because he has already internalized the rules of a logo centric system with the “Name of Father” (a phrase from Lacan) at the center, whether this “father” is alive, as in “The Judgment,” or dead, as “In the Penal Colony.” Kafka, a modern prophet in the rank of Goethe, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky and others, is another prime example of deconstruction before there was “deconstruction” as a signifier.

Modern world history witnesses that reason, when instrumentalized, can be put to the use of making the unreasonable seem reasonable and the barbaric

appear civilized, as in various colonialist, totalitarian, racist, profit-hungry or war-mongering projects.

Literature's role, as this brief survey shows, is vital in shaping the fugue of modernities. This review is obviously not comprehensive or adequate since it so far includes only a few modern European authors. Europe alone, of course, is not global and the examples of these European visionaries do not quite constitute "global modernities" although profoundly global implications are already contained in them.

Europe nonetheless is the necessary starting point for considering problems of global capitalism and forms of resistance to it. Modernity as a singular system of thinking first developed from the industrialized Europe, and gradually engulfed the rest of the world and accelerated globalization through bourgeois-capitalist expansion. The arrival of globalization means that nations, civilizations and belief systems can no longer operate independently of each other. In the age of global capitalism, contacts and interactions are the new modes of operation and take place economically and politically, culturally and intellectually, through peaceful means and through violent means.

In the era of globalization, which is also the post-colonial era, contrapuntal themes increasingly come from cultures, civilizations and nations that the West, in the Enlightenment, wanted to bring to its "time" or concept of progress. The nations and cultures that were made the other by the West are now becoming part of the West, just as the West is becoming part of the East.

II. Literature's Otherness

Literature's "otherness" has various yet interconnected significations.

In the Western context, it is inevitable that the phrase alludes to the relationship between philosophy and literature, but there should be a careful differentiation between two statements: (1) literature is *the other of philosophy*; (2) literature is *the other philosophy*. The first should be understood in connection with the tradition symbolized by Socrates and Plato. The second should be explained in connection with Nietzsche and others who negotiated a turn from Plato's tradition.

Literature became the *other of philosophy* the moment when Plato, under Socrates's influence, denounced Greek tragedy and banished poets and poetry from his utopian republic. Plato's segregation of poetry from philosophy is consistent with his signature dialectical reasoning, namely: poetry is a negative example of "reason" because reason, to Plato, stands opposed to rhetorical thinking, to emotions and instincts that characterize the so-called irrational principle of the human soul. Consequently, "What is literature?" has been made a philosophical question and has to be answered in connection with philosophy.

In the 19th century, Nietzsche saw the separation of poetry from philosophy to be a problem that both underlines and undermines the Platonic tradition of philosophy. Classical ontology in the tradition has managed to justify and sustain itself partly because it has willed blindness to rhetorical thinking that constitutes its grounding. When this tradition of rationalism (whose influence continued into the Enlightenment and into the modern idea of science) turns out to be a reason-first and reason-only tradition, the exclusion of the poet/poetry from reason also has serious ramifications for those values optimistically imagined as the system

of modernity. Nietzsche's re-evaluation of existing values (meaning those values derived from Plato) is sophisticated and simple: Nietzsche begins the re-evaluation by bringing poetry and philosophy back together again.

The defining moment in the Nietzschean turn is *not* an attempt to negate reason (which would repeat the error of Socratic reason) but a well-conceived rhetorical transformation of the figure of Socrates. Nietzsche suggests in *The Birth of Tragedy* that Socrates, the symbolic figure of reason, should be changed to "music-practicing Socrates." If the spirit of Dionysian music, which has been excluded by Socrates and Plato, is re-introduced into reason, then sense, force, perspectivism, rhetorical thinking and, indeed, the value of art in general will be restored to critical thinking, to philosophy. With the Nietzschean turn, the West, after more than two millennia, regains a simple truth: literature is involved in philosophy as it is involved in culture, history and science. Literature is thus no longer *the other of philosophy*, but an *other* philosophical mode. The Nietzschean turn signifies that literature is *the other philosophy*.

Literature's *otherness* should also be understood as signifying literature's characteristic modalities, including its fictionality. By the time of Renaissance, the dawning of the modern period, Sir Philip Sidney reinterpreted Aristotle and interpreted the classical notion of poetry as *mimesis* to mean "a representing, counterfeiting [fiction], or figuring forth [thinking through figurative language]" (Sidney, 2007, 139). To say that literature is fictional, figurative and representational is to acknowledge that it is produced from variously interpreted and figuratively imagined *intersections* between this world and the imagined world. A literary text, by definition, crosses the archive of "real" and the archive of "fiction," and conveys insights through new metaphors. Considering this *otherness* of literature, we say that literature exists in an *imagined* and *signifying*, not a mirror-reflecting, relationship with this world. In other words, it signifies not only what poets perceive this world *is* but also what they propose this world *ought to be*.

What has been called "deconstruction," now virtually personified in Jacques Derrida, is not an event that just occurred in late 20th century; rather, it is an event as the result of historical accumulation. Jacques Derrida, in his *Manifesto of Deconstruction* ("Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" 1966), named Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger as his precursors or earlier deconstructionists (Derrida, 2007, 917). One commonality in all three precursors is that they, in their own styles of *bricolage*, have attempted to rebuild the bridge between poetry and philosophy and exemplified, in their own ways, what that rebuilding could look like. Into the 20th century, the efforts to rebuild such a bridge have continued and the examples flourished. Derrida, in his adolescent years, witnessed how surrealism, existentialism, the writings of Sartre and Camus "practiced a fairly new kind of contact between philosophy and literature" (Derrida, 1992, 34).

Derrida's way of practicing deconstruction is one of the many ways of continuing the momentum of the Nietzschean turn which includes, necessarily, the "fairly new kind of contact between philosophy and literature." What makes Derrida's way of philosophizing seem "strange," to both traditional philosophers and traditional literary critics, is that his deconstructive practice is an effort to emulate literature, and to merge philosophy and literature into one. To those who believe that Derrida practiced only philosophy and was opposed to literature, the

following remarks he made in an interview with Derek Attridge could be both surprising and enlightening:

Experience of Being, nothing less, nothing more, on the edge of metaphysics, literature perhaps stands on the edge of everything, almost beyond everything, including itself. It's the most interesting thing in the world, maybe more interesting than the world, and this is why, if it has definition, what is heralded and refused under the name of literature cannot be identified with any other discourse. It will never be scientific, philosophical, conversational. (Derrida, 1992, 47)

Here, Derrida indicates not only the philosophical function of literature but also how, in its special modalities (that which differentiates it from other discourses), literature both engages this world and distances from it. Literature therefore crosses this-worldliness and other-worldliness.

It is with its *otherness* that literature is involved in other discourses. Derrida also explained that “the event [in a story] already crosses within itself the archive of the ‘real’ and the archive of ‘fiction.’ Already we’d have trouble not spotting but separating out historical narrative, literary fiction, and philosophical reflexion” (1992, 35). The New Historicism, as part of post-structuralist thinking, likewise argues that literary modalities—how narratives are structured and made, the use of figures of speech, and the exercise of imagination—are always and already involved in historical narratives.

Literature’s special modalities also include its performativity. Literary texts, says Attridge by way of elaboration, “are acts of writing that call forth acts of reading” (1992, 2). The “acts” of literature open up possibilities of interpretation so that we can think more critically about conventions rather than just live within them. Deconstruction evidently draws from this performativity from literature. Derrida’s deconstruction cannot function unless it performs, like literature and as literature.

Modernist literature in particular also shows *a responsibility for otherness*. In *The Concept of Modernism*, Astradur Eysteinnsson argues that modernism or modern literature can be understood as the aesthetics of interruption in that “not only do we feel that [modernism] acts out the crisis of the symbolic order, of the system of codes that are still, however, essential for us as producers and receivers of signs and meaning, we also seek in it the *other* of the order that is our world, an other which still hints at us what it is like *not* to be caught in the prevalent socio-symbolic network of meaning” (Eysteinnsson, 1990, 220).

Deconstruction can in part be described as a philosophizing practice that emulates literature and “acts” like literature. Like literature, deconstruction functions “in a respect for *otherness*. . . . This responsibility toward the other is also a responsibility toward the *future*, since it involves the struggle to create openings within which the other can appear beyond any of our programs and predictions, can come to transform what we know or think we know” (Attridge, 1992, 5). Indeed, Attridge’s explanation of Derrida’s deconstruction resonates with Eysteinnsson’s description of modern literature.

Literature’s concern for otherness, this responsibility *for* the other in imagination and in real life, makes it “political” in a manner which is to be distinguished from the political in the conventional sense. Literature is thus apolitically political; it practices the *other* politics.

Noteworthy among our featured articles in this issue (in the first segment and under the subheading "Literature's Political Otherness and Deconstruction") is Zlatan Filipovic's argument. In line with Adorno, Blanchot and especially with Derrida, Filipovic argues that the political nature of literature, ironically, lies in how it refuses to be part of any political ideologies, programs or agendas. This inherent "bad faith" of literature, Filipovic suggests by borrowing a phrase from Blanchot, is seen in the fact that while literature "registers historical and political stresses" it also resorts to its fictionality when anyone tries to take literature to be literal. The paradox of literature is that it exercises its own responsibility through its seeming irresponsibility. It is irresponsibly responsible.

Filipovic's argument can also be made differently, in terms of the aesthetic judgment of literature which can be characterized as a "negative capability" in that the best literature is capable of being in "uncertainties, mysteries and doubts" (John Keats). Literature helps us learn to judge by teaching us to learn to doubt and to entertain ambiguities, ironies and paradoxes.

Citing Bartleby's famous dictum "I would prefer not to" as an example, Filipovic characterizes this poetic Nay-saying (poetry's seeming irresponsibility) as carrying "an ethico-political injunction" that both evokes an alternate future and questions the "present," more specifically, "the dispassionate world of emerging materialism in 1850s America and the corporate reality of Wall Street."

Filipovic's argument is thus also in agreement with Attridge's description of deconstruction, as cited earlier, that it is "the struggle to create openings within which the other can appear beyond any of our programs and predictions, can come to transform what we know or think we know" (Attridge, 1992, 5). Filipovic also resonates with Eysteinnsson who suggests that modern literature functions as "aesthetics of interruption" in regard to the prevalent socio-symbolic order.

The "irresponsible responsibility" of literature is also, to coin another word, a "response-ability," for it responds, through Nay-saying or Yes-saying, to history and reality. Ultimately, however, the best literature, immersed in negative capability, is marked by a Yes-saying to the ever-changing and never-ending forces of life. Literature is grounded in what Nietzsche calls *affirmation*.

Filipovic affirms this insight from Derrida: literature and the democracy-to-come are linked, by the unconditional right to say anything (through fictionality, says Filipovic) and by the responsibility to question dogmatisms.

To coin another phrase: literature has a *political otherness*, meaning that with its fictionality and its special *response-ability*, imaginative literature acts out a kind of politics *other* than the politics of any existing ideology, program, agenda or party line. Walter Benjamin makes a similar point in his "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," arguing that aestheticized politics (as in Fascism) is fundamentally different from politicized aesthetics (as in Communism, which was a coded word for progressive literature then) (1969, 239-242). Benjamin's context should be noted: he was analyzing the potential benefits and dangers of the modern culture which is increasingly caught in the matrix of the masses.

III. Global East-West Modernities and Trans-civilizational Imaginations

This world is one of many worlds. The East and the West, so to speak, are two worlds that are historically and civilizationally separate yet increasingly interconnected.

The East and the West (like “the North and the South”) are not exact geographical terms as they have varying geo-political, geo-cultural and geo-spiritual connotations. It is from the perspective of geo-politics in the world that Edward Said studies the complex relationship between the East and the West. His argument is well known: in a world where levels of development are uneven and powers are out of balance, the West (the Euro-American world from which capitalism originated) has invented a network of discourses about the East from its superior position of power with which the West tries to maintain that power.

Neither the East nor the West, however, is a singular entity. The East, in geo-cultural and geo-spiritual terms, includes various different civilizations and belief systems. The Islamic civilization of the Middle East and the Buddhist-Confucianist civilization of East Asia, to name two, are not quite the same worlds within the East, with their distinct civilizational differences. Historically, the former has had more extensive contacts and entanglements with the West (manifested in peaceful coexistence as well as through wars and violence), whereas for the latter, contacts with the West was less extensive in earlier ages. In a later period (e.g., the 19th century), more engaging contacts began, first, through trades and then through wars (the Opium War comes to mind). It is not Samuel Huntington’s oversight but a revelation of his biased stance that when he spoke of the clash of civilizations in the world, he stretched the meaning of the East and treated the Islamic world and the Buddhist-Confucian world together as the same “East,” which is in the same position of “absence” for the Western world. Said, on the other hand, took a position significantly different when he began his discussion of “orientalism” by questioning the notion that the “East” is a singular entity.

It has been a long and slow historical process that the East and the West as separate worlds move towards a global East-West in which the two worlds, still separate to some extent, become increasingly interconnected in a fugue of modernities. Contacts between the East and the West have not always been peaceful but filled with strife, violence and wars. The hyphen that joins the two worlds is therefore full of ambiguities, signifying resonance and dissonance, understanding and misunderstanding, fusion and friction, inclusion and exclusion, but nonetheless interconnections.

The kinds of imagination revealed in literature are historically infused and culturally informed. Trans-civilizational imaginations, a distinct characteristic of modern and contemporary literatures, are always complex and need to be considered in connection with the nature and extent of historical contacts and to the psychologies arising therefrom. Speaking psychologically, trans-civilizational imaginations are either shaped by desires to understand the other, or by fears and anxieties, or, as is often the case, by a mixture of both. The other, if imagined to be exotic, fearful or fantastically strange, only prolongs mutual misunderstanding.

In its earlier contacts with the West up to the 19th century, the imperial courts of China (Ming and Qing) initiated some cultural and commercial exchanges but were largely caught in a Central Empire Syndrome. To China, the

West—the curious but barbaric other—was perceived to exist at the very margin of the Sino-centric imagination; the Chinese Empire regarded itself and its neighbouring countries as the world “under heaven” (*tian xia*), which means the whole world. China then lived in a different sense of time and history within the confines of its own civilizational model and showed little interest in joining in the world process of modernization. What happened next was history: the West forced the door of China open with gunboats and humiliated China with looting, stealing and endless imperialist annexations in the 19th century.

With hindsight, we see how extremely limited humanity's knowledge of the earth and of the universe was at the dawn of the modern age. Our knowledge of each other at the time was also minimal to the point of being comically absurd. Julia Kristeva cites a 16th century case as example: Rabelais's *Fourth Book* (written between 1548 and 1552) narrates the journey of Pantagruel's companions to visit the Oracle of the Holy Bacbus supposedly located “near Cathay [China] in upper India.” “[T]his expedition toward China,” says Kristeva, “is actually a journey toward [Western] myth, dream, [fantasized] ideal, wealth, and happiness” (Kristeva, 1991, 112). As Rabelais tried to allegorize his discontents with corruption in the Catholic church, he depicted a journey through bizarre places such as Sneaks' Island (“where King Lent rules, a stupid and sterile monster”), Savage Island (where the Protestant-like Chitterlings inhabited), Ennasia Island (the island of “noseless people”), the land of Clerkship (alluding to the courts of law and its corruption) (Kristeva, 1991, 112-113).

Rabelais's imagined journey towards China had nothing to do with the reality in China or Asia; it was a product of the collective unconscious in the West. *The Fourth Book* itself shows how Rabelais “takes up again an old and particularly fruitful tradition in the writings of the thirteenth- to sixteenth-century explorers, such as Marco Polo's accounts of the *Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, Jordan Cathala de Severac's *Mirabilia Descripta*, or *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* in the fourteenth century.” These explorers had already added to their discoveries “Western or Islamic legends, even seeing the inhabitants of the new lands as fabulous birds, or as people ‘without buttocks or digestive system,’ or simply endowed with ‘gold, rubies, and infinite amount of other wealth’” (Kristeva, 1991, 114).

Regarding the West's imagination of China in the 20th century, Jonathan D. Spence once wrote: “China, which once seemed to promise endless wealth to a new breed of Western sea-borne adventurers, now provides endless ground for armchair speculation instead. We do not understand China and we constantly invent it, and what we think we know is constantly disproved” (Spence, 1991, 100). Spence's remark reminds us of how Ezra Pound used to brag of his “invention” of Chinese poetry. In today's China, there is also the perception that even the Nobel Committee does not quite know how to select a winner from contemporary Chinese literary authors since the decision has to be largely based on the interpretations by certain translations in which something either gets mysteriously lost or suspiciously gained. Although translation is extremely hard, what gets lost in translation should not be the result of lacking the proverbial sympathetic ear in transnational and trans-civilizational contacts.

Nonetheless, it is only now that we are more ready to recognize the extent of ignorance and distance that have been separating the East and the West. The arrival of globalization thus affords us opportunities to re-interpret, re-synthesize

and re-imagine what we, in the more isolated era, held to be “knowledge” of each other. In this process, intellectual and artistic efforts to bring the East and West into a global East-West are as important as the political, economic and diplomatic efforts that become headlines. A new breed of literature, trans-civilizational, trans-national and translational in nature, plays a vital role in such efforts, adding the much-needed human sympathy and compassion to the fugue of modernities. Indeed, any consideration of the fugue of modernities would be incomplete today if it lacked the trans-civilizational and transnational dimensions.

Atef Laouyene’s article, included in the second segment and under the subheading “History, Memory and Global East-West Modernities,” is an extraordinarily poignant contribution to the ongoing dialogue in this respect. Laouyene insightfully takes us back to al-Andalus, the time of medieval Moorish Spain from the 10th to late 18th century, not so much to repeat the conventional images of Andalus in the collective unconscious of the Western and the Arabic worlds, but to *re-interpret* the Andalusian as the site of memory from which much of the contemporary conflicts between the Western and Arab world’s arises.

The Andalusian period was not just a quasi-utopian time of peaceful *convivencia* (cohabitation) of Muslims, Jews and Christians. That period was characterized by fusion as well as friction, and, furthermore, it was not unmarred by religious violence and dynastic strife.

Laouyene links Western remembrance of the Andalusian period to a fear-infused imagination that the contemporary influx of Arab Muslim immigrants into Europe would be the ultimate return of Muslim dominion over European soil, thus effectively exposing the uncanny roots of Islamophobia underlining contemporary politics in the West.

On the other hand, Laouyene also critiques “the al-Andalus syndrome” or “pathology of Moorishness” with which some people in the Arab world are preoccupied. This is, in short, the melancholic desire to bring back the glory and greatness that was once al-Andalus. This desire or pathology in the Arab Muslim imaginary, when distorted by anxieties of the present, encourages self-professed missions of conquest and counter-conquest.

How does one re-narrativize the Arab Muslim imaginary linked to al-Andalus? This is the question, Laouyene argues, on which the hope to build a vision of worldly humanism depends, for the West and for the Arab world. In this context, Laouyene’s article examines contemporary Arab fiction, especially one of the post-9/11 Anglophone Arab novels, Lalami’s *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005). Lalami’s novel is not one lamenting the lost greatness of al-Andalus, argues Laouyene, but “an exercise in critical self-scrutiny anchored in the dystopian social reality of the Arab world.”

Also in the second segment, this special issue includes a well-researched article by Ou Li, a scholar from Chinese University of Hong Kong. Li’s article revisits the issue of how William Wordsworth, in several books of *The Prelude*, approaches the legacies of the French Revolution from the introspective perspective of the poet himself, thus displaying both therapeutic and traumatic effects of remembrance. Ou Li’s careful textual analysis of Wordsworth’s *Prelude* validates the value of the “negative capability” of literature and reinforces memory-related theories in literary criticism such as offered by Freud. Wordsworth, indeed, prefigures the modernist “introspective fiction”; his

disillusionment in the French Revolution poetically recreates the inner turmoil as experienced by witnesses of modern revolutions and modernization.

Underlining Li's study of Wordsworth's reprocessing of memories of the French Revolution is a concern that has contemporary currency and global implications. Li suggests that Wordsworthian remembrance "also illuminates many later literary works written on a violent political experience, including those recollecting the 1989 Democracy Movement in China. What happened in 1989 in China is not a revolution, but it is certainly the most significant political experience in contemporary Chinese history. Like the French Revolution, it is marked with contradictions. . . . Like *The Prelude*, many recollective works of 1989 reveal the tension between commemoration and repression, emphasizing both the disturbing and the healing power of remembrance."

The third segment of this special issue, "Re-imagining Global East-West: The Case of Octavio Paz," includes two separate articles by Roberto Cantu and Margarite Nieto who focus on the Mexican Nobel poet Octavio Paz. Both scholars bring to their studies insights and expertise that result from many years of research on Paz.

Paz, a poet passionately devoted to translations of ancient Asian poetry, found that the Western sense of modernity is at a juncture of crisis due to its obsession with a one-way direction towards the "future." Paz's re-imagining of a poetic "present" is not just a projection of simultaneous co-existence of Western and Eastern civilizations but, more importantly, a synchronic vision of different times or ages. The vision of global East-West gains special meaning as well as powerful advocacy in Paz.

Cantu himself has gained much from his long friendship with Paz. His essay, as included here, brightens our special issue with insights about Paz drawn from the spiritual affinity between him and the poet. Cantu argues that Paz has an extraordinary vision in seeking to redefine modernity through incorporating Asia as the other. This redefinition is figuratively expressed in Paz's poetry and poetics. Paz's *Blanco*, Cantu suggests, is "a series of 'ultrarapid exposures' of appearances (the worldly shadows, replicas) and apparitions (the archetypes) with a fugue-like representation, synchronous and contrapuntal."

Cantu makes an especially insightful point that, to Paz, the East represented by the former U.S.S.R. and the West represented by the USA "were the wayward offspring of one civilization and one single historical orientation: the Enlightenment and industrialization"; it is this same civilizational force represented by both that declined during the Cold War. Thus, Paz hoped that a redemption myth would emerge from an *other* civilization on a global scale. As is the case with *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Paz's sense of the other is based on "Paz's reflections on ancient civilizations (hence not limited to India's) and is part of a "project of recovering *living* portions of the past." This otherness, poetically expressed, is a blend of various spatial and temporal categories figured forth through a stream of symbols such as a ritual, a pilgrimage, a river, a mandala, a human body, and lovers. Paz's poetry also transforms the activity of reading, argues Cantu. "The reader of *Blanco* thus turns into Isis" who "gathers the scattered limbs of Osiris, resuscitates the body, and makes it our contemporary."

It takes a poetically enthused critic like Cantu to articulate so well Paz's vision expressed through poetry. Cantu argues that Paz's "operating *ars poetica* is

really an *ars combinatorial*” and with that art Paz refutes the impossibility of love and recovers the possibility of love to rebuild another vision of the world, in fugue.

Margarite Nieto, in her focused study of Paz’s *The Labyrinth of Solitude* and *In Light of India*, provides insights related to Paz’s biography and his hermeneutical self-examination. *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950) was composed while Paz lived in Mexico and combined his observations of the everyday Mexican life with his search of “the other.” Two years later he observed “the other” through his experience in India to which he returned in 1962. *In Light of India* (1995), in part, narrates Paz’s sense of the other as embodied by India. An important agency through which Paz made his excursions into the realm of the other is Heidegger who too is interested in Asian thought.

Paz once used a phrase that Heidegger had borrowed from a Buddhist saying: “the Other, Share.” It is a whisper which requires that we listen to it in a Zen-like thunderous silence. In that silence we hear it and experience the strength of hope and wisdom. So it is on this note that I end this introduction: “the Other, Share.”

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FOR A FUTURE TO COME: DERRIDA'S DEMOCRACY AND THE RIGHT TO LITERATURE

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Abstract: Reflecting on the political nature of literature and its relation to modern democracy, the essay begins by problematizing any notion of commitment in literature. However, irresponsibility found in literature, far from undermining the political process, is what animates the political field seen as an endless contestability of our social practice. The way our notion of modern democracy informs our understanding of literary practice is explored through a selection of Derrida's writings where democracy emerges as the possibility of imagining alternatives to the world and "of thinking life otherwise," as Derrida (2004) says, which is to say that democracy cannot be thought without the possibility of literature. Democracy implies not political stability but a continuous call for unrest that prevents its atrophy, and literature, in its unconditional right to call everything to account, is its rearguard work as it were, keeping democracy forever open, for better or for worse.

No democracy without literature; no literature without democracy.
— Jacques Derrida, *Passions*

To write is to engage oneself; but to write is also to disengage oneself, to commit oneself irresponsibly.
— Maurice Blanchot, *The Work of Fire*

I

IN HIS RESPONSE to Sartre's famous call for commitment in literature, Theodore Adorno wrote that art was "not a matter of pointing up alternatives but rather of resisting, solely through artistic form, the course of the world, which continues to hold a pistol to the heads of human beings."¹ The political nature of a literary work, for Adorno, does not reside in any political program or partisanship it may assume, but precisely in its resistance to any program that would appropriate it for its own ends. This is what Maurice Blanchot calls the inherent "bad faith" of literature, the fact that it registers historical and political stresses but as soon as taken seriously literature can also proclaim its own fictionality. In other words, one never knows how to read a work of fiction, because it places its bet on both sides of the ironic coin. "Literature," as J. Hillis Miller suggests, "is an exploitation of the possibility that any utterance may be 'non-serious.'"² This ambiguity is what Blanchot, in his own response to Sartre's notion of *littérature engagée*, flashes out as the very watershed of literature and

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¹Theodore Adorno, "Commitment," in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2, trans. Shierry Webber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia UP, 1992), p. 80.

²J. Hillis Miller, "Derrida and Literature," in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tom Cohen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), p. 65.

the cause of its inherent deceitfulness. "Literature," he writes "is language turning into ambiguity," and it "asserts itself as continually differing possibility."³ Literature, in other words, always signifies more than we are prepared to acknowledge and can always exceed our assignations. "It is easy to understand," says Blanchot (1995),

why men who have committed themselves to a party, who have made a decision, distrust writers who share their views; because these writers have also committed themselves to literature, and in the final analysis literature, by its very activity, denies the substance of what it represents. This is its law and its truth. If it renounces this in order to attach itself permanently to a truth outside itself, it ceases to be literature and the writer who still claims he is a writer enters into another aspect of bad faith. (309-10)

Literary commitment, after all, does not seem to be easy to square with political activism and responsibility. This, however, may be due to the ontological instability of literary practice, which we will return to shortly, as well as its "bad faith" or the impossibility of literature to stay true to its own statement. Political assurances literature seems to give are thus always haunted by deeper complicities it shares with irony, laughter and the figurativity of language in general. The duplicity of literature that one cannot surmount in the end or conjure away without taking the magic with it rests on the fact that "the same text," as Jacques Derrida points out in his reading of Blanchot's short story "The Instant of My Death," can be read both as a testimony that is said to be serious and authentic, [but also] as an archive, or as a document, or as a symptom—or as a work of literary fiction, indeed the work of fiction that simulates all of the positions that we have just enumerated. For literature can say anything, accept anything, receive anything, suffer anything, and simulate everything...⁴

This ambiguity of literary writing, its recourse to fictionality and simulation, is what constitutes the specific resistance of literature by continually preserving the alterity of a literary text. If, on the contrary, a literary work is given a specific political fiat that would legislate for a determinate set of readings then literature itself with its inherent pervertibility of all positions is made to comply with the censor's close-up of political life. However, even the most committed of works will betray their allegiance to the very thing they attempt to excoriate. Even the "so-called artistic rendering of the naked physical pain," writes Adorno (1992), "of those who were beaten down with rifle butts [in the Warsaw Ghetto] contains, however distantly, the possibility that pleasure can be squeezed from it. The

³Maurice Blanchot, "Literature and the Right to Death," in *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandel (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), pp. 341, 343. "In literature," writes Blanchot, "ambiguity is in some sense abandoned to its excesses by the opportunities it finds and exhausted by the extent of the abuses it can commit... It is not just that each moment of language can become ambiguous and say something different from what it is saying, but that the general meaning of language [in literature] is unclear..." (341).

⁴Jacques Derrida, "Demeure: Fiction and Testimony," in *The Instant of My Death/Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, Maurice Blanchot/Jacques Derrida, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), p. 29. The impossibility of knowing what one reads—a testimony, a harrowing autobiographical episode or a fictive narrative—is precisely one of the questions Blanchot's short story seems to solicit, but the fact that it is still literature bears out Derrida's point here.

morality that forbids art to forget [suffering] for a second [can] slide off into the abyss of its opposite” (88).⁵ In other words, there is an excess in art and literature that no reading, not even the most rigorous one, can fully account for. Something in the very nature of art seems to adulterate and compromise with the truth that art nevertheless unequivocally tries to reach and represent.

In a sense, ambiguity of literature is implacable because literature is never at peace with the world. Literature is inextricably bound up with the world while at the same time reserving a place of detachment that enables it to imagine it otherwise. Literature always exceeds its apparent capacity to represent the truth of the world. Insofar as it offers alternatives to the world, it is also what makes the world contain more than it is. And it is this excess, as we shall see, that tethers literature to a promise contained in Derrida’s notion of “democracy to come” whose specific relation to literature I intend to develop in the course of this essay.

For Derrida, right to literature seems to be synonymous with democracy and the freedom of expression, which not only warrants our right to say anything but also implies, more crucially, our right to disavow all responsibility for what is said. The fact that one cannot be held responsible for what one says, which the freedom of expression implies, is also what constitutes the ambiguity of literary writing that here becomes exemplary since it stubbornly preserves the trace of rhetoricity in even the most literal of statements. Furthermore, both literature and democracy, in Derrida, share the same affirmation of the other as that future that is unpredictable—and thus cannot be contained in and by the *existing* institutional and discursive practice—and in the name of which the institutions that represent literature and democracy are always open to question and to the exigency of critique. At the heart of Derrida’s political thought that concerns itself with democracy, justice, ethics and the other, one also finds literature that opens the space necessary for the contestability of the social practice that democracy endlessly calls for. Indeed, the very idea of literature is somehow inimical to the slackening of the discursive field that animates political life.

But what, for Derrida, is democracy and what are its implications for literary discourse? Is there, indeed, such a thing as democracy and is there such a thing as literature? “[T]here is no—or hardly any, ever so little literature... in any event there is no essence of literature, no truth of literature, no literary-being or being-literary of literature,” writes Derrida in *Dissemination*.⁶ No ontology of literature, in other words, is possible due to its ability to transcend the world and imagine it otherwise, as we have noted earlier, and due to the fact that literature answers to a future beyond the institutional practice which represents and determines it. But is this the case with democracy as well? Are we to say that there is no democracy? In order to solicit and enable a closer look at the relation between literature and

⁵Although Adorno here has Schoenberg’s composition *A Survivor from Warsaw* in mind and the fact that the victims are being violated by the very act of artistic rendering, by being “turned into works of art, tossed out to be gobbled up by the world that did them in” (88), the same also applies to the literary aesthetic that in the very act of fictionalisation could be seen to deprive the victims of their dignity or even to assign meaning to the unthinkable horror of genocide that cannot be explained insofar as it is what interrupts all reason and turns any explanation into a mockery of the victims and those left behind. However, as Adorno suggests, it is impossible to protect oneself against it.

⁶Jacques Derrida, “The Double Session,” in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1981), p. 223.

modern democracy, a set of tentative questions regarding the significance of literature for Derrida as well as the way his notion of democracy informs our understanding of what we might mean by literary practice in general will form an inconspicuous but necessary backdrop of this essay. After all, the historical fibre of politics and literature would seem to set them up in an uneasy relationship to say the least, certainly not one that would perfunctorily assume the catchphrase that almost has the resonance of a maxim: “No democracy without literature; no literature without democracy.”⁷

II

The possibility of politics in general must rest upon a commitment, in the community, to question and to improve the existing institutional practice.⁸ Politics is essentially linked to the promise of a future that is better and worth more than the present state of affairs. In other words, it is linked to the possibility of imagining alternatives to the world, of relating things differently and “thinking life otherwise,” as Derrida says in *Rogues*,⁹ or, which amounts to the same thing, to the possibility of literature. This is why literature, all literature, is essentially political. Adorno (1992) writes: “The moment of intention [of a literary work] is mediated solely through the form of the work, which crystallises into a likeness of an Other that *ought to exist*. As pure artefacts, products, works of art, even literary ones, are *instructions for the praxis they refrain from: the production of life lived as it ought to be* (93, emphasis added). Insofar as politics is set in motion by a sense of disappointment to which we are not resigned but which demands and legitimates the necessity of critique where our current practice is related to the production of life other than it is, literature will retain its political significance. Both politics and literature, in fact, seem to be carried by a sworn allegiance to what is yet unwritten by the existing accounts of history. There is an essential pledge, both in politics and literature, to keep watch over absent meaning.

For Derrida, literature and democracy are essentially linked by their unconditional right in principle to say anything and by their responsibility to question all dogmatisms—in particular those that seem to have become prosaic or beyond dispute:

Literature is a modern invention, inscribed in conventions and institutions which, to hold on to just this trait, secure in principle its *right to say everything*. Literature thus ties its destiny to a certain non-censure, to the space of democratic freedom, (freedom of the press, freedom of speech, etc.). No

⁷Jacques Derrida, “Passions: ‘An Oblique Offering,’” in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit, trans. David Wood et al. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), p. 28.

⁸“When one says politics,” says Lyotard, “one always means that there is something to institute. There is no politics if there is not at the very center of society, at least at a center that is not a center but everywhere in the society, a questioning of existing institutions, a project to improve them, to make them more just. This means that all politics implies prescription of doing something else than what is.” Jean-François Lyotard, and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1985), p. 23.

⁹Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault & Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004), p. 33.

democracy without literature; no literature without democracy. One can always want neither one nor the other, and there is no shortage of doing without them under all regimes; it is quite possible to consider neither of them to be unconditional goods and indispensable rights. But in no case can one dissociate one from the other. No analysis would be equal to it. And each time that a literary work is censored, democracy is in danger, as everyone agrees. The possibility of literature, the legitimation that a society gives it, the allaying of suspicion or terror with regard to it, all that goes together—politically—with the unlimited right to ask any question, to suspect all dogmatism, to analyze every presupposition, even those of the ethics or the politics of responsibility. (Derrida, 1995, 28)

As an institution, literature finds its place (*topos*) within the social conventions, laws and rights that legitimate its practice. However, having an authorisation to say everything, to overturn all our prerogatives and entitlements, to generate alternate histories and place in question the very laws that determine it, literature is also a counter-institution or, as Derrida says elsewhere, “an institution that tends to overflow the institution.”¹⁰ This means that literature cannot be contained by an institutional or canonical practice that, in fact, regulates and assigns its meaning. It cannot be kept in place (*atopos*), but rather exceeds any determination that may prescribe its function or its place. Literature never simply is then, never simply takes place within the limits of a defined topology. This is what Derrida (2000) suggests when he writes that there is no literary place strictly speaking, “no essence or substance of literature: literature is not. It does not exist. It does not remain at home, *abidingly* [à demeure] in the identity of a nature or even of a historical being identical with itself. It does not maintain itself *abidingly* [à demeure], at least if ‘abode [demeure]’ designates the essential stability of a place...” (28). This “strange” topology of literature, where it is both inside and outside the institution that legitimates it, is tied not only to the fact that, like democracy, literature seems to lack any ontological status but also, like democracy, it reserves the right to say everything and thus question its own institutional and juridical presuppositions.

However, its freedom to say everything, which “is a very powerful political weapon,” as Derrida (1992) says, is also “one which might immediately let itself be neutralized as a fiction” (38). And it is necessary that it be so, if “the right to say everything” is to remain safeguarded from political intimidation or religious persecution. This is why, as Blanchot suggests, literature commits itself irresponsibly.¹¹ It retains the right to fictionalize its own account, to disclaim all responsibility when brought to the stand; without it, literature would become hostage to opportunism and vagaries of political power. “This duty of irresponsibility,” writes Derrida (1992), that literature assumes as its own, “of refusing to reply for one’s thought or writing to constituted powers, is perhaps the highest form of responsibility” (38). To speak for the autonomy of literature, that

¹⁰Jacques Derrida, “‘This Strange Institution Called Literature:’ An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 36.

¹¹“To write is to engage oneself; but to write is also to disengage oneself, to commit oneself irresponsibly. To write is to call into question one’s existence, the world of values, and, to a certain extent, to condemn the good; but to write is always to try to write well, to seek out the good.” Maurice Blanchot, “Kafka and Literature,” in *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandel (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), p. 26.

is to say its “irresponsibility”—with regard to the existing politico-judicial practice, for instance—is, in fact, to argue for the radically political nature of literary practice. This “duty of irresponsibility” is an excessive form of responsibility in the name of which literature can call into question any positive law and contest the conscience of an entire nation reflected in its body politic. Literature that does not, in one sense or another, cultivate the ethos of irresponsibility is literature surrounded and pressed for air by the claustrophobic embrace of political power and whenever this occurs, democracy itself is under siege. This irresponsible responsibility associated with literature is in Derrida (1992) directly related to “democracy to come:” to refuse

to reply for one's thought or writing to constituted powers, is perhaps the highest form of responsibility. To whom, to what? That's the whole question of the future or the event promised by or to such an experience, what I was just calling the democracy to come. Not the democracy of tomorrow, not a future democracy which will be present tomorrow but one whose concept is linked to the to-come [*à-venir*, cf. *avenir*, future], to the experience of a promise engaged, that is always an endless promise. (38)

It is by asserting the exceptional status of literature, that one also assumes responsibility for the infinite promise that constitutes democracy. This democracy, to which literature, in the final instance, is accountable, is never present or realised, constituted in the present, as it were, but is rather always and yet to come precisely in virtue of the fact that democracy allows of self-contestability, which implies that it remains unfinished. The promise essential to democracy both defines the incomplete or *diastemic* relation it has to its own history—the fact that no historical determination can instantiate it, which is why it presents itself as a continuous promise—and the risk that ties it to the future which cannot be foreseen by instrumental reason but remains radically unpredictable. This radical openness of democracy that no teleology or reason can regulate is, in fact, what is democratic above all and what constitutes democracy's supreme possibility, even if openness always means “for better or for worse.”

Literature's right to say anything is thus, on the one hand, related to the very pragmatic juridico-institutional context of censorship, of political persecution and religious intolerance where the right to speak out against the constituted powers must be maintained. Democracy, in all its polyvalence, is maintained for Derrida insofar as it preserves the right of literature to remain irresponsible. On the other hand, however, literature is also related to the messianic aspect of responsibility that transcends the empirical and historical determinations of democratic rights and keeps open the possibilities of their transformation. This responsibility, that Derrida (1995) calls “the highest form of responsibility” or “hyper-responsibility” which “goes together with democracy” (29), is what makes democracy obligate itself beyond its historical limit, what makes it contain *more than it is* or, which amounts to the same thing, what constitutes its incompleteness. This incompleteness, however, should not be seen as a lack or deficiency, but as an agent of unrelieved negotiation that constitutes the democratic process. The “to come” in Derrida's democracy points to the constant distress of all political practice whose present is held hostage by a radical demand of responsibility that calls for its interminable critique. The “to come” expresses a concern, in other

words, that no present can abate because one will never be responsible enough and there can be no political or other regime that can embody this responsibility.

However, literature, insofar as it offers alternatives to the world and to the positivistic epistemologies of fact, constitutes the rearguard work of this responsibility. This is why in literature's "authorization to say everything" that also implies its unconditional "right to absolute nonresponse," the right of not having to respond to the powers that be for everything it says, Derrida (1995) finds a "hyperbolic condition of democracy" which, as he continues, "seems to contradict a certain determined and historically limited concept of such a democracy, a concept which links it to the concept of a subject that is calculable, accountable, imputable and responsible, a subject having-to-respond..." (29).¹² As Jonathan Culler points out, this right of nonresponse, similar to Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" in Herman Melville's short story, is "an essential feature of democracy, for it is totalitarian to *require* that one respond, to call one to answer for everything."¹³ Hyper-responsibility, as Culler further and crucially suggests, is associated more with a literary subject than with an imputable "calculable, responsible citizen-subject" (Ibid., 9) that we all are as part of a particular judicial and historically determined social structure. This means that the literary subject becomes exemplary rather than mimetic, the one to imitate rather than the one that imitates, which also means that it becomes performative. In other words, literature never reflects the world *as it is*, there is no "realism" in literature that, at the same time, does not suffer from the pathos of what it is not yet. Even the most realistic of literary works carries a virtuality which haunts and destabilises the present by offering visions of alternate futures, even if, and especially when, these remain unseen. In a sense, Bartleby's irresponsible "I would prefer not to" carries an ethico-political injunction that evokes an alternate future which calls into question the present that cannot accommodate it, in this case the dispassionate world of emerging materialism in 1850s America and the corporate reality of Wall Street.¹⁴ Beyond the narrator's sentimentalising of Bartleby's fate, which denies his complicity in its tragic end, his concluding words, "Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!" ironically charge the story with all the pathos coming from a world in which the heuristic and instrumentalising drives of Western

¹²This right to "nonresponse" that Derrida identifies with literature is further developed here in his motif of secrecy that is far from an incidental aspect of literature and democracy. In literature it could be associated with the alterity of the text, the fact that the text ultimately keeps itself secret and in view of which there are different readings of the text that can never appropriate it fully however. In democracy, without the right to secrecy there would be a totalitarian insistence on absolute transparency instead. In *The Gift of Death*, for instance, Derrida writes that if the "essential possibility of secrecy and every link between responsibility and the keeping of a secret; everything that allows responsibility to be dedicated to secrecy" is institutionally unacknowledged or suppressed, then "[f]rom there it takes very little to envisage an inevitable passage from the *democratic* to the *totalitarian*..." Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago, Chicago UP: 1995), p. 34. The right to "absolute nonresponse," to keeping secret, is thus integral to any consideration of literature in its relation to democracy.

¹³Jonathan Culler, "The Most Interesting Thing in the World," in *Diacritics*, 38, Spring-Sum. 2008, p. 8.

¹⁴This ethical injunction of "I would prefer not to" that calls the present to account was at the heart of the protest organised by Occupy Wall Street movement in New York on November 10, 2011 when a marathon reading of "Bartleby, the Scrivener" took place.

rationality will have reduced human beings to a mere technical product used in the service of monopoly capitalism.¹⁵ Literature commits itself thus to the endless promise of a better world to come. It obligates itself, but does so in its licence and its irresponsibility, in its very capacity to suspend literalism and referentiality.

Literature and democracy seem thus destined by the same promise to chart the course of a life imagined *otherwise* than the present. This, however, implies both licence and irresponsibility. Literary licence to say everything and anything without implications, the poetic licence to go against the grain and fibre of proven historical structures is what safeguards the historical adventure of democracy, Derrida would say, its openness that is for better or for worse. Licence, writes Derrida (2004), has always been associated with democracy or rather with “democratization:” “For democracy, the passage to democracy, *democratization*, will have always been associated with licence, with taking too many liberties [*trop-de-liberté*], with the dissoluteness of the libertine, with liberalism, indeed perversion and delinquency, with malfeasance, with failing to live according to the law, with the notion that ‘everything is allowed,’ that ‘anything goes’” (20-21). The “to come” of democracy, constituted in real terms as the permanent contestability of the social, requires disobedience, which literature, “linked to an authorisation to say everything,” indeed, to allow everything, where anything truly goes, seems to embody. Literature is thus not dependent on a “democracy in place,” that would legitimate and guarantee its rights, but “seems inseparable,” Derrida (1992) argues, “from what *calls forth* a democracy, in the most open (and doubtless itself to come) sense of democracy” (37, emphasis added). Literature is thus structurally linked to the very opening of the idea of democracy as a continuous promise.

III

Ontological instability that we said was at the heart of literature is also what troubles the concept of democracy in general. The fact that no ontology could essentialise literature, as Derrida claims in *Demeure*, is also valid for democracy. There is “a freedom of play,” he writes, “an opening of indetermination and indecidability *in the very concept* of democracy, in the interpretation of the democratic” (Derrida, 2004, 25). Insofar as it is interminably contested and unfinished, the concept of democracy remains undetermined and cannot be represented by any of its historical manifestations. It is a “quasi regime,” says Derrida, that is “open to its own historical transformation... and its interminable self-criticisability” (Ibid.). Because of its endless imperfection, that is, its right to criticize and correct itself, to ask any question about itself, democracy is never complete but remains to come. This is why it is not even a “regime” but a “quasi-regime” whose definition and practice remain in question.

Put in the service of global capital that today claims its transnational validity, liberal democracy has become an alibi used as a warrant for measures taken against the voices that put its authority in question. This may be part of the historical adventure of democracy to come but it is not democracy in Derrida’s terms. Furthermore, to protect or immunize democracy against the voices of

¹⁵Herman Melville, “Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street,” in *Great Short Works of Herman Melville*, ed. Warner Berthoff (New York: Perennial, 2004), p. 74.

dissidence that may threaten it is to limit it and suspend its grace, its very capacity to tolerate and accommodate more than it can, its hospitality upon which it depends. For is not democracy, Derrida (2004) asks, that which, in a sense, should ascertain my right to act and speak against it? “Is the right to speak without taking sides *for* democracy, that is, without committing oneself to it, more or less democratic?” (41). Democracy, as Derrida suggests, allows of self-contestation. This is what constitutes both its weakness as a system of government but is also what constitutes the very excellence and merit of democracy, the fact that it is never finished, which means that it cannot be unilaterally monopolised by the West and enforced upon others.

This fundamental indeterminacy of democracy as a concept, is also what opens its history to endless transformations and to hospitality that also seems to threaten it insofar as its unconditional welcome is extended even to those who question and speak against it. But this threat goes together with “a certain hyperbolic essence, an essence more autoimmune than ever, of *democracy itself*, if ‘itself’ there ever is, if there ever is a democracy... worthy of this name” (Derrida, 2004, 41). What Derrida seems to suggest is that democracy in virtue of its openness, which constitutes it above all, imperils itself. The autoimmune response of democracy whenever it is in peril is to limit itself or the very freedoms upon which it depends.¹⁶ As Derrida suggests, one can always suspend the democratic or electoral process in order to immunise democracy against its threats. This may indeed be necessary in the context of increasing political paranoia that surrounds us, but the “hyperbolic essence” of democracy requires an unconditional openness to “anyone,” to “no matter who” (Ibid., 86), that is at the same time never present but constitutes the deferred and always differing structure of its “to come.” This does not mean that it is not historical however; on the contrary, it is here that one may find the very exigency of all its historical transformations.

If this “to come” structure of democracy becomes immanent to a body politic, that is, when a historically determined polity believes itself to embody democracy fully, when it becomes its positive expression, so to speak, which has not only become part of the Western rhetoric, but even the articulation of its identity, it inevitably sanctions oppression of others in the very name of democracy and gives free rein to imperialism and global hegemony currently underway. But democracy arises, on the contrary, in the encounter with the other that puts its legitimacy and the authorities that uphold it in question, calling for their justification. This is a chance for democracy, what makes it possible in general:

[Democracy is] the only system that welcomes in itself, in its very concept, this expression of autoimmunity that is called the right to self-critique and perfectibility... [It is] the only constitutional paradigm, in which, in principle, one has or assumes for oneself the right to criticize everything publicly, including the idea of democracy, its concept, its history, and its name.

¹⁶This overactive immune response, however, is not limited to democracy alone but to all concepts that in order to remain pure against corruption end up destroying themselves. One can speak of the autoimmune reaction of nationalism or separatism, for instance, of National Socialism, that ends up destroying its own cells in its ever increasing sanitising compulsion towards purity.

Including the idea of the constitutional paradigm and the absolute authority of law. It is thus the only paradigm that is universalizable, whence its chance and its fragility. (Derrida, 2004, 87)

The fact that democracy, like literature, is “the *name without the thing*” (Derrida, 2000, 20), that it remains incomplete due to its autoimmunity, is also what makes possible its transformation and its future, and, above all, what keeps open the possibility of politics that we have associated with a commitment to move beyond the present and imagine it otherwise. This is also where literary practice—indeed fiction—finds the gravity of its being that is also to come and, in the end, why literature, standing “on the edge of everything, almost beyond everything, including itself” is “the most interesting thing in the world, maybe more interesting than the world” (Derrida, 1992, 47). Literature, in other words, suspends the world but becomes the possibility of other worlds, or, as Culler (2008), following this much quoted passage from Derrida, puts it in his essay: “Literature can be ‘the most interesting thing in the world... more interesting than the world’ because it exceeds the actual but includes its possibilities, opening their condition of possibility” (9). Literature could then be understood as part of a process of a certain disaffirmation of the world rather than its positive expression. It is part of a recasting of the sense of the world, of “thinking life otherwise.” And democracy itself, says Derrida (2004), “if there is a to-come for it... is only on the condition of thinking life otherwise, life and the force of life” (33).

Both literature and democracy are inimical to the very question of essence, of identity and metaphysics that the question of “what is” seems to imply. In fact, they both resist and challenge our ability to stabilise them other than in contingent and provisional terms, that is to say, in terms of *doxa* as the *only* terms left to us. But this is not an occasion for disenchantment. That there *is* no literature or democracy does not mean that we have witnessed their demise but rather the opposite; this is their radical affirmation as transformative, as what commits them beyond the present. What is lost, however, but not to be lamented, are the normative foundations that have for too long tied both democracy and literature to a certain aggressive expansionism and political dominance of the Western axiological systems. But both democracy and literature, although eminently Western institutions, remain what they are only insofar as they put this very ownership in question. In the end, literature and democracy do not belong to anyone while everyone and everything belongs to literature and democracy.

Democracy then is both a formal, historical structure of political organization and distribution of forces and needs, but it is also related to “the force of life” that exceeds its formal expression and, in this excess, enables its transformation. Like literature, it is bound up with the same excessive or promissory responsibility that may not be readily justifiable by established critical heritage precisely insofar as this heritage itself may be in question. Both democracy and literature preserve the promise of alterity, of something other than what is and it is this promise that animates politics, preventing it from the atrophy of uncritical provincialism and from the reduction to ontopolitics.

The irresponsibility and ambiguity of fiction that, for Blanchot, as we mentioned in the beginning, is its “bad faith,” and the right to non-accountability that saying everything and anything implies are part of the political ad-venture of democracy, just as democracy with its promise of alterity is part of literature and

its continuous recasting of the world. The “what if” that, in a sense, haunts even the most entrenched realisms in literature, the fact that literature is always in excess of the world, that it plays in the domain of virtualities and alternate futures that overflow and swell the world, which does not mean that there is no world in literature but rather that there is *too much* of it, are hyperbolic interventions into the order of things that infinite responsibility demands. If literature and democracy in Derrida are to say something, surely it must be that we are *better* than we are, where “better” carries all the weight of humanity and its history, dragging it behind, as it were, towards a future to come.

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IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER: A LACANIAN AND DERRIDEAN ANALYSIS OF KAFKA'S "THE JUDGMENT"

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Abstract: Kafka's art is one of negative capability immersed in negative emotions. Towards what is this art of negativity directed? In the broad sense, the Kafkaesque strangeness can be seen as part of his modern allegory meant to expose the modern conditions of unfreedom. With combined insights from Lacan (those related to the Name of the Father and the analysis of psychosis) and from Derrida (regarding the logocentric structure), the authors examine one specific story, "The Judgment," to understand how Kafka exposes conditions of unfreedom and why such an exposition in fact reflects Kafka's passionate desire for the freedom which has been restricted or denied under certain modern condition. The more shocking and also more sobering part of Kafka's prophecy in "The Judgment" is this revelation: the victim of repressive power, often in the image of a "son," is victimized partly because he has already internalized the rules of a logocentric/лого centric system with the "Name of Father" (a phrase from Lacan) at the center, whether this "father" is alive, as in "The Judgment," or dead, as "In the Penal Colony."

KAFKA'S WORLD is "strange" in formal details and yet "familiar" in its implications. Readers of Kafka might remember the absurd situation in which a child-like yet tyrannical father sentences his son to death and the son obeys, or a Commandant who rules from beyond the grave a penal colony symbolized by an Apparatus that punishes and kills, or the psychological rollercoaster of Gregor Samsa's transformation into a giant beetle. Kafka's art is obviously one of negative capability immersed in negative emotions. Towards what is this art of negativity directed? In the broad sense, the Kafkaesque strangeness, as illustrated in the above examples, can be seen as part of his modern allegory meant to expose the modern conditions of unfreedom. We argue that Kafka's exposition of conditions of unfreedom through an art of negativity in fact reflects the author's passionate desire for freedom which has been restricted or denied under certain modern conditions, and how, in turn, it awakens the same passion in us. Like the negatives in photography, Kafka's allegories of unfreedom need to be "developed" (interpreted) into positives so that we, allowed an insight into the conditions of unfreedom, regain the courage to continue the struggle for freedom. This essay will look at one such story, "The Judgment," from a Lacanian and Derridean perspective in order to understand how the conditions of unfreedom are established in a repressive structure, and how violent power is exercised within that structure.

Kafka's stories invariably lead the more informed reader to find a socio-psychological order that commands the enslaved (often in the image of a "son"). In Derrida's term, that order can be more accurately described as a logo centric structure in which a center forbids, controls and reigns. More shocking and also more instructive in Kafka's "strange" ways of revelation is that the victim of this repressive power, a Kafkaesque "son," is victimized because he has already internalized the rules of a logo centric structure at the center of which sits a

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symbolic Father who exerts his power relentlessly and even violently, whether this “father” is alive, as in “The Judgment,” or dead, as “In the Penal Colony.”

Insofar as Kafka’s stories are modern allegories, the father figure depicted should not be confused with a biological father (or Kafka’s own father), but as a symbolic one whose function is to stabilize the order within the logo centric structure. Symbolically, Kafka’s father should be read as what Jacques Lacan calls the Name of the Father capable of keeping the “son” in some form of slavery by manipulating his sadomasochistic ills and pains. Kafka has been interpreted in various ways but the most fitting exegesis for reading Kafka is deconstruction, in both the Derridean and Lacanian sense. Indeed, Kafka was a natural deconstructionist before there was “deconstruction” the name.

What is the Name of the Father as postulated by Lacan? Why should we appreciate and adopt this phrase? The Name of the Father, rather than just the word “father,” indicates how the oppressive rule of a patriarchal structure is linked to a symbolic center. In other words, the Name of the Father assumes an omnipresent and omniscient authority guaranteed by regulations of that socio-symbolic order. The Name of the Father, in turn, “justifies” the symbolic power of a repressive structure. Lacan maintains, further, that Name of the Father derives much of its authority from the religious implications in the inception associated with “the order that prevents the collision and explosion of the situation as a whole” (Lacan, 1993, 96). Therefore, a tradition with the Name of the Father at the center is more than just a product of simple human nature, but instead, something symbolically ordained by “divinity.” “Divinity” is understood as the sense of being “superimposed” (Lacan, 1993, 96) which allows the representative of that authority to be God-like and thus fearfully obeyed. With such religious connotations, the Name of the Father represents the ultimate truth, the transcendental signified.

Lacan, in this sense, is a deconstructionist like Derrida who argues that “the concept of centered structure [...] is constituted on a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude” (Derrida, 2003, 278) that is both irrefutable and inflexible like the word of an all-powerful God. Since the central logic of such a structure cannot, by its nature, be questioned, those within it remain slaves to its regulations and are forbidden to have the freedom of their own opinions.

In Kafka, the center, in the Name of the Father, has a shockingly unwavering resilience through which it demands obedience. In Derrida’s term, this symbolic father has *full presence* to which all signification within the structure is controlled. Freedom to express or interpret otherwise is forbidden.

The Name of the Father thus also figures the Other in Lacan. Lacan argues that because everyone of us is born and socialized into the structure of a cultural language which alienates us from our primordial desires (called the imaginary order), each one of us is, first of all, “a slave of language [...] because language and its structure exist prior to the moment at which each subject at a certain point in his mental development makes his entry into it” (Lacan, 1977, 148). In that sense, unfreedom, rather than freedom, is a given since we are always under the authority of this Other (the symbolic order). That the structure of the “whole language” exists prior to a subject’s entrance into the world thus assumes a power of *Gestalt* unless the individual learns how to challenge it with a language of his own while operating with the structure. Self-exile could be an option but it would

mean that the individual would forfeit such benefits as social communication and relations.

Since full participation in the structure is taught to everyone who enters into it, the alienation caused by it is all the more persistent and pernicious. The structure, with its set of rules and regulations, is internalized as our unconscious, thus subjugating the individual. For example, masked with phrases like “the American (or Chinese) Dream,” traditional regulations dictate to people what they should want and strive for regardless of whether or not those goals are actually in line with a person’s internal desires. The implied instruction to those living within the structure is the expectation to “follow the rules or you risk becoming ostracized.” Such an implicit instruction is rarely ever questioned. In fact, most people are under the impression that the expected goal is in fact something they truly wish to accomplish. The structure mediates our desire in such a way that it sometimes jeopardizes our natural desires. What makes Kafka’s allegories both “strange” and “familiar” is the way in which Kafka explores how the consequences of such a structure can be damaging if the dictated desire solely defines the individual that he loses his desire and ability to pursue his life naturally. Thus, the individual becomes a case of what Lacan calls “psychosis.”

In “The Judgment,” when Georg begins a conversation with his father, his inner desires are said to be in direct conflict with what his father expects of him. Instead of being able to argue for his own desires (e.g., I will continue to run the family business successfully, I be married and will invite my friend to my wedding), Georg finds himself only capable of repeating his father’s words. In the Name of the Father, Bendemann Sr. assumes a power to cancel out Georg and enslaves him by invoking those rules internalized in his unconscious since birth. Georg would be more free if he could refuse his father’s blackmail. But Kafka shows us the negative: George remains under the thumb of his father who has all the power symbolically assigned to him. The absoluteness of this un-equation is the horrifying ending in which Bendeman Sr. sentences George to death, and the son even goes on to carry out the sentencing by jumping off a bridge. George’s death is not the result of suicide. Rather, he is suicided.

Georg’s unfreedom is seen not so much in that he has a conflict with his father but in his inability to question and argue. He does not yet have a language of his own. Had he been able to articulate his own wishes, he would have gained at least some freedom. Therefore, the story of Georg and his father is most chilling because of the blatant suspension of natural freedom. Not only does the judgment of a decrepit old man upon a vibrant son strike the reader as strange, but so do the images that lead up to that point including the odd mores of Georg’s father along with his childish behavior, and the strange and violent way that Georg meets his end.

Underlining the horror is Kafka’s courtroom-like drama in which the son’s “guilt” is shockingly contrasted with the insignificance of his alleged crime. The father becomes the embodiment of a completely unjust “law”; he judges accordingly and the son has to find the judgment and sentencing “natural.” Georg is not only unable to tangle with his father regarding the minuteness of his infraction, but even cheers his father for being fair in limiting his desires.

The fundamental unfairness about this “trial” is that Georg cannot defend himself. He passes up opportunities to fight for his case even when his own life is at stake. Moments arise in their conversation where Georg could either avoid his

father's edicts or refute them entirely but instead, he either remains silent or finds himself parroting the words of his father. In Lacanian terms, Georg displays symptoms of psychosis, following a thought process or round of regulation that is "not [being] part of the subject's own thought processes [but those which] impose themselves on the subject's mind from without" (Lacan, 1993, 4). Like a parasite to a host, the ideas of an imposing outside force, which in the case of "The Judgment" would be Bendemann Sr. to Georg, reside within the psyche, controlling its host on an unconscious level for the purpose parasitic preservation. The fact that Georg appears to be unaware of the depth of his father's control over him speaks to the very basic level that defines him to be unfree.

Georg's case of psychosis is strikingly evident when he accepted his father's verdict calmly even though he is shocked by the unfairness of the father's judgment of his "crime." He even begins to enforce the logic of the system upon himself despite its inequity to his "crime." The regulation, as prescribed by the Name of the Father, gains its stock by planting itself in the realm of "fundamental immobility and [...] reassuring certitude" (Derrida, 2003:278). The father's verdict, with authority akin to the "word of God," is based on the "crimes" ranging from Georg planning to take a wife, "the nasty creature," only "to make free with her undisturbed" (Kafka, 1948, 60), to attempting to overthrow his father in the business, to trying to replace and kill his father by "cover[ing him] up" (Kafka, 1948, 59).

What gives Bendemann Sr.'s words absolute power is not only the centuries of a patriarchal rule he has on his side but also his knowledge that the son will admit "guilt" no matter what. A prominent feature of logo centric structure, as it is explained by Lacan and Derrida, is that the center of a repressive logo centric structure derives its power from a divine source. Derrida names this "divinity" as the "transcendental signified." Lacan explains that "at the heart of the religious thought that has formed us there is the idea of making us live in fear and trembling, that the coloration of guilt is so fundamental that it [...] fundamentally bear[s] on our relationship to the other" (Lacan, 1993, 288). The receiver of the authoritative word must then follow it or risk the mystical and fearful experience of guilt. How very unholy is this supposed divinity!

Since Bendemann Sr. is the god-like enforcer of laws set forth by the years of cyclical patriarchy that came before him, he is the man who is allowed to allege and judge of his own accord. Compliance with such judgment is already preconditioned and instilled in the son's unconscious from his birth when he enters into the system. Thus spoke Lacan, in his far-reaching revision of Freud's concept of the unconscious. "The Judgment" is so fittingly an illustration of Lacan's theory that one wonders if Lacan himself were not an avid reader of Kafka.

What is discovered in the unconscious is "the whole structure of language," says Lacan. Let us look at the story again from that perspective. In that moment when Georg attempts to disagree with his father, he seems to remember his assigned place concentric within the structure his father represents. When he attempts (almost the only moment when he so attempts) "to make fun of his father, but in his very mouth the words turned to deadly earnest" (Kafka, 1948, 62). Georg is divided. The eerie scenario Georg faces is then "the immediate cancellation of Georg's posture of self-defense" and the rise of "a force inside him [supporting] his father against himself" (Sokel, 1988, 226). The father knows

the language with which he can punish and he knows that his son has internalized it. The linguistic grammar, the logic, of the implicit patriarchal system is one based on certain binary oppositions that are “not . . . a peaceful coexistence *vis-à-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms has the upper hand” (Derrida, 2003, 41). Violence exercised by Bendemann Sr. is seen not only in the judgment itself but also in his constant scolding of his son meant to tear away all of Georg’s accomplishments and self-pride.

Georg should be the one on the rise in life. He is young, doing well in the family business and will be married. Metaphorically, he is, or should be, the symbol of life’s fertility. In striking contrast to this is his father who begins to show all the signs of a dying force. Bendemann Sr. seems to have entered into his second childhood as he has to be carried to bed by Georg and “the old man on his breast was playing with his watch chain” (Kafka, 1948, 58). The imagery given in this passage tells the reader that, not only is Bendemann Sr. in a state of physical handicap, but he has somehow reverted back into a child, playing with the watch chain as if he were trying to reverse time to his favour, or, as an infant would, asking to be tucked into bed. By trying to take over the role of “father” to a sick and weak “son,” Georg, for a moment, can be read as making an attempt to take over the power of his father, for “the images of Georg caring for his father like a child and then [tucking him] up in bed and . . . asking whether he is adequately covered up, all reinforce the idea that Georg is trying to reduce his father to the role of child that he has patronizingly applied to his friend in Russia; and for a while old Bendemann plays along with Georg” (Sokel, 1988, 107). But Bendemann Sr. has a language advantage over Georg, as he says, ““you wanted to cover me up, I know, my young sprig, but I’m far from being covered up yet. And even if this is the last strength I have, it’s enough for you, too much for you”” (Kafka, 1948, 59).

The father’s frail appearance and inability to adequately take care of himself would justify that it is the son’s place to take over care of his father. Georg has been running the business in what Sokel calls “Darwinian nature” where “the brute strength of youth prevails over the wielders of authority who are weakened by age” (Sokel, 1988, 211). However, when regarding Bendemann Sr. as symbolizing the Name of the Father, even the natural progression “literally becomes a crime” (Sokel, 1988, 211) as it is perceived as a threat to the father by the son. The strangest part about this instance is the fact that, despite the father’s objections, the son has the physical ability to overtake his father, but does not. Georg instead handcuffs himself for his father by giving in to the criticisms and proclamations made by Bendemann Sr. Georg relinquishes the individual life he would have with his fiancée, the business he has made more profitable by his dedication to it, and even his ability to make his own decisions. This is very strongly stated when, in the heat of the confrontation, Bendemann Sr. stands on his bed and shouts, ““you think you have strength enough to come over here and that you’re only hanging back of your own accord. Don’t be too sure! I am still much the stronger of us two”” (Kafka, 1948, 61). The father is a weak, infirm, and lonely man, how then could he possibly be the stronger of the two? That’s implicit thought-provoking question from Kafka.

Bendemann Sr. accuses his son of “betrayal.” But a “betrayal” of what? Metaphorically, it is the betrayal of the bachelorhood (a symbol of infertility) in which the father lives. Allegorically, then, the story becomes a conflict between

life and death. But as the force of death desperately clinging onto the last straw, Bendemann Sr. tries to regain power by reclaiming everything in the Name of the Father. He spits, “and my son strutting through the world, finishing off deals that I had prepared for him, bursting with triumphant glee and stalking away from his father with the closed face of a respectable business man!” (Kafka, 1948, 61). Sokel suggests that we read it as “implicitly the Oedipal of father by son [which] had been present as soon as the father withdrew his full energies from the business and the son jumped, ‘decisively’ to use his own word, into the power vacuum thus created” (Sokel, 1988, 210). But instead of holding a discussion about the resentment the father might have about being displaced in the business “the father automatically [assumes] an accusatory view of the natural succession of the generations” (Sokel, 1988, 210).

The voice that declares Georg’s death sentence is the voice of death itself. Yet, Georg accepts it with a farewell to his “loving” parents: “Dear parents, I have always loved you all the same” (Kafka, 1948, 63). All that needs to be signified is signified, in the phrase: “all the same.”

One cannot be suicided unless one also slavishly accepts the terms of one’s death. So the more shocking and also more sobering part of Kafka’s prophecy is how Georg’s internalization of a tyrannical patriarchy causes him to be, what Lacan terms, an *interposed subject*. This means that Georg’s ego has been so infused with the rules of his father’s structure that his connections to his own desires have been interrupted and are instead filtered through the desire of the Other. Georg thus “is happy to say, *This is how things are*, and one does not even try to see that this is how things are” (Lacan, 1993, 97). In agreeing to be suicided, Georg’s desire to marry and go on in life is brought to an abrupt and permanent end. In that sense, Georg, an example of Kafka’s allegorical son, is sabotaged by his inability to free himself from the Other which governs his unconscious.

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PATHOLOGIES OF MOORISHNESS: AL-ANDALUS, NARRATIVE, AND “WORLDLY HUMANISM”

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*Abstract: This essay examines political and literary invocations of the history of al-Andalus (Muslim Spain) particularly in the post-9/11 era. Drawing on Edward Said's concept of “worldly humanism,” I argue that the Arab predicament today can be properly addressed only by cultivating an Arab consciousness that is freed from the perceived glories of the past and that emanates from within the “worldly” reality of Arab societies in the present. The contemporary Arab novel, particularly that which incorporates Andalusian themes and of which Moroccan-American Leila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005) is an example, claims our critical attention in this respect for two main reasons: first, it parodies the affective, and often detrimental, urge to recover elsewhere ideals (al-Andalus in this case); and, second, it anchors its resistive humanistic endeavour in the worldly exigencies of Arab contemporaneity. It is precisely this labour of imaginative and humanistic resistance, I argue, which well entitles work like Lalami's to special critical reflection.*

I. 9/11 and the Pathology of Moorishness

IN *FREEDOM and Orthodoxy: Islam and Difference in the Post-Andalusian Age* (2004), Moroccan-American scholar Anouar Majid argues that the 1492 Spanish *Reconquista* “[has] in many ways created the ideological foundations of the modern world” (xi). In other words, the virulent religious extremisms, the ongoing political conflicts, and the profound socio-economic disparities that characterize our modern times are to a large extent the result of a Euro-American messianic impulse that initially animated the Spanish *Reconquista* (reconquest), then the European Imperial enterprises, and now the post-9/11 war on Islamic terrorism. The irony of this impulse is perhaps most striking in the Madrid train bombings in March 11, 2004 carried out by an Arab Muslim faction in retaliation for the perceived injustices of the *Reconquista* and Inquisition, a vendetta operation aimed at “settling old accounts with Spain, the Crusader” (Lowney 2005, 1). Moreover, and in a declaration made in the wake of the Madrid attacks, Spain's former President José María Aznar (1996-2004) was quick to place such attacks in the context of an ongoing history of conquest and counter conquest between Moors (i.e. Arab Muslims) and Spaniards:

If you take the trouble to focus on what Bin Laden has written and stated in recent years [...] you will realize that the problem Spain has with Al Qaeda and Islamic terrorism did not begin with the Iraq Crisis. In fact, it has nothing to do with government decisions. You must go back no less than 1,300 years, to the early 8th century, when a Spain recently invaded by the Moors refused to become just another piece in the Islamic world and began a long battle to recover its identity. This Reconquista process was very long, lasting some 800 years. However, it ended successfully. There are many radical Muslims who continue to recall that defeat, many more than any rational Western mind might suspect. Osama Bin Laden is one of them. His first statement after 11th September - I

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repeat, the 11th September - did not begin by referring to New York or Iraq. His first words were to lament the loss of Al Andalus - Moorish Medieval Spain - and compare it to the occupation of Jerusalem by the Israelis. (Tremlett 2008, xvii)

Al-Andalus here refers to the historical Arabic name for the Iberian Peninsula (today's Spain and Portugal) when the latter was ruled by the Moors for more than seven centuries, a rule that came to an end in 1492 when the Spaniards conquered Granada, the last Moorish stronghold in Europe, and thus successfully culminated their repossession of the entire Peninsula.¹ In former President Aznar's view, therefore, the 3/11 attacks on Madrid symptomize the extent to which the fall of Granada and the ultimate loss of al-Andalus to Christian Spain constitute one of the most enduring traumas that structure the modern Arab psyche, an open wound that still breeds violent historical revanchism at times and triumphal visions of cultural rehabilitation at others.

Al-Andalus, however, does not only refer to the eight-centuries-long history of Moorish political rule in Spain (711 to 1492); it also designates a cultural "Golden Age" in Arab Islamic civilization where the coexistence of different religious communities (Muslims, Christians, and Jews) did not preclude the efflorescence of an unprecedented tradition of multicultural tolerance, artistic creation, and scientific advancements. In fact, many are the scholars of al-Andalus whose significant accomplishments in various branches of knowledge cannot be overstated and continue to be celebrated both in the East and the West up to this day. Suffice it to mention here two of the most well known to the Western public: Avicenna (Ibn Sina), most known for his *Canon of Medicine* (1025), a standard textbook in Europe up until 1650 and still taught in today's universities as part of the history of medicine; and Averroes (Ibn Rushd), most renowned among scholars as "The Commentator," for he authored the most sustained and perhaps most important commentaries on the works of Aristotle and Plato, in addition to other works in Islamic jurisprudence, astronomy, geography, logic, psychology, and politics. Other prominent Andalusian scholars, known perhaps more in the Arabic Islamic world than in the West, include Ibn Hazm from Cordoba, a theologian, historian, jurist, and litterateur, whose *The Ring of the Dove* is viewed by scholars of comparative medieval studies as a classic in the literature of love; and al-Ghazali, a theologian and a Sufi mystic of Persian origin, whose incorporation of Sufism into religious thought had a major influence on the development of both Islamic and Western medieval philosophy. The achievements of these scholars and those of many others in a variety of fields (astrology, physics and optics, botany, medicine, mathematics, architecture, literature, and music) contributed to an extraordinary cultural renaissance in Muslim Spain, and this at a time when the rest of Europe was still wallowing in the dark ages.

In both scholarly and public discourses, then, al-Andalus is persistently remembered as the site of a supreme Arab Islamic civilization characterized by religious and multicultural tolerance and numerous scientific discoveries. It goes without saying that medieval Moorish Spain could not have flourished into the center of a great humanistic culture without an atmosphere of tolerance and conviviality, one that is conducive to the interplay and cross-pollination of

¹The term al-Andalus will henceforth be used interchangeably with Arab, Muslim, or Moorish Spain.

different cultures, ethnicities, and traditions. In fact, this convivial, pluralistic *modus vivendi* which characterized Andalusian society is often described in terms of what the historian Americo Castro calls *convivencia* (cohabitation), designating that quasi-utopian moment of peaceful “living togetherness” among the three confessional communities (Muslims, Jews, and Christians) from the tenth to the late fifteenth century (Castro 1971, 584). Later critics and historiographers, however, have sought to deflate the myth of al-Andalus as a multicultural utopia and suggested that the Iberian Peninsula’s history was in reality characterized by fusion as well as friction, by periods of relatively undisturbed acculturation as well as periods of conflict and mutual distrust.² Any reflection on Arab Spanish history must therefore take into account the fact that such history was by no means unmarred by religious violence and dynastic strife. Indeed, following the decline of the Umayyad caliphate in the early eleventh century, Arab Spain witnessed a half-century (1039-1089) of violent political infighting, as the newly formed mini-states (*Taifas*) constantly vied against one another for dominance over southern Iberia.

The fragmentation of Arab Spain into warring fiefdoms promptly emboldened the Christian princes in the north to claim back pieces of the peninsula by carrying out sporadic raids on their Muslim neighbours to the south. Unable to ward off the rise of crusader Christendom, the petty *emirs* (princes) of al-Andalus had no choice but to summon the support of their North African Muslim brethren, the Almoravids. The Almoravids swiftly heeded the call and sallied forth to Muslim Spain and managed to restore—albeit temporarily—some sort of Muslim suzerainty, only to come back in 1085 after the devastating loss of Toledo to King Alfonso VI of Castile. Notwithstanding its history of intermittent political violence, al-Andalus still figures in the Arab Muslim imaginary as a safe haven for multiple faith communities, a beacon of learning for scholars, and an emblem of unsurpassed architectural splendour and dazzling sybaritic living—a lost paradise (*al-firdaws al-mafqûd*) that may one day be returned to its rightful owners, namely, the Arabs (Snir 2000, 265; Shannon 2007, 308).

In Western eyes, the ultimate return of Muslim dominion over European soil continues to be a looming possibility, especially given the constant influx of massive Arab Muslim populations into Europe during the last two decades. Triggered by the quick rise of Muslim populations inside Western countries, or by what is now called “the other September 11 effect” (Aidi 2003, 43), Western anxieties about an imminent Islamic takeover warranted the implementation of drastic national security measures. Such measures range from the installation of machineries of surveillance and screening to the promotion of ideologies of fear mongering and vigilantism, all of which are intended to forestall the transformation of Europe into what the Egyptian-born, British-Swiss historian Bat Ye’or (Giselle Litmann) calls “Eurabia.” In her book *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis* (2005), Ye’or uses the term to decry the alleged conspiracy between European politicians and a Muslim fanatic fringe the purpose of which is to Islamize Europe and ultimately transform it into an Islamic colony. The late Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci (d. 2004) also helped popularize the concept in two controversial anti-Islamic books, *The Rage and the Pride* (2002) and *The*

²For critical re-readings of medieval Spain’s *convivencia* culture, see Mann, Glick, and Dodds (1992); Lewis (1995); Cohen (1996); Menocal (2002); and Fletcher (2006).

Force of Reason (2006), as she draws her venal quill not only against the menacing Arab Muslims but also against the all-too-complacent European Christians who apparently have failed to heed the threat of a “reverse Crusade” carried out by the “sons of Allah” (Carr 2006, 3). Such notions of conspiracism, Spenglerian pessimism, and apocalyptic millenarianism are, sadly enough, still part of the neoconservative arsenal of vehement critical salvos to be readily fired at Western and non-Western liberals whose pro-immigrant multicultural sensibility is thought to undermine the secular democratic values of Europe (Carr 2006, 14).³

This alarmist Islamophobia is certainly never so manifest as when it relates to the Spaniards who share with Arabs undeniable ethnic connections as well as overlapping histories of imperial conquests. To the Spaniards, the constant arrival of Arab and other sub-Saharan immigrants into Spain is disturbingly reminiscent of the medieval Arab Muslim invaders who landed on the shores of Iberia in 711, drove out the Visigoths, and inaugurated Arab Muslim rule in Europe, one that would last for nearly eight centuries. Spain’s anxiety about the dreaded return of the Moors finds its hauntingly eloquent articulation in the epitaph inscribed on the sepulchre of Spain’s most notorious *Reconquista* Monarchs, namely, Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon. Among the many achievements of these renowned monarchs, only two appear to be deserving of epitaphic commemoration: “Destroyers of the Mohammedan sect and the annihilators of heretical obstinacy [i.e. of the Jews]” (Lowney 2005, 254). In the Spanish collective imaginary, the two monarchs are best remembered for their effort to cleanse Spain’s racial make-up of any “impure” Semitic blood. In fact, and with the introduction of the statutes of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood), which denied Moriscos (Moors converted to Christianity) any “genealogical claims to Catholicism” (Majid 2004, 34), Spain effectively established racial purism as the prime condition for Hispanicity. One of the consummate ironies of this abiding maurophobic sentiment was that the Spanish troops that were sent to Iraq in 2003 to establish peace and democracy in the region sported army badges bearing the cross of Santiago *Matamoros* (Saint James of Compostela, “the Moor Slayer”), Spain’s national patron and notorious combatant of Saracens (Arabs) in ninth-century Galicia (Tremlett 2008, 18). Nowhere is the post-9/11 Islamophobia more unfortunate than in these misguided resuscitations of a medieval crusading spirit.

The year 1492 is a crucial moment in Spanish history not only because it marked the beginning of Spain’s imperial adventures in the New World, but also because it inaugurated Spain’s grand narrative of nation building. This narrative is unmistakably driven by one major impulse: asserting a post-Andalusian *espaniolidad* that breaks with the *convivencia* ideal propounded by the “philosemitic school of Americo Castro” (Fuchs 2009, 1). Spain’s narrativization of its post-1492 national identity is based simultaneously on a disavowal of its Moorish past and a desire to gain long-denied access to Europeaness. This denied membership in the European community (at least up until 1986, when

³For further discussions of this dreaded potential Islamization of Europe, see also Melanie Phillips’ *Londonistan* (2006); Claire Berlinski’s *Menace in Europe: Why the Continent’s Crisis Is America’s Too* (2006); and Bruce Bawer’s *While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam Is Destroying the West From Within* (2006).

Spain officially entered the European Union) is usually traced back to the identification of Catholic Spain, especially in the Black Legend pamphlets circulating in late-sixteenth-century Protestant Europe, as “a miscegenated race, tainted by Moorish and Jewish blood” (Fuchs 2009, 116).

As part of a relentless “anti-Spanish propaganda” by other European imperial powers, the Black Legend pamphlets were intended to associate the Spaniard’s “cruelty and greed in the New World” with his “*intrinsic Moorishness*” (Fuchs 2009, 117; emphasis in original).⁴ In the Spanish national imaginary, then, the constant arrival of Arab (and especially North African) immigrants causes anxiety because it carries with it an uncanny reminder of the Medieval Moorish rulers whose ghosts Catholic Spain spent about eight centuries trying to exorcize and who are now returning to claim what is “theirs” (Flesler 2008, 116). In other words, the presence of Arab immigrants in Spain threatens to dissipate Spain’s hard-won European identity and to resuscitate its long-repressed Moorish one (Flesler 2008, 123).⁵

If the year 711, when the Arabs first invaded Spain, represents for the Spanish a moment of great loss, the year 1492, when Muslim Granada fell to the Spaniards, represents for the Arabs a moment of lost greatness. In the Arab world, the 1492 tragedy gave rise to what Akbar S. Ahmed calls the al-Andalus syndrome, that is, the melancholic desire to bring back the glory and greatness that was al-Andalus (2002, 160).⁶ This syndrome, I want to argue, has to do with a *pathological* relation to history, memory, and national identity. The “pathology of Moorishness,” as I wish to qualify such relation, designates the ways in which the memory of al-Andalus in the Arab Muslim imagination becomes so saturated with, and often distorted by, the anxieties of the present (poverty, political oppression, religious persecution, social injustice, etc.) that it loses its heuristic value and may even be mobilized in self-professed missions of conquest and counter-conquest (as is the case with the 9/11 and the Madrid attacks). In *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Paul Gilroy deploys the phrase “pathologies of greatness” in order to critique Great Britain’s nostalgia for its ethnic unity during the anti-Nazi resistance, as opposed to the ethnic fragmentations that characterize its “multicultural” present (2005, 89). Transposing Gilroy’s insight, I avail myself of the phrase “pathology of Moorishness” to denote the persistence of al-Andalus in the Arab Muslim imaginary not simply as a site of unparalleled Arab Muslim

⁴The “Black Legend” here refers to a number of “anti-Spanish pamphlets that circulated furiously throughout Protestant Europe in the last decades of the sixteenth century and that we have come to know as the Black Legend” (Fuchs 2009, 116). This desire to construct a Western identity “untainted” by Semitic blood is, in fact, consonant with a larger Eurocentric impulse to establish a purportedly autonomous Western civilization unindebted to medieval Arab-Islamic contributions. For further discussion of this subject, see María Rosa Menocal’s classic book *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (1987, 5-9) and also Martin Bernal’s controversial study *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, particularly the first volume on *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985* (1986).

⁵For a detailed discussion of Spain’s anxiety over Moroccan immigration, see Daniela Flesler’s *The Return of the Moor: Spanish Responses to Contemporary Moroccan Immigration* (2008).

⁶Akbar S. Ahmed writes, “The Andalus syndrome creates a neurosis, a perplexity, in society. It is a yearning for a past that is dead but will not be buried, a fear of an unreliable future which is still to be born” (2002, 160).

achievement but also as a rallying memory in major political conflicts with the West. To address properly the Arab predicament today, I suggest, a new Arab consciousness must be cultivated, one that is freed from its “pathology of greatness” and emanating instead from within the “worldly” reality of Arab societies in the present.

In most twentieth-century Arab writing—be it in the poetry of Ahmed Shawqi (Egypt), Nizar Quabbani (Syria), and Mahmoud Darwish (Palestine) or in the novels of Jurji Zaydan (Lebanon), Amin Maalouf (Lebanon), and Radwa Ashur (Egypt)—al-Andalus is constantly evoked with elegiac nostalgia as the site of an ideal past against which the violent failures of modern Arab polities are measured.⁷ Post-9/11 Arab literature, however, I want to argue, seeks to undermine this tendency to mythify and immortalize the Andalusian legacy and highlight the dangers of constructing national identities out of a historical memory that is no longer compatible with the realities of the present. Works like Moroccan-American Leila Lalami’s *Hope and Other dangerous Pursuits* (2005), Jordanian-American Diana Abu-Jaber’s *Crescent* (2003), and Franco-Moroccan Tahar Bin Jelloun’s *Leaving Tangier* (2006), to name but a few examples of such literature, develop Andalusian tropes that clearly signal a departure from earlier and more romanticized literary representations of al-Andalus. More importantly still, through their critical re-imagining of al-Andalus, I argue, these authors envision a modern Arab consciousness that derives from the lived social reality of Arab societies—societies that are, despite any claim to the contrary, increasingly secular both in outlook and sentiment. Post-9/11 Arab fiction, particularly that which incorporates Andalusian themes and of which Lalami’s novel *Hope* will be the selected example for this essay, claims our critical attention for two main reasons: first, it parodies the affective, and often detrimental, urge to recover elsewhere ideals (al-Andalus in this case); and, second, it anchors its critique in the material exigencies of Arab contemporaneity.

⁷For a comprehensive list of Arabic Andalusian dirges, see Alexander E. Elinson’s *Looking Back at Al-Andalus: The Poetics of Loss and Nostalgia in Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Literature* (2009), where mourning the lost cities (*ritha al-mudun*) is identified as a major trope in medieval Andalusian poetics. Romantic invocations of an Andalusian “Golden Age” are particularly persistent in Arabic *belles-lettres*. See Granara for an assessment of the uses of al-Andalus as an idealized chronotope in the twentieth-century Arabic novel. Romanticized Andalusian topology is also a salient feature in modern Arabic poetry, especially in the works of Ahmed Shawqi, Nizar Quabbani, and Mahmoud Darwish. See Noorani, for an insightful discussion of Andalusian poetics in Ahmed Shawqi and Urdu-Persian Moahmmad Iqbal. Recent literary works (by Arab and non-Arab writers) that incorporate Andalusian themes and settings include Lebanese Amin Maalouf’s *Leo Africanus* (1994); Egyptian Radwa Ashur’s *Granada Trilogy* (1994-95), the first part of which (*Granada*) was translated from Arabic into English in 2003; Tariq Ali’s *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1993), the first novel of his *Islam Quartet* (1993-2005); Lewis Weinstein’s *The Heretic* (2003); and Kevin Oderman’s *Going* (2006). This is not to mention, of course, Salman Rushdie’s *The Moor Last Sigh* (1996), which turns the notorious sigh of the lachrymose Nasrid King Boabdil, as he hands over the keys of Alhambra in Granada to the Christian monarchs, into a symbol not only of the loss of the last seat of Muslim rule in Europe (Granada), but also of the failure of Modern India to live up to the multicultural ideal it inherited from its post-1492 Jewish diaspora.

Narrative reconstructions of al-Andalus in light of the political exigencies of the Arab world today, however, inevitably raise a host of conceptual and ethical questions: How do we understand narrative enunciations of the Andalusian legacy in the present and what are the tropological, conceptual, and ethical limits of such enunciative moments? How to narrativize an Arab collective imaginary melancholically drawn to the glory of its Moorish past and at the same time preclude the mobilization of that imaginary by militant ideologies (Islamism, for instance) in proverbial missions of vengeance and counter-conquest? To what extent appropriations, literary or otherwise, of the Andalusian past steer clear of a potential ideological entrapment in the Manichean logic of post-9/11 master narratives? The politics and poetics of al-Andalus, particularly in post-9/11 Arab writing, remain to be adequately examined. This essay is in part an effort to address such inadequacy.

II. Al-Andalus, Narrative, and “Worldly Humanism”

Contemporary Arab fiction about al-Andalus compels our attention more urgently now than ever, precisely because it instigates, amongst other things, a critical interrogation on the relevance of the Andalusian past to the changing and heterogeneous realities of Arab societies today. It is, in fact, this self-critical attitude toward the Andalusian past that allows us to maintain its enabling energies without saturating it with the political anxieties of the present. Moreover, only a critical attentiveness to the historical specificity of the Andalusian experience, I argue, will undercut its potential activation in East-West civilizational clashes and inscribe it instead in what Edward Said calls “worldly humanism.” Anchored in “the real historical world” and defined primarily by “its democratic, secular, and open character” (2004, 48; 22), the humanistic critique that Said envisions and which I perceive operating in work like Lalami’s allows us to bring into creative harmony the inspiring memory of al-Andalus, on the one hand, and the socio-political urgencies of the present, on the other.

Because the *actual* always and ineluctably precedes the *potential*, Said argues, any system of humanistic knowledge in any society must first proceed from close scrutiny of the “worldly reality” of that society (75). The “worldly,” according to Said, “denote[s] the real historical world from whose circumstances none of us can in fact ever be separated, not even in theory” (48). When applied to the humanities in educational institutions, worldliness comes to suggest that “all texts and all representations [are] *in* the world and subject to numerous heterogeneous realities” (49; emphasis in original). In other words, any intellectual enterprise, literary or otherwise, is historically situated and determined by a number of social, economic, and political factors. Moreover, a veritable humanistic education, according to Said, involves a special attitude toward the pursuit of learning, one that is open to the influences of foreign cultures and driven by a persistent desire to seek knowledge regardless of its nature and its source. Secular in nature and interrogative in method, humanistic practice should be “a process of unending disclosure, discovery, self-criticism, and liberation” (21-2). In short, Said’s worldly humanism describes a comprehensive educational project that incorporates a plethora of world civilizations and that has one single purpose: the cultural and moral edification of humankind and the attainment of that *eudaimonic* ideal in society, that is, the

attainment of happiness, which is the ultimate end of all human action. Never more urgently than today, I insist, do we need to claim this Saidian humanistic model in order to counter the exclusivist ideologies that seek to circumscribe the possibilities of critique and resistance.

In the context of the post-9/11 Islamophobic culture, Said's worldly humanism becomes an urgent critical and cultural project, for it helps us resist discourses that capitalize on morally complacent attitudes toward violence. It is clear to everyone now that the popular media in the West reveals only so much of the narrative of Islamic terrorism as is necessary for the purpose of condemning it as an unfathomable human aberration, at best, or an emanation of pure evil, at worst. A humanist critique that is both worldly and democratic is eminently essential for our war-ridden times, and this for two reasons: first, it helps us move beyond the neoconservative narratives that seek to pre-package our moral response to violence; and, second, it invites a serious enquiry into the historical, and often contingent, circumstances that give rise to that violence. Both intellectuals and academics must be wary of the purveyors of anti-Muslim propaganda whose xenophobic patriotism continues to gain significant and dangerous political and ideological purchase in Western mainstream culture. The humanistic culture desperately needed today is one that interrogates the complacent public discourse that seeks to circumscribe what it perceives to be the proper and thus permissible response to human violence and suffering. The practice of "humanistic resistance" (73), as Said calls it, "must literally break the hold on us of the short, headline, sound-bite format and try to induce instead a longer, more deliberate process of reflection, research, and enquiry argument that really looks at the case(s) in point" (74). In other words, the humanistic academy must resume its center-stage position in the public sphere and bring to public consciousness alternative (i.e. non-Western) narratives and experiences that may help us address better the re-emerging ideologies of violence.

I should like now to examine briefly one of the post-9/11 Anglophone Arab novels, Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005), and show how its incorporation of Moorish themes is less the signature of a melancholy Arab author lamenting the lost greatness that was al-Andalus, as is the case of most Arab authors in the previous century, than an exercise in critical self-scrutiny anchored in the dystopian social reality of the Arab world. Consonant with Said's conceptualization of worldly humanism, the narrativization of the pathology of Moorishness in Lalami's *Hope*, I want to argue, contributes to a "worldly" Arab literary discourse that draws primarily on the material realities of contemporary Arab societies.

Lalami's debut novel opens in *medias res* with thirty illegal immigrants crossing the Strait of Gibraltar toward Spain on an inflatable Zodiac boat. Among these *harraga* (dialect Arabic for North African illegal immigrants) are the four central Moroccan characters whose lives before and after the precarious fourteen-kilometre crossing constitute the main chapters in the book: Murad Idrissi, a jobless English Major who occasionally works as a tourist guide, goading fans of Paul Bowles into trips around Morocco; Faten Khatibi, a misguided college student who flirts temporarily with Islamic fundamentalism, only to end up a clandestine prostitute in Spain; Halima Bouhamsa, an indigent mother of three, who struggles to obtain a divorce from her abusive husband; and Aziz Amor, a talented but destitute mechanic who lands a less-than-decent job in

a restaurant in Spain after his successful attempt at escaping the Spanish coast guards.⁸

I shall restrict my discussion here to a key passage at the beginning of the novel, in which we find university graduate Murad huddling in the Zodiac boat with the other *harraga* halfway across the Strait and contemplating the ironic unfolding of history:

Tarifa. The mainland point of the Moorish invasion in 711. Murad used to regale tourists with anecdotes about how Tariq Ibn Ziyad had led a powerful Moor army across the Straits, and upon landing in Gibraltar, ordered all the boats burned. He'd told his soldiers that they could march forth and defeat the enemy or turn back and die a coward's death. The men had followed their general, toppled the Visigoths, and established an empire that ruled Spain for more than seven hundred years. Little did they know that we'd be back, Murad thinks. Only instead of a fleet, here we are in an inflatable boat – not just Moors, but a motley mix of people from the ex-colonies, without guns or armour, without a charismatic leader. (Lalami 2005, 2-3)

Murad's invocation of that inaugural moment in Arab history, when the Arab and Berber armies under the much celebrated commandership of the converted Berber (native inhabitant of North Africa) Tarik Ibn Ziyad crossed the Strait of Gibraltar into Iberia in 711, is important here in two respects: first, it parodies the fantasy of a redemptive Moorish return, since the returning Moors are not the Arab invaders of yore, but rather their postcolonial descendents, the flotsam and jetsam of the former colonies disgorged by the *mare nostrum* onto European shores; second, and more importantly, it imputes the plight of the Arab immigrant, at least in part, to the enduring failures of the postcolonial Arab polity. Indeed, in the dim and grim setting of modern Morocco, Lalami seems to suggest, calls for the return of a Moorish dominion in Europe ring all but false and hollow.⁹

Murad's embittered reflection on the historical irony underlying the plight of North Africa's *harraga* today is symptomatic of what Tunisian critic Nouri Gana eloquently describes as a "melancholic wound, fissuring chiasmatically between narcissistic cultivation and elegiac vulnerability" (2008, 234). "In the history of

⁸In colloquial Arabic the term *harraga* (literally meaning "those who burn") is a label for North African immigrants who cross clandestinely into southern Europe, burning in the process, literally, their documents to avoid deportation and, metaphorically, the life of poverty and oppression they are leaving behind. Many of these immigrants drown before they reach European shorelines.

⁹It is perhaps no historical coincidence that Tariq Ibn Ziyad is notoriously reported to have ordered his ships burned upon landing on Iberian shores in Spring 710 and to have exhorted his soldiers with the famous address: "Whither can you fly,--the enemy is in your front, the sea at your back. By Allah! There is no salvation for you but in your courage and perseverance" (Lowney 2005, 30). Very few are the *harraga* who are not familiar with the famous incident. Illegal immigration continues to be a predominant theme particularly in Francophone North African literature. See, for example, Mahi Binebine's *Cannibales* (1999), Salim Jay's *Tu ne Traverseras pas le Detroit* (2000), Youssouf Yassine Elalamy's *Les Clandestins* (2001), and Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Partir* (2006, translated into English in 2009 as *Leaving Tangier*).

Arab consciousness,” Gana goes on to explain, al-Andalus figures at one and the same time as “a distant utopia of inimitable Arab achievement” and “an unjustly but irrecoverably lost key to rightful home” (234). The idyllic memory of al-Andalus as “God’s paradise on earth, ‘*jannat Allāh ‘alā al-ard*’” (Snir 2000, 265), occupies the Arab imaginary more as a haunting absence than a definitive loss. Neither fully present nor irrecoverably lost, al-Andalus cannot, therefore, be the object of conclusive mourning, for conclusive mourning is predicated primarily on the belief in the irrecoverability of loss. Taking my cue from Gana’s idea of “Arab melancholia” and its post-Andalusian emanations (234), I would like to suggest that this melancholic longing is driven, not solely by the enduring affect of un-mourned loss, but also by the political and socio-economic structures of power that determine the primary conditions for such melancholic longing. Woven into the portraits of Lalami’s many characters is also the unsettling portrait of modern Morocco as it grapples with high unemployment rates, corrupt bureaucracy, and rising Islamic radicalism. The unspeakable social conditions that Lalami’s characters face and the lack of educational and professional opportunities conducive to their social and cultural integration often toss them into an insalubrious environment of crime and prostitution and usually drive them to sail forth into prosperous Europe, only to find themselves shipwrecked on the reef of hollow hopes and dangerous pursuits.

While open to a variety of hermeneutic possibilities, the post-Andalusian motif, as I see it in Lalami’s novel, signals to a story far more alarming than the professed post-9/11 Moorish return. A quick glance at the 2009 United Nations Arab Human Development Report reveals an abundance of sobering facts about the extreme fragility of the social, economic, and political structures of many Arab regions today—something which certainly commands our attention more urgently than the alarmist mantras of the “Eurabian” kind. In 2005, for instance, 20.3 % of the Arab population, the report indicates, was still surviving on less than the 2-dollars-a-day international poverty threshold (11). Morocco, which is considered a low-middle-income country by World Bank classification standards, is one of the highest scoring Arab countries on the Human Poverty Index with 38.1 %, right after the three low-income countries of Sudan, Yemen, and Mauritania (11). Moreover, “the spectre of unemployment” continues to loom over many Arab regions as “the major source of economic insecurity.” In the case of Morocco, one of the surveys included in the report indicates that 81 % of Moroccans believe that unemployment is the highest threat to human security (26), human security being defined here as “the liberation of human beings from those intense, extensive, prolonged, and comprehensive threats to which their lives and freedom are vulnerable” (17). Over 60% of Moroccan households also report having at least one family member who is unemployed and looking for work (110).

Political corruption and failure to adhere to international charters of human rights are also revealed to be among the persistent obstacles to human security and development in the Arab regions. Most Arab states have acceded to and ratified such charters, but they still have yet to bring their legislative initiatives in line with the stipulations of international conventions (5). Violation of the norms of democratic governance and the failure to uphold and guarantee the human right to life and freedom clearly suggest that security of the state takes precedence over security of the individual. Worse still, in the aftermath of 9/11 and with the

passage of the US Patriot Act, many Arab governments relied on a broad and vague definition of “terrorism” in order to empower their national security agencies and thus clamp down on opposition parties, muzzle dissenting voices, and exert tighter scrutiny on public media outlets. In Morocco, for example, and following the May 16 2003 bomb attacks in Casablanca (killing 45 people), the government was reported to have held in *gard-à-vue* detention between 2,000 and 5,000 people on charges of having ties with Islamic terrorism. In the absence of *habeas corpus* in Morocco, the *gard-à-vue* policy meant that detainees were held in custody over an indefinite period of time (often beyond the 48-to-144-hour legal limit) and had no access to legal counsel, nor were their lawyers informed of the arrest date. This means that the pre-trial detention could be extended *sine die*, and may in some cases lead to the disappearance of the detainee during the secret investigation (Slyomovics 2005, 17).

In a nutshell, what the findings of the UN Arab Human Development Report confirm is that the entrenchment of autocratic regimes and the structural vulnerability of Arab economies constitute the real threat to human security in Arab societies, a threat which the underprivileged segments of those societies seek to avert, ironically enough, by exposing themselves to more dangerous threats. A painful case in point is the perilous journey across the Mediterranean undertaken daily by the *harraga* of North Africa, a journey the motives of which are invariably socio-economic. The regular and unchecked immigration of large numbers of impoverished and desperate North-African and sub-Saharan populations into Europe, especially through the Spanish Mediterranean outposts of Ceuta and Melilla, often fosters an underground culture of drug dealings and organized crime and conveniently provides European-based radical Islamist networks with an illicit supply of recruits.¹⁰ A few figures highlighting the gravity of the phenomenon are in order here. In 2003, for instance, Spain alone counted 600,000 illegals (Celso 2005, 89). In 2006, the Spanish government reported the death of 6,000 *harraga*, an event that led Massimo D’Alema, the by-then Italian minister of foreign affairs, to call it “the tragedy of the 21st Century” (89). Moreover, the mafias involved in trans-Mediterranean human smuggling are estimated to rake off up to \$ 8 billion a year from illegal transportation across the Strait (89).

In part, it is also the failure of the integration policies in many European countries that accounts for the marginalization of ethnic minorities and thus for the potential radicalizing of such disenfranchised minorities by Islamist organizations. As Hisham D. Aidi puts it, “Though Westerners of different social and ethnic backgrounds are gravitating towards Islam, it is mostly the ethnically marginalized in the West—historically, mostly black, but nowadays also Latino, Arab American, Arab and South Asian minorities—who, often attracted by purported universalism and colour-blindness of Islamic history and theology, are asserting membership in a transnational *umma* and thereby challenging or ‘exiting’ the white West” (2006, 44). It is little short of disgraceful that France,

¹⁰The 3/11 Madrid bombings were carried out by Moroccan youth tied to fringe Islamist terror groups operating in Ceuta and Melilla. “According to Spanish authorities,” Anthony Celso writes, “Ceutan and Melillan drug gangs are sources of financial support for Islamist terror groups, mosques, and community organizations in Spain” (2005, 91).

the country most alarmed by the rise of Islamism, is also the country where “50 to 60 percent of [its] prison population is Muslim” (46).

Lalami’s exceptional narrative endeavour resides in dramatizing the ways in which anxiety about the limited socio-economic possibilities of the present may trigger dangerous re-openings of the perceived ideals of the past. And this is precisely the worldly humanist task that I perceive and commend in her novel. Lalami participates in Said’s worldly humanist critique by compelling us to rethink the emerging post-9/11 grand narratives (the progressive, secular West vs. the regressive, religious East) in terms of the often-unacknowledged micro-narratives of Arab struggles for dignity, freedom and equal opportunities. In fact, it is this attentiveness to the socio-economic reality of Arab societies that lends work like Lalami’s concurrently to literary criticism and social analysis and undercuts its potential marketing as exotic “Third-World” literary commodity vacated of any transformative political energies or resistive values.

Conclusion

The pressures of the current global economy, on the one hand, and the lack of sustained human development in the Arab world, on the other, generate a melancholic urge to reconnect with the purported glories of the past. The deficiency of Arab economies, exacerbated in no small measure by the exigencies of globalization, often precipitates the re-activation of the perceived ideals of the Andalusian past and the potential ideological mobilization of the latter in the service of civilizational conflicts between the Muslim East and the Christian West. The ethico-historical burden that the Andalusian legacy places upon us, I insist, is that we apply to it the same exacting scrutiny that we apply to the other legacies of modern history (colonialism, imperialism, nationalism, fascism, capitalism, etc). Only then can we open up the rich cultural heritage of al-Andalus to a plethora of enabling hermeneutic possibilities in the present. As the world continues to be drawn into the vortex of terrorist violence, “wrapt in the old miasmal mist” of religious dogmas (*pace* T. S. Eliot), “thinking in dark times,” to use Julia Kristeva’s phrase, may seem to be the modern intellectual’s impossible task. Be that as it may, a relentlessly secular and democratic humanistic pursuit *à la* Said may still hold out a measure of hope for a more convivial coexistence.

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REVOLVED RECOLLECTION OF REVOLUTION IN WORDSWORTH'S PRELUDE

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*Abstract: This article examines Wordsworth's recollection of the French Revolution in Books VI, IX and X of *The Prelude*. It argues that Wordsworth's self-reflexive memories of this traumatic political experience suggest not only his personal ambivalence towards the event but also the ambivalent meanings of modernity as it is often associated with the French Revolution. Wordsworth's recollection shows a salient pattern of recurrence and revision, in which the "two consciousnesses" of the narrated and the narrating self exist both in affinity and in tension. The pattern reveals that Wordsworth's urge to restore the early ideals of the Revolution is in coexistence with a painful disillusionment that these early ideals are betrayed by the Revolution itself.*

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH was the only major English Romantic poet who witnessed the French Revolution at first hand. While still a university student, Wordsworth visited France briefly in 1790 on his walking tour and became inspired by revolutionary ideals. In 1791, Wordsworth graduated from Cambridge and went to France again in search of further inspiration. This time, among other things, he fell in love with a French woman, Annette Vallon. Monetary difficulty and the political troubles between France and Britain forced Wordsworth to return to Britain in 1792, before Annette bore their illegitimate daughter Caroline. Various personal and political circumstances—including Wordsworth's estrangement from the progress of the Revolution and the war between Britain and France—prevented him from returning to France and seeing Annette and Caroline until ten years later. It is thus not surprising that the French Revolution becomes a complex signifying process for Wordsworth in his autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, which was never published while he was alive. In Books VI, IX and X of the 1805 *Prelude*¹ Wordsworth recollects his emotionally complex experience in France, a recollecting process that lasted virtually his entire life and bears a powerfully personal witness to a revolution that signifies the complexity of modernity that is our collective legacy.

This article argues that the relevant books in *The Prelude* offer valuable insights into the question of modernity, not just because they concern the most important historical event that defines modernity, but also because Wordsworth's self-reflexive exploration of the complex nature of memory forecasts the preoccupation with time and memory in many modernist works and the surge of studies of memory, especially traumatic memory, at the end of the 20th century. The French Revolution ushered in the modern era in social history and politics, but its connection with modernity and the values of the modern world exceeds its socio-political significance. The revolutionary experience can be seen as a sample of modernity in the ambivalence and contradictions it entails. In terms of its violent course of development and its diverse legacy, and in the various

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¹All references to and quotations from *The Prelude* in this paper are the 1805 edition.

historiographies and interpretations centering on it, the French Revolution is marked with paradoxes, schisms and multiplicity. “The French Revolution was the primary instance of that somber truth for the modern world it in many respects inaugurated.” (Best, 1988, 15) But *The Prelude* is not just a historical document. It deals with this most important modern political experience from the introspective perspective of a poet, highlighting the tension between history and memory and foregrounding both the therapeutic and the traumatic power of memory.

As an important literary text dealing with the French Revolution, *The Prelude* also illuminates many later literary works written on a violent political experience, including those recollecting the 1989 Democracy Movement in China. What happened in 1989 in China is not a revolution, but it is certainly the most significant political experience in contemporary Chinese history. Like the French Revolution, it is marked with contradictions. Started in enthusiasm and exaltation, it was concluded in violence and bloodshed; having inspired infinite hopes, it eventually caused disillusionment and spiritual crisis. Like *The Prelude*, many recollective works of 1989 reveal the tension between commemoration and repression, emphasizing both the disturbing and the healing power of remembrance.

Critical studies on *The Prelude* abound, including those on these books. Herbert Lindenberger remarks, “*The Prelude* bears enough affinities with the concerns of our present age that it no longer seems necessary ... to insist on the modernity of certain of Wordsworth’s themes” (Lindenberger, 1963, 280). He observes that Wordsworth prefigures the modernist “introspective fiction” of Proust, Lawrence and Virginia Woolf, and that “Wordsworth’s record of his disillusionment in the French Revolution re-creates more powerfully than any record by an English or American poet of the 1930s and 1940s the inner turmoil which Western liberals underwent during this period” (Lindenberger, 1963, 280). But he also suggests the need to look at these books on the French Revolution more closely: “We ignore the fact ... that the books on the French Revolution represent a type of poetry unique in the history of English verse” (Lindenberger, 1963, 102) but “as poetry they have been virtually ignored” (Lindenberger, 1963, 261). Stephen Gill also believes that this part of *The Prelude* calls for the most attentive reading. Books IX and X are often skimmed because they are about politics and apparently little more than a chronicle, but in fact no part of the poem is more demanding. In these books most clearly of all the verse registers the effort involved in re-invoking and analyzing past emotion without effacing it, the struggle of being true to the past *and* to the present. (Gill, 1991, 14)

So what more can we “learn” about Wordsworth’s thoughts on the French Revolution and thus on modernity by focusing on the working of memory in this part of *The Prelude*? As modern studies of memory have made us increasingly aware, recollection is never a simple retrieval of ready-made historical facts. Instead, the past is constantly being reconstructed in the recollector’s mind, so that recollection is always a complex interaction between the past experience and the reprocessing of that past experience and is constantly motivated and reshaped by perceptions and needs in the present. Wordsworth is clearly aware of this:

... so wide appears
The vacancy between me and those days,

Which yet have such self-presence in my mind
 That sometimes when I think of them I seem
 Two consciousnesses – conscious of myself,
 And of some other being. (Wordsworth, 1979, II:28-33)²

As Wordsworth says, “those days” still have a strong “self-presence” in his mind, while his present self seems sometimes so far apart from his past self as to be some “other” being. So “the two consciousnesses” paradoxically distance themselves from as well as connect with each other.

Memory, generally reconstructive with regard to any kind of past, is understandably much more so when faced with a pervasive, violent political event such as the French Revolution. This remembrance necessarily involves the taking of a stance or perspective and can be further complexified when conflicting perspectives emerge. The violence of the Revolution, moreover, burdens the recollector with traumas. In the case of Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, remembering it takes a complex form in which repression and persistence coexist, and in which re-creations and revisions betray an urge for sense-making and recovery. In Wordsworth's own words:

I cannot say what portion is in truth
 The naked recollection of that time,
 And what may rather have been called to life
 By after-meditation. (III:645-8)

The remembrance is therefore a mixture of the “naked recollection” of the past, what might be called “archaeological memory” on one hand, and what may be termed “processual memory” (Olney, 1998, 19) called up by “after-meditation” on the other. Wordsworth is one of the first poets to make this duality of memory explicit in a self-reflexive manner.

Several points in the revolutionary books clearly suggest that “the naked recollection” has been processed by “after-meditation.” Many critics, for example, have discussed Wordsworth's suppression of his love affair with Annette and its reconstruction in the tale of Vaudracour and Julia, as well as the confusion of chronology in recounting the attack on Chartreuse, Beaupuy's death and the climbing of Snowdon³. A more profound discrepancy than these obvious gaps, however, is between the past and present self visible throughout these books. On the one hand, the experience has been so significant in the formation of the self that “the naked recollection” remains powerful and persistent, with some core values of the past self being firmly retained in the present self. On the other hand, however, the experience has been so violent in its changing course that the “after-meditation” has to constantly intrude, correcting the past limited perspective with a retrospective and more knowing viewpoint of the later self. The two consciousnesses coexist at times in close affinity, where the narrating

²Subsequent quotations from *The Prelude* will be in-text references with book and line numbers.

³See Stephen Gill's *William Wordsworth: A Life*, p.38, Nigel Wood's “Introduction” to *The Prelude*, pp.8-10, and James A. W. Heffernan's chapter, “History and Autobiography: The French Revolution in Wordsworth's *Prelude*” in his *Representing the French Revolution*.

self obviously grows out of the past narrated self. More often, however, the tension between the two is fierce, for the narrating self has been transformed from the narrated self by the very experience that is being narrated. This is clearly revealed in how Wordsworth retraces the formation and the transformation of the self in the Revolution. Remarkably, this violent transformation of the self is described as a “revolution” by the poet:

And now the strength of Britain was put forth
 In league with the confederated host;
 Not in my single self alone I found,
 But in the minds of all ingenuous youth,
 Change and subversion from this hour. No shock
 Given to my moral nature had I known
 Down to that very moment – neither lapse
 Nor turn of sentiment – that might be named
 A revolution, save at this one time:
 All else was progress on the self-same path
 On which with a diversity of pace
 I had been traveling; this, a stride at once
 Into another region. (X:229-41)

Several levels of meanings converge in the word “revolution.” The word was undergoing significant changes in this time period. Etymologically the word denotes a “periodic return of a celestial object to a particular point in the sky” (*OED*). When it began to be used in the political field in the 17th century, it still kept this meaning of “return,” so it was actually an antonym of the present word with its meaning of revolution as a complete change or reversal. The word was therefore used to refer to the events of 1660 in England when “the overthrow of the Rump Parliament” and “the restoration of the monarchy” took place (*OED*), and later, to the Glorious Revolution, again not in the sense of a complete change, but of “a restoration of ancient liberties threatened by the tyrannical actions of James.” (Prickett, 1989, 2) Though 1789 is the time we associate with the new meaning of “revolution” to be “change, upheaval” (*OED*), Thomas Paine, the key proponent of the Revolution, still uses the word in its original sense, thus calling the American and the French Revolutions “counter-revolutions” (qtd. Arendt, 1963, 45). Burke, the most powerful spokesman in England against the events in France, uses the word in the same sense as his opponent when he refers to 1789 as “Revolution”. According to Prickett, “the word ‘revolution’ is applied to the events in France only by what he (Burke) sees as a monstrous mistake, and it carries throughout the force of the word in ironical quotation marks” (Prickett, 1989, 5).

Many images Wordsworth invokes in characterizing the various stages of the Revolution convey a sense of cyclical movement or return. In Book VI, the narrator recalls his celebration with the French hosts of the Fête de la Fédération in his first visit to France in 1790: “We ... formed a ring / And hand in hand danced round and round the board” (VI:406-7). The circular shape of “ring” is reinforced by the circular movement in the dancing, further highlighted a few lines later when the narrator repeats, “and round and round the board they danced again” (VI:413). The encircling ring that symbolizes the universal power of the Revolution and the repeated word “round” both draw out a circle, reminding one

of the original meaning of revolution as cyclical movement. In Book IX, when the narrator recalls his second visit in 1791, "round and round" returns. He follows his comparison of "the revolutionary power" to "a ship" "rocked by storms" (IX:48-9) by describing how "The Arcades I traversed in the Palace huge / Of Orleans, coasted round and round the line / Of tavern, brothel, gaming-house, and shop" (IX:50-2). The narrated self, as the observer of the Revolution, makes a circular movement on the periphery around the centre of the Revolution, looking on it from a distance. But when the Revolution proceeded to a more violent stage, the sense of cyclical movement takes on a further meaning of return or regress. In Book X, in his second visit to the capital before his return to England, "divided" "by a little month" (X:65) from the September Massacre, the narrated self contemplates violence as being cyclical, bound to return:

"The horse is taught his manage, and the wind
Of heaven wheels round and treads in his own steps;
Year follows year, the tide returns again,
Day follows day, all things have second birth;
The earthquake is not satisfied at once" – (X:70-4)

Recounting the Reign of Terror, the narrator compares its executors to a child

Having a toy, a windmill, though the air
Do of itself blow fresh and makes the vane
Spin in his eyesight, he is not content,
But with the plaything at arm's length he sets
His front against the blast, and runs amain
To make it whirl the faster. (X:340-5)

The guillotine is a rotating windmill, but its spinning is accelerated into ever faster whirling to symbolize the inevitably exacerbated violence brought forth by the Revolution. When the narrator describes the enthronement of Napoleon, the "catastrophe" (X:930) of the revolutionary drama is compared to "The dog / Returning to his vomit" (X:934-5) and "the sun" "turned into a gewgaw, a machine," that "Sets like an opera phantom" (X:935, 939-40). The Revolution starts out in a celebratory circle, goes on with further dizzying circular movement that gives birth to a violence that continually repeats and exacerbates itself, and finally returns to the despotic point where it began. All these references seem to evoke the original meaning of the word "revolution" and by so doing, reveal both the poet's initial celebration of the Revolution as regenerating human ideals and his later disillusionment with the Revolution as betraying these early ideals.

Prickett notes that by 1795 "the word 'revolution' had acquired its new meaning of a clean break with the immediate political past" (Prickett, 1989, 2). Arendt on the other hand, traces the newly acquired meaning to the eve of 14 July, 1789 when the messenger Liancourt, in reply to Louis XVI's question whether it was a revolt, answered, "Sire, it is not a revolt, it is a revolution" (*OED*). Here, Arendt argues, "for the first time perhaps, the emphasis has entirely shifted from the lawfulness of a rotating, cyclical movement to its irresistibility. The motion is still seen in the image of the movements of the stars, but what is stressed now is that it is beyond human power to arrest it, and hence it is a law unto itself" (Arendt, 1963, 47-8). Similarly, in *The Prelude*, the revolution has

been compared to “the devouring sea” (IX:4), “a ship” “rocked by storms” (IX:49), and to earthquakes (IX:182, X:74), all pointing to natural forces beyond human control.

If we look back at the above quoted passage where Wordsworth uses the word “revolution” to describe the violent change undergone by himself (X:229-41), we find his usage highly ambiguous, which indicates his own ambiguous attitude to the overall revolutionary experience. Explicitly, he seems to follow the newly acquired meaning, when the revolution is described as not just “change” but “subversion,” or “a stride” “into another region,” in contrast to “the self-same path,” literally an unprecedented displacement.

But he also seems to allude to its original meaning of return at the same time. When this revolution is described as contrary to “all else” which is “progress,” the indication then is that it is not only a subversion, but a “regress” leading back to its starting point. More importantly, Wordsworth’s “revolution” takes on yet another level of meaning for it turns from the external political realm to the internal private one. It comes closer to the third meaning of the word defined in the *OED*: “The action or an act of turning over in the mind or in discussion; consideration, reflection.” In fact, Wordsworth also uses the verbal form “revolve” in the same sense. In Book X, he recalls, at the time of Robespierre’s ascendancy, “Inly I revolved / how much the destiny of man had still / Hung upon single persons” (X:136-8). In Book IX, he recalls that Beaupuy “revolved / Complacently the progress of a cause / Whereof he was a part” (IX:324-5).

Though Wordsworth is redefining the word by shifting the subversion from the public to the private realm, he also insists that this is not his personal experience alone, but something “in the minds of all ingenuous youth.” Evidently he is speaking for his generation at the same time, making his personal remembrance simultaneously a commemoration. The autobiographical poem should be more than the recording of his own life; as Coleridge had advised Wordsworth, before he started the poem, in a letter dated around 10 September 1799 relating to *The Recluse*:

I wish you would write a poem, in blank verse, addressed to those, who in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind, and are sinking into an almost epicurean selfishness, disguising the same under the soft titles of domestic attachment and contempt for visionary *philosophes*. It would do great good... (Coleridge, 1973, 37-8)

No wonder then when *The Prelude* was finally published in 1850, the eminent Victorian Macaulay passed his famous verdict on the poem as being “to the last degree Jacobinical, indeed Socialist. I understand perfectly why Wordsworth did not choose to publish it in his life-time” (Macaulay, 1979, 560). As Bromwich observes, “*The Prelude*, meant as a history of the growth of his mind ... would in the end be swallowed up by the narrative ... of a birth of individual conscience in an age of revolution” (Bromwich, 1998, 11).

Wordsworth’s rhetorical use of the word “revolution,” admitting the new meaning while retaining a veiled sense of the old one, illustrates his complex self-transformation in recollecting the revolutionary experience. Immediately following the books dealing with his French experiences, Books XI and XII, the conclusion of the entire *Prelude*, are entitled “Imagination, How Impaired and

Restored." Indeed, restoration, which can only take place after the impairment by his French experiences, is the culmination of *The Prelude*. As Heffernan states, "this return to a pre-Revolutionary moment at the end of his poem prompts us to ask whether Wordsworth simply aimed to cut the Revolution out of his memory, or parenthesize it within the main line of his autobiographical argument" (Heffernan, 1992, 44).

The Prelude is itself a gigantic revolution in the restorative sense of the word, making a cyclical journey and going back to its starting point. This revolution is completed in the psychological sense but, analogous to the verbal "return" to the pre-1789 meaning of "revolution," it also reveals a return to the pre-Revolutionary self in the political sense.⁴ Within the revolutionary books themselves, though recording the clean break in the public realm and the violent change undergone by the self, the recollection nevertheless follows what Heffernan calls "the structure of recursive narration" (Heffernan, 1992, 57),⁵ seeking for a restoration despite the terrible shock brought by the complete change. Just as the meaning of the word "revolution" can be ambivalent, Wordsworth's recollection itself is an ambivalent project. It indicates an urge to return to the Revolution to restore its ideals, and paradoxically reveals an urge to turn away from it to restore the earlier self before it experienced the trauma of the Revolution. It is simultaneously a "revolution" in both the pre- and post-1789 senses.

It is evidently through this recursive structure that Wordsworth makes a "return" within the recollection of his experience in the Revolution. In the middle of Book X (the beginning of the 1850 Book XI), after the narration of his reception of the news of Robespierre's death and before proceeding to record his own mental crisis, he suddenly pauses and claims, "I must return / To my own history" (X:657-8). Then curiously, in the next hundred lines or so (X:657-790), he goes back to the time he has already narrated, when he first arrived in France in 1791, and re-narrates the experience up to the point when Britain joined the coalition forces and his internal "revolution" took place. This re-recollection makes the twice-remembered experience not a "spot" but almost an "expanse" of time.⁶ Whether or not it also "[retains] / A renovating virtue," it certainly has "distinct preeminence." (XI:258-9). If, in making the recollection of the Revolution a circle back to the pre-revolutionary self, the poet betrays an effort to seek restoration in both the psychological and ideological senses, in drawing a full circle within this recollection, he seems to do just the opposite. Going back to the initial stage of the Revolution which inspired infinite hope and enthusiasm,

⁴Chandler discusses many Burkean echoes in these France books, calling attention to the double perspective of the narrating and narrated self in the political sense. See Chapter 3 of his *Wordsworth's Second Nature*.

⁵Herbert Lindenberger "[proposes] ... to look at the poem as saying essentially the same thing again and again.... There is no real progression in *The Prelude*, but only restatements of the poet's effort to transcend the confines of the temporal order" (Lindenberger, 1963, 188).

⁶Both Lindenberger and Jonathan Bishop point out that there are two "spots of time" in the France books: the night in Paris and the death of Robespierre (Bishop, 1972, 134-53). Lindenberger also notes spots of time are "of no avail in his picture of the Revolution" (Lindenberger, 1963, 253). The re-recollection, however, nevertheless has a close affinity with other "spots of time" in its reappearance though it is on a vaster scale.

Wordsworth seems at first to attempt to uphold the revolutionary ideals, but contrasting the two recollections only ironically highlights how these ideals have been betrayed. While the first recollection focuses more on the chronicling, the re-recollection tends to be more meditative and reflective. In this recurrence, the two consciousnesses are brought together to reveal how memory works when faced with a violent political experience.

The self-reflexive nature of memory is seen right at the start of the re-recollection: “It hath been told / that I was led to take an eager part / In arguments of civil polity / Abruptly, and indeed before my time.” (X:658-61) The abruptness has been mentioned already, in Book IX, when he recounts:

I was unprepared
With needful knowledge, had abruptly passed
Into a theatre of which the stage
Was busy with an action far advanced. (IX:92-5)

The sense of abruptness is again conveyed, but the later recounting makes an evident change in describing the self as being passively “led”: rather than actively, though unwittingly, “[passing] into” the theatre of Revolution. “[I]ndeed before my time” is another knowing piece of hindsight by the later self. If the first recollection attempts to recapture the past self more closely, then the second distances the two consciousnesses more manifestly.

The re-recollection continues with this pattern of recurrence through revision:

I had approached, like other youth, the shield
Of human nature from the golden side,
And would have fought even to the death to attest
The quality of the metal which I saw. (X:662-5)

In this medieval fable Wordsworth alludes to, the shield is two-sided, one side gold and the other silver, so knights approaching it from different directions are misled to fight “to death to attest” its quality. The fable indicates the deceptive duplicity of the Revolution, and also suggests that any viewer of the Revolution must have a biased perspective. By such a comparison, the narrated self becomes a chivalric figure too, reminiscent of the key “mentor” figure in converting Wordsworth to the revolutionary cause, Beaupuy, who is also described as a knight “wandering” “as through a book, an old romance, or tale / Of Fairy” (IX:307-8). At the same time, the “golden” colour calls to mind the famous lines in Book VI, “France standing on the top of golden hours, / And human nature seeming born again” (VI:353-4). In the second recollection then, the earlier recollection is significantly revised. The “golden hours” are only illusory, or at best perspectivized, and so the earlier recollection in retrospect acquires a tone of irony, for human nature after all only “[seemed] born again.” The irony also applies to the middle of Book X itself where, when recounting Robespierre’s fall, the narrator recalls himself saying, “Come now, ye golden times” (X:541), and adds with conviction, “The mighty renovation would proceed” (X:556).

The second recollection is saturated with this sense of disillusionment. The poet continues, immediately after the famous lines “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven!” (X:692-3):

O times,
 In which the meager, stale, forbidding ways
 Of custom, law, and statute took at once
 The attraction of a country in romance –
 When Reason seemed the most to assert her rights
 When most intent on making of herself
 A prime enchanter to assist the work
 Which then was going forwards in her name.
 Not favored spots alone, but the whole earth,
 The beauty wore of promise... (X:693-702)

The passage, albeit recalling the early enthusiasm, has a subtle undertone of the later, retrospective disillusionment. The land of Revolution is “a country in romance,” enchanting but something other than reality. Recapitulating the indication of the chivalric fable, it reinforces the irony already revealed in the knights’ fable. Reason only “seemed” to assert its rights, while actually being “a prime enchanter,” reminiscent of Spenser’s evil magician Archimago and carrying with it negative connotations, while all else is using its “name.” The universal promising light, too, is only an apparel “worn” by the earth rather than something inherent.

This part of the re-recollection is permeated with the duality of the two consciousnesses. The coexisting “naked recollection” and the “after-meditation” at once chronicle the self experiencing the external and the internal Revolution, and reflect upon that experiencing self from the point of view of the post-Revolution self, which knows that the Revolution has already regressed to its starting point. Tyranny has been restored. Putting it side by side with the earlier recount, we find that the recurrence only heightens irony.

Irony is also evident in the poet’s recurrent portrayal of the universal influence of the Revolution. The Edenic promise of the Revolution, Wordsworth recalls in the second recollection, had a pervasive influence on everybody: “What temper at the prospect did not wake / To happiness unthought of? The inert / Were roused, and lively natures rapt away” (X:706-8). The universality of the Revolution reached different categories of people, the narrator continues, be it “They who had fed their childhood upon dreams” (X:709), or “they... of gentle mood” (X:716). The world was enveloped in the promising light of the revolutionary ideal, and the poet claims, with a tone of enthusiasm still retained in retrospect, that it was “the very world which is the world / Of all of us, the place in which, in the end, / We find our happiness, or not at all” (X:725-7). The emphasis on the pervading influence of the Revolution recalls various stages of the Revolution recorded in the earlier recounting. In Book VI, on his first arrival at Calais “on the very eve / Of that great federal day” (VI:356-7), 13 July 1790, the narrator recalls, “How bright a face is worn when joy of one / Is joy of tens of millions” (VI:359-60). The earliest impression of the Revolution is the overall joy and festivity shared by “one” and “tens of millions,” very much like Lenin’s glorification of revolutions as “the festivals of the oppressed and the exploited”⁷. Compared with the celebration of this universal joy presented in Book VI, the

⁷<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/tactics/ch13.htm>

second recounting in Book X seems to have a different focus. The universality is indicated to lie in its overall power to transport different tempers, so that the inert are “roused,” and the lively “rapt away,” literally transported. What the Revolution has brought in is a violent disruption of normal order. And if uniformity of the many is the focus of the earlier recollection, then the diversity of the many is the emphasis in the re-recounting. If the irresistible revolutionary power could transport the many into one in celebration, the narrator’s retrospection reminds us that it could also lead to further transport equally irresistible, and the diversity of the many involved in the Revolution could also make the uniformity a precarious one.

The precarious nature of this uniformity is already suggested in Wordsworth’s first recollection of his longer visit to France in 1791. When the narrated self visited Paris on his arrival, he saw on the streets of Paris a distortion of the overall festivity he records in Book VI. It is a “great rendezvous of worst and best,” of people who “had a purpose, or had not,” including both “builders” and “subverters,” on whose faces he reads both “hope” and “apprehension,” “joy, anger, vexation, in the midst / Of gaiety and dissolute idleness” (IX:53-62). The universality of the Revolution here reveals an ominous, perilous force in its massive scale. The varied crowd is much like a mob in its formation.

The universal power of the Revolution is then a double-edged sword. While the early enthusiasm had almost an omnipresent impact upon everybody, its later tendency to chaos and violence is also a terrible sway that nobody could escape. A little later in his first recollection of his visit to Paris, the narrator describes how “the mildest” are turned into the “agitated,” and what was “peaceful” becomes “unquiet”. The universality is manifested not in joy, but in a state of “ferment,” “commotion,” and “strife,” all indicating the dangerous power being unleashed by the Revolution (IX:165-8). This general agitation foretells the later universal madness sparing no one during the Reign of Terror: “The goaded land waxed mad; the crimes of few / Spread into madness of the many,” “And all the accidents of life, were pressed / Into one service, busy with one work” (X:312-3, 325-6). The “one” service, and the “one” work reveal the single-mindedness of the revolutionary cause, which reduces the complex diversity of humanity. The universal power of the Revolution has spread joy and agitation over all, but is finally unleashed into violence, when the overall madness develops into universal bloodshed: “all perished, all – / Friends, enemies, of all parties, ages, ranks, / Head after head, and never heads enough / For those who bade them fall” (X:333-36). The revolution has indeed revolved, turning back to its antithesis. In Wordsworth’s second recollection, he is not remembering a single moment in the past, but drawing out a trajectory of the Revolution from the early overall celebration to its later stage of universal terror and bloodshed.

Similarly, when Wordsworth continues with this re-recollection by focusing on himself, he is also creating a multi-layered recount full of tension:

Why should I not confess that earth was then
To me what an inheritance new-fallen
Seems when the first time visited, to one
Who thither comes to find in it his home? (X:728-31)

The tone of reluctant questioning with which the passage starts, with the modalized negative question "why should I not confess," reveals a sense of guilt that can only belong to the experienced, retrospective narrator. What is recalled here, rather than the isolated self, is the self as related to the "earth," which is compared to "an inheritance new-fallen," a simile rich in oppositions: the earth is like something new, but also something inherited, a part of a tradition; it indicates regeneration, but the sense of fallenness is evoked in the compound "new-fallen." The "I" is at once a "visitor" or "guest" of this earth for "the first time," and a resident or a host, who "thither comes to find in it his home."

The metaphor of visitor/resident or guest/host suggests a psychological rather than geographical identification with the country of Revolution, but of course it is also literal in Wordsworth's case. The double identity indicates not so much a contradiction as a transformation, from the sense of strangeness to the sense of belonging in relation to the "earth." This transformed identity recalls the earlier recollection, not just at one point but through the whole course of the transformation whereby the self receives different identities, thus relating the poet to "the country in Romance."

In the earlier recollection of the 1790 visit, the narrator already puts much emphasis on his sense of identity in relation to the country of Revolution. He calls himself and Robert Jones "A lonely pair / Of Englishmen" (VI:391-2), conveying the sense of strangeness and isolation in a foreign land. But at the same time, "the name of Englishmen" is also "a name / Honoured in France," "As their forerunners in a glorious course." (VI:409, 410, 412) The harmony between the national identity and the "revolutionary identity" at this point of the Revolution prepares for the irony of the later fierce clash of these two identities, but it binds these alien visitors to their hosts at this moment of universal joy in the Revolution. Though the poet emphasizes that they are "guests" (VI:403), he also makes clear that they are "welcome almost as the angels were / to Abraham of old" (VI:403-4). They are also amidst "a merry crowd / Of those emancipated" (VI:393-4) which forms a "blithe company" (VI:401), the sense of harmony dissipating the sense of strangeness. If in the first visit the national identity is in line with the revolutionary cause, then in his second visit, it is this same, English, foreign identity that gains him acceptance from those who are against the Revolution. The narrator stresses that if it were not for his alien identity as "An Englishman" (IX:191) and "A stranger" (IX:194), he would be "Shunned and not tolerated" (IX:197) by the royalists he associates with. His national identity as an Englishman then acquires an aspect of fickleness in face of the revolutionary cause, indicating the inherent contradictions within the Revolution itself. At the same time, both periods convey a keen awareness of himself as an outsider in the nation of Revolution.

But the outsider is soon to be swayed by the universal power of the Revolution, as recounted in markedly different manners in the two recollections. The first recollection is ambiguously worded: "I gradually withdrew / Into a noisier world, and thus did soon / Become a patriot –" (IX:122-4). Remarkably, the conversion from an outsider to a participant is described as an oxymoronic withdrawal into a noisier world instead of some place of retirement, and into a community rather than from a community. The deliberate contradiction may indicate the mistaken perception of the narrated self realized by the narrating self,

and “withdraw” also has a military undertone of removing oneself from a more favourable position, indicating the loss inherent to this withdrawal.

As he does with the word “revolution,” the poet also uses the word “patriot” in an ambiguous way and thereby indicates the “identity crisis” he would have to go through in the Revolution. “Patriot” here fits in with its extended sense of “a lover, devotee, or supporter of a particular place, cause, ideal, etc.” defined in the *OED*. He uses the word in the same sense when slightly later he describes Beaupuy as “A patriot” (IX:295) as well. But the word “patriot” in its usual, modern meaning can be both commendatory and derogatory. According to the *OED*, a “good patriot” is “A person who loves his or her country, *esp.* one who is ready to support its freedoms and rights and to defend it against enemies or detractors” (*OED*). This meaning “is *rare* before 1680. At that time often applied to a person who supported the rights of the country against the King and court” (*OED*). The word, however, “fell into particular discredit in the earlier half of the 18th cent., being used, according to Dr. Johnson, ‘ironically for a factious disturber of the government’” (*OED*). The “patriot” Wordsworth claims to have become evokes the association of the word with radicalism and would indeed make him “a factious disturber” of the British government later. On the other hand, the word also reminds one that “the Revolution’s most permanent big legacy has been the apotheosis of the nation-state” (Best, 1988, 9). With the ambivalent suggestions of the word “patriot,” the poet seems to forecast the later fierce opposition between his revolutionary “patriotism” and his national “patriotism.” At this moment, the poet recalls, “my heart was all / given to the people, and my love was theirs” (IX: 123-4). His allegiance turns from the geographical native place to the ideological revolutionary cause which takes place in the foreign country. The national identity gives way to the revolutionary one.

This shift, however, is almost omitted in the second recollection, where the narrator cuts off the “gradual withdrawal” in the first recollection, but comes directly to the conversion: the visitor “thither comes and finds in it his home.” The editing of the memory in the re-recollection highlights the drastic change brought by the Revolution. At the same time, the omission of the transformation undergone by the self also betrays the trauma the very change involves that the narrator may be reluctant to confront again in the re-recollection. In the first recollection however, the gradual shift of self-identity from outsider to patriot is carefully traced. In Book IX, the narrator recalls that in his second visit to France, when arriving at Paris, he was much like a sight-seeing tourist, who “visited / In haste each spot of old and recent fame” (IX:41-2), and listened to the “hubbub wild” “with a stranger’s ears” (IX:54,55). The self starts as a visitor and stranger to the foreign land both literally and psychologically. Different from the self of the first visit who, as a guest, had been welcomed and accepted by the host, here the self seems confused and estranged by what is going on around him. Sitting at the ruins of the Bastille, he puts on “the guise / Of an enthusiast” (IX:66-7), “Affecting more emotion than [he] felt” (IX:70-1). The sense of distance is strongly emphasized, with the self as almost an indifferent spectator of the revolutionary drama, so much so that it has to act as seemingly more enthusiastic than it is, thus participating unwittingly in the grand drama at the same time. A little later, we remember, the sense that the revolution is a drama, a spectacle to observe, recurs when he recalls himself as “abruptly [passing] / Into a theatre of

which the stage / Was busy with an action far advanced" (IX:94-5). Again, the self is an outsider, to whom the dramatic action of the Revolution does not make full sense.

Only when the recollection further continues, do we see what Nicholas Roe calls "a first moment of emotional commitment to their cause" (Roe, 1988, 54). Paradoxically, this is also the moment when the "two consciousnesses" of the narrating and narrated self clash fiercely. When the war started and the streets "were crowded with the bravest youth of France" (IX:269), the narrator recalls with an entirely different tone as a spectator of the scene:

Yet at this very moment do tears start
 Into mine eyes – I do not say I weep,
 I wept not then, but tears have dimmed my sight –
 In memory of the farewells of that time,
 Domestic severings, female fortitude
 At dearest separation, patriot love
 And self-devotion, and terrestrial hope
 Encouraged with a martyr's confidence.
 Even files of strangers merely, seen but once
 And for a moment, men from far, with sound
 Of music, martial tunes, and banners spread,
 Entering the city, here and there a face
 Or person singled out among the rest
 Yet still a stranger, and beloved as such –
 Even by these passing spectacles my heart
 Was oftentimes uplifted, and they seemed
 Like arguments from Heaven that 'twas a cause
 Good, and which no one could stand up against
 Who was not lost, abandoned, selfish, proud,
 Mean, miserable, willfully depraved,
 Hater perverse of equity and truth. (IX:273-93)

The repetition of "stranger" calls our attention to this key moment when the self turns from being a stranger himself to one who empathizes with other strangers. The identity is no longer an identity assigned to the self, but to the other: the soldiers on the streets are "files of strangers," among whom a face or person singled out is "yet still a stranger," but "beloved as such." Consequently, the scene, though still referred to as "passing spectacles," is no longer a drama that "I," as a spectator, could not make sense of. Instead, they "uplifted" his heart, and he no longer needs to feign the guise of an "enthusiast." The passage is a rare moment in the recollection of the Revolution, formal, other-oriented, almost banner-waving, and seemingly designed for commemoration. It starts a little oddly however by making an almost trivial distinction between "tears starting" and "weeping." Only in the recollection, "in memory of the farewells," does the full emotion well up.⁸ On the other hand, the ominous "seem" appears again: they only "seemed" heaven-sent arguments that this is a good cause, pointing out the theatrical nature of the cause again, however touching it might be. The retrospective narrator seems to remind us that the good cause that the spectacle of

⁸Roe also rightly points out that these "farewells" are also "a memorial of Wordsworth's own parting from Annette" (Roe, 1988, 54).

the Revolution “seemed” to be would however be turned upside down; this bitter hindsight emerges glaringly side by side with the strong emotional involvement the narrating self still feels in retrospect.

Ironically, this very shift of the self’s identity from stranger to patriot would entail a terrible ordeal when Wordsworth’s home country became the enemy of the country of Revolution that he had pledged allegiance to, thereby making this part of the memory particularly traumatic. This is when the revolution takes place inside him, when he is torn apart by the conflict between his national identity and his revolutionary identity. Being a revolutionary patriot makes it impossible for him to be, in the modern sense of the term, an English patriot. As he recounts in the first recollection, he “rejoiced” (X:258), “When Englishmen by thousands were o’erthrown” (X:261). Once a welcomed “guest” in the foreign country, he now becomes “an uninvited guest” in his own land, and the “only” one among the “all” “in the congregation” whose prayers are dedicated to the country’s foe (X:268-72). What the recollection has traced is a revolution in the self’s identity, a complete overturning of its relationship to its native land and the foreign republic, where as an alien it has found itself at home. Now the native finds the home country foreign, and himself a stranger, almost a traitor. Worse still, the narrator reminds us that “the day of vengeance [is] yet to come” (X:274), when the self-defensive war of the republic would turn into the imperialistic war of conquest and when he would have to face yet more painful disillusionment and crisis. The violent revolution of the self’s identity is bound up with the drastic turn of events in the external Revolution.

Significantly, in the second recollection, the identity “patriot,” which confuses the revolutionary identity with the national one, is changed into “partisan,” the negative connotation of which highlights the constant remaking of the past in the process of recollection:

An active partisan, I thus convoked
 From every object pleasant circumstance
 To suit my ends. I moved among mankind
 With genial feelings still predominant,
 When erring, erring on the better side,
 And in the kinder spirit – placable,
 Indulgent oftentimes to the worst desires,
 As, on one side, not uninformed that men
 See as it hath been taught them, and that time
 Gives rights to error; on the other hand
 That throwing off oppression must be work
 As well of license as of liberty;
 And above all (for this was more than all),
 Not caring if the wind did now and then
 Blow keen upon an eminence that gave
 Prospect so large into futurity – (X:736-51)

This long discursive passage clearly reveals the entangling perspective of the narrating and the narrated self. On the one hand, the narrated self is labelled as “an active partisan,” someone who has lost disinterestedness, become blind and fanatic in the cause. The subjectivity of the narrated self, to “suit my ends,” is recognized and pointed out by the narrating self. On the other hand, the narrated self is recalled by the narrating self as “[moving] among mankind with genial

feelings," as a member of the human race, still the patriot in its extended sense, though he is also the one who has erred. The narrating self is clearly distant from the narrated, thus the sense of self-introspection; but the narrating self also identifies with the narrated, thus the tone of self-justification. The narrating self passes judgment on the narrated as "erring," but this is followed with "erring on the better side." Similarly, "indulgent to worst desires" is balanced with the quality of being "placable." The syntax from here onward becomes notably tortuous. Though signals like "on one side," "on the other hand," and "above all", together with the parenthetical "this was more than all", should serve to outline a clear, logical thinking process, this is nevertheless complicated by frequent additions, qualifications, and modifications, suggesting the narrating self's struggle to "get it right," to make the recollection of the narrated self as precise as possible, which can only be achieved by reliving the past as the narrated self. On the other hand, the tortuousness also puts the recollecting process in the foreground, and the narrating self becomes a stronger presence than ever.

The label of "partisan" on the other hand also gives us new insight into the earlier recollection, where the radical, revolutionary self is indicated. In Book X, immediately after relating the ascendancy of Robespierre, the narrator recalls: "An insignificant stranger and obscure, / Mean as [he] was," is still ready to serve the cause "so great, / However dangerous" (X:130-1, 135-6). The repeated identity of "stranger" reinforces the drastic change of the self from being a stranger to the revolutionary ferment, to being one empathizing with other strangers' brave deeds to defend the republic, and now to one pledging to serve the revolutionary cause. The contrast between the dangerous, great cause and the "insignificant" self highlights the devotion and determination of the narrated self who is later recognized by the narrating self as "an active partisan." Similarly, in the first recount of the time after his return to England, the narrator recalls: though he "was and must be of small worth / No better than an alien in the land," "[he] doubtless should have made a common cause / With some who perished, haply perished too –" (X:191-5). The contrast between the self of "small worth" and the great cause again highlights the danger that service to that cause entails. The word "perish" reinforces the danger by reminding one of the "all" who "perished" in the Reign of Terror. Putting these moments in the first recollection side by side with the re-recollection of the self as "an active partisan," we see that the involvement with danger and death of the revolutionary cause reveals the narrated self's tendency to violence and terrorism⁹, only recognized by the later, reflective self.

After this long discursive passage on the self as partisan, the re-recollection reaches the moment of the war between France and England, which is the point where the re-recollection is heading to its end: "In the main outline, such it might be said / Was my condition, till with open war / Britain opposed the liberties of France" (X:757-9). The internal "revolution" he recalls in the first recollection is recounted at the end of this re-recollection: the "change and subversion" experienced are all the way "upwards to the source," signifying its thoroughness, and, different from "hitherto," are now a complete break from the past, not in

⁹Roe calls our attention to "Wordsworth's awareness of his active revolutionary self and, more significantly, of that self as potentially violent and extreme as Robespierre" (Roe, 1988, 39).

degree, “a swallowing up of lesser things in great,” but in kind, “change of them into their opposites” (X:761-4). As in the former recollection, the new meaning of the word “revolution” is also implied here. The retrospective narrator also adds that this “blow, which in maturer age / Would but have touched the judgement, struck more deep / Into sensations near the heart” (X:771-3). The hindsight reveals that it is someone in “maturer age” who is making this observation, distancing himself from the younger self. On the other hand, however, in the re-recollection, he also gives a closer account of his emotional intensity than in the first recollection: “What had been a pride / Was now a shame, my likings and my loves / Ran in new channels, leaving old ones dry,” suggesting the narrating self is reliving the revolution experienced by the narrated self (X:768-70). This double stance of the narrating self as both empathetic with and introspective into the narrated self defines the perspective of this re-recollection throughout, conveying both “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” of the experiencing self and the “emotion recollected in tranquility” by the experienced self.

At this point, the re-recollection reaches its end, coming back full circle when reaching the most violent internal “revolution,” in the post-1789 sense, and accomplishing a “revolution” in memory in the restorative sense of the word as well. With this detour only, it seems, can he proceed to the next stage of events, when Frenchmen would “become oppressors in their turn” (X:791), reversing all the ideals of the cause.

In this part of the re-recollection, the narrator goes back to this period of terrible emotional and political turbulence, underlining the obligatory nature of memory as well as the psychological need to reprocess the memory. In re-recollecting the Revolution from the beginning to the point before its betrayal, the narrator seems to attempt to preserve the revolutionary ideals by making this part an “expanse” of time. On the other hand, by reprocessing the memory, the narrator also shows in the light of hindsight the self who has gone through the whole course of the Revolution, and thus relentlessly unveils the illusory nature of the early ideals. The complex interplay between the two consciousnesses shows clearly how the poet struggles to foreground the subtle working of human memory in “the fluxes and refluxes” of the human mind. After all, it is the self who had gone through the memory of the Revolution that finally grew into the poet. As Roe remarks at the end of his book, “More than the aspiration he felt with his generation, ... it was failure (of the Revolution) that made Wordsworth a poet” (Roe, 1988, 275). In this poet that he came to be, he prefigures the preoccupation with memory prominent not only in the early 20th-century modernist literature, but also in the late 20th-century “memory boom” (Rossington and Whitehead, 2007, 5) along with the rise of interest in the Holocaust studies and the release of new archives after the Cold War. Many recollective works on the 1989 Democracy Movement in China published on and after its 20th anniversary can be seen as a part of this “memory boom”.

In 1818, Keats writes in one of his letters that human life can be compared to “a large Mansion of Many Apartments,” and when passing from Innocence to Experience, “This Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken’d and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open – but all dark – all leading to dark passages To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive when he wrote ‘Tintern Abbey’ and it seems to me that his Genius is

explorative of those dark Passages" (Keats, 1958, I:280-1). Unknown to Keats, even more than in "Tintern Abbey," it is in *The Prelude*, particularly these revolutionary books, that Wordsworth is "explorative," not only of dark passages in human life, but dark passages in human memory as well. And it is in the re-made, revolved recollection that one sees his "explorative genius" working most strenuously.

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IDEOGRAMS OF THE EAST AND THE WEST: OCTAVIO PAZ, BLANCO, AND THE TRADITIONS OF MODERN POETRY

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Abstract: This essay engages two questions: first, it is a response to current attempts to make sense of various literary traditions in an era associated with postmodernity and globalization. I argue for a global but period-specific approach to the study of literary history. Secondly, this essay applies the period-specific theoretical model to the study of one poem: Octavio Paz's Blanco (1967), known for its global reach and complex structure, but often read as solely focused on India's ancient past, thus antiquarian and with no relation to our present era. On the contrary, I argue that Blanco can only make sense in the history of conflicts between the East and the West, better known to Paz as the Cold War, a global conflict that involved the former U.S.S.R. and the United States. The multiple and therefore confusing meanings of "East" and "West" best define, I would argue, the need to understand the history of its various connotations from Herodotus and the Crusades, to the Cold War and the current conflicts between the West and the (Islamic) East. Thus, any attempt to define globalization and postmodernity as an age in which all cultural differences and Otherness find their happy resolution can only be read as part of the marketing system of globalization itself, and not as a serious attempt to make sense of literary history at a transnational or global level.

A RECENT ANTHOLOGY of world literature places Octavio Paz in an unexpected literary affiliation: not Mexican or Latin American, but in the section "Crossing Cultures: The Example of India." This correlation is not surprising given that Octavio Paz devoted more than 40 years of his life to the study of the poetry and civilizations of China, India, and Japan, and published poems and essays specifically on India during and after his years of service as Mexico's ambassador in New Delhi (1962-1968). The editors of this anthology claim that a writer's ability to dwell in a transnational, global culture is a sign of an emergent "postmodern consciousness" that has allowed writers such as Octavio Paz, Salman Rushdie and, among others, Bahrati Mukherjee, to connect, integrate, and thus reconcile the East and the West.¹

This judgment no doubt would have pleased Paz, in spite of the different historical meanings assigned to the terms "East" and "West" by Paz's generation. In a Babel-like era in which the (Middle) East and the West have been unable to reach any level of reasonable understanding, bristling instead with fears of terrorist attacks and wars of occupation, the global range of the editors' argument and their insinuating use of language ("a citizen of many cultures," "postmodernism," "an emerging global consciousness," and so forth) would seem to obstruct or nullify the possibility of a productive critique. Nonetheless, to

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¹See "Octavio Paz," in *The Bedford Anthology of World Literature, The Twentieth Century, 1900-The Present, Book 6*, ed., Paul Davis et al. (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003): 1292.

question said “fusion” of generations and political differences is a choice that grounds itself on the ambiguity in meaning and loose definition of a postmodern condition that has been defined in plural ways, among them the alleged incredulity toward metanarratives (Jean François Lyotard), or an age in which the sense of history has been repressed or diverted (Fredric Jameson).²

Current and conflicting postmodernist models can be useful on condition that one situates a writer such as Octavio Paz in his own era and according to the poet’s generational poetics and politics. Paz’s poems and essays were explicit attempts to understand the Other as *already one’s own*, and not the result of a multicultural process that would lead to a resolution of contradictions, conflicts, and to an East-West synthesis. As Paz affirmed in his book *In Light of India* (1995): “I can understand what it means to be Indian because I am Mexican” (81). What he meant is that, in terms of Paz’s proposed syntax of civilizations, (1) India and the West emerged from the same Indo-European origins; and, in terms of modern times, that (2) Mexico’s and India’s colonial histories raise similar questions regarding nation-building in an age of globalization.³

Globalization, according to Liu Kong, demands that one conceive it as both an idea and a concrete historical situation, associated respectively with global capitalism and a world-system that includes alternate “modernities” that best represent how developing nations, such as China, have responded to capitalism on a global scale. Kong explains the defining “break” with the past or point of emergence of globalization as follows:

Globalization is generally perceived as the result of the collapse of Soviet-style socialism, as well as the unprecedented expansion of transnational capitalism. While avowedly Eurocentric in its hegemonic formations, globalization also sets up an indispensable structural context for analyzing what happens in the world today (164).

² See Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (University of Minnesota Press: 1984), p. 37. See also the opening line in Fredric Jameson’s *Postmodernism: or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke UP, 1991): “It is safest to grasp the concept of the postmodern as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place” (p. ix). Interestingly, the postmodern is defined by Jameson as the “first specifically North American global style” (p. xx), hence a global consciousness associated with U.S. interests.

³ Octavio Paz developed the notion of a “universal syntax of civilizations” in *Conjunctions and Disjunctions*, trans. Helen R. Lane (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), pp. 35-41. This book was published as *Conjunciones y disyunciones* in 1967, thus only one year after the poem *Blanco*. Paz’s views on India’s civilization are congruent with his universal syntax of civilizations in which ancient cultures—prostrated and fossilized through centuries of exhaustion—serve only as sources of a new redemption myth that would lead world nations to independently resolve and thus transcend the Western-Eastern conflict that created the Cold War: “Inside India, Hinduism and Buddhism were the protagonists of a dialogue. This dialogue was Indian civilization. The fact that it has now ended helps explain the prostration of this civilization for over eight centuries, and its inability to renew itself and change. The dialogue degenerated into the monologue of Hinduism, a monologue that soon assumed the form of repetition and mannerism until, finally, ossification set in. Islam, appearing just as Buddhism disappears in India, failed to take its place” (*Conjunctions and Disjunctions*, p. 31).

Paz's understanding of the world was inextricably tied to his generation's critical engagements with fascism during the Second World War and its global aftermath: the Cold War.⁴ As Paz proposed in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950), the East (the former U.S.S.R.) and the West (USA) were the wayward offspring of one civilization and one single historical orientation: the Enlightenment and industrialization. Paz considered both superpowers to have declined as a civilizational force during the Cold War; thus, instead of Third World countries siding with one or the other, Paz pointed to the necessity of a "redemption myth" that would be the originary principle from which would emerge an *other* civilization on a global scale.⁵

Octavio Paz's idea of history during the Cold War, nourished by the revolutionary avant-gardes of the 1940s, led to his own critical judgment regarding the hostile relations between the East and the West, and of modernity's relation with ancient civilizations. Paz's poetics of history, conceptualized in theoretical essays published from 1950 through 1974, turn on cycles and spirals:

Cyclic time is another way toward absorption, transformation, and sublimation. The date that recurs is a return of previous time, an immersion in a past which is at once that of each individual and that of the group. As the wheel of time revolves, it allows the society to recover buried, or repressed, psychic structures so as to reincorporate them in a present that is also a past. It is not only the return of the ancients and antiquity: it is the possibility that each individual possesses of recovering his living portion of the past.⁶

As an illustration of the above premises, I will propose a reading of *Blanco* (1967), a poem considered to be Paz's most difficult to interpret and deeply "Indian" in inspiration. I propose that this complexity, however, is not the result of Paz's appropriation of India's classical heritage; this long poem, on the contrary, displays Paz's reflections on ancient civilizations (hence not limited to India's), the project of recovering *living* portions of the past, and of his critique of modernity—above all of the East-West global polarization and hostilities—during the peak years of the Cold War, an age in which—according to Paz—love was

⁴For a more detailed discussion, see Cantú, 2007: 24-26.

⁵See *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, trans. Lysander Kemp (New York: Grove Press, 1985): for the same historical origins of the USA and the USSR, pp. 67-68; for the redemption myth, pp. 211-212. Paz's ideas and reflections on the Cold War—constant throughout his essays and poetry, but with critical variants due to historical changes from 1945-1991—is an area of study beyond the scope of this article. I should add, however, that Paz's anti-nuclear age discourse is a constant theme as of *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, where he addresses the crisis of modernity as follows: "[I]t is not Western civilization that is in danger of being destroyed tomorrow, as the cultures of the Greeks and the Arabs, the Aztecs and the Egyptians were destroyed in the past: it is man himself [...] The contemporary crisis is not a struggle between two diverse cultures, as the conservatives would have us believe, but rather an internal quarrel in a civilization that no longer has any rivals [...] The past has left us orphans, as it has the rest of the planet, and we must join together in inventing our common future" (pp. 172-173).

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 10. The "date that recurs" in India's historical cycles is the Bhakti movement in the 15th century (*In Light of India*, pp. 43-44), when a "new India" could have emerged. Conversely, in Mexico's history the "date that recurs" is the 1521 Conquest and Spain's inability to build a "new Spain" without ethnic and religious divisions (see *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, chapter "The Sons of La Malinche," pp. 65-88).

almost an impossibility, a human condition with its own date that recurs, mostly as missed opportunities but sometimes with promises of fulfillment as “a revelation of two solitary beings who create their own world, a world that rejects society’s lies, abolishes time and work, and declares itself to be self-sufficient.”⁷ This, in a nutshell, comprises the poetic core of *Blanco* (1967).

I. *Blanco* and Octavio Paz

Blanco opens with two epigraphs, one taken from *The Hevajra-Tantra* (“By passion the world is bound, by passion too it is released”), and the second from a sonnet by French poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), with an emphasis on the eighth line in “*Ses purs ongles*” (her pure fingernails). The reader’s first attempt to make sense of these epigraphs lead the interpretive act in the direction of three different traditions: (1) the literature of Western Hermeticism; (2) Tantric Buddhism—its art, its eroticism, and its doctrine—and (3) the literary inheritance claimed by Paz: that of modern poetry, with aesthetic affiliations to German Romanticism, French Symbolism and Surrealism, and to modern Anglo-American poetry (T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, among others).

In the notes that Paz added to the publication of *Blanco*, he describes the poem as a blend of spatial and temporal categories that turn the poem into an extended metaphor of a ritual, a pilgrimage, a river, a mandala, and a human body; or, to an ancient book of pictures and emblems, like a scroll from ancient China or Egypt or, among other possibilities, a Mesoamerican codex.⁸ Paz’s labyrinthine description, written as a procession of analogies and correspondences that are implicitly trans-historical, concludes with an emphasis on writing and reading as fundamental activities. *Blanco*’s initial commentary and reading instructions thus underscore a triangular field of relations: poet, poem, and the reader.

In the authorial notes, Octavio Paz explains *Blanco*’s tripartite composition, its chromatic stages (yellow, red, green, and blue), its four human faculties (sensation, perception, imagination, and understanding), and the possibility of “variant readings” of the poem (i.e., reading *Blanco* in its totality, hence as a poetic unity; reading only the central column, etc.). Paz’s reference to the possibility of “variant readings” of *Blanco*, however, transcends the limits of a mere aesthetic experience, leading instead to a structuralist notion of “literature” in which texts are viewed as fragments of a larger system. The search for meaning, therefore, shifts from the text to the system that establishes its conditions of possibility. As such, Paz’s reading instructions are only a reminder that *Blanco* is a game with its own rules: since meaning is produced in a system

⁷See *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, p. 200.

⁸See Paz’s explanatory notes on *Blanco* in *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz, 1957-1987*, ed. Eliot Weinberger (New York: New Directions, 1987), p. 311. The poem *Blanco* can be read in Spanish and in its English translation on pages 312-331. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to *Blanco* have been taken from this bilingual edition. At the end of *Blanco*, Paz includes the place and dates of its composition: Delhi, July 23-September 25, 1966 (p. 331). A brief search of the Cold War during 1966 will bring up the Dominican Republic and Vietnam as two instances of the United States’ fears of a communist global take-over. As Mexico’s ambassador in India, Paz could not ignore international political conditions.

of relations, the operating *ars poetica* is really an *ars combinatoria*, with structural relations governed by metonymy, synecdoche, and metaphor. Fated to remain incomplete, interpretation nonetheless is always initiating other readings and generating new meanings. This will explain the fascination Octavio Paz has with the fragment as a synecdoche of the mutilated body (*sparagmos*), ritual dismemberment, the cult of Osiris, and Mesoamerican ritual sacrifices. The reader of *Blanco* thus turns into Isis: in reading the poem, s/he gathers the scattered limbs of Osiris, resuscitates the body, and makes it our contemporary.

A close reading of *Blanco*, consequently, must *re-member* the poem's fragments into one unified "book" but with attention to its parts or rotating members that seek their own reconfiguration. In other words, from *Blanco*'s opening lines to its conclusion the reading must be structural, not linear: as such, one must read simultaneously and in succession the poem's 14 fragments (4 + 6 + 4), clustered in the axes of three columns. With this goal or *blanco* (target) in mind, I will begin by charting the poem's full structural composition. To visualize *Blanco*'s internal organization, let us note its poetic configuration in terms of sections, lines, and functions:

<u>Section</u>	<u>Lines</u>	<u>Verse-hinges with an Iterative Function</u>
1:	lines 1-13	"la enterrada con los ojos abiertos"
2:	lines 14-52	"la pasión de la brasa compasiva"
3:	lines 53-110	"la transparencia es todo lo que queda"
4:	lines 111-161	"el mundo haz de tus imágenes"
5:	lines 162-224	"da realidad a la mirada"
6:	lines 225-317	"da realidad a la mirada"

Blanco is composed of six central poetic sections that connect poems on the left and right columns—therefore in the tradition of the pictorial triptych—and with the scrolling of the poem marked by a concluding phrase or verse-hinge that signals a stop in each strophic section with an iterative function that is recognizable in *Blanco*'s last lines (6: 76-94). As we will note shortly, the hinge-like structural model serves a twofold purpose: horizontally, the relations are with the lateral eight poems; vertically, with the central six poems. The poems adjacent to the central column tell two stories: to the left, it is a tale of love and its images according to the four elements; to the right, it records the spiral unfolding of the soul's faculties, from the senses and perception to imagination and understanding. Due to space limitations, my analysis of *Blanco* will be focalized on parts 2, 3, and 5.⁹

II. *Blanco* and the Reader

The strophic structure of the second part (2: 14-52) introduces for the first time the lateral poems that represent, according to Paz's notes, a love vignette, the element of fire, and sensation. The second strophe thus corresponds to the

⁹This chapter completes my previous study of *Blanco* where I analyze parts 1, 4, and 6, published under the title "Octavio Paz and India: *Blanco*, Modernity, and the Poetics of Simultaneism," in *One World Periphery Reads the Other: Knowing the "Oriental" in the Americas and the Iberian Peninsula*. Ed. Ignacio López-Calvo (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp. 56-81.

allegorization of a hermaphroditic organism, a brother and sister in an earthly womb but already stamped in its androgynous origin with sexuality, eroticism, and the possibility of love. The strophe's composition classifies senses as gradually developing ("not seen nor imagined: heard" ([*ni vista ni pensada: oída*"]), and defamiliarizes situations ("A lamp beats beneath / penumbra skin" [*Bajo la piel de la penumbra/ late una lámpara*"]), so as to suggest a figurative reading of these lines: *inside the womb's penumbra, the life [light] that will come forth is already pulsating*. The couple represents the union of lovers, but as a simultaneous synchronic vision of different but paired ages: *as unborn*, on the earth's womb-like cave; *as adults*, near a lamp's penumbra. The lamp is a frequent motif in Octavio Paz's poetry, playing an important function in *The Monkey Grammarian* as it casts a dance of light and shadows over a couple of lovers oblivious to their surroundings while joined in and by their own love-making. The key to this poetic code is given by Octavio Paz while writing *In Light of India*:

One of the tirelessly repeated motifs of the Palatine Anthology is that of the flickering lamp that illuminates the lovers' bedroom. The same motif appears in Sanskrit poetry. I particularly like this ingenious variation that combines the religious notion of *nirvāna*, which is extinction, with the quenching of the bright and blushing light. (155)

The motif of the flickering lamp plays a deliberately ambiguous function in this line, first associated with the gestating twin fetuses inside a womb, followed by the image of a couple in a lovers' embrace. The ambiguity can be resolved if one interprets the passage as representing an instant in which the couple's past, present, and future converge on a vanishing point: the fourth dimension. I will discuss this point shortly. For now, let us read both senses simultaneously, certain that the motif of the lamp serves as a connotative link between the central column and the initial lateral poems where the human senses and faculties of the soul begin to manifest themselves as the figurations of two lovers who are about to be born into their own Garden: on the left, the interplay of fire, a wall, and the shadow of two lovers' swaying in the flames; on the poem to the right, the fire that is felt for the first time by a newly formed sensorium: "the senses open" (*los sentidos se abren*"), hence anterior to perception, imagination, and understanding.¹⁰

As if to cancel the Judeo-Christian idea of Paradise, Octavio Paz portrays a variant of Eve in a garden consumed by fire, a non-Western primal garden with the unfamiliar features of flower and song: *copper stalk, leaves of clarity, a sunflower, a yellow chalice of consonants and vowels* (lines 21-41), followed by the female lover as "Girl/ you laugh—naked / in the gardens of the flame"

¹⁰The question of the unity of the senses in Mesoamerican civilization is studied by David Carrasco as *synesthesia* and in a manner that adds an appropriate dimension to our reading of *Blanco*: "There is no doubt that all the senses were alert and tuned to the ritual expressions in Tenochtitlan's great ceremonial landscape. The songs were heard, the beat was pounded with feet and interpreted with muscular movements, the blood was smelled, and the gods were touched, and sometimes eaten [...] 'synesthesia' or the unity of the senses, was the avenue through which knowledge about the cosmos or unity of the world was communicated" (*City of Sacrifice*, 122).

(“*Muchacha/ tú ríes—desnuda/ en los jardines de la llama*”, lines 49-51). The conventional Catholic association between carnal sin and the fires of hell are thus erased in favor of the purifying fire of an erotic embrace. The second strophe closes with a line in the center column that seems to express the essence of the entire section: “La pasión de la brasa compasiva” (strophe 2, line 52: “The passion of compassionate coals”), a line that will reappear as the “date that recurs”—and as all the poem’s hinge-like junctural lines do eventually—in *Blanco*’s concluding sixth section.

Blanco begins and unfolds, therefore, with shifting metaphors and analogies—as the birth of language, a descending river, a screenfold codex, as a column of changing colors, a serpent of fire (*kundalini*), and as two lovers in the womb of creation about to be born. In the third strophic section, the active faculty is perception, the focal element is water, and its central trope the rivers and lakes of the world: the Ganges, the Nile, and Mexico’s Lake of Texcoco: the *axis mundi* of the world, according to the Aztecs.

Considered by people in India as a holy river, the Ganges originates in a glacier in the Himalayas and is formed by the confluence of six rivers (therefore as an analog of the central column in *Blanco* with its six internal and cascading poems) that flow toward the Ganges’ destination: the Bay of Bengal. It is known that this bay was the last stronghold of Indian Buddhism against the crushing Islamic attack in the 12th century (Snellgrove 1), and, according to Octavio Paz, the place where “modern India begins” (*In Light of India* 103). Through its tributary known as the Jamuna river (found often in the poetry of Octavio Paz), the Ganges crosses Bangladesh, a predominantly Islamic state, which adds a political dimension to *Blanco*: the conflicts between Hinduism and Islam.

India’s internal religious conflicts are examined in detail by Octavio Paz in his book *In Light of India*; similarly, the political implications of wars of conquest and colonization in ancient India gain thematic primacy in *Blanco*’s third poetic section (3:53-110). Its composition is parallel to *Blanco*’s second section, with the perspective in the opening central poem given to an *unborn* first-person narrator (“Sin decir palabra / oscurece mi frente / un presentimiento de lenguaje,” [“Without saying a word / my forehead grows dark / a presentiment of language”]), followed by two lateral poems that chart the poetic space of the narrator’s interlocution with its (also unborn) female consort: “*los ríos de tu cuerpo/ país de latidos*,” (“the rivers of your body / land of pulse-beats”), and concluding with a hinge-like sentence that underscores *perception*: “La transparencia es todo lo que queda” (“Transparency is all that remains”).

The initial lines in the third section contain a premonition of civilized life through visions of wars of conquest, colonization, and the role language will play in human history:

el lenguaje
 es una expiación,
 propiciación
 al que no habla,
 emparedado,
 cada día
 asesinado,

el muerto innumerable ¹¹

In full agreement with the trope of the world's lakes and rivers, the *river of blood* of the unborn narrator functions as a variant of the *trompe-l'oeil* tradition with its own deception of the eye and meaning:

*El mío es rojo y se agosta
entre sableras llameantes:
Castillas de arena, naipes rotos
y el jeroglífico (agua y brasa)
en el pecho de México caído.
Polvo soy de aquellos lodos.
Río de sangre,
Río de historias de sangre.* ¹²

These nine lines (61-69) correspond to what Elizabeth Hill Boone calls “cells” in Mesoamerican codices (boxes in red ink with calendrical information), “characteristic of preconquest Nahua cosmology, land allocation, oracular expression, and even grammar” (66). The metaphor of the *red river* opens and closes the poetic cell formed by these seven lines which can be reduced to six if one considers how the opening line echoes redundantly but significantly the closing image of a *river of blood*. Since the implied red river (“Mine is red”) of the *unborn* male must be interpreted as a metaphor for an umbilical cord, the entrance of Octavio Paz into his own poem is made clear in this specific poetic cell, both at the level of history (Spanish Conquest of Mexico in 1521), an avowed origin (“*Polvo soy de aquellos lodos*” [I am the dust of that silt]), and a global history of violence (“river of histories of blood”). Poem and poetics thus give way to autobiography and politics: the self as history in three lines (64-66). The Castiles of sand are none other than the Spanish monarchical dream in the New World: built on sand. The hieroglyph on the chest of the “fallen Mexico” (“*México caído*”) tells of water and fire (*brasa* as metonymy for fire), therefore alluding to the Nahuatl *atl tlachinolli* (fire and water), a *difrasismo* or conceptual couplet meaning *total war*. The poetic voice identifies the “mud” or clay of such red river as his own origin, therefore marking this historical event, place of conflict, and total war as the poet’s vital source, shaping trauma, and birthplace.

The direct quotation of Livingstone’s diary (“*Patience patience/ river rising a little*”) is an intertextual device that parallels the collage technique invented by Picasso and later used by T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*, a poem much admired by Paz. ¹³ In *Blanco*, Paz also inserts a verse from a sonnet by Quevedo (identified by the line “*las altas fieras de la piel luciente*” [“the tall beasts with shining skins”]). Octavio Paz thus “glues” lines authored by Livingstone and Quevedo so as to stress imperial moments in the history of European global expansion from the 16th-19th centuries, resulting in a poetic reflection on the riparian origin of

¹¹In English: “language / is atonement, / an appeasement / of the speechless, / the entombed, / the daily / assassinated, / the countless dead,” in *The Collected Poems*, 316.

¹²In English: “Mine is red and scorches / in the flaming dunes: / Castiles [sic] of sand, / shredded playing cards / and the hieroglyph (water and ember). / Dropped on the chest of Mexico. / I am the dust of that silt. / River of blood.” *Collected Poems*, p. 316.

¹³For the references to Livingstone and Quevedo, see Eliot Weinberger, *The Collected Poems*, p. 648.

civilizations and the legacy of European/Aryan colonialism in Mesoamerica, Africa, and India.¹⁴ In terms of David Livingstone (1813-1873), he is generally associated not only with medicine and missionary work in Africa, but also with the search for the origin of the Nile river. There might be, however, a more personal connection to Livingstone: he and Octavio Paz were born in March (with coincidental numerological permutations in the number 13), and while the former launched his search for the Nile in 1866, the latter set out to write *Blanco* exactly a century later.

The sonnet by Quevedo is well known: it refers to a beloved who finds herself enclosed in a “picture”: what the Nile will be for one, the Ganges will be for the other in the way Spain held the New World and Asia (“all the Indies”)—clasped in its fist (“traigo todas las Indias en mi mano” [“I carry all the Indies in my hand”]). *Blanco*’s anti-imperialist subtext, written along the lines of a European construct of “love” (and the inevitable associations with aggressive desire and libertinage), achieves its poetic representation in a cubist-like canvas that defies a hermeneutic based on one’s accustomed method of reading.

The third strophic section is evidently organized around an explorer (Livingstone) and a poet (Quevedo) who represent two world imperial forces, with specific colonial sites identified in *Blanco* as Egypt and the Indies. The poetic cluster at the end of this third section presents a view of the primal couple in a womb-like aquatic environment fed by a seminal river (“*rueda el río seminal de los mundos*” [“seminal river of the worlds wheeling”]) in a universe which is the sum of all worlds, from the near and minuscule organism to the most distant and enormous star (“*astros, infusorios, reptiles*” [“stars infusoria reptiles”]).

This poetic cluster—the last section in which both left and right poems will be facing each other before they fuse and blend in a lover’s embrace—privileges the sense of vision in a shared mode: both lovers are seeing each other for the first time inside the cosmic womb (“*es mi creación esto que veo...soy la creación de lo que veo*” [“what I see is my creation...I am the creation of what I see”], lines 104-107), but written as a tacit riposte to Marcel Duchamp’s well-known claim: “The spectator makes the picture” (*Marcel Duchamp* 85). As an acknowledgment of one of the mantras of Cubism, Octavio Paz adds a line: “*la percepción es concepción*” (“perception is conception,” line 105), thus punning on an avant-garde aesthetic and the condition of the two gestating lovers. It is in this third section of *Blanco*—and in its center—that one hears echoes from distant poems by Octavio Paz, such as “Cuerpo a la vista” (from *El girasol*, 1943-1948), where Paz describes the nude female body in its plural associations with a womb, a geography of the homeland, and the cosmos, recapitulated in the concluding four lines “*Patria de sangre/ única tierra que conozco y me conoce,/ única patria en la que creo,/ única puerta al infinito*”).¹⁵

¹⁴In other words, this is Octavio Paz’s own collage. In the history of Cubism, Picasso’s pasted newspaper clippings in *Glass and Bottle of Suze* (1912) represent a departure from the hermetic Cubism of 1907-1910. Cottington observes that Picasso turned into an art the glued newspaper “reports from the battlefield and an account of a demonstration against the war held in Paris by the Socialists,” with oil cloths and chair patterns that introduced for the first time “the technique of collage” (*Cubism* 69, 70).

¹⁵“My blood’s homeland, /the only land that I know and knows me, /the only land that I believe in, / the only door to infinity” (my translation). The theme of two homelands—woman and infinity—in which the nation plays only an ambiguous part, is found

The birth of the two lovers is near and described as a delta, therefore as a river's end, as the lovers' bed, as well as a bright star in the universe: from a mountain cave to a constellation, the near and the distant are revealed by the same numinous moment. The closing line functions as a telling strophic hinge: "*La transparencia es todo lo que queda*" ("Transparency is all that remains," line 110).

In terms of poetic function, *Blanco*'s fifth section (5: 162-224) is divided into two levels of communication: the expressive or conative (the first person narrative voice describing what he sees, lines 162-195, 223-224), and the inter-subjective (the first person narrator addressing the female consort, lines 196-222). Although his mind is "blank," the visual memory of the narrative voice brings forth a recapitulation of language's uterine life ("*la palabra*" as the primal word) at the level of colors, followed by the language of amazement and vertigo, a clear indication of the narrator's bewildered response to his first retinal impressions of life and, by logical Adam-like inference, a paradigmatic garden: no doubt made of clay, but born from the earth, in a womb-like cave. According to the combinatorial possibility of this reading, the first ten lines can be read as the account of the couple's last stage in their uterine journey through the earth canal and their sudden emergence, like the sprouting of sacred corn:

Del amarillo al rojo al verde,
peregrinación hacia las claridades,
la palabra se asoma a remolinos
azules.
Gira el anillo beodo,
giran los cinco sentidos
alrededor de la amatista /ensimismada.
Traslumbramiento:
no pienso, veo.¹⁶

The language is suggestive of a birth in its references to uterine contractions followed by the internal rotations of the head and shoulders of the newly born: *peregrinación hacia las claridades, la palabra se asoma a remolinos, gira el anillo, giran los cinco sentidos* ("pilgrimage to the clarities, ring spins, the five senses spin," lines 163-167). The actual birth is registered as a blinding light ("*Traslumbramiento*"), and as the poetic image of a child's first visual impressions: *no pienso, veo*. The narrative quality of these lines thus traces the language of pregnancies ("*traslumbramiento*" puns with "dar a luz" ["to give light" as in "giving birth"]), as well as the primal portrait of the Edenic narrator who can't distinguish between the womb left behind and the wonders of the brave new world he glimpses for the first time.

The entry into human reality in *Blanco* is marked by verbs of motion which range from the sacred to the groping walk (*peregrinación hacia las claridades...*

frequently in Octavio Paz's poetry as his own Trojan Horse against modern Mexican nationalism.

¹⁶ "From yellow to red to green, / pilgrimage to the clarities, / the word peers out from blue /whirls. / The drunk ring spins, / the five senses spin / around the centripetal / amethyst. / Dazzle: /I don't think, I see." (Lines 162-171), *Collected Poems*, p. 323.

avanzo...avanzo ["pilgrimage to to the clarities...I walk... I walk"], lines 163, 186, 191). Where is he going? We are not told, but no doubt the journey is now heading toward another end ("blanco"): toward death. Life on earth has been an "ultrapid exposure" (*Duchamp* 141). This reading possibility of *Blanco* does not spring from Tantrism, but from Octavio Paz's analysis of Duchamp's avant-garde art and a sustained study of Martin Heidegger whose philosophical discourse shapes much Paz's *The Bow and the Lyre* (1956):

I aspire to being, to the being that changes, not to the salvation of the self. I am not concerned about the *other life* elsewhere but here. The experience of *otherness* is, here and now, the *other life*. Poetry does not seek to console man for death but to make him see that life and death are inseparable: they are the totality. To recuperate the concrete life means to unite the pair life-death, to reconquer the one in the other, the you in the I, and thus *to discover the shape of the world in the dispersion of its fragments*. (148-149, my italics)

If we return to lines 162-169, one notices that the reference to the "spellbound" or "wrapped up" amethyst ("centripetal" in Weinberger's translation does not quite correspond to "ensimismada" in this line), might be a poetic reference to the semi-precious stone, either quartz or rock-crystal of a "clear purple or a bluish violet colour of different degrees of intensity," believed to be "a preventive against intoxication" and with its finest samples brought from India (*Oxford English Dictionary*). In the language of myth, the amethyst is associated with Dionysus, the metamorphosis of a maiden into white quartz, and the colors it acquired through Dionysus and his mourning after the maiden's death—thus a variant of the Isis and Osiris myth. "The most famous part of [Dionysus] wanderings in Asia," writes William Smith, "is his expedition to India, which is said to have lasted several years" (148).¹⁷

Beyond this intricate weaving of possible hermetic associations and numerological symbols (a game loved by Octavio Paz), one point is clear: the inebriated ring (*anillo beodo*) is a metaphor for the rotating and spinning of the child's five senses around the quadrature of the semi-precious amethyst, hence the quincunx or cosmic-center image of the womb whose constant whirl marks the beginning of mortal time and the centering of space, transforming the amethyst into a stone that absorbs all the colors of the spectrum. Since the amethyst is the *Rose de France*, its association with Robert Delaunay's painting "Windows Open Simultaneously" (1912) is inevitable if one considers that such a painting resembles a semi-precious stone that refracts and splinters into small kinetic cubes one's view of the Eiffel Tower and the Pyramids of Giza, two

¹⁷It is generally known that Octavio Paz's essays often turn to Isis, the consort and sister of Osiris, and to themes of life, death by dismemberment, and number 14 as the symbol of Osiris's resurrection as a unified body. A repressed source in our reading of *Blanco* has been Euripides, close to Octavio Paz's poetics and a center piece in *The Bow and the Lyre*. In a longer study, one would have to consider Euripides' play *Bakkhai*, with the image of the young Dionysus reaching the West (Thebes) from India, thus as an exile returning to his western home. In Euripides' play we find the same images that interest Paz in *Blanco*: earth goddesses, lunar cults, erotic rites, homecoming, women who in a frenzy slay their loved ones, the dismembered bodies (*sparagmos*), the loving assembling of the limbs, and so on. See Euripides, *Bakkhai*, trans. Reginald Gibbons (New York: Oxford UP, 2001).

matrices of ancient and modern metropolitan centers.¹⁸ Cubism's obsession with the representation of movement was a sign of its hermetic fascination with the fourth dimension, proposed by Octavio Paz in his book *Marcel Duchamp: Appearance Stripped Bare* (1973, but published in Spanish in 1968, thus in close proximity to *Blanco's* publication): "It was an interest [Duchamp] shared with most of the poets and artists of his time, as we see in the 'simultaneism' of Barzun, Delaunay, Cendrars, Apollinaire, and others" (130).¹⁹

With an important stage in the couple's journey completed, the fundamental elements, colors, senses, and human faculties begin to reach a stage of individuation, culminating not only in the couple's birth but also with an allusion to a calendrical marker: the infant couple is born on two ancient Mexican day signs, "wind" (*viento*), coupled with "house" (*casa del viento*, line 222b). Octavio Paz writes what appears to be a neologism: *Aerofanía*, as if to insinuate the "hierophany" or manifestation of the sacred, in this case the god of wind (Quetzalcoatl) in a native Mexican setting. Elizabeth Hill Boone explains the ancient calendrical significance of births that take place under the day signs of house and wind as follows:

For anyone born on one of the first four day signs (Crocodile, Wind, House, Lizard), the maize/flower/solar lords Centeotl or Xochipilli would control the birth [...] A theme of vegetation and abundance thus governs the birth process for those fortunate to have these day signs. (141)

In the second part of section five (lines 196-215) one could read an inter-subjective level of communication in which the first person narrator (now appearing implicitly as Osiris) addresses Isis, the young sister/wife. This is the more developed and hermetic part of *Blanco*, with a constant word-play ("*testigos los testículos solares*" ["testimony of solar testicles"]), alliteration ("*cielo y suelo se juntan*" ["sky and earth joining"]), and the poetic ingenuity in the synesthesia of the closing lines: "olida por mis ojos/ puente hung from color to smell"). The central features, however, allude to a "falling" from the consort's body to her shadow, and from her shadow to her name (thus from birth to social or mythic identity), then back to her body and its origin: a downward flow of disarray and dismemberment: "caes de tu cuerpo a tu sombra [...] caes de tu sombra a tu nombre [...] caes de tu nombre a tu cuerpo [...] caes en tu comienzo [...] tú te repartes como el lenguaje / *espacio dios descuartizado*."²⁰ Just born, both are already on their circular *nostos* or return to the origin: toward the world of sacrifice ("*dios descuartizado*"

¹⁸See Cantú, 2010: 57-58.

¹⁹In his book *The Other Voice*, published in 1990, Paz returns to this point and expands: "Cubism, and above all the Orphism of Delaunay, inspired the first experiments by Cendrars and Apollinaire, with whom Simultaneism truly began. In the case of Cendrars especially, the influence of film techniques—montage flashback—was decisive. The use of cinematographic devices shattered syntax and the linear, successive nature of traditional poetry" (50).

²⁰"[Y]ou fall from your body to your shadow [...] you fall from your shadow to your name [...] you fall from your name to your body [...] you fall to your beginning [...] you divide me [sic] like parts of speech / *space quartered god*," lines 196-204, *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz*, p. 325.

[“quartered god”]), shadows, and death. The weight of fate on the young couple is evident in the determinism that shapes their brief lives coded in the language of riddles, hence of a Kali-like Sphinx: “*siempre dos sílabas enamoradas / los labios negros de la profetisa / A d i v i n a n z a*” (“*always two syllables in love / the black lips of the oracle / P r o p h e c y*,” lines 211-212).

Eliot Weinberger translates “*adivinanza*” as “prophecy,” no doubt because of the association with the oracle (“*profetisa*”). But *riddle* is a better word since the intent is not to foretell the future, but to solve a puzzle or mystery.²¹ As expected, Octavio Paz includes possible answers on the word’s lateral phrases: “*siempre dos sílabas enamoradas*” (“always two syllables in love”), and “*entera en cada parte te repartes*” (“Whole in each part you divide yourself,” line 213). The first phrase is explained through another poem, the *Topoema* which plays with the words *sí*, *no* (yes, no), and *sino*, a word meaning “destiny” or “fate.”²² The second phrase is a pun on *parte* (“in each part”) and *repartes* which more so than meaning “divide yourself” (as in the translation), should be read as “you give yourself” (from *repartir*, that is, to give or hand out equal portions). As such, *sílabas enamoradas* are the dispersed but matching syllables in a discourse of love that signify “destiny” or fate in Spanish (“*sino*”).

The sixth section marks *Blanco*’s “epilogue,” one which dramatizes a couple’s metaphysical pilgrimage that leads to incarnation, followed by a journey back to primal matter. The simultaneous representation of a pilgrimage toward incarnation and back to the origin illustrates what has been a recurring pattern in *Blanco*, with different stages and ages spinning and spiralling in a temporality that includes past, present, and future: in other words, the “date that recurs,” an eternal present in constant rotation.²³

III. *Blanco*, Octavio Paz, and the Tradition of Modern Poetry

As observed at the beginning of this essay, Octavio Paz defined modernity by its otherness: to be modern means to reject the present tradition in favour of an anterior age which, once life is breathed into it, returns with the renewed force of its own passion for contradiction and re-creation--the true mission of an avant-garde. Paz’s poetics and politics thus call for a return (*vuelta*, one of Paz’s favorite words) from which a model of a trans-national literary history would offer a better vantage point to understand the efforts of Latin American writers during the 1940s to naturalize the avant-garde in native lands. Paz’s critical views on the East and the West can now be envisaged as an aesthetic horizon for a new poetry: neither a hemispheric project nor destruction of meaning, but a search for otherness and an attempt to make sense in a world that had lost it:

[T]he invention of weapons for total annihilation interdicts every hypothesis or theory about the meaning of history and the supposed reason inherent in the movements and struggles of nations and classes [...] Indeed, in proportion as

²¹Thus translated by G. Aroul and Charles Tomlinson in their English version of *Blanco*, published in *Configurations*, p. 189.

²²Read this example of Paz’s concrete poem in *Collected Poems*, p. 337. Also, the poem “*Adivinanza en forma de octagón*”, which Weinberger aptly translates as “*Riddle in the Shape of an Octagon*,” *Ibid.*, p. 361.

²³For an expanded analysis of sections 1, 4, and 6, see Cantú, 2010.

the future it builds is less and less imaginable and appears devoid of meaning, it ceases to be a future: it is the unknown that intrudes on us [...] So it is: everything that once seemed loaded with meaning now appears before our eyes as a series of efforts and creations that are a non-sense.²⁴

Blanco's structural composition, with an initial and concluding rotating chaos and maelstrom of fragments, can now be read as a poem composed during the Cold War in the form of a myth of origins, a metaphor for writing, and as an ideogram of the world seconds after the detonation of a hydrogen bomb. To write and read poetry, according to Paz, is "to discover the shape of the world in the dispersion of its fragments."²⁵ Inspired by Buddhism, the poet imagines Nothingness. Thus read, *Blanco*'s epigraphs from *The Hevajra Tantra* ("By passion the world is bound, by passion too it is released"), and Stéphane Mallarmé ("*Ses purs ongles*") with its reference to the Master's departure and the nobility in Nothingness—reveal an appropriateness beyond the literary. On the same line of reasoning, the reader's attempts to clarify allusions to ancient civilizations (Egypt, India, Mesoamerica) could have formalized the reading of *Blanco* as a proposed cultural syncretism or collage. There is truth to the fact that the poem's fractured syntax, its obscure references (highly condensed or ambiguous), the absence of punctuation, and frequent defamiliarized contexts validate Manuel Durán's reading of *Blanco*: "More than once we feel we are drowning in a sea of intoxicating sensations" (180).

Evidently, *Blanco*'s emphasis on ancient civilizations is not meant as a proposed "multicultural syncretism" that would be a remedy to global conflicts; read in the context of Paz's writings from 1950-1970, *Blanco* is a series of "ultrarapid exposures" of appearances (the worldly shadows, replicas) and apparitions (the archetypes) with a fugue-like representation, synchronous and contrapuntal: "For a mere instant we are the oculist witnesses" (*Duchamp* 141). As a way of closing, let us examine two questions: What does *Blanco*—as a poetic text that belongs to this stage in Paz's writings-- break away from and, Janus-like, anticipate?

In his book *Sor Juana or, The Traps of Faith* (1982), Octavio Paz devotes a chapter to the study of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's hermetic poem *First Dream*. The analysis is systematic and a scholarly feat in the best sense of the term: it is a study of the sources, an exegesis of the poem, and a literary history with Sor Juana, Mexico's colonial era, and modern poetry as major vantage points. It is also a most revealing chapter about Paz's own poetry, especially *Blanco*, in spite of the fact that this poem is not mentioned once.

After establishing the contrasts between Sor Juana's poetics and Luis de Góngora's, Paz turns his attention to Sor Juana's poem ("*First Dream* is strangely prophetic of Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés*," 358), explaining the trope that guides it—the spiritual journey of the soul during a dream—and the literary tradition that she embraces and simultaneously breaks with. It soon becomes evident that Octavio Paz is proposing more than just an analysis of *First Dream*: Sor Juana and Mallarmé turn into important synchronic moments in the literary and artistic history that Paz had conceptualized in works such as *The Bow and the Lyre*, and

²⁴Octavio Paz, *The Bow and the Lyre*. Trans. Ruth L.C. Simms. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973. Pp. 243-244.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 149.

Children of the Mire, a history noted for its trans-national range and emphasis on contradiction and negation, not on presumed resolutions or syntheses. Before he enters into his critical reading of *First Dream*, Octavio Paz writes a commentary which merits quoting in its entirety:

First Dream is the first example of an attitude—the solitary soul confronting the universe—that later, beginning with romanticism, would be the spiritual axis of Western poetry. The solitary confrontation is a religious theme, like that of the voyage of the soul, but religious in a negative way: it denies revelation. More precisely, it is a revelation of the fact that we are alone and that the world of the supernatural has dissipated. In one way or another, all modern poets have lived, relived, and re-created the double negation of *First Dream*: the silence of space, and the vision of non-vision. The great and until now unrecognized originality of Sor Juana's poem resides in this fact. And this is the basis for its unique place in the history of modern poetry. (367)

Sor Juana and Mallarmé are studied as poets who look retrospectively and forward in history: Janus-like poets who represent thresholds and liminal transitions, the beginning and the end, dawn and dusk, the sun and the moon: Janus and Diana (*Duchamp* 129). Sor Juana, says Paz, was fascinated with the goddess Isis, the inventor of the Egyptian hieroglyphs, thus the mother of writing. We are told that etymologically Isis means “twice a man,” thus “a great sexual mystery” that intrigued Sor Juana in spite of its unorthodoxy (*Sor Juana* 170). Sor Juana's interest in Isis and in Egypt, claims Paz, is an intellectual rebellion against Catholicism's ideas regarding women, and yet it is more: “Sor Juana believed that the Mexican pyramids were derived from those of Egypt, origin of all the arts and philosophies of the ancient world [...] The Egyptian pyramids appear as allegories of the soul and of its rise toward the light” (*Sor Juana* 373). Clearly then, the spiritual journey in *First Dream* (as well as in Mallarmé's poem and, by extension, in *Blanco*) ends without a revelation for obvious reasons: the Catholicism in Colonial Mexico lacked the depth, mystery and sacredness of ancient Egypt, the mother of all civilizations in Sor Juana's view. Her break with tradition, according to Paz, corresponds to a modern critique of the present and an alternating return to ancient civilizations that retain their aura of the sacred. Modernity's chance encounter with the date that recurs, and our only possibility of recovering the living portion of humanity's past.

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IN SEARCH OF THE “OTHER”: OCTAVIO PAZ’S THE LABYRINTH OF SOLITUDE AND IN LIGHT OF INDIA

Margarita Nieto*

*Abstract: In 1949, while living in Paris, Mexican poet-essayist Octavio Paz wrote his first major work, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950), a hermeneutical text of self-examination based on observing the everyday phenomena of Mexican life while in search of “the other.” Two years later, he had a glimpse of “the other” in India to which he returned in 1962. In *Light of India* (1995) narrates how India became Paz’s “one and the other.” The writing of these works reveals an intellectual consciousness of the relationships between Heidegger and Asian thought, offhandedly revealed in 1991, in which Paz uses a quote by Heidegger of a Buddhist saying, “the Other, Share” basic to both these thinkers in their search for “the other.” Paz’s initial major work of 1950 and the final work on India in 1995 are read as face-to-face reflections of the One and the Other.*

NEARING THE END of a life given to inventions in language and consequently thought, Octavio Paz completed a circular trajectory uniting the discourse that emerged in his first major work, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950), and the primary confrontation with the “Other,” in 1951, when he travelled to India. In 1993, five years before his death, he published *Itinerario*, informing the ground that led to *The Labyrinth of Solitude*’s conception and in 1995 two years later, he wrote *In Light of India*, a work mirroring and interpreting his *being* in India, the history, geography, religion, politics and above all, his feelings from his first visit and the recurring moments that he experienced there.

Underlying these works is a critique of modernity, for in engaging himself with and within the world he inhabited, Paz explored the problem and project of modernity as it surfaces in the world-at-large through experience, language and thought viewing it in its dialectical role of reform and de(con)struction of history, culture, society. He underscores modernity’s role in both accepting and condemning violence, terrorism, humanity and dehumanization. Yet his gift lies in inscribing and challenging the *writing* of the modern era by eradicating barriers between reason and instinct in a dialectic of thought and feeling. Paz opens the door to an interpretation of the phenomenon, to a hermeneutic interpretation of his being-in-the-world.

Going beyond the traditional pre-set rational boundaries of the essay as conceived in the West, Paz examines the phenomena of his everyday life, as a male, as a Mexican, but above all, as a human living in the modern era. It is a world of extreme identities, of excursions into nothingness, of the irrational joy of the Fiesta and simultaneously, of the confrontation with death, of the ‘other side’ of the self, of history as a rite of passage and of absolution, and of a dialectic with solitude and finally, communion. If this, his first major work, initiated a journey charged with the confrontation with “the other” within himself and through the examination of the *things* around him, *In Light of India* was a final excursion

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through a world that was essentially “the other” when he first went there, and that became, “the other, Share.”¹

The Labyrinth of Solitude first appeared in *Cuadernos Americanos*; a journal founded in 1942 by Latin American and exiled Spanish intellectuals published by the University of Mexico (UNAM). Written in Paris during the summer of 1949, where Paz held a diplomatic post, the work flowed from interrogations emerging from confrontations with and of his world-view: Mexico, its cultural and ancestral history and its role in his life; his initial childhood experience in Los Angeles, California, at the age of 5; the year spent as a Guggenheim Fellow in Berkeley in the early forties; and the detached view of these events from Paris amidst the multi-lingual and multi-cultural intellectual environment in which he found himself:

I reached Paris in December, 1945. In France, the years in the wake of the Second World War were of dearth but of great intellectual liveliness. It was a period of great riches, not so much in the domain of literature itself, of poetry and novels, but in ideas and essays. I zealously followed the philosophical and political debates. A burning atmosphere: passion for ideas, intellectual rigor and at the same time, a marvelous sense of freedom . . . I soon met friends who shared my intellectual and aesthetic anxieties. In those cosmopolitan circles - Frenchmen, Greeks, Spaniards, Rumanians, Argentines, North Americans - I could breathe freely . . . I did not belong there, and yet I felt I had found an intellectual homeland. A homeland that did not demand identity papers and documentation. But the question about Mexico was still there. Having made a decision to face up to it, I drew up a plan--I never managed to follow it completely-and I began to write. It was the summer of 1949. (Paz 1999, 3)

In an interview in *the Paris Review* he goes on to say:

I wrote *The Labyrinth of Solitude* in Paris. The idea came to me in the United States when I tried to analyze the situation of the Mexicans living in Los Angeles . . . a kind of mirror for me-the autobiographical dimension you like to see . . . There are two situations for every human being. The first is the solitude we feel when we are born. Our first situation is that of orphanhood . . . later we discover the opposite: filial attachment . . . because we are thrown, as Heidegger says, into this world, we feel we must find what the Buddhists call “The Other, Share.” This is the thirst for community. I think philosophy and religion derive from this original situation or predicament. Every country and every individual tries to resolve it in different ways. Poetry is a bridge between solitude and communion. Communion, even for a mystic like Saint John of the Cross can never be absolute.

INTERVIEWER: Is that why the language of mysticism is so erotic?

OP: Yes because lovers, which is what mystics are, constitute the greatest image of communion . . . we are always with someone, even if it is only our shadow. We are never one, we are always *we*. These extremes are the poles of human life. (MacAdam 1991, 11-13)

¹Aspects of this essay come from my long and sustained friendship with Octavio Paz: a mentor and a friend with whom I was privileged to share discussions, thoughts, silence laughter and a “time-out-of-time.

These observations slip lightly into our consciousness, informing the intellectual circumstances that supported Paz's observations. I have referred to the hermeneutical construct of this work based on numerous readings of the work. Studies and essays by Paz scholars including Enrico Mario Santí, Enrique Krause, Rafael Segovia, Anthony Stanton and Álvaro Matute observe the influence of José Ortega y Gasset, and of the Mexican intellectuals of the day: Samuel Ramos, Alfonso Reyes, the exiled Spaniard, José Gaos and Leopoldo Zea among others.² Yet there is yet much to be read into Paz's reflections about the intellectual ferment outside of Mexico. Beginning with his encounter with a circle of poets in Berkeley, including Josephine Miles and Muriel Rukeyser and resuming his friendship with Benjamin Péret in Paris:

Through him (Péret) I finally met Breton . . . The Surrealists embodied something the French had forgotten: the other side of reason, love, freedom, poetry. The French have a tendency to be too rationalistic, to reduce everything to ideas and then to fight over them. When I reached Paris, Jean-Paul Sartre was the dominant figure.

INTERVIEWER: But for you existentialism would have been old hat.

OP: That's right. In Madrid, . . . Ortega y Gasset and later his disciples in Mexico City and Buenos Aires had published all the main texts of phenomenology and existentialism, from Husserl to Heidegger, so Sartre represented more a clever variation than an innovation. (MacAdam 1991, 11)

Yes, "Existentialism was old hat," because the major philosophical texts of German philosophy had already appeared in and through *La Revista de Occidente*, directed by José Ortega y Gasset.³ But Existentialism is only part of the question, as we shall see later.

Surrealism, a movement that sought out the Irrational as a door to perception, is one of the apertures to the writing of *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, a springboard toward a narrative that mingles a scholarly discourse with interpolations of poetry. In a text fraught with imagery and rhythm, the presence of the *dasein*, the life of everyday action is omnipresent. References to history and politics, conquest, colonialism, independence and revolution, all form a structure against which the reflective silence and word illustrate the "being-ness" of Mexico.

Pre-judgment, a constant mark and objective of Western criticism disappears. The telling quotation I mentioned earlier "because we are thrown, as Heidegger says, into this world, we feel we must find what the Buddhists call 'The Other, Share'" is the aperture to "the Other" the homeland Paz is seeking and finds as we shall see, in the East.

This seemingly off-hand response brings two issues to light: The first is Paz's knowledge of an area of Heideggerian scholarship that has been, at best, ignored and the second is the relationship between Heidegger and Paz regarding "the other."

²Fondo de Cultura Económica. Memoria Del Coloquio Internacional "Por El Laberinto De La Soledad a 50 Años De Su Publicación". Anuario De La Fundación Octavio Paz 2001 (Spanish Edition). (Mexico D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001.)

³See Segura Covari, E. *Índice de la Revista de Occidente*, an alphabetical list of the works published under Ortega y Gasset's direction. As a consequence, Spanish-speaking readers read major texts by the leading German philosophers approximately fifty years before they were available in English.

I am speaking of a parallel history of ideas, of Heidegger's utilization of the Buddhist concept of "the other, Share." It affirms Heidegger's appropriation of Asian philosophy, an area that the West has slowly and only begun to recognize since the 1960s. That Martin Heidegger had been reading and discussing Asian philosophy with a number of scholars from the East since the 1930s involves an intellectual discourse that Octavio Paz must have been aware of.⁴

The Labyrinth of Solitude (Paz, 1961) begins with an epigraph from the Spanish poet Antonio Machado, citing one of the poet's alter-voices:

The other does not exist; this is rational faith, the incurable belief of human reason. Identity=reality, as if, in the end, everything must necessarily and absolutely be one and the same. But the other refuses to disappear; it subsists, it persists; it is the hard bone on which reason breaks its teeth. Abel Martín with a poetic faith, as human as rational faith, believed in the other, "in "the essential Heterogeneity of being," in what might be called the incurable otherness from which oneness must always suffer.

This epigraph, the portal to the text itself provides the pathway toward the reading of this work. We enter into a world in search of "the other." As stated before, the chapters explore one after the other, the *dasein*, the everyday actions that characterize the Mexican being-in-the-world.⁵

This hermeneutical entry defines the ontology of the text. And given the world of interpretations that Paz enters in this long journey exploring "the other," a review of the history of the interactions between the ranking Western philosopher, Heidegger and Asian philosophers that took place over two to three decades demands our attention.

In 1969, Graham Parkes organized a symposium at the University of Hawaii, "Heidegger and Eastern Thought" in celebration of the philosopher's eightieth birthday. The proceedings were published in 1987 in *Heidegger and Asian Thought* (Parkes 1990). Essays by philosophers from the Kyoto School notably Keiji Nishitami, Tetsauki Kotoh, Kohei Mizaguchi, Akihiro Takeichi, the Heideggerian J.L. Mehta, Heidegger's student, Otto Pöggeler, and Paul Shih-yi Hsiao, the translator into Italian of Lao-Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* and who had also collaborated with Martin Heidegger on a German translation of this classic text (Parkes 1990; May 1996; Stanford 2010).

This event began a renewed examination into East-West comparative philosophical communication. In his introduction to *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, Parkes reviews this history, a field initiated by Leibnitz's interest in Neo-Confucianism and the *I Ching*. It is Hegel who brought a momentary end to this widening interest by declaring his thinking to be "the culmination of Western metaphysics" even as ideas from Eastern Thought were embedded in his own.

⁴Paz's close friendships and associations in the Paris of the Fifties, his dismissal of Sartre's "variations," seem to confirm that he was not only aware of Heidegger but that he had read him. In *El Arco y la Lira* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1956) he references frequently Heidegger.

⁵The idea of the other in contemporary philosophical thought is often defined as "that which the one is not." It appears in Hegel and his concept of consciousness and subsequently to Husserl (intersubjectivity). A basic concept of contemporary philosophy it functions as well in Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*), in the works of Emmanuel Lévinas, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and the Frankfurt School.

Schopenhauer above all, understood the need to learn more from the East and Nietzsche began to acknowledge that Eastern Thought is not that different from his. (Parkes 1990, 1)

Parkes also discusses the question of "comparative philosophies" and of the problems inherent in such studies given the difference in language, above all, and point of view. He concludes this discussion by stating that:

There can be a genuine problem concerning the significance of the "and" titles of books or papers which engage in comparisons, and the question, "So what?" can often be posed legitimately.... But ultimately the criteria for the success of a comparative study of two thinkers from different traditions are no different from those pertaining to a discussion of a single philosopher. The question in both cases is, simply: does the study enhance the understanding of the philosopher's thought, of the problems engaged by it-and of ourselves and the world? (Parkes 1990, 4-5)

Heidegger's incursions into Eastern philosophy can be traced back to the his questioning Nietzsche's inability to break from the Western Metaphysical tradition and stating that it was he, Heidegger, who was the first to *overcome* that tradition. From that point on, Heidegger's dialectic with Eastern thought appears from the 1920s on. One major reason why this issue remained hidden for so long is the disinterest of Western scholars to "legitimize" Eastern thought within their consciousness. Moreover, it has been difficult to track the reading and exchange between Asian scholars and Heidegger. Over half a century of writing and publishing, there are only two references to Taoist thought in his works. Parkes clarifies this omission in two references to Hans Georg Gadamer about this issue:

You have to understand that a scholar of the generation to which Heidegger belongs would be very reluctant to say anything in print about a philosophy if he were himself unable to read and understand the relevant texts in the original language (May 1996, 18).

In Reinhard May's monograph, *Heidegger's Hidden Sources* (1996) the translator, Graham Parkes refers to this *absence-presence* in a text from the mid-fifties, an idea from the Japanese philosopher, Kuki Shūzo that Lao Tzu had mentioned a year earlier. May's contribution says Parkes is:

... to document Heidegger's familiarity with several German translations of Chinese and Japanese philosophical texts, and by showing the similarity between vocabulary and locutions in those translations-especially concerning key formulations of Heidegger's principal ideas-especially Being (*sein*) and Nothing (*Nichts*). The parallels are far too significant to be merely coincidental, and they become even more expressive in the context of Heidegger's close relations with a number of Japanese thinkers. (Mays 1996, viii)

Parkes traces Heidegger's direct contact with Eastern Thought "at least as far back as 1922." In that year, he begins his interaction with Tanabe Hajime (1885-1962) one of the most prominent Japanese scholars. From that point on, he became personally acquainted with Japanese philosophers who became known as the Kyoto School. These included Miki Kiyoshi (later exiled on account of his

Marxist leanings), Kuki Shūzo, and Keiji Nishitani.⁶ Although affiliated with Kyoto University and its ties to ancient Japanese tradition and located in what been the ancient capital, the Kyoto School was the first group of thinkers that explored philosophical thought beyond the confines of Eastern Thought. These intellectual excursions led both Nishitani and Kuki to Germany and to Heidegger along with the Chinese philosopher Paul Shih-yi Hsiao and Tezumi Tomio.

These four figures left concrete evidence of their interaction with Heidegger. Both May and Parkes detail these encounters and point out that these scholars had already published major works before meeting Heidegger. Kuki is the subject of the fictional “Conversation on Language” subtitled, “Between a Japanese and an Inquirer” based on a conversation with Kuki that focused on a poem by Bashō and on the Japanese word for “language” (kotoba) and then for “appearance and essence.”⁷ Tomio also published the account of his meeting with Heidegger shortly before Heidegger’s death in 1976 that began with a conversation of a photograph of Kuki’s tombstone and in which he touched again, upon the poem by Bashō, the word for “language” and its possible correlation to “thing” a concept that also came up in the “Conversation on Language.”

Paul Shih-yi Hsiao spent the summer of 1946 collaborating with Heidegger on a translation of the *Tao Te Ching* that Heidegger had read through Martin Buber’s 1910 translation along with texts by D.T. Suzuki and Chan Chung-yuan (May 1996, 1). But the project was abandoned the following year and while the two met again, Heidegger made it clear that it would not continue (Hsiao 1990, 93-101). Yet its influence remains in Heidegger’s 1959 work, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* in which he utilizes the word, “*dao*” as equivalent to the “way” (May 1996, 18).

This beguiling history of East-West studies between one of the most influential Western philosophers and his Eastern counterparts deserves much more attention. My purpose in presenting it within the context of this essay is to complete the partial view we have of the range of intellectual ferment that greeted Octavio Paz in the Paris of the 1950s. Recalling his friendship with Albert Camus and María Cásares, he speaks of the Celebration of the 18th of July, the anniversary of the Franco Uprising, during which he read chapters of *L’Homme Révolté*

... and Camus himself recounted to me, so to speak, the overall argument of the book. We argued a great deal about certain points- his critiques of Heidegger and Surrealism for example – and I warned him that his chapter on Lautréamont would arouse Breton’s wrath. And so it did (Paz 1990, 104).

Paz, possessed as he was, of such boundless intellectual curiosity could not but be aware of Heidegger’s works and of his Asian studies in a world in which Henri Corbin was a professor of Islamic Studies at the Sorbonne, translating Heidegger into French and writing on Hermeneutics and Islam. “Existentialism is old hat” says his interlocutor in the *Paris Review* interview reflecting current generalities

⁶Graham Parkes uses the Japanese traditional usage of the name, listing the surname before the given name. I have followed that usage in referring to his text.

⁷This text appears in *On the Way to Language* (Unterwegs zur Sprache) translated into English in 1971 and into Japanese by Tomio in 1988.

about the philosophical tenets of that era but Paz responds with Heidegger's Buddhist appropriation, *The Other, Share*.⁸

The opening paragraph of the first essay of *The Labyrinth of Solitude* prepares the reader for the examination and interpretation that follows:

All of us, at some moment, have had a vision of our existence as something unique, untransferable and very precious. This revelation almost always takes place during adolescence. Self-discovery is above all the realization that we are alone: it is the opening of an impalpable, transparent wall—that of our consciousness—between the world and ourselves (Paz 1961, 9)

The "problem" exists as well in nations and peoples. Even though, the only territory or space he can confront is Mexico:

My thoughts are not concerned with the total population of our country, but rather with a specific group made up of those who are conscious of themselves, for one reason or another as Mexicans. Despite general opinions to the contrary, this group is quite small (Paz 1961, 11).

The mirror for this awareness, this consciousness of being "Mexican" commands a scrutiny, a self-reflective mirror. Paz relentlessly uncovers and peels back the varnished surface of the un-examined, the smug self-satisfaction of national pride, accepted behavior, a proud history that lamentably escapes scrutiny through a ". . . language of reticence, of metaphors and allusions, of unfinished phrases" while his (the Mexicans) silence is "full of tints, folds, thunderheads, sudden rainbows, indecipherable threats" (Paz 1961, 29).

A continuum throughout the text is the relationship between the United States and Mexico, a study in extremes between developing and developed economies, Anglo versus Latin and Indigenous, Protestant and Catholic, and the resentment of a war that still exists in the history of Mexico but that the United States has erased from its conscience, save for the taking over of the Southwest.

He reaches the matrix, the root of Mexican passion, the mythical Mothers: Guadalupe the Sacred, the intercessor, and *Malinche, La Chingada*, the One whose name is not uttered except as a whispered curse and occasionally shouted.

He unearths *Mestizaje*, the mixture of Spanish and indigenous bloodlines, and a symbol of the Conquest as an unreconciled issue that divides the Mexicans between tacit social acceptance or rejection and the question of being European or of indigenous origin.

Every *thing*, every belief, every mythology is laid out and dissected, forming a dialectic of oppositions, language and silence, fiesta and death, white and brown, male and female, viewed as the active and the passive. And beyond these, the question of Humanity and Technology, the fear confronting the optimistic future that will never arrive. He condemns the dehumanization thrust upon the

⁸In "Modern Japanese Philosophy and Heidegger" in *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, Yusuo Yuasa relates that: Shuzo Kuki spent eight years studying German philosophy at Heidelberg, Marburg and Freiburg under Rickett, Husserl and Heidegger. He then went to Paris to study under Bergson. During that time he learned French from a young French student. This student was Jean-Paul Sartre. Although probably not known outside Japan it was Kuki who instilled in Sartre an interest in Heidegger's philosophy" (Yuasa 1990, 158).

factory worker, evoking the individual and human pride of the craftsman. He raises the clean technological advancement of death, of violence and terrorism, of a sleek thought process that uses language to cover up inadequacies and the horrors of mass murder through war and invasion. Yet, he arrives at a communion, a final dialectic between solitude and communion, love and community. Dismissing the convention of marriage, Paz seeks to go beyond the social barriers:

. . . but modern society attempts to do this by suppressing the dialectic of solitude which alone can make love possible . . . Our social life prevents every possibility of true erotic communion. Love is one of the clearest examples of that double instinct which cause us to dig deeper into our own selves and, at the same time to emerge from ourselves and realize ourselves in another: death and re-creation, solitude and communion. In the life of every and there are periods that are both departures and reunions, separations and reconciliations. Each of these phases is an attempt to transcend our solitude and is followed by an immersion in a strange environment (Paz 1961, 201-202).

In 1951, two years after writing *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Fate intervened and Paz was posted to “the Other,” New Delhi. In an essay “Changing India-West Cultural Dialectics” published in 2010, R.S. Khare uses the cases of four figures, the French anthropologist, Louis Dumont, Wilhelm Halblaus, the German Indologist and philosopher, Octavio Paz and the economist and social philosopher, Amartya Sen.

Speaking of Paz he states:

Once in India, in 1951, Paz, as it were, never left India. Given his many comings and goings, travels and his deeply etched poetic-aesthetic works and his comparative philosophical disquisitions, Paz had interiorized India (Khare 2009, 232)

Paz arrived by ship in November, 1951 landing in Bombay:

We arrived in Bombay on an early morning in November, 1951. I remember the light despite the early hour. An enormous of liquid mercury, barely undulating, vague hills in the distance, flocks of birds and scraps of pink clouds. (Paz 1995)

Checking into the hotel, he doesn't rest. He wanders throughout the city, dazed and intoxicated, seduced by what he sees, hears and smells, all senses open to the New. Returning exhausted to his hotel, there is no containment. After a brief shower, he again takes to the streets and as he remembers that first view, the prose becomes short poems in prose.

Paz's initial reaction to India is "Humankind cannot bear much reality." This phrase comes to him after venturing again into the night, as he becomes conscious of looking at what? At what lies beyond and is still nameless. A brief visit, but filled with friendships, readings, observations, it would be followed eleven years later by a much longer stay (Khare 2009, 232).

In 1962, he returns as Mexico's Ambassador to India. But a series of coincidences (a useless Western concept) bring about a significant entry on his

journey toward Love and Communion. In Paris, he met the novelist-essayist Raja Rao, and sharing a mutual interest in Catharism, they became friends. In 1963 again in India, he was received the news that he would be granted, the International Poetry Prize, Knokke le Zoute. He began undergoing a crisis: this was a public recognition of a secret, his poetry. Accepting the prize became a conundrum. What to do? Quite by chance, he met Rao and upon hearing about the dilemma, nodded and told Paz that while he could not advise him, he knew someone who could:

They went to a modest dwelling, entered, and met a woman in her fifties, seated on the floor. She smiled and continued playing with a basket of oranges at her side. Suddenly she tossed one to him. Paz caught it right away. She attended to other visitors and then said, "Raja has told me your problem. What do you think? I responded, and she laughed. "What vanity. Accept the prize with humility. But accept it knowing that it has little or no value. To not do so, is to make it important. True disinterest is to accept it as you accepted the orange I threw to you." (Paz 1995, 8)

Paz accepted the Prize and on his way to Belgium, he stopped in Paris and there, one morning, he ran into Mari-José Tramini whom he had met in India. They met again and decided to return to India together. Fate, a cosmic re-union, for Mari-Jo became the other, "the love that leads the being out of the labyrinthine jungle" (Paz 1995, 22-26).

She was destined to be his companion, love, guide and muse until he crossed over to the other side in April, 1998.

Paz left India under the shadow of the 1968 student movements that were in part "against the values and ideas of modern society" (Paz 1995, 212). These protests quickly turned violent and upon returning to New Delhi, he was informed that in Mexico, students were also protesting, putting the Administration into a quandary given that the Olympics were scheduled to open that fall, in Mexico City. He wrote to his superiors supporting the students' demands for democratic reform, that force not be utilized against the movement, and that the protest be settled through political means. He was informed that the Government, that is, the President had read his message. Ten days later, on October 3, 1968, he learned of the Tlatelolco Massacre. Paz had no choice. He could not continue representing such a repressive Administration.

Accompanied by his wife, Paz left India, and India sent him off rendering homage by poets, artists and students offering garlands of flowers. But he remained there. India never left the Octavio Paz that returned to Mexico after a self-exile in 1971 (Paz 1995, 197-205).

In the *Labyrinth of Solitude*, Paz peered into the mirror reflecting the self. *In Light of India* will become the recognition of the self in "the other." History, language, religion, daily life, and food support the intellectual journey that Paz takes into the beyond, violent and subtle time. Not successively like in the West but in conjunction. It is a logic that rules over almost all Indian creations . . . as a Mexican, he meaningfully triangulated India, Mexico and Europe across a wide swath of historical and cultural difference . . . A co-traveler with humanity whether these were the learned, the rich or the poor of India, Mexico, Europe or anywhere else. He not only critically examined and

recognized the work of modernity and globalization but also the fanaticism and violence (Khare 2009, 232).

In an interview with the Mexican journalist, Braulio Peralta in 1995, shortly before *In Light of India* appeared, Paz states:

The most radical critique of time comes from the Hindus. For the time is an illusion, time is *maya*.

PERALTA: A lie?

OP: Not a lie, an illusion. Everything is a reality that evaporates, leaves and nothing remains. There are two extreme positions about time: the Hindu that states that time is *maya* or the Western that states that the only real thing is time, that is, progress and the conquest of the future (Peralta 1996, 121).

Paz's life journey followed an itinerary that spirals into an ever-widening circle, from Mexico to California, New York, Paris, Spain, Bombay, New Delhi and Tokyo. But in and through India, East and West confront one another face to face, Paz understands and interprets for us that we are one and the same, only transformed by our "Other." Forty-five years later the spiralling circle intertwines and comes together. *The Labyrinth of Solitude* finds its counterpart in the text of *In Light of India*.⁹

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BOOK REVIEWS

Olivier Philipponnat and Patrick Lienhardt, *The Life of Irène Némirovsky, 1903–1942*. Translated by Euan Cameron, Alfred A. Knopf, 2010, Pp.448.¹

MANY RECENTLY released novels have been written by authors who are unavailable for interviews, on account of their posthumous status. But even more thrilling than the publication of works by Roberto Bolaño, Ralph Ellison, Stieg Larsson, Vladimir Nabokov and Henry Roth was the recovery of “Suite Française,” an ambitious project that Irène Némirovsky was working on when deported to Auschwitz in 1942.

Prodigal Daughter: Némirovsky perished in the Holocaust, despite converting to Catholicism. Retrieved from a suitcase by the author’s daughter, Denise, the manuscript contains two sections of an intended five-part epic about France under German occupation. Jonathan Weiss, Némirovsky’s first biographer, contends in “Irène Némirovsky: Her Life and Works” that “‘Suite Française’ would have been, in its final form, one of the most important works of literature produced in twentieth-century France.”

Even truncated, the brilliant novel, which appeared in French in 2004 and in English translation in 2006, evoked comparisons to Tolstoy and Balzac and enjoyed commercial and critical success. The enthusiastic reception of “Suite Française” in dozens of languages encouraged posthumous release of another of her unpublished texts, “Fire in the Blood” (2007), as well as an ongoing plan to restore earlier books to print. More than 60 years after perishing in the Holocaust despite her conversion to Catholicism, Némirovsky was world famous.

It was not the first time. Olivier Philipponnat and Patrick Lienhardt make clear in their book that Némirovsky was not discovered, but rather re-discovered, in 2004. She was a prolific and popular writer throughout the 1930s, but France’s discomfort over its complicity with genocide resulted in her neglect after liberation. Working with a wider range of interviews and documents than Weiss used, Philipponnat and Lienhardt have produced a richly textured, dramatic account of being Russian, French, Jewish and Catholic during a barbarous time when none of those adjectives guaranteed survival.

Their biography opens with a chilling scene aboard Convoy No. 6 — densely packed cattle cars that for three days transported Némirovsky and 927 other Jews, who were in a holding camp in France, to a death camp in Poland. It concludes with the publication of “Suite Française” and with the question, “Who can have any doubts today that Irène Némirovsky is very much alive?”

The only, lonely child of mismatched parents, she was born in Kiev in 1903. Her father, Leonid, was a tenacious, avaricious Jew from an indigent background whose “sole preoccupation was to prosper, unfettered, and to erect a bulwark of gold between himself and his childhood.” Through banking, imports and mining, he amassed enough wealth to wed Anna “Fanny” Margoulis, a middle-class monster of vanity and self-indulgence who scorned her upstart husband and flaunted numerous lovers. She was, Philipponnat and Lienhardt write, “conceited,

¹This book review first appeared in the *Jews Daily, Forward*, July 23, 2012. Reprinted with the permission of the author.

vain, pleasure-seeking and spiteful,” and she resented and ignored her impressionable daughter.

At age 2 1/2, Némirovsky barely survived a pogrom in Kiev. Leonid’s connections allowed the family to live beyond the Pale, in a splendid residence in St. Petersburg, but the Bolshevik Revolution, which left 300,000 Ukrainian Jews dead in its wake, forced them to flee to Finland and then to Sweden. In 1919, they settled in France, where they had been vacationing regularly, and which Némirovsky, tutored in French from an early age, deemed “the most beautiful country in the world. La Belle France, though, never quite reciprocated her affection, refusing repeated applications for citizenship and eventually packing Némirovsky off to slaughter.

Like Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Nathalie Sarraute and Andreï Makine, she was a gifted translingual writer, excelling in her adopted French. But in an atmosphere of toxic anti-Semitism, contributions to French culture were unable to neutralize Némirovsky’s Jewish origins. She grew up in an assimilationist household that celebrated Christmas and Easter, and with a mother who eschewed the sound of Yiddish and the smell of Jewish foods. When she converted to Catholicism, in 1939, it was, her biographers suggest, less out of Christian piety than out of a desire to secure the safety of her two daughters. They survived, but friendships with Catholic clergy and with influential fascists did not spare Némirovsky or her banker husband, Michel Epstein, from the fate reserved for Europe’s Jews.

The principal characters in “David Golder” (1929), the novel that established her reputation, are Jews, repulsive variations on racist stereotypes. Charged with being a self-hating Jew, Némirovsky responded, “I simply drew a portrait of papa and mama.” The biographers ask, “Had ‘David Golder’ been written in 2009 by Bernard Madoff’s daughter, who would dream of accusing her of anti-Semitic views?” (Since the French edition dates from 2007, pre-Madoff, the sentence must have been inserted in Euan Cameron’s translation). The grownup author wreaked her revenge for a miserable childhood by making the character of Mama abhorrent in “The Wine of Solitude” (1935) and other fictions.

When Leonid died, and Fanny denied her access to the family fortune, Némirovsky published prodigiously in order to maintain her affluent tastes. Though her stories appeared beside vicious anti-Semitic pieces in xenophobic magazines, Philipponnat and Lienhardt argue that “Irène Némirovsky was a writer, not a polemicist.” They present her as a serious artist whose theme is moral decline. That decline is nowhere more apparent than in the tribulations of her brief, productive life.

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Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson *Paris as Revolution: Writing the 19th-Century City*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. 257 pp. Hardcover, ISBN 0-520-08642-2

EIGHTEEN YEARS after its publication, Priscilla Ferguson's *Paris as Revolution* remains a crucial contribution to our understanding of the connection between the French Revolution as a historical event and the revolution as literary practice throughout the nineteenth century. Ferguson explores the way that writers continually revised what both revolution and Paris meant depending on the current political climate and topographical changes. Her work comprises both analyses of the texts produced during the nineteenth century in Paris and readings of Paris itself as a text of revolution and modernity.

Power, Ferguson tells us, can be read in nomination practices. Street names, when employed at all, were first derived from popular description; however, Henry IV relocated the authority to name streets to the central government. After the French Revolution, the impulse was to rewrite the power structures of Paris through renomination. Thus began a period in which proposals for such nomination stemmed from a desire to rationalize and systematize Paris's nomination; in particular, the clean grid of such American cities as Philadelphia were admired for their logical lettering and numbering of streets. However, Ferguson argues, any system of nomination inevitably encounters resistance when it runs up against popular practices which lead to further nomination reform. The result is modernity "rooted in... the perpetually unfinished, always provisional nature of the present and the imminence of change" (35).

Given the slippery nature of names, it was only natural that Parisians would need a guide to move around their constantly changing city. The execution of the king prompted a "crisis of authority that necessitated redefinition of the city" (36). Paris became the head of state, and writers stepped in to offer their own authority as guides to Paris as text. Nowhere is this more evident than in the rhetorical strategies of guidebooks of the time. Ferguson traces the lineage of nineteenth-century guidebooks back to Mercier's *Tableau de Paris* of 1781, in which he balances descriptions of the city with descriptions of her inhabitants. That Mercier used his own figure as the central point of his guide was only possible because he was representing a cohesive, pre-revolutionary Paris; nineteenth-century guidebooks, on the other hand, reflect the fragmentary nature of the city through their collective authorships. It is in these guidebooks that metonymy becomes the primary way of representing Paris. Ferguson's reading of these guides culminates with a contrast between Victor Hugo's introduction to *Paris-Guide* (1867) and Jules Vallès's *Tableau de Paris*. Where Hugo attempts to render the city whole through "his assimilation of Paris with the Revolution" as idea, Vallès writes his "revolutionary aesthetics" in the streets with the poor and overlooked (73,78). Ferguson argues that while Hugo is more closely associated with Paris as revolution, Vallès has the stronger voice because he is more frustrated by the actual revolutionary events.

In one of her most compelling chapters, "The Flâneur: The City and Its Discontents," Priscilla Ferguson traces the changing figure of the flâneur through the nineteenth century as he becomes increasingly productive. In literature, the flâneur acts as a vehicle through which the writer can observe the city and comment on the dramatically changing landscape. This figure is both literally in

the midst of the street and intellectually above the seductions of city, a double position which gives the flâneur's criticisms credibility (80). The literary tradition of the flâneur extends throughout nineteenth-century Paris, but his stock as a character type rises to a peak mid-century, before falling by the end of the century.

Ferguson notes that discourse surrounding the flâneur at the beginning of the century was almost entirely negative. The first images of the flâneur as a disengaged Parisian appeared in pamphlets during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. He moves through the streets as a pure observer, much like the personas present in literary guidebooks of the time. Ferguson explains, "This flâneur is clearly Other and manifestly bourgeois, a distant cousin of Réne, whose insufferable idleness offends and importunes the lower-class speaker" (82). Perhaps what was so troubling about this figure to these early decades is this unproductive apathy. From the standpoint of the lower class, the inactivity of flânerie was deemed an insult when placed in contrast to the lives of those trying to scrape together an existence. From the bourgeois perspective, the otherness of the flâneur stems from his lack of participation in the bourgeois system that rewards work. Though the flâneur may be bourgeois in terms of class, he is something else in terms of values. Perhaps the most threatening aspect of the flâneur is that "unlike the dandy whose flamboyant dress sets him apart, the flâneur remains anonymous, devoid of personality, unremarkable in the crowd" (88). *Lurking* may be a better description of this early flâneur, for his actual individuality is cloaked in the exterior trappings of the bourgeoisie. The negative valuation of the flâneur in the early nineteenth century suggests a Parisian society unwilling or unable to allow space for such individuality and threatened by the presence of values other than its own.

What began as a figure of indolence at the beginning of the century is reinterpreted by such writers as Balzac and rewritten to be a figure possessing the qualities necessary for artistic genius. Thus, Ferguson argues, Balzac recuperates flânerie for Parisian society by reconfiguring the flâneur as an artist. The artist-flâneur "does not look, he observes, he studies, he analyzes" (88). This critical approach to the environment gives the artist-flâneur material for his art and justifies his unique position within society. The artist-flâneur's movement through the city exists as a "mode of comprehension, a moving perspective that tallies with the complexity of a situation that defies stasis" (91). Writers used the figure of the flâneur to attempt to understand, though representation, what Paris means, which implies the belief that what appears unknowable about Paris is actually available only to the artist-flâneur and subtends his creativity. Through Balzac, flânerie became a method of intellectualizing the environment and thereby controlling it, in terms that were explicitly gendered.

That the artist-flâneur would come to have a more ambivalent relationship with the city mid-century is not particularly surprising given the transformation of the political and physical environment following Louis-Napoleon's rise to power and the subsequent haussmannization of Paris. Ferguson argues that in this period, writers such as Baudelaire, Flaubert, and Benjamin, complicate the role of the flâneur and his ability to *know* the city. While Ferguson notes that Flaubert does not directly identify his characters as flâneurs, their distance from their environment and aimless wanderings suggest a version of the figure that has been revalued within the newly modern sphere. Baudelaire draws the flâneur as an

“anguished poet, for whom exploration of the city is a pretext for exploration of the self” (94). Instead of the flâneur functioning as a critical observer of the environment, Baudelaire’s figure collapses the space between environment and self. Flaubert’s flâneur is utterly unproductive and come to symbolize “estrangement, alienation, and anomie,” because he is unable to find a stable position within the sudden and extreme modernization of Haussmann’s Paris (95). She argues that Flaubert inverts Balzac, for the former reverses Balzac’s trope of the flâneur processing the city, and demonstrates how this new flâneur is ultimately powerless (99). The mid-century flâneur is almost returned to his original negative position in society, but whereas the first flâneurs were lazy from the outset, this later flâneur makes attempts at creativity but is stymied by the environment that he can no longer control.

Indeed, by positioning the flâneur as alienated, these later writers articulate the sociological position that “the most intimate of emotions is also and at the same time the most social” (100). Ferguson identifies two primary conditions of the later flâneur – anomie (as well as its counterpart: egoism) and alienation – and connects these themes to their respective theorists. Durkheim theorizes egoism as a condition that results from the disconnection of the individual from society as previously normative social bonds erode. Anomie is the corollary condition of “unregulated passion” that results in “disillusionment...because the most boundless passion inevitably comes up short against the real world” (103). Marx posits that social bonds dissolve because of “the division of property and the class society” (104). In particular, the artist is alienated from society because of the commodification of art. Social fragmentation forms the basis for the flâneur’s complicated relationship to Paris. Finally, looking back on this time, Walter Benjamin “elaborated a vision of a city of revolution, but a revolution that somewhere, somehow went wrong” (107). The failure of the revolution is the same paralyzing failure of Flaubert’s flâneur. Because commodification results in a system of values that idealizes a fundamentally illusory object, Benjamin describes modernity as obsessed with “phantasmagoria” (108). The anxiety of the flâneur is an anxiety of a loss of individuality within a crowd. The flâneur’s anxiety is a direct inversion of his earliest form; whereas the first figures were viewed anxiously because they did not conform to society, these latter figures have internalized the anxiety that they may be unable to resist the commodifying values of society, which renders them innocuous from society’s perspective. Unable to find a place in society that would have any value, the flâneur is returned to his original axiological position where his disengagement is seen as indolence rather than creative perception, but his indolence is rendered impotent. From this analysis of the representative figure of the revolutionary Parisian, Ferguson turns her attention back to the topography of the city, in particular the changes wrought by haussmannization. She notes that the dominant discourse of the literature of the Second Empire is displacement; this revolution in cityscape required a revolution in representation. She finds such revolution in Zola’s *La Curée* (1872), for the text primarily represents an ambivalence: “Zola simultaneously celebrates the new Paris, the beautiful city that serves as backdrop for the corrupt society he denounces” (125). This ambivalence leads to what Ferguson terms “the aesthetics of modernization,” which reflects the tension between the past and the present.

In considering two texts from "The Terrible Year" of 1871, Ferguson returns to the contracts between Hugo and Vallès. Hugo is nearly synonymous with Paris; his writing places Paris as the central point of all civilization and his own persona reflects a "politics of performance" (158). Ferguson argues that Hugo's *Quatrevingt-treize* is premised on a conflict not of competing political systems, but of good and evil, which erases the historicity of Paris and rewrites it as legend. Vallès, on the other hand, rejects such grandiosity and instead embraces an "aesthetic of the street" which "produces a politics of the street" (184). Vallès's Paris is grounded in his commitment to the quotidian struggles of regular Parisians. Ferguson suggests that not only do these two figures contest each other, but also French literary culture remains divided as to the proper status of each writer.

Ferguson's final chapter is devoted to persuasive readings of Zola's *La Débâcle* and *Paris*. She argues that in these texts the revolutionary impulse moves from the public to the private, and the French Revolution shifts from the literary present to the past. At the end of the nineteenth century, after the conflicts between France and Paris, the city ceased to be an effective synecdoche for the country; where once had been metonymy, Ferguson now finds metaphor. The figure of the flâneur, too, is changed into the figure of the intellectual, and the debates that proceed in the wake of the Dreyfus affair center on the credentialing of the intellectual. Finally, Ferguson argues that at the end of the century, the ahistoricity of the Eiffel Tower makes it the appropriate emblem for a political program intent on de-revolutionizing the Revolution.

Ultimately, Ferguson's insightful work read Paris as a text of Revolution and traces the political impulses of writers who represent Paris as a profoundly modern space and practice. This work provides the reader with a new historical hermeneutic for understanding texts from nineteenth-century Paris and for understanding Paris as a nineteenth-century text.

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Toming Jun Liu, *Modernity in Fugue: Revelations of the 19th Century European Literature*. By (童明, 《现代性赋格: 19 世纪欧洲经典文学启示录》). Beijing and Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008. 210 pp. Paperback, ISBN: 9787563377626

MODERNITY IN FUGUE: Revelations of the 19th Century European Literature, written in Chinese, is a postmodern reflection on how several significant writers of 19th century European literature—Baudelaire, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, Gogol, Nietzsche among others—thoughtfully respond to problems of modernization and to the systematized modernity of the Enlightenment. The book is not only a poignant critical study of the concept of (post)modernity and of 19th century European literature, it also offers an insight into the modernity that China has been experiencing if we read the book between the lines. As the author states, "for China, a country that is still in search of a modern consciousness, the lessons from the history of European modernization (the history of literature included) cannot be ignored"(Liu 4). The "revelations," therefore, are directed mainly toward the author's homeland, which he left thirty years ago.

Based on the argument that modernity should be understood as a fugue of themes and contrapuntal themes, Liu's book distinguishes itself in three aspects. First, Liu's book, written in a refreshingly literary style, focuses on how modern literature's rhetorical thinking critically respond to problems in systematized modernity, thus highlighting the critical capacity of poetry and the poetic capacity of criticism. Unlike the dryness usually associated with theoretical writing, Liu's theorizing of modernity is poetically evocative; his reading of the 19th French and Russian literatures is not only lyrical but solidly philosophical. Secondly, Liu foregrounds the often overlooked aesthetical dimensions of modernity represented by a diverse range of rhetorical styles by Montaigne, Baudelaire, Flaubert, Chernyshevsky, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, bringing to light a modernity contrapuntal to the unifying narrative of instrumental modernity. "If modern thinking had evolved from Montaigne rather than from Descartes, there would have been a totally different movement of Enlightenment," conjectures Liu at one point (8). The author's readings of Baudelaire, Flaubert, as well as of Chernyshevsky and Dostoevsky, also reveal a more complex map of modernity from both the perspective of a more developed European continent and that of an under-modernized Russia. Thirdly, considering that Liu's readership is his country-fellows in China, he is implying an argument that China has paid and is still paying a high price in a rather blind drive to modernize herself.

The Introduction, in a pleasant prose, connects 19th century Europe with contemporary China in the sharing of similar problems in modernity and introduces the book's argument: that the "other" modernity as offered by literary writers is a Derridean supplement to the Enlightenment modernity. After the Introduction, the first two chapters, focused solely on the Enlightenment, set up the basic theoretical framework of Liu's metaphorical argument that modernity is a polyphonic fugue consisting of various themes and responses. Indeed, one must agree that any discussion of modernity has to tackle the issue of Enlightenment. We cannot speak of a modernity separate from the Enlightenment, because the Enlightenment was the historical origin of a system of modernity or modern values. What, then, is Enlightenment? Liu suggests that this is not a question that can be asked and answered once and for all. Kant gave a noble answer that the

Enlightenment means we exercise our independent thinking to free ourselves from the tutelage or guardianship of others. Since Kant, various authors revisited the idea of Enlightenment, developing answers related to and different from Kant. In the 20th century, Adorno and Horkheimer pointed out self-destructive seeds of the Enlightenment's instrumental rationality; and Foucault, furthermore, identified this side as the "blackmail of Enlightenment." For Foucault, we should inherit the positives of the Enlightenment and refuse its blackmail in order to continue the project of modernity.

From Kant, to Adorno and Horkheimer, and to Foucault, reflections on the Enlightenment show a serious critique of systematized modernity and acknowledge the contradictions and tensions of the concept. The word "Modernus," as is known, first came into existence in the 5th century to distinguish the "modern" society of Christianity from the older one of Roman Catholicism. And modern philosophy, in the practice of Descartes and Hegel, then embraced subjectivity as *ego sum cogito* and the reason-first tradition and defined modernity in those terms. These and other ideas constituted the Enlightenment. As Liu argues in his book, over-emphasizing this modernity sometimes leads to an oversight of other dimensions (including the aesthetic and cultural dimensions) of modernity. Liu thus suggests that the "Enlightenment is a contradictory historical movement with both its advantages and disadvantages"(5). In spite of all the improvements and benefits it has brought to human history, the Enlightenment's system of rationality, subjectivity and knowledge needs to be re-evaluated so that we can continue the Kantian dream of human freedom.

Drawing from Baudelaire, Flaubert, Chernyshevsky, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, Liu's book deconstructs the supremely unifying narrative of the Enlightenment. Such a way of studying modernity not only distinguishes the book as a postmodernist reading of modernity, but is in itself a fugue of modernity in that it synthesizes different notes and themes from various sources. Some, like Anthony Giddens, would suggest that there have existed two lines of critical reflections on modernity. Beginning from Baudelaire, as is richly discussed in Liu's book, and via Simmel to Foucault, who respectively focused on society and ethics, there evolved a history of aesthetic modernity, which modernity, in Giddens' term, is a "literary aesthetic concept." The second line was initiated by Max Weber, through the two generations of the Frankfurt School, from Adorno and Horkheimer to Habermas is the line which mainly focused on criticism of Enlightenment. This second line, for Giddens, is modernity as a "sociological-historical category." However, the two-line theory may have been challenged by Liu's book. While Liu's analysis of the 19th century European literature focuses on the aesthetic reflection on modernity, his poignant relevance to China nonetheless fits his study into the "sociological-historical category."

Liu's advocacy of an aesthetic modernity that responds to rational modernity is wonderfully expressed in his reading of the 19th century French writers from the developed Europe and the writers from the underdeveloped Russia. Baudelaire's poetry and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Gogol's short stories and Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, as well as Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, all of which, in Liu's analysis, mockingly criticizes an emergent culture of China's nouveau bourgeois and provoke Chinese readers to find historical mirrors for China's current struggle to develop a culture fitting for her

modernization. Liu is perhaps not unaware that the theme of aesthetic modernity has been a debated topic in the Chinese field of literature since the 1990s and that Chinese discourses of aesthetic modernity are circulated among literary critics as a critical and redeeming force to make up for the costs and blunders of China's modernization. Liu, as both a Chinese and American scholar concerned with China's way of modernization, sees it very clearly that in the ongoing project of modernity, what is rather spectacular is the ever increasing movement of revolt, the changing role of the individual's feeling and behavior in social reality, the changing structure of community ethics, as well as the generative reconstruction of the forms of culture as institution.

As it is the valuable insight of Liu's book, the modern value system created by the European Enlightenment has been a force to push forward reforms, but it also has substantial problems in its oversight of humanity and history (Liu 101). He doesn't say it too explicitly, but we feel his critical impulse in his careful exploration of the modernization projects of Paris and St. Petersburg as reflected in literature and we sense his deep concern with the blind blunders in China's massive modernization and the heavy costs arising therefrom. "After Haussmann, the ghost of Haussmann still looms large in many country's projects of urbanization. Politically, he may have gained an edge. Yet aesthetic judgment, as it is different from political judgment, springs from our humanity and has a very strong force of life as well as a very long memory. It reminds us of the fundamental value of human beings"(Liu 63). Among the consequences of modernization is a "culture" of the new rich marked by their bourgeois shallowness and glorified vulgarity (65, 68, 94, 101). As an antidote to the bourgeois culture, Liu speaks of an aesthetic wisdom which he continually elaborates through Baudelaire, Flaubert, Dostoevsky and most importantly, Nietzsche. Aesthetic wisdom is indeed greatly needed in today's China which is still suffering from a closed value system.

Hegel once said that the owl of Minerva won't fly out of the woods until the coming of dawn. When the optimism- and progress-driven narrative of modernity loses its appeal and validity, we will appreciate more the contrapuntal themes that constitute what Liu calls the fugue of modernity. In the context of globalization, modernity is a fluid concept, as Giddens says. In an age when modernity is global, different nationalities, cultures and countries inevitably will reform and reconstruct modernity according to their actual needs. That, too, is a point emphasized repeatedly in Liu's book. Modernity, therefore, is plural rather than single; it is a fugue, not the solo of the Western world.

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Xunwu Chen, *Justice, Humanity, and Social Toleration*. Lanham, MD: The Rowman & Littlefield, 2008. Pp.184.

THE SUBJECT-MATTER of justice is one of the enduring subject-matters of philosophy. The philosophical passion devoting to explore the theme of justice remains as strong today as it was in Plato's time. In the last three decades in the West, there has arisen a trend of comparative studies of the subject-matter. *Justice, Humanity, and Social Toleration* is part of such a trend. *Justice, Humanity, and Social Toleration* sets out to justice in general and requirements of justice in our time (such as social toleration and democracy).

It brings into dialogue between Chinese and Western philosophies on the subject-matter of justice. But the enterprise aims not at raising the MacIntyrean question "Whose Justice, which Rationality?" or advancing a postmodern view on justice. Instead, it aims at developing a formal concept of justice acceptable to all cultures. It may be too ambitious. Yet, following Kant and Habermas, influenced by thoughts of John Rawls, Thomas Scanlon, Christine Korsgaard and others, Chen believes firmly that there is such a thing called universal justice in spite of cultural diversity. Another core feature of *Justice, Humanity, and Social Toleration* is its focus on justice in human term, or its tenet of justice of humankind, for humankind, and for humankind. As Chen sees, only this kind of justice is relevant to our existence and worth our time and energy. Given both universalism and humanism have such a bad press in philosophy today, Chinese enterprise devoting to define formal human justice manifests distinctive spirit of swimming against the wave.

The narrative structure of the book is organized around the two concerns above. While Chapter 1 of the book is basically an introduction, chapters 2 is devoted to exploring the Chinese conception of justice. In particular, it explores four different meanings or concepts of *Zheng Yi*, the Chinese counterpart of the English term "justice". Digging into the Chinese traditional philosophical discourse on justice as rectification, truth, reason, essence, substance, and standards, Chen detects a common Chinese definition of formal justice as: "Justice is the condition in which the true, the authentic and great righteousness stands straight in social life; it is propriety or fitness of things that stand straight and embodies the good par excellence" (p.29). Taking this Chinese concept of formal justice as the starting point, Chapter 3 of the book sets out to develop a concept of formal justice in terms of humanity—that is, justice as setting things right, or in his own words, "setting things right and erecting righteousness" (p.165). In addition, starting with this concept of formal justice, Chen further proceeds to develop what he considers to be the third family of justice, along with distributive justice and corrective justice.

As justice is claimed to be exclusively of, by, and about humankind, Chen contends, there is one distinctive family of justice as setting things right righteously as setting *human affairs* right in terms of humanity. Chen dubs this family of justice as "normative justice", parallel to distributive justice and corrective justice. What is the distinct way in which normative justice makes human affairs just in the sense of setting them right? Chen contends that being distinguishable from both distributive justice that requires righteousness in distribution of natural and social resources and from corrective justice that requires righteousness in correction of the wrong and reward of the right,

normative justice requires righteousness on such basic human values as human rights, human goods (humanity as the end), and human bonds. Apparently, it is both necessary and legitimate to single out a concept of normative justice defined as “setting human affairs right in accordance with the principles of human rights, human goods (humanity as the end), and human bonds” (p. 49). It seems to Chen that the articulation of normative justice restores the universal conception of humanity, tightens the relation of justice to humanity, and rebuilds the theory of justice on a rational ground. Practically, normative justice imposes a set of duties or obligations on all members of humankind and provides ethical ground for the mental attitude of tolerance and the behavioral form of toleration, which in turn gives rise to the state of human affairs in which people remain harmonious while maintaining disagreements and stay unified while preserving diversity.

Chen’s further explications of normative justice and its theoretical and practical implications, however, invoke philosophical scrutiny on a number of issues. In his explanation of justice in terms of its relation to humanity Chen insists that the substance of justice is righteousness in and on the universal truths of humanity, where these truths are universal human rights, universal human goods, and universal human bonds” (p.78). However, justice so construed appears to be as much normative in character as is normative justice; and the concept of justice and that of normative justice appear to share similar intensions. Chen’s arguments about normative justice are constructed along two dimensions. On the one hand, normative justice demands that the respect for human rights and the treatment of humanity as the end be distributed to all members of humankind. On the other hand, normative justice dictates that humans have the duty or obligation to observe these principles of humanity and that any violation of these principles must be punished (in the legal context) or condemned (in the moral context) in order to make human affairs straight.

If we broaden our understanding of distributive and corrective ways of justice as well as all localizations of justice to include the principles of humanity, then the concept of justice and that of normative justice are identical extensionally. It seems that the readers of Chen’s book would be much less encouraged to accept the new discovery of normative justice than to adopt more moderate reform by enriching the concept of justice with the notion of normativity and broadening substantive forms of justice to include the principles of humanity.

A fundamental assumption underlying Chen’s thought experiment on the notion of normative justice is that justice is *intrinsic* to humanity (p. 44) or that there is *internal* connection between justice and humanity (p. 57). This essentialist assumption may gear the reader to the wonder about what justice is for. Chen’s arguments that justice has the function of rectifying human beings and making them virtuous, that it is a means to achieve human end, and that it is a form of loyalty to humanity are quite convincing. However, justice would be unnecessary if it were an intrinsic property of humanity though humanity may be intrinsic to justice. Here the problem is not so much metaphysical but rather empirical one. That there isn’t a necessary connection between justice and human individual or institutional behavior is an undeniable empirical fact; and this fact seems to impede any metaphysical manoeuvre leading to the point where justice becomes an intrinsic good in humanity. A direct consequence of this fact is that humankind is constantly under the evolutionary pressure to get human

affairs right. With reference to the evolutionary pressure, Chen's argument that humanity is intrinsic to justice is instrumental to understanding of justice as being normative in character because this argument makes it prominent that the one-way intrinsic relation is what justice was established for and what it has evolved for. But, this argument trivializes the project of extracting a notion of normative justice. One way out of the dilemma is to elaborate the humanistic normativity of justice and this kind of elaboration is a prominent outcome of Chen's thought experiment.

Chen's essentialist assumption goes hand in hand with his metaphysical assumption that there exist "universal" or "common" human rights, goods, and bonds. For Chen, these universalities are the truths of humanity; and they constitute the essence or normative identity of, and are embodied in, all human beings. In response to possible objections from empiricism and postmodernism, Chen offers a transcendental argument that the existence of various human attributes entails the existence of humanity as the substance, an empirical argument that humankind as a distinct species must possess the property of unity that differentiates it from other species, and a pragmatic argument that we would be better off believing in the universalist conception of humanity. In response to possible challenges from relativism, Chen advances a context-oriented account of justice to embrace the idea that the embodiments of universality may be particularized contextually. Thus, "human justice is universal and particular, absolute and historical" (p. 88). Here the reader is offered a rationalist meal with an empiricist flavor or a Platonic Form with Aristotelian modifications.

Chen's experiment invokes centuries-old problems about humanity—Is humanity universally shared by all members of humankind or particular to individual members? Is it a persistent property or a creative act? Is it a natural endowment or a cultural achievement? A part of Chen's thought experiment is an attempt to settle a compromising ground for solutions to these problems. An apparent difficulty here is how to allow justice to be context-oriented while disallowing a contextual pressure, or an interpretation of the pressure, to bend the rule of justice. Chen's strategy is to appeal to human reason—listening to the voice of reason, as he says. This brings us to another fundamental assumption underlying Chen's thought experiment. Chen believes that there is a mutual entailment between "the idea of justice and the idea of the rule of reason" (p.166). Reason commands humans to be just and justice makes humans reasonable. This is, Chen explains, why justice can be particularized without being sacrificed. To be differentiated from the Enlightenment mentality, the rule of reason is characterized as "the unforced force of reason" (p. 41).

The philosophical ancestries across world cultures left us a puzzle of positioning reason and justice in the right order. One can be rational without getting things right and one can get things right without being rational. Reason is not always just and justice is sometime unreasonable. Would the Enlightenment mentality with postmodernist modifications solve the puzzle? World philosophical traditions have gone in different directions. For many Asian philosophies, at least for the main stream of Chinese philosophy, reason must be qualified, or even restricted, by goodness, and it has to be so qualified and restricted that whatever is reasonable must be good in the first place. Whereas for many western philosophies, at least the main stream of analytical tradition,

whatever is good must be reasonable in the first place. Chen's book exhibits a genuine effort to bridge the chasm.

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