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Noel Polk

## Living Outside of History

The autobiographical impulse is the curse of the aging – and the bane of everybody else. I have long since stopped trying to interest my children in my – and their – antecedents: they turn not even deaf ears but merely bored ones to my thrilling tales of yesteryear just as, I confess, I mostly turned deaf ears to my own parents' actually quite interesting memories of Depression Mississippi and even earlier. In fact, though, I can't really blame my children since the parts of my childhood that I remember, the bland fifties, wouldn't register on many scales as much of a childhood: I lived across the street from my grammar school and barely a block or two from junior high and high schools, so I had no weary tales of five-mile trudges barefoot through the snow to school; I was a city boy, so no tales of getting up at 4 a.m. to milk the cows before trudging barefoot five miles through the snow to school – and not much snow in South Mississippi anyway. But the autobiographical impulse strikes anyway, and we are nearly always helpless when it does, and so in spite of what I am about to say tonight, I may be more of a Southerner than I care to admit, since I can't seem to stop talking. I want to try to bring together a couple of things that I think are related, or hope they are; they are, at any rate, things on my mind greatly of late, for a variety of reasons.

My main title – “Living Outside of History” – is a perhaps too clever play on the title of my little book about the town of Picayune, Mississippi, where I grew up in that little corner of Southeast Mississippi just north of New Orleans and bordering on the Gulf Coast. I called the book *Outside the Southern Myth*; it was a meditation on lots of things connected with my growing up southern in a geographical sense but not really in any sort of historical sense. That is, Picayune and most of the Piney Woods were not, are not, southern in the same way that Natchez, Columbus, Oxford, Selma, Birmingham, Jackson, and the Mississippi Delta are. Indeed, we are somehow not even as *Mississippi* as the rest of the state is, apparently – especially if the Delta, as Jim Cobb would have it, is “the most Southern place on earth” – since we Piney Woodsers seem to get left out when anybody takes a group photo: we are perennially overlooked, like the ugly stepchild or the ungainly sibling – not an embarrassment, not shunned exactly, and not even with particular malice, but just sort of overlooked, forgotten, erased. Books called *Mississippi* sort of routinely leave the Piney Woods out.

In fact, history never seemed of much interest to Picayunites, as a whole. The one antebellum house in the region was privately owned and operated and since hardly anybody came to Picayune except to see somebody who lived there it hadn't been turned in to a bed & breakfast residence. It was also at the end of a very long driveway which made driving past it to show friends impossible. I actually laid eyes on it only once in twenty years – when I went there with a friend to run an errand. Grampaw Grady Thigpen, one of Picayune's half-dozen real patriarchs, did a yeoman's and commendable job of interviewing the older folks in the Picayune area, particularly those from Turtleskin and Gainesville, and of recording those interviews in a series of books he published himself, to record the old times, especially beginning in the late fifties when the most impossible of rumors exploded throughout the region that NASA would move in and take us into outer space, although to get us there it would have to destroy much of the area's early history at Gainesville, Pearlington, Logtown, and Turtleskin. There was some muttering among a few naysayers and discontents, but most of us were proud to be on the solar map, and a few cemeteries and old houses were a small price to pay to belong to the universe – especially since the houses and cemeteries to be lost were somebody *else's*, not Picayune's. But even Grampaw Grady's books are histories only in the sense that they are about the past – or rather they are about what people remembered about the past; and they were generic history: they describe almost nothing that is peculiar to Mississippi or to the South: most of what happened there could have happened anywhere with similar geography. Picayune, sitting high and sitting pretty, was saved, apparently, because it had managed to situate itself on the *one spot in all of Southeast Mississippi* where nothing had ever happened. We even erased the one trace of Indian life in the area by simplifying the perfectly marvelous name of the Hobolochitto River to Boley Creek. It tells a lot that we had no kind of monument to our war dead until 1988. And though several times over the past five or six years I have asked several in Picayune what plans are being made for its upcoming centennial, I have gotten no response that indicates that anybody actually cares whether there's a centennial celebration or not. Actually, I find this kind of charming, even refreshing, given the worship of the South's past in so many places – a worship that always looks to me like enslavement.

But I'm far from complaining, really, no matter how much like whining this sounds, since growing up outside of history – or at any rate growing up in a sort of time-warp where southern history was a kind of distant bell – gave me certain advantages – or I call them advantages, might as well, as a default option, since whether they are advantages or not they are what history – or historylessness – handed me at birth and there's not a lot I can do about that. I can never have been born in Natchez or Oxford or the Delta,

desirable as that might be, no matter how hard I try, so I might as well accept my Picayunist status and get on with my life, and I hope to succeed pretty soon.

It is as if Picayune had succeeded in hiding from the rest of Mississippi and the South, swaddled as we were in those tall gorgeous pines, as if we did everything we possibly could to avoid calling attention to ourselves, to diminish our presence. Even the name *Picayune*, surely the oddest, most bizarre name ever bestowed upon a town, not only suggested or implied but actually *claimed* its kinship with the smallest, the least valuable, the least inspiring, identified it with small-mindedness and pettiness: by naming it, the city parents described it as something worthless and uninteresting, something to be avoided, if possible. It is not a name that attached us to the glories of the past or to the aspirations of the future. The name, it would seem, stuck us smack dab in the present, the current moment; like the daily newspaper which a Picayune bought, life went on by the day, each day different, each day the same. The name was apparently given to us by Eliza Jane Poitevent Nicholson, the woman editor of the New Orleans newspaper by that name, who lived in our antebellum house; at very least the town was named in honor of her exalted position on that paper. Since she had already given her married name, Nicholson, to a small railroad stop two or three miles south of Picayune, we can only speculate whether the namers ever considered calling our community Poitevent or even Eliza Jane. I confess I have often wondered what it would have been like to grow up in Eliza Jane, Mississippi, and whether Jesus could have ever been lord over Eliza Jane, as the signs proclaim him to be over Picayune.

So: I grew up outside the Southern myth, by which I mean, of course, that portion of southern history, that part of the public image of the South that belongs to Natchez, Vicksburg, and Oxford, but which attaches itself to all the rest of us, and that has accounted for a lot. There were no Civil War battles in the area, so we had no statues of Civil War heroes adorning the courthouse square: we had no courthouse square, for that matter. We had no huge courthouse or antebellum mansions which we showed to visitors. I never to my knowledge talked to a Civil War veteran or anybody else who knew one, and I never heard tales about *The War* from uncles and aunts. Andrew Jackson and his merry men apparently marched through the area, even camped there, on the way to fight the Battle of New Orleans, but that was in another war and so does not really count. I did not grow up imbibing from my mother's milk or from any ancestors an overwhelming sense of myself *as a southerner*. I did not grow up surrounded by natural-born story-tellers and we did not sit around the veranda of an afternoon sipping toddies or moonshine, telling and retelling enthralling family legends. I had only one uncle who fancied himself a raconteur, who would stumble through a joke and laugh himself into hysterics while repeating the punch line every time his audience's polite

laughter subsided. When I studied Mississippi and southern history in high school I might as well have been studying the history of Afghanistan; and I still cannot keep the names of Confederate and Union generals straight.

Oh, like Doris Betts, I can *do southern*, of course, because I have been around a bit and know all the *signs* that folks take for southern: I can supply southern upon demand or expectation for those who think they want southern. I can give you what I think you think you want, and I do so partly because it's fun to put you on, but also partly because it's often easier to give you what you want than to expect you to accept something other than what you are going to see no matter what you are looking at. I can hunker for hours, eat grits by the gallon, talk with a twang and a drawl, but I draw the line at chewing tobacco and dipping snuff; I own three Patsy Cline and a dozen Willie Nelson albums and mostly sing Hank Williams, Sr., in the shower. I can fry catfish and hushpuppies and drink large quantities of Dixie or any other kind of beer while doing so, and the clerk in my local liquor store used to be a guy named Billy Bob who once sold me a bottle of what he called *pie-not nawer* wine. I can preach you a sermon that'll make you want to be a Southern Baptist and make your mama and papa send me their social security checks every month. I can do Rhett to your Scarlett and, given enough time and incentive, Scarlett to your Rhett. *BUT* I also drink St. Emilion and eat Beluga caviar. If forced to choose I would listen to Kiri Te Kanawa, Renee Fleming, and Elizabeth Schwarzkopf rather than Patsy Cline and Loretta Lynn. On good days I can spell Nietzsche and Kierkegaard and would drive a Porsche if I could afford one. I do not come from a slaveholding family; nobody that I know of in my ancestry was a Confederate soldier. My history is thus more pathetic than tragic, and the things I feel guilty about are none of your damned business.

I want to tell you my puzzlement when I discovered that Picayune had no part of the Civil War, and so shared in none of the glorious exploits of those who created that Southern heritage that still makes grown men and women weep to share. Oh, we were required to take History, of course: the curriculum at Picayune High School, we believed, was even designed so that the one teacher everybody had to take before graduating was the History teacher, Mrs. Richardson, a classic, a cliché from all our childhoods: you have *ALL* known her, in one guise or another. But the main feature of history in her classes was our collective interest in whether she would ever find a brassiere that fit: we even occasionally pooled bets on how many times during class she would reach under her collar to adjust those straps. And so it comes as something of a shock to recall the *one fact* that I gleaned from her classes. It was a moment in my 10<sup>th</sup>-grade history class in 1959, I believe, when Mrs. Richardson came smirking into class one morning brandishing a newspaper and announced that the last Civil War veteran had just

died – finally, I gathered. I remember it that she said he was a Mississippian, from just up highway 11 in Poplarville. “You know what this means, dont you?” she said, with the only twinkle I ever saw in her very serious eyes. We didn’t. “It means the South has finally won the Civil War!” She announced this as something momentous, but we either hadn’t gotten to the Civil War yet in American History or, more likely, I was not paying attention during Pickett’s charge or Vicksburg or Jackson or Appomattox. So I was more mystified than elated at the news that we had won! Won *What?* I wondered. What war? What the hell is she talking about? I knew about World War II because my father had fought in it, and about Korea because I had seen it on television. But Natchez and Vicksburg were foreign countries to me, part of a time and place I had not inherited and knew nothing about.

So that to learn that *we* had just won a war I didn’t even know we were fighting, much less *still* fighting set in motion a lifelong puzzlement and distress for me and lodged me firmly in a historical gap, a chasm, of history, which seemed to shut me off from a past that everybody seemed to have but us Picayunites, or maybe it was only I who didn’t have it. So in Picayune I was outside of history, but I began catching up, or trying to, when as an undergraduate just outside of Jackson, Mississippi, I learned that the war in fact had *not* been won but was an ongoing battle. I heard Ross Barnett incite Mississippians to mob rule at an Ole Miss-Kentucky football game and then, within a week or so, listening to the carnage at Ole Miss on radio stations that played “Dixie” instead of commercials; and I read and heard as the freedom riders and marchers and demonstrators made their way through the South; listened and read and shuddered as the names Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner emblazoned themselves across America’s beautiful for spacious skies and amber waves of grain. I did have the grace to be embarrassed, humiliated even, when Lawrence Rainey’s tobacco-stuffed face leered at the nation in *Life Magazine*’s famous photo of him sitting in the courtroom with his cronies; and at Mississippi College I met and got to know one of the sweetest girls I *ever* knew: she became a kindergarten teacher, and was killed in the summer of 1968 in a shootout with the FBI as she and her lover were transporting in the trunk of their car a bomb to place in a synagogue in Meridian. The Jackson papers extolled her virtues and praised Mississippi College for making such fine young people possible. All this without hearing a shot myself, without seeing a klan cross-burning, without witnessing a lynching, and almost without witnessing so much as a single act of discourtesy of any kind between the races. Running, still trying to catch up, but still not mine, not even as the bodies continued to pile up over a century after Appomattox.

But perhaps running away from, not toward: it was still not my war, not my history, not the history that positioned *me* in time and space, since I was not Natchez or the Delta

but merely small, twentieth-century middleclass, historyless Picayune. In graduate school in the late sixties I was catching up, but still running at a distance. In South Carolina I was advised that in fact the North had won the war and that everybody in South Carolina was still mightily pissed off about it. I was astonished to meet 80 year olds who were still mad as hell at Sherman in particular for burning Atlanta and in *particular* particular for burning Columbia, the houses where their parents and grandparents had lived; they took the burnings very personally – which, as I once suggested to one of them, was exactly what Sherman had intended, wasn't it? I met professors and other graduate students who knew details of Antietam, Shiloh, and Chickamauga that I had only recently read about in Faulkner and who boasted of their own ancestors' heroism at Petersburg or Cold Harbor, and I kept quiet when they all assumed that because I was a Mississippian I had similar stories about my own family which I for some reason did not want to share. And some of these today, nearly forty years later, are still promoting the delusion that that damned war destroyed the last ordered society civilization has known – without, of course, considering on whose black backs, by whose black sweat, that order, those antebellum mansions, had been built. *Order?* I thought, even then: *for whom?* I had no such ancestors, no such connections, no such history as they had. As I've said, I could never even keep the Confederate and Federal generals straight (still can't, now after 2 volumes of Shelby Foote's magnificent history of the war and Ken Burns's documentary). That war was on the one hand a great Black Hole into which drained so much of the twentieth century I encountered when I left Picayune and threatened to suck me through along with everything else; and on the other hand a kind of challenge to me since because I liked reading and writing about Faulkner, I seemed inevitably and understandably taken to be *in* Southern Studies, where folks would expect me to know all there was to know about The Wilderness and Lookout Mountain. But not my history, not yet, and thanking God, for that war was indeed a hard war to love. You have to work hard to love any war, I'd say, much less to love one you had *lost*.

Not my history, not my war even yet, when back in Mississippi for good some 25 years ago, I took visitors to Natchez and listened as the tour guides told us all about the beauty of the antebellum mansions but said not one single solitary word about the black sweat that made them possible, watched continuing battles in the newspapers and the legislature, often joining them myself, over the replication of the confederate flag in the Mississippi state flag until finally our legislature heroically decided to turn the choice of state flag over to the Mississippi voters who *of course you bet your season tickets to Ole Miss football* voted to keep the flag as it was, flying confederately and smugly over capitol and all state institutions. So it was my history, after all, when our governor

attended a press conference to announce that there would be no more set-asides for minority contractors wearing a wide gray tie on which Rebel soldiers hoisted the confederate flag high.

My war, finally, then, at that moment: and it always has been, it and all its afterglow, which I never feel more bitterly – and bemusedly too – than when I travel and meet people who type me because I am a Mississippian. I'm bemused because I know better; bitter because I know our accusers have ample justification for thinking of all Mississippians that way, given how often we shoot ourselves in our social and cultural and political feet; and when candidates for jobs come to my campus for interviews and are *still* surprised that we have sidewalks and McDonald's and Porsches and BMWs, and report how many of their friends and family had questioned their intelligence and sanity by presuming to seek employment in savage, redneck, racist Mississippi. It is my war, my history most galling of all, in my recognition that I was going to be tarred with it no matter what I said or did or was or tried to be: racist, redneck, ignoramus, and, almost worst of all, backwardlooking. And all the more reason to hate that damned war, since *I did not and do not want it*. But I did not want to go back to Picayune either, though I came close, by moving to Hattiesburg and it has been mine these 25 years.

For me, history was something that happened somewhere else, in another country, countries as far away as Natchez and Oxford – and I don't mean miles. I vaguely knew that history had happened in New Orleans, where I went at every opportunity, but I had very little larger sense of its history than the general signs partly in a foreign language that I read and immediately forgot. So that I seem to have grown up in a historical vacuum of sorts, an area swaddled in pine trees that seemed to keep time, history out, to insulate us not from change so much as from any of the traditions, good or bad, by which so many Mississippi towns, even Piney Woods towns further west and south, created an identity that connected them to the past, and therefore for better or worse gave them a foothold on the present, a solid place to look *from*.

If anything, our eyes seemed always on the future: we mushroomed around the railroad that came through carrying folks to Chicago and other points north; we rejoiced when the interstate came through, and didn't worry too much, that I could tell, over the possibility that a great influx of New Orleanseans might make of Picayune a bedroom community and so change its demographics and its bland social life (though there would have been considerable concern over the possibility that some of those Cajun catholic folks might want to be able to buy beer at the 7-11); and we rejoiced when NASA announced it was on the way, to the point of naming our first shopping mall the Space Flight Plaza Mall, a quite wonderful and even preposterous ecstatic *overreach*, it seemed to me even then, to attempt to catch the tail of the first rocket to the moon and to ride

along with it. Picayune was ever a waystation for folks on their way from one place to another, folks escaping the past into an unknown, unknowable future. That is, Picayune's motto seems always to have been: *we start today*, not yesterday. We look forward, if only because we have no Backward to look at. Picayune was Ground Zero.

Growing up without history, I say, and with eyes pointed by default into the future, I had no solid place to stand on the slippery slopes, the constantly shifting and destabilizing sands of the present moment, no already-established points of view to guide my understanding of what was happening, no traditions to accept or to rebel against, to help me make sense of things, which is, of course, among the important things that history does for us. I had no sense of *process*, of how things got to be the way they are, the step by step accretion of action, reaction, and consequence, cause and effect multiplying themselves infinitely over the years. Oh, I knew well enough that things happened in the past, but they seemed unconnected to each other, and unconnected to me. It never occurred to me that any of the citizens of Picayune, other than my own parents, actually had a *reason* for coming to live in that little place; they just seemed to me to have appeared there one fine morning and settled down. It never occurred to me to wonder how things, people, *started*, how they got to be where and what they were. It is more than difficult for me to confess these things to this group, since I know you are shaking your heads at least internally, pointing out to yourselves my own obtuseness, my own purblindness; and I agree that a good deal of what I describe today was my own intellectual and emotional limitations that caused me to miss so much; no doubt they are still at work. But work with me, please, since I am talking about how it seemed to me, one person, not necessarily how it actually was.

Such a start in life, though, isn't necessarily all that bad; since without a ready-made history to tell me what I thought and saw, a condition which could have been a considerable advantage to a worthier pair of eyes, the advantage of being able to see things for the first time, to experience things for the first time and to try to understand them, or even describe them, on their own terms instead of the terms history handed me. I had precious little of the state's racial history to explain, for example, either to defend or accuse: Yes, I know that Pearl River County occasioned Theodore G. Bilbo and Mack Charles Parker, and I know they didn't occur in a historical vacuum – though in fact Bilbo and Parker are more closely associated with Poplarville than with Picayune and in fact the Parker episode did seem to come out of nowhere and was as strange to my youth as a mountain in the Mississippi Delta would be. Picayune's protective bubble gave, but it did not give way. I know from my own family that all that history, all those blunders, lay simply quiescent during the fifties and erupted in racial conflict at Picayune High during the eighties; but I am speaking here of how Mississippi's and the South's history

intruded, or did not intrude, on us at Picayune in the fifties, how Picayune seemed to me so oblivious to its southernness, so innocent of any collective need to claim any history at all, who were dead set on the future.

I'm not sentimentalizing the fifties in Picayune, I hope: it was not an Eden, to be sure, since I was aware of change, of something energetic and dynamic about those days. There were, still are, those truly wonderful pine trees everywhere, thanks to Lynn and Stewart Gammill, some few live oaks here and there along the Pear River. I saw the logging trucks that pulled the cut trees from the forest and I lived barely two or three blocks from the sawmill the trucks brought them to; I heard the saws rip them in to lumber; I saw the gleaming bright boards stacked by the thousands, probably by the millions. So I know they – the loggers, the lumbermen – were cutting the timber, but I was never conscious of any diminishment of the forests that has distressed so many southerners and northerners too who read Faulkner's "The Bear" – read it wrongly, I should say – and who inevitably saw lumbermills as scenes of despoliation; despoiling not just the wilderness but Eden too, they were tools of Satan. Faulkner disparaged the *waste* of natural resources, not their uses, and I saw little waste.

I had no sense that anything was being destroyed, but rather in fact that the lumber was the spawn not of Satan but of very creation itself, and that in the Piney Woods around Picayune at least, creation and destruction fed on each other in a perfectly balanced symbiosis of nature and people and need. I had the great good fortune to know L. O. Crosby, Jr., as the father of two of my friends, and had the opportunity on several occasions to follow with his son Oz and other friends through the woods at Camp Tiak just outside Wiggins, as he talked lovingly about the trees, teaching us the difference between short-leaf and long-leaf pine, which was easy to spot, and slash and loblolly, which was not. At any rate I got from him and such experiences in Boy Scouts a city boy's sense of the Big Woods as *useful* rather than merely holy or merely mystical and symbolic: I saw the forests being replanted as they were cut and so knew the Pine Forests as dynamic and not static, as existing *in* time rather than *before* time, as Faulkner's Isaac McCaslin – but not Faulkner – would have it: cities cannot be unless at least some of the natural world is sacrificed to it.

Thus the Picayune of the fifties seems to me now a place where the South started over, could start over because it was free of so many of the blemishes, the irreparable blunders of the past that marked other parts of the state so indelibly and not incidentally made them so interesting for historians and buffs and tourists alike.

Picayune, historyless itself, swallowed up the relicts of Gainesville and Turtleskin by offering them a place to come to to start over after being dislodged from their own history, where they had always shopped anyway. It had done that for others, too, among

them my own father who came to Picayune to start his own life over. In *Outside the Southern Myth* I talk about him in a chapter called “My Father, Flem Snopes,” because like thousands of other southerners, he and Flem left the farm in order to be city boys; Flem, as you know, has been castigated over and over again for escaping the land, for becoming a merchant, a banker, a deacon, the devil-spawn of the middle-class mind; but Faulkner told Flem’s story through other people’s reactions to him; Flem never gets to tell his side of things. When I began to understand my father, I believe I got somewhere close to Flem’s own story.

What Picayune represented to my father was opportunity: the future. He wanted to escape his past, his origins: not a bad desire, of itself, and easier to understand if you don’t – like a lot of city folks, like a lot of urban and otherwise urbane critics who have swallowed the Fugitives’ agrarian line – sentimentalize rural life. It is quite simple to understand, however, if you can see things from the point of view of the escapee, the real twentieth-century fugitive, who makes those ideologues from Nashville look like Bossman on a chain gang. I’ve no doubt that some real sense of the possibilities of the American Dream drove my father almost from the beginning; I’ve also no doubt that he was less driven by the dream than by the white-hot burning desire not to have to spend the rest of his life plowing to make a living. All of the children, he and all his siblings except his older sister moved away from farming as soon as they could. He never talked much about farming, and so I cannot identify from the highway any crop less obvious than corn or cotton in bloom. So far as I could tell, he felt no need to *be southern* in any but the geographical sense. He never mentioned Robert E. Lee or Jefferson Davis either, that I remember, and I doubt if he could have outlined the Battles of Gettysburg or Shiloh or the Wilderness. He simply didn’t have time for history, anybody’s but his own, and was running like hell from that. He was much more interested in his future and ours, was as committed to the present and the future as NASA was; he was as committed to being by God middle class and by God American and by God cityfolks as he could possibly be, and I expect he’d have willingly run every tree in Pearl River County through the planing mill to make all that happen. And I expect he wasn’t alone either.

He turned his back to, if not on, his rural origins and, like Scarlet O’Hara, swore never to be poor again. He moved to Picayune in 1939. He was twenty-two, with a high school education, a fugitive from the Depression in rural Mississippi. Picayune was actually incidental; his father came to pastor at a church in Nicholson, a couple of miles south, and he followed to seek his fortune in the big city. He took a job as a night clerk in a service station owned by Bill Alexander, spent his days moonlighting by borrowing one of Alexander’s pickup trucks and driving satsumas to Monticello to sell, so that he could visit my mother-to-be.

When he and Mother got married Alexander raised his salary from \$15 to \$20 a week. In 1943 he was inducted into the army and was wounded in Italy. After the war he worked as a chief clerk for Schrock's Western Auto Associate Store and then for a while for Bo Stevens in a similar capacity. From them he learned the trade. In 1953 he decided he wanted to be the boss himself; he bought a Firestone Tire & Rubber Company franchise, and sold Firestone tires and Philco appliances for the rest of his life.

He explained his nerves as the result of his experiences in Italy. No doubt: I have seen him tremble watching news footage of the Korean War on television; he would not, did not at any rate, talk very much about the war, and would not watch a movie in which there were battle scenes. I suspect that he suffered from a version of what we now call post-trauma stress syndrome most of his post-war life, and that that was at the base of a lot of his, and our, problems. My mother and my Aunt Virginia assure me that he returned from the War a different person. But I, of course, didn't know him before the War and so had nothing to compare him to, no reason to compare him to anything but my own need.

The store's essential product was the middle class life: we sold Firestone tires and various other appliances and devices for the good life: refrigerators, ranges, washers and dryers, lawn mowers and parts, shotguns and rifles, fishing gear, radios and televisions and hi-fi equipment. It was a small hardware version of an old-fashioned general store and a risky proposition, since there were at least three or four other similar stores in small-city Picayune, stores much larger and better equipped, much older and more established in the community, with a wider range of choices.

I was ten in 1953. I spent my teen years watching and, I like to think, helping him build a business. He kept citing frightening statistics about the number of failures among newly-started businesses like his and vowing that that was not going to happen to him – us. I never did know, still don't know, how he managed to make a decent living; perhaps I don't want to know. I don't know what combination of the power of his personality, the quality of the Firestone and Philco line of products, dogged hard work, under-the-table financial deals, or simple good luck made the Firestone store a go. He did work hard. He left home early, sometimes way before dawn, and came home late, sometimes spending twenty or so hours a day at one or another aspects of the business. He could afford to employ only two or three people at any given time – a bookkeeper, a salesman/assistant manager, someone to change the tires, to deliver and install air conditioners and washing machines – so he had to tend to a lot of the store's activities himself, both managerial and menial: delivering appliances, changing tires, repairing lawn mower engines, installing TV antennas. When bookkeeperless, he would sometimes go the store at four a.m. to post the previous day's receipts, before opening the doors at seven. When he

closed at six p.m., he would come home for supper, then perhaps head back to the store to catch up on the lawn mower engines that had been brought in for repair; frequently he would then go “collecting,” looking for people who were behind in their payments, tracking them down in their homes and if necessary repossessing the item they had bought. Sometimes I would go with him, when the item to be repossessed was so large he couldn’t handle it by himself; but he could singlehandedly load almost anything into the pickup, even a large refrigerator. I could too, after some practice.

By 1968 he had indeed made a go of the store; it was beginning to pay off in all the ways he wanted it to. As he became successful, he was invited to join the Rotary Club, and was very proud to associate with some of Picayune’s older and more distinguished people. He became a deacon in the First Baptist Church. He became a Shriner. He bought nice clothes in Dallas when we went there to visit his brother, and he enjoyed telling about the shopping, the purchase. Picayune wasn’t big enough for him.

For fifteen years he worked like a dog to make a go of it, and died of a massive heart attack, his first, on a hot July day in 1968, literally from the strain of overwork, changing a huge truck tire (a very complicated and physically demanding process in those days), because there was nobody else to do it.

I fear that much in this minimalist sketch of his life will leave the impression that I accuse him of Babbitry, of a shallow chamber-of-commerce quest for material certification; that I present him as a parody of the American Dream. Nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, that is precisely the opposite impression I want to create. There is nothing parodic about his life, certainly not if seen from his own point of view or that of thousands of others across the South who shared that same quest. You can see the outlines of parody only if you are sufficiently a Have as to see him and his like as pretenders. He wasn’t pretending. Not a bone in his body was faking anything. He desperately wanted a share of the good life and it wasn’t his fault if he didn’t have the luxuries of place and fortune, wasn’t the prince of a Delta of Natchez plantation family, that would have allowed him some, any, distance on himself and his dream – luxuries that I do have, largely thanks to him. He was too seriously involved in escape and survival to see himself, or to allow anyone else to see him, as anything to laugh about. It is essential to grant him the absolute dignity and seriousness of purpose that he invested his own life with.

He hated life in the country, as I say, but life in the city was also a serious, serious business. He told me that he often had to do things to survive in business that were unethical, though he was never very specific about what those things were, and I have often wondered why he told me about them – to keep me from discovering them

independently, perhaps, though I did so little with the store's financial records that that was not really likely. To implicate me? I doubt it, since he knew I had no plans to inherit the store and its good will. To be honest with me about the real world? To confess?

The city presented more serious problems, too. I ran across a picture of him during his early days in Picayune some years ago when I was reading through microfilm copies of the Picayune *Item*. The accompanying story reported that he had been the victim of a holdup at Bill Alexander's service station, on the main drag of town, where Canal Street crosses Highway 11. The thieves held a gun to his head, forced him to the floor, and fled with the cash in the till and a tank full of gas. He never mentioned it and I didn't discover it until long after he was dead. I doubt that he forgot it, as I cannot.

I have tried to meditate on this scene, but without much luck. I would like to structure my way into his mind as he lay on that cold floor waiting for those invasive strangers to empty the cash register and perhaps to shoot his young life casually through the head, but I cannot do it, boggling perhaps at the picture of my own life spread so receptively there upon a cold grease-stained gas station floor, my own preemption a cold barrel nuzzling behind my notyet father's ear. Perhaps it's just that I cannot impute fear or helplessness to him, not even at twenty-two. Try as I might, I cannot impose on him at twenty-two what I would have felt at twenty-two or any other age with a gun at my head (though of course that gun *was* at my head). He must have felt fear and helplessness, as he must have felt them later, during the War; this perhaps explains why he would not speak of either or at least did not, since to speak of them would admit not weakness but vulnerability – which, like respect and respectability, are different but not incompatible. What is respectability anyway but a shoring up against vulnerability?

What really terrified him in the city, I suspect, was of another order altogether. The summer following my tenth grade, I think it was, he and I worked the Firestone Store mostly by ourselves: just the two of us to do all the store's activities of selling, sweeping, installing, delivering, collecting. In some ways we were closer than ever, but the summer was unrelenting in its pressure on both of us, he to make a living, I to get along with him, to contribute. I worked most days from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. or so; it was one of those several stretches when he started at 3 or 4 a.m. and didn't come home until around midnight, sometimes later. If I sometimes went home at lunch he frequently didn't, and I'd bring him a plate lunch or a sandwich; Mother would even more frequently bring us both a meal of some sort. Usually around closing time he would tell me to bring the display merchandise – lawn mowers and cane fishing poles – in from the front, to drive the pickup home and he'd call me or Mother when he was ready to leave. We locked the rear entrance to the store from the inside, so that when we went home together in the evening,

one of us would go out the back and drive the pickup to the front while the other locked the back door and met the truck at the front.

On this evening he told me to go ahead home and he'd call. We lived barely a half mile from the store and, because I wanted to walk and dawdle and probably because I just didn't want to be obligated to come back to get him later, I brought the truck around, parked it in front where he'd have to see it, then began my mindless walk home. I had not gone five blocks when he caught up with me. He jerked the truck over toward the sidewalk I was on, slammed the brakes, and said "Get in this truck, boy." He was angrier than I had ever seen him. He spoke softly, but I could hear him over the blaring retributive squeal of the brakes. I got in, shaken, not knowing what I had done; but this was a more or less permanent condition, not knowing what I had done that would eventually turn out to be wrong. He jerked the truck into first gear, pulled off so hard my head bumped against the back window, and sped the rest of the way home as if running from something. He turned into our driveway, lurched to a gravelly stop behind our new high-finned Chrysler and said, "I don't work twenty hours a day to pay for a car and a truck so that my family has to be seen *walking*," and he leaned over me and opened the door. I couldn't even think, much less say, "But I wanted to walk. I *wanted* to." I could only get out of the truck, watch him slam into reverse, slew backwards out into the street, and gun it on back in the direction of the store.

I am still stunned by this, nearly fifty years later; even then I knew that it came from out of nowhere, both its intensity and its devastating originality. It was light years outside the widest range of errors I thought I might ever be guilty of: walking home. From this distance I can attribute motives, probable causes, and I have tried to teach myself that to understand is to forgive: who to know what encounter with what richer folks at the Rotary Club, what innocent jest, what crack, overheard by what improbable chance, had set him off, reminded him of his many long walks to town or to a neighbors' or even just of the time when he didn't have other transportation than his feet? Even so, I cannot account for, or forgive, his exceptional fury. Understanding and forgiveness are not the same, not necessarily even related.

I don't remember what passed for the next three or four hours, whether I talked to Mother about what had happened or not, whether I actually cried or, as usual, just bore it silently, loud as it was. I only remember myself in my bed in my room at the front of the house, in the dark, wide awake and wishing I – or he – were dead, wishing I could figure out how to make him happy somehow, not suspecting that he was probably even unhappier than I, more out-of-place than I, and much less likely than I ever to understand what he'd done. I lay there opening myself to hatred, almost convincing myself of its power to immobilize him, to shut him out of my emotional concerns: that

was the only power I had over him. And then came the only apology he ever offered me, an apology which, in being even more complicated than the affront, denied me that saving hatred.

Lying there, in more than one kind of darkness, I had no idea of the time. I heard the house's reverberating wood signal his arrival home. He and Mother talked, I do not know about what; perhaps she remonstrated with him. Some time later, long enough for him to have stewed, bathed, prepared for bed, he came to my room. I was preternaturally aware of every sound as he walked the long hall toward my room. He knocked and I said "come in." He opened the door in the dark and I remembered in a flash that I hadn't closed the door to the cedar chest closet, which opened toward the door behind which he stood repentant. But no sooner than I regretted my carelessness, he entered the room. I heard the *bump* and then the silence, into which I plummeted in freefall. I knew from the sound that he had bumped his head and I hoped he hadn't put his eye out on the sharp shaped corner. It was bad enough but he said nothing, and after a pause, he came on to my bed. He stood there a moment; even in the dark I could tell he didn't know how to implore, what position to assume, how even to begin, so foreign was the idea of apology to him. I didn't help him; I didn't turn on the bedlight; I didn't want to see. I was still plummeting, though his footsteps had given me some purchase on time and space. He got into bed, embraced me. "I'm sorry," he said, and I bawled. "It's o.k." I said, and hoped that it was, but of course it wasn't. He lay there with me some time longer – I don't know how long; it could have been most of the night – then got up and walked carefully back to his bed: I knew his arms were outstretched to find the cedar chest before it found him; I still would not turn on the light. Next morning there was a spot of blood on my pajamas and one on my pillowcase, brown and accusing; he had a small bandaid on his forehead. We never spoke of the incident, and it has never been more than a micromillisecond or two away from my mind. The apology is constant because it was sealed in blood that I had inadvertently drawn. The affront is there to explain the apology and if the incident had not been significant enough in his own life for him to apologize for it, actually to recognize and admit culpability, doubtless I would have swallowed this too, deep-sixed this too, like everything else.

Still, it's not the apology but his virtually helpless sputtering exasperation at me for walking home, his sense that my walking home was somehow a public humiliation of him, an action that somehow excluded him from a class to which he desperately wanted to belong, a future to which he had desperately and even frantically committed himself so long ago, a future by which he would escape his own history. His helpless, desperate exasperation, doubtless more terrifying to him than it was even to me, is the center, the core, around which all my memories cohere, the vortex out of which all my meditations

about things southern whirl, in double and triple helixes, roaring soundlessly round and round in my head, and they swirl all the more complicatedly because nothing in his life seems to me now particularly southern at all. He was merely one of thousands of country boys across the nation during the Depression who figured life in the big city would have to be better than subsistence living facing the wrong end of a mule.

I never doubted that in his own way he loved me, too, but his love was always on his terms and he made it my terrifying responsibility to figure out how and when to tap that love, how to be worthy of his generosity. Still, he did the best he could, within his lights, and as I say he was often generous and supportive, even if hardly ever tender and gentle, intimate. I could just never tell which father was going to greet me each day, could never tell what inadvertence, what circumstance from a day or a week ago would bring censure or praise. How much of our problems are traceable to character, mine or his, how much of it his debilitating brushes with vulnerability during the War or on that cold service station floor, how much of it he brought with him from his relationship with his parents, I do not know. It breaks my heart to realize that knowing is hardly to the point any more: when I got old enough to understand that the problem might rather be in him than in me, he was long since dead. Even so, even knowing, I have spent hours of psychic energy trying to understand him, trying to figure out what was wrong with him, to fix *him* somehow, even in my memory, to make everything retroactively all right and, by fixing *him*, somehow to fix *me*.

In my more generous moods I can indeed think of my father as wanting something I might eventually have been able to give him had he lived long enough. He often said, and I believed, that he wanted us to have things he didn't have, and I know that he didn't mean just nice middleclass things like indoor plumbing and airconditioned houses. I think he also meant, though he would not have put it his way, to exculpate me from *his* past, to absolve me of *his* history, to give me a past less needful of escaping. Perhaps we missed each other because he could not have explained that to me in any way that I could have understood it even if he had completely understood it himself; perhaps because my need caught him at a time when he had to concentrate on the material side of his ambition, but I think it's far more complicated: in order to provide me those things he had not had he necessarily positioned me, as a city boy, to be able to want things that he, as a country boy, could not have wanted because he didn't know they were there to be wanted. We thus wound up wanting different things, things which might have been compatible had he lived long enough for us to reconcile them.

He manifestly wanted me to succeed and to be happy and productive, took pride in the little I accomplished before he died. What I wanted was not in him to give or to accept, probably not in me to articulate in any way that either of us at the time could

have understood. I am sure that he knew then, as I was to learn only later, that to need is to be vulnerable. So far as I could tell, he did not need from me either understanding or any form of love that I could have described: respect and obedience were as close as either of us could have come. I therefore insulated myself from him and his volatility by withholding my love. I am now no more permeable to love or hate either than fifty years ago. He beat them out of me, or perhaps rather drove them indelibly inward. Perhaps he did this deliberately, even if not consciously; perhaps he was protecting himself, too, from vulnerability: from my love, by quashing it in me.

In ways I am still stuck in that darkened room, waiting for another apology, which will never come and which I can't move on without. Mostly now, I don't feel much of anything for him: neither love nor hate, fear nor pity nor pride, pain nor pleasure, not even indifference. When I let myself feel anything, it is not even regret so much as a constant ponderable sadness at whatever of family we didn't have because he had his history and I had mine, he was he and I was I, blood be damned, and because each of us desperately needed the other to be something that he was not and could never be.

I had not the leisure, in the trenches of the fifties, to worry overmuch about his history, much less his parents, who died before I was 4 years old; I was too engaged in the daily act of making myself invulnerable to him. But knowing his history, understanding him, would not have helped me one little bit, there, in the trenches of the daily raw-nerved confrontations, major and minor: my understanding of him would not have changed one thing about him, would not have given me the power over him, over myself even, that I so desperately needed; understanding him then would have complicated my life, since knowing his history would have asked of me the impossible: to pity him, and pity him I could not, so it was pointless to try to know him: nothing could absolve me of him or him of me. So maybe the sanitized bubble of historylessness that I thought insulated Picayune was rather my own opaque bubble that insulated me from lots of things. Maybe I had no history because there were things I did not want to know, about him or about Mississippi, for fear I would inherit a history which nothing could absolve me of, and which I could not change. Maybe I feared the outrage and the helplessness I would feel if I knew how my antecedents of blood and region had helped to create the conditions which were already beginning to explode in Mississippi, literally and figuratively, as I entered my teen years. Maybe I was scared that I would be called upon to *do something about* it, that having a history I would be called upon to *be responsible to it*. And in Mississippi in the fifties and sixties, how terrifying was *that*? So maybe it was not a protective bubble I grew up in but a womb taking its own good time to birth me into my history; or maybe not a bubble or a womb either, but a simple hole in the sand in which I buried my head.

When my Polk grandparents were moving to Picayune, I have been told, my grandmother put the suitcase holding all the family photos and mementoes on top of the car; the suitcase fell off as they turned one or another bend on the way. Gasoline was very expensive, and they were very poor, so when they discovered the loss they did not turn around to look for the lost suitcase: they kept moving forward. I suspect my family has lost lots of pictures on the various radii they have travelled and have likewise wasted little time in search or in regret.

I've always taken that incident as almost too perfectly symbolic: the history, the documents, at any rate, that get lost along the road to somewhere else, but symbolic nevertheless of my own history. I have made some half-hearted efforts to discover my Polk roots, but have never been able to go backward further than about 1880, or forward later than 1830 or so, and never able to connect up either of the strands, so I sort of gave up, and to tell the truth was not all that interested, since James K. Polk had no children and clearly so I was not presidential timber.

But going through my mother's papers just last week – she died in October at the age of 82 – I discovered that she had become something of a closet genealogist, and had tracked down her – and my – Hamilton and McDaniel ancestors. Our Hamiltons, four brothers' worth, had come by way of Ontario down the Mississippi; three of them settled in East Feliciana Parish Louisiana, where one of them built a house that still stands. The fourth was my great great great great grandfather, Hance Hamilton, who bought some land in Pike County in 1820 and built a home there, making him one of the earliest settlers in Southwest Mississippi. I have to admit, that's pretty nice to know: Hance Hamilton's very name entrances and en-Hances me!. Maybe I have a history in spite of myself, in spite of Picayune. Maybe I'll have some history yet.

Agnieszka Salska

## Dickinson, Whitman and the Civil War: How Can Language Deal with Upheaval?

The issue of *Harper's Weekly* for August 22, 1863, told the story of the battle of Gettysburg illustrated with woodcuts made on the basis of some of Timothy O'Sullivan's photographs taken on the battlefield (Horan 45).<sup>1</sup> The battle of Gettysburg, one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War, raged for three days from July 1 to July 3, 1863, and involved 90.000 Northerners confronted by 75.000 Confederates. By the night of July 3 when the fighting was over, the South had suffered 20.000 casualties, the North 17.500. The battle did break the South's invasion of the North, but its effects on the whole war campaign were not immediately visible. The previous year had been an anxious and dreary one for the North, ending with the unsuccessful attempt of the Union Army to cross Rappahannock at Fredericksburg (Dec. 13), where the Union casualties reached 12.000 with the South sustaining losses of 5.500 soldiers; the early part of 1863 amounted to a bloody stalemate in the East, while the victories in the West were too costly (*Family Encyclopedia of American History*). The war had turned into a nightmare. At its outbreak, on April 28, 1861, Reverend Charles Wadsworth had preached a sermon on "American Patriotism," which basically accepted and justified the war, yet in his conclusion Wadsworth feared for the future:

We, perhaps, may not live to witness the end of the conflict. Indeed there are some men who, in view of our present rate of progress, have little hope that we shall. God seems to be treating us as he treated Israel – because of their unbelief and cowardice, keeping them marching backward and forward forty years in a desert, which a band of Bedouin cavalry would have crossed in a month...<sup>2</sup>

In the first half of 1863 the prospect for peace did not seem brighter.

There is an uncanny correlation between personal and national history in the case of Whitman's and Dickinson's biography. For both poets the Civil War constitutes the

<sup>1</sup> Woodcuts were used since newspaper reproductions did not come until many years later. For unclear reasons *Harper's* credited the photographs to Matthew Brady. Horan mistakenly dates the Gettysburg issue of *Harper's* (vol.7 no.347) for August 27; the correct date is August 22. Both photographs reproduced in the present article come from Horan's book.

<sup>2</sup> I'd like to thank Dr. Magdalena Zapędowska for sharing this material with me.

critical time of their lives, just as it stands out as critical time in the nation's history. It drastically changed Whitman's life. At the outbreak of the armed conflict, the poet vowed to live a "purged" and "cleansed" life and took to visiting the sick, injured, and wounded at New York Hospital. In December, 1862, having heard that his brother was wounded, he went to Virginia and, after George's return home, remained in Washington as a volunteer visitor and attendant in the capital's military hospitals. By June, 1864, his health deteriorated so that he had to return to Brooklyn on an extended sick leave, but again went to Washington in January, 1865, taking up a clerkship at the Department of the Interior. He continued the self-imposed hospital duty. That summer he wrote the Lincoln elegy and in October published it, together with his other Civil War poems, in *Drum Taps and Sequel (Complete Poetry and Collected Prose, "Chronology")*. Among the *Drum Taps* poems was "A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim," which I want to consider here. The idea for the poem was entered in the poet's notebook of 1862-1863: "Sight at daybreak in camp in front of hospital tent Three men lying, each with a blanket spread over him – I lift up one and look at the young man's face, calm and yellow. 'Tis strange! (Young man: I think this face of yours the face of my dead Christ.)" (*Leaves of Grass* 306). In the post-Civil War editions of *Leaves of Grass* "A Sight in Camp" remained in the *Drum Taps* group practically unchanged.

Dickinson was over a decade younger than Whitman, and though in terms of poetic development both were late bloomers, it may be accurately said that the peaking of her poetic powers coincided exactly with the War years. She wrote but a handful of poems relating directly to the War, such as "It feels a shame to be alive" (Fr. 524), "When I was small, a Woman died –" (Fr. 518), and, perhaps most famously, the poem in which she reacted to the death of Frazar Stearns, son of the President of Amherst College and Austin Dickinson's friend (Fr. 384).<sup>3</sup> Frazar was killed at Newbern, North Carolina, in the bleak year 1862. Dickinson, of course, never went to the battlefields or visited military hospitals, yet she read about the War in the newspapers and magazines which her family subscribed to, *Harper's* among them. And, first of all, the War was simply all around her. As Daniel Aaron argued long ago, it produced intense emotional experience for an entire nation of people, and Dickinson's poetry fed from this outpouring of intensity (355-356).

Confronted with the war, the men closest to her had to make agonizing moral and life choices. When Austin was drafted, he paid \$500 for a substitute (Sewall 536); the fact must have made Frazar Stearns's death even more shocking for the Dickinsons. Reverend Charles Wadsworth, the man who seems the most likely candidate for the Master,

<sup>3</sup> All quotations from Dickinson's poems refer to *The Poems of Emily Dickinson. Reading Edition*, edited by Ralph Franklin, and are identified in the text by the abbreviation Fr. followed by the poem's number.

resigned his position in Philadelphia, reluctant to risk a conflict with the parishioners over his tolerant view of slavery, the official cause of war. Wadsworth found a new congregation, consisting largely of pro-Union Southerners, at the other end of the continent, in San Francisco.<sup>4</sup> Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the writer to whom Dickinson turned for criticism and professional support in April of 1862, accepted, in the fall of the same year, a commission as colonel of the First South Carolina Volunteers, a regiment formed from freed slaves. He was wounded in July, 1863, though Dickinson learned about his injury only early next summer (L. 290). Neighbors' sons were being brought to Amherst to be buried at home. Dickinson's private crisis must have felt almost indistinguishable from the national ordeal.

Shira Wolosky acknowledged the fusion of personal and national misery in Dickinson's experience interpreting the poem "My Triumph lasted till the Drums" (Fr. 1212) as expressive of the way her struggle with the war experience paralleled her struggle with religious doubt. By 1863 several Dickinson's letters indicate that her health had given in under pressure, and in the summer of 1864 – then again in 1865 – she had to be treated in Boston for unidentified eye trouble. In the letters, especially to her Norcross cousins, the poet refers to her "nervous prostration," comments on the bleakness of war time, and on her own shaky condition. In late May of 1863, for example, she entreats the Norcross cousins to come and help her survive the annual Commencement ceremonies, describing her unstable condition:

The nights turned hot when Vinnie had gone, and I must keep no window raised for fear of prowling 'booger,' and I must shut my door for fear front door slide open on me at 'the dead of night,' and I must keep 'gas' burning to light the danger up, so I could distinguish it – these gave me a snarl in the brain which don't unravel yet, and that old nail in my breast pricked me; these, dear, were my cause. Truth is so best of all I wanted you to know. (L. 281)

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Lease correlates the evidence of poems and letters for Dickinson's personal crisis in the early 1860s and the circumstances leading to Charles Wadsworth's resignation from the Arch Street Church in Philadelphia demonstrating that "the spring and summer of 1861 brought crisis for both the minister and the poet" (see also "Wadsworth, Charles" entry by Lease in *An Emily Dickinson Encyclopedia*). Wadsworth was a Union supporter but believed that slavery was not in itself a sin and denounced "the wicked and hypocritical attacks on our Christian brethren of the South." Rather than risk an open conflict with his parishioners or compromise his integrity, he resigned, and after protracted negotiations accepted a call to Calvary Church in San Francisco. Its founder, William Anderson Scott was a close friend of his and may have been instrumental in securing the invitation for Wadsworth. Scott, too, resigned because his congregants did not share his secessionist sympathies. Eventually, Wadsworth sailed for San Francisco on May 1, 1862. The whole complicated story, seen against the emotional misery of Dickinson's second and third Master letters, more than implies an intimate interweaving of personal and public issues in that critical period of Dickinson's life.

In the poems of this period she intensely investigates the process by which one learns to live with pain. A central element of such learning is seeking emotional balance in language adequate for a clear-sighted, disciplined but truthful rendering of one's plight. The use of formal or conventional language, like her school Latin, seems to help in distancing pain:

It don't sound so terrible – quite – as it did –  
I run it over – 'Dead,' Brain – 'Dead'  
Put it in Latin – left of my school –  
Seems it don't shriek so – under rule. (Fr. 384)

I want to put together two Civil War poems – one by Whitman and one by Dickinson – against the background of two Civil War photographs by Timothy O'Sullivan. The photographs serve, as they were originally meant to serve, as visual documentation, not as examples of period art (anyway, the 1860s were yet too early for photography to be conscious of itself as an artistic medium). Neither was reproduced in the above mentioned issue of the *Harper's Magazine*, where illustrations clearly avoided drastic scenes,<sup>5</sup> but both come from the same series of battlefield photographs, and they show well the uncensored, shocking reality of war to which the poets respond. As Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly* for July, 1863, about a series of photographs made after the battle of Antietam (September, 1862):

Let him who wishes to know what the war is look at this series of illustrations. These wrecks of manhood thrown together in careless heaps or ranged in ghastly rows for burial were alive but yesterday.... It was so nearly like visiting the battlefield to look over these views, that all the emotions excited by the actual sight of the stained and sordid scene, strewn with rags and wrecks came back to us... (quoted in Orvell, 62-63)

The poems selected for discussion here similarly exemplify the two poets' reaction to the upheaval which undermined the very foundations of their culture; O'Sullivan's photographs bring into focus the essence of that upheaval – the loss of meaning of indi-

<sup>5</sup> Actually only one of the illustrations in *Harper's* shows dead bodies in the distant right foreground. The magazine wrote about the Battle of Gettysburg in several successive issues, starting on July 11, 1863. The issue for July 22, 1865, featured an article "The Gettysburg Monument. Consecrated July 4, 1865" and an illustration by unknown engraver which is a composite of borrowings from several prints by Timothy O'Sullivan and Alexander Gardner. Echoing the title of O'Sullivan's widely known photograph, the picture was captioned "The Harvest of Death." Possibly in response to the occasion, the author of the engraving retrospectively sought to intensify the drama of the original photographs (see also Orvell 62-67).



Timothy O'Sullivan, *The Devil's Den at Gettysburg*

vidual life. The shot of a single, fallen soldier (*The Devil's Den at Gettysburg*) showing the corpse's face attempts, despite the lonely anonymity of this young death, to rescue individuality from oblivion, affirming that tragedy or at least pathos is still possible. However, the other photograph (*The Slaughter Pen*), a panoramic view of landscape of massive destruction, cruelly depicts death's casualness as human bodies merge into earth ploughed over by artillery shells. There is no hierarchy of values in this stark, naturalistic view, and no ethical space opens for tragedy. The two photographs, thus, may be taken as visual equivalents of the directions in which Whitman and Dickinson respectively move in the poems under discussion.

Here is the poem by Whitman:

A sight in camp in the daybreak gray and dim,  
As from my tent I emerge so early sleepless,  
As slow I walk in the cool fresh air the path near by the hospital tent,  
Three forms I see on stretchers lying, brought out there untended lying,  
Over each the blanket spread, ample brownish woolen blanket,  
Gray and heavy blanket, folding, covering all.

Cautious I halt and silent stand,  
Then with light fingers I from the face of the nearest the first just lift the blanket;  
Who are you elderly man so gaunt and grim, with well-gray'd hair,  
    and flesh all sunken about the eyes?  
Who are you my dear comrade?

Then to the second I step – and who are you my child and darling?  
Who are you sweet boy with cheeks yet blooming?

Then to the third – a face nor child nor old, very calm, as of beautiful  
    yellow-white ivory;  
Young man I think I know you – I think this face is the face of the Christ himself,  
Dead and divine and brother of all, and here again he lies.

*(Leaves of Grass 306-307)*



The poem is ordered by physical movement in space, as Whitman's poems so often are... by a version, if we may say so, of his characteristic road motif supported by the magical and liturgical number of three encounters with an unknown dead soldier, in which the question about his identity is asked three times. In this sequence of encounters, the natural progression from childhood to maturity, from birth to death, so typical of early Whitman, has been abandoned and supernatural order is asserted. We move with the speaker from the naturalistic, camera view of blanketed, "untended" corpses left for the night outside the hospital tent to the revelation of the radiant, divine identity of the third soldier. Although we recognize in the poem some of the characteristics of Whitman's early poetic technique – the structuring by movement in space, the vignette encounters with successive realistic but also symbolizing figures (as e.g. in the first paragraph of section 8 of "Song of Myself") – the final identification with Christ as a meaning-giving authority is new and thoroughly uncharacteristic. As in early Whitman, the speaking "I" moves from the vision of the eye to spiritual vision, yet here the spiritual vision is not of the eye's own making but achieved by superimposing the orthodoxy of the Christian myth on what the senses perceive. Similarly, on the aesthetic level the speaker moves from the "gray and dim" photographic view of unidentified, dead bodies covered with "heavy," "brownish," "gray" blankets to the transforming vision of formal clarity and aesthetic beauty of religious art. The dead body of Christ – the third soldier – and the speaker tenderly stooping over him form a *pieta* group. The "very calm, as of beautiful yellow-white ivory" face of the soldier recalls sculpted heads of crucified Christ. The final revelation of the dead soldier's identity is thus not only a revelation of divine presence but also of the power of language and art to lift the sordid and horrible into the sphere of the sacred. To achieve this, the transformative power of heroic imagination alone is no longer sufficient. It needs the support of both traditional cultural mythology and traditional aesthetic forms.<sup>6</sup> Art and ritual, art and liturgy work together to order and transform the horror of reality.

Now, here is the Dickinson poem dated by Franklin for the poet's most prolific year 1863:<sup>7</sup>

They dropped like Flakes –  
 They dropped like stars –  
 Like Petals from a Rose –  
 When suddenly across the June  
 A Wind with fingers – goes –

<sup>6</sup> On Whitman's relation to tradition see Kenneth M. Price, *Whitman and Tradition. The Poet in His Century*; also Agnieszka Salska, "The Growth of the Past in *Leaves of Grass*."

<sup>7</sup> Johnson's dating (J.409) is 1862.

They perished in the seamless Grass –  
No eye could find the place –  
But God can summon every face  
On his Repealless – List (Fr. 545)

It is interesting to compare Dickinson's poem, certainly not one of her best known or most impressive creations, with a specimen of popular War verse published in contemporary newspapers. The following fragment comes from a poem called "Roses," which appeared on July 4, 1862, in the *Springfield Republican*, a newspaper the Dickinsons subscribed to. It was signed with initials F.H.C. and its earlier sections address white and yellow roses:

Ah, here is a crimson rose,  
As red as blood can be,  
And the turf is blushing where it grows  
With leaves from the fading tree;  
They are falling every day, like those  
Who are dying for you and me.<sup>8</sup>

We tend to think of Dickinson as a poet of intimately personal voice and, despite the impact of many recent studies contextualizing her work,<sup>9</sup> as an intensely private poet. Nevertheless, the quoted poem, especially when placed next to one like "Roses," strikes the reader with its matter-of-fact, reporting tone. Like Whitman, Dickinson does not appeal to compassion for the fighting soldiers. Employing generalizing nature imagery

<sup>8</sup> Shira Wolosky argues that in Dickinson's poems images of nature appear in war poems, and images of war appear in nature poems as, for example, in her verbal paintings of sunsets (37). However, it should be remembered that nature imagery applied to the war situation was common in contemporary writings about the War. The *Springfield Republican* for Saturday, June 1, 1861, referring to the English "War of the Roses", called the American conflict "the war of the trees" (pine and palmetto for the North and South respectively). Over a decade later, Helen Hunt Jackson, Dickinson's girlhood friend and then literary correspondent, applied a similar image of falling leaves to epidemic civilian deaths: "It was a terrible winter for old people. They dropped on all sides, like leaves swept off trees in autumn gales" (214; I am indebted to Dr. Magdalena Zapędowska for the quoted examples). Thus, in the poem under discussion, Dickinson seems to draw deliberately on language in popular circulation.

<sup>9</sup> Such as Barton St. Armand's *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture*, Shira Wolosky's *Emily Dickinson. A Voice of War*, Betsy Erkkila's "Emily Dickinson and Class," Nina Baym's "Emily Dickinson and Scientific Scepticism" in Baym, *American Women of Letters and the Nineteenth Century Sciences*, which show Dickinson's awareness of changes in the culture undermining traditional religious and social order. Unlike Whitman, she belonged to the class of old privilege, conscious of both its prestige and its responsibility. There is a recognizable streak of conservatism in Dickinson's social attitudes, even more importantly a recognizable streak of conservatism in her religious attitudes, and in her, sometimes difficult to accept, submissiveness to authority, or better, her need for authority that counterbalances her rebelliousness.

akin to that used by the author of “Roses,” she clips her syntax,<sup>10</sup> foregrounds dynamic verbs and invests the poem with a very different emotional intention so that, in the first place, it confronts the outrageous anonymity of mass death. The opening triple comparison shows no revelatory progression. Instead, hurriedly, almost perfunctorily, it equates humans falling in the war with seasonal “fallings” in nature. Also, only seemingly, like Whitman, at the end of her poem Dickinson invokes divine authority to infuse meaning into the war carnage. Her speaker treats the horror of mass killing as an elemental, wholly naturalistic and natural phenomenon: a snowstorm, a summer night’s shower of shooting stars, a sudden gust of wind on a fine June day – a temporary disruption of nature’s order. Those falling in the battlefields are never identified, their death is not mythicized, and it is not sacrificial or even particular; they do not “fall” but casually “drop,” they do not “die” but “perish” with the suggestion of rotting in the verb, and they vanish from sight in “the seamless grass” sinking into the soil rather than ascending to heaven. The familiar, we might even say stock, imagery of romantic nature poetry applied to the reality of the bloody battlefield may lull the superficial reader with its clichéd associations but to someone more attentive, it demonstrates how the conventional language suppresses horror by turning it into spectacle. The poem’s concluding quatrain juxtaposes the end of the show, when the dead disappear “in the seamless Grass” so effectively that they also disappear from collective human memory, with the wishful? conventional? ironic? statement proclaiming God to be the only guardian of the memory of their faces. It is God’s task to continue to see them as individuals. Art’s aestheticizing vision falsifies or, even more cruelly, seems uninterested in preventing their individual “perishing.”

Although in this poem Dickinson’s images may appear blandly conventional, her anger is conveyed through her choice of words and through the music of her verse. Her characteristic metrical standard – some variation of the hymn or ballad stanza – is clearly disrupted.<sup>11</sup> The first section of the poem has five lines lengthening from two to three stresses in a line, with accents irregularly distributed. A pattern closer to the ballad stanza seems about to emerge in the second section, a quatrain with a full rime linking the perfectly regular, three and four stress middle lines to accompany the suggestion of resurrection in the third verse. The emergent order is, however, totally disrupted by the aggressive, ugly: “On his Repealless – List.” Returning to the two-stress brevity of the opening lines, the end line wrecks their natural, iambic smoothness. Thus, the sound

<sup>10</sup> Following Dickinson’s concentrated sentence structures the whole line “As red as blood can be” may be rewritten simply as “red as blood” or even “blood red,” thus lose the lilting, iambic regularity of the original.

<sup>11</sup> Significantly, the poem was “regularized” in its first published version (*Poems*, 1891). It was printed as two quatrains and the two last lines were rearranged to achieve a regular rhyme pattern: “But God on his repealless list / Can summon every face” (editor’s note *The Poems of Emily Dickinson. Variorum Edition*). Franklin dates the poem “about spring 1863.”

pattern of the poem makes the innocuous nature imagery an instrument of active attack on the prettifying falsity of conventional language and belief.

As Cristanne Miller has argued, in its alliance with the Puritan tradition of plain style Dickinson's language says less rather than more, it tends to hide and even obscure meanings:

Her very disguise of defiance, however, may also stem from inherent characteristics of the plain style, which demands simplicity reflected in its name but paradoxically also a kind of reticence that may prevent its complete message from being articulated.... [P]artly as a consequence, writers in the plain style leave much unsaid, and they claim that their discourse says even less than it does. Using words sparingly leaves much to implication, and making modest claims for the text may disguise the authority its author in fact feels. (144)

It is perhaps too easy to read "They dropped like Flakes –" as a conventional nineteenth-century consolation poem and overlook its implied denouncement of language in popular use for hiding facts, for preventing the recognition that mass death has become a spectacle of some intensity but no durable impact or meaning. Neither can art lift this kind of death into the sphere of *sacrum*. Only God knows the "repealless" list of persons irrevocably banished from this life.<sup>12</sup> But God's province of exiled meaning is a territory no longer accessible for the living.

Metrically, the poem moves from the hurried two stress lines of the opening to quieter, three stress verses ending the first stanza, then to the near regularity of the common meter in the final quatrain. As always in the best of Dickinson, her rhythm, the melody of her verse is telling; in this poem it tells us that order is being made as the poem develops, that upheaval is being put "under rule." But the poem's order is made in irony and outrage. The appearance of God as the keeper of images of individual faces at the end of the poem comes as the climactic element in the compulsive attempt to restore meaning after disaster. The two spheres: this-worldly and other-worldly, put next to each other in the final stanza, are opposed in their functions: "seamless grass" is where the dead soldiers "perish," while God keeps "every face." Significantly, they are also separated by the characteristic Dickinsonian dash. They remain stitched together only by a strategically located full rhyme, "place/face," joining the middle lines of the quatrain, not typical for the common meter stanza but emphasizing the imposed character of the poem's order.

My reason for reading the two poems by Whitman and Dickinson next to each other is that I see both as poems by romantic authors for whom the sacredness and power of the

<sup>12</sup> The now obsolete meaning of "repeal" that Dickinson was certainly conscious of is "to summon back or recall, especially from exile" (*The American Heritage Dictionary. Second College Edition.*)

individual self was a foundational truth. Here they are attempting to find language capable of ordering the upheaval, which both recognize as negating, more, as invalidating the cornerstone principle of their worldview and of their art. If Whitman dedicated his whole poetic project to creating a model heroic self of “an American – this new man,” one might say that in “A Sight in Camp” we look at the new man killed in the prime of his manhood. The meaning of his death and so the continuing centrality of his self is, however, insisted on even if it has to be authorized by traditional Christian mythology and set motifs of religious art. After the Civil War Whitman was able to return to his expansive poetic mode only briefly in the Lincoln elegy, where death is once more viewed as the seed of new life without recourse to orthodox Christianity. But, being an elegy, the poem is programmatically a consolation poem and we might say that Whitman again fell back upon the authority of the traditionally sanctioned poetic convention,<sup>13</sup> much as in “A Sight in Camp in Daybreak Gray and Dim” he resorted to other cultural conventions: the orthodox Christian myth and the canonical motifs of religious art.

Dickinson’s poem, on the other hand, investigates the failure of language in contemporary use to deal truthfully with the landscape of mass carnage; it also at least implies the poet’s anger at that condition. On the level of personal experience, her response was summed up in conclusion of the letter she wrote in March, 1862, to the Norcross sisters to tell them of the death of Frazar Stearns: “Austin is stunned completely. Let us love better, children, it’s most that’s left to do” (L. 255). In the poems of the war period, however, we find the poet Dickinson again and again turning the appalling insight this way and that in an effort, not so much to construct her own order against the experienced destruction of meaning – that will be the modernist artist’s task – but to try on, for herself as well as her reader, ways of linguistically “wearing murder” of the imperial, meaning-making self:

I suppose it will interrupt me some  
Till I get accustomed – but then the Tomb  
Like other new Things – shows largest – then –  
And smaller by Habit –

It’s shrewder then  
Put the Thought in advance – a Year –  
How like “a fit” – then –  
Murder – wear! (Fr. 384)

<sup>13</sup> Agata Preis-Smith, for example, claims that “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” may be Whitman’s “only conscious approach to the traditional genre” and, referring to Richard P. Adams’ “‘Lilacs’ as Pastoral Elegy,” she goes on to point out “at least seven traditionally pastoral/elegiac ingredients in ‘Lilacs’ that are found also in classical elegies from Moschus and Bion to Matthew Arnold” (73-75).

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Marek Paryż

## Global Communication and Imperial Imaginings in Walt Whitman's Poems

This paper concentrates on the centrality of the notions of globality and communication in Walt Whitman's shaping of the discourse of the American empire in his poems. Whitman foregrounds, in his poetic writing, all sorts of interconnections – between individuals, communities, races, nations, traditions, religions, etc. – and thus he interrogates the existing cultural and political hierarchies, and concomitantly, in constructing a unique and distinct rhetoric, characterized by a strong authorial presence, the poet unequivocally points to himself as the one who decides about the terms of presenting such interconnections. It goes without saying that Whitman identifies himself with the American nation as much as he does with the entire human kind, therefore he carries with him the national legacy wherever his imagination takes him. Indeed, the poetic imagination is a key concept here because it is seen as a way to facilitate the shifts and to create the parallels between the reality which is perceived and the reality which is invented, between tangible political doctrines and imaginary political designs, between local happenings and global processes. The ways in which certain imperial notions function in Whitman's poems illustrate the dual contextualization – with regard to America's past and present, on the one hand, and to the universal human experience, on the other – which allows the poet to explore historical contingencies and transcend them with equal easiness.

One of the most important tendencies in recent Whitman scholarship is to probe the poet's involvement with American politics as revealed in his poetic discourse, in particular his forms of support for the U.S. expansionist policy. For example, Betsy Erkkila stresses the continuity between Whitman's early journalism, which articulated an unrelenting endorsement of the American Western expansion, and the poems in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, wherein "the representation of 'the other'... – whether as the West, nature, the Indians, Mexico, the People, or the soul itself – is made to serve the jealous and passionate instinct of American – and specifically imperial – policies and 'standards'" (61). This article demonstrates how Whitman evokes the concepts and strategies that inform his expansionist discourse to talk about a process which, in comparison with U.S. expansionism, is far less plausible, but no less desirable, namely American leadership on the global scale. As Edward Said writes: "Just as none of us is

outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons, but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings” (6).

Whitman scholars almost unanimously agree that the Civil War marks a caesura in the development of the poet’s personal ideology and in his use of literary means, although, as James Perrin Warren warns us, the critical view that “[i]f the prewar style represents Whitman at his best, then the twenty-seven years of his postwar writing should be read as a story of decline and failure” (45), leads to simplifications. Warren defines this caesura in stylistic terms, distinguishing Whitman antebellum “revolutionary” style from his post-bellum “evolutionary” style. The primary difference between these two stylistic and ideological structures is that, in the latter, the vision of America is accompanied by a far greater awareness of its roots in the past. Characteristically, the crucial continuity between the two styles and visions is the figuration of America as “the principal actor in the world’s cultural drama” (48). This is precisely the kind of continuity that this article highlights. In keeping with Amy Kaplan’s general postulate that “United States nation-building and empire-building” be seen as “historically coterminous and mutually defining” (17), the article demonstrates that the presence of what John R. Eperjesi calls “the imperialist imaginary” constitutes a permanent feature of Whitman’s poetic vision, as if the rhetoric of empire alone provided a compensation for his political uncertainties. Accordingly, the poems illustrating the present argument come from different periods in Whitman’s career.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said observes that imperialism, defined as “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of the dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory,” is “impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination” (8, original italics). Accordingly, the people, who, in various ways, helped to build the great Western empires, were motivated not only by “profit and hope of further profit” (9), but also by:

a commitment in constant circulation and recirculation, which, on the one hand allowed decent men and women to accept the notion that distant territories and their native peoples *should* be subjugated, and, on the other, replenished metropolitan energies so that these decent people could think of the *imperium* as a protracted, almost metaphysical obligation to rule subordinate, inferior, or less advanced peoples. (10, original italics)

Said talks about two nineteenth-century European imperial powers, Britain and France, and his observations are not fully relevant with regard to the American context, never-

theless, they shed light on the ways in which Whitman envisages himself as the one who embodies and articulates American national aspirations and even dreams. First, Said presents imperialism as a political initiative that provides a response to a certain existing state of things; it can be said that an imperial power possesses the potential that must necessarily be used elsewhere. There is, so to speak, the idea of invitation in such a view of imperial duties, which is very much in keeping with Whitman's imaginings. Second, Said identifies a psychological mechanism that makes people see their participation in the project of empire as a manifestation of "a protracted, almost metaphysical obligation to rule," which is precisely how Whitman conceives of American global leadership. However, the American poet does redefine the goal of imperial endeavors: in a self-contradictory manner, he wants to rule without subjugating others, without letting them feel their inferiority.

One of the symptomatic features of Whitman's discourse of empire is the presence of naval imagery, with the ship as a figurative representation of the American expansive spirit. In the short poem "The Ship Starting" (1865), included in "Inscriptions," the poet attributes to the ship such qualities as energy and dynamism, on the one hand, and pride and majesty, on the other: "The pennant is flying aloft as she speeds she speeds so stately – below emulous waves press forward" (174). Setting sail appears to be an activity resulting from an internal urge, aroused and intensified by the view of "the unbounded sea" (173). Characteristically, Whitman does not define the destination, as if the destination mattered less than the very process. In a sense, he envisages American ships going everywhere and nowhere in particular at the same time, notwithstanding the occasional meticulous enumerations of geographical names, most notably in "Salut au Monde!" (1856). Such a figuration of American expansiveness attests to a certain solipsistic condition as a factor behind the project of empire. In an article on Emerson and American continental expansionism, Jenine Abboushi Dallal observes that "[a]t its height in the nineteenth century, expansionism was represented as an abstract, tautological, and domestic process, not a corporeal encounter with rivals over land" (50). Furthermore, she writes that "U.S. expansion organizes the encounter of the United States with itself – its own destiny; the ideology admits no dialectic and no Other, which accounts for the rhetoric's self-referentiality and opacity" (54). A similar focus on the national destiny, with regard to both continental expansion and global influence, can be found in Whitman's poems. Interestingly, in the representation of domestic policies, the poet's discourse foregrounding the nation's special destiny helps to gloss over the facts of ruthless land acquisition, while in the vision of America as the world's leader it ignores the difficulty of translating American imperial fantasies into a tangible political program. Evidently, Whitman magnifies American

possibilities to such great proportions that his poetic program reaches far beyond the existing political doctrines.

Needless to say, Whitman constructs the kind of rhetoric that allows him to harmonize political realities and imaginary prospects. A good illustration of how he annuls the apparent discrepancies between the two realms is the following passage from “Starting from Paumanok” (1860), the poem distinguished by an extended presentation of America:

Yet upon the plains west of the spinal river, yet in my house  
of adobie,  
Yet returning eastward, yet in the Seaside State or in  
Maryland.  
...  
Yet sailing to other shores to annex the same, yet welcoming  
every new brother,  
Hereby applying these leaves to the new ones from the hour  
they unite with the old ones,  
Coming among the new ones myself to be their companion  
and equal, coming personally to you now,  
Enjoining you to acts, characters, spectacles, with me. (186)

The vision of the varied American nation smoothly turns into the vision of a rather enigmatic unification of “the new ones” and “the old ones.” Not surprisingly, Whitman emphasizes the personal dimension of this process, the sign of which is the strong personal bond between the poet and his addressee. This closeness between individuals ultimately guarantees that general equality will remain a fundamental principle. However, the poet’s categorical statement of his intention of “[e]njoining you to acts, characters, spectacles, with me,” clearly suggests that the one to whom these words are directed does not really have much choice but to accept the course of events triggered off by the coming of the poet. Additionally, this passage implies the continuous nature of American expansionism; in other words, once the continental expansion has been completed the annexation of “other shores” will be a natural and logical corollary. It is, indeed, characteristic of Whitman’s poetic vision that the act of annexation is accompanied by a gesture of brotherly embrace. In “Starting from Paumanok,” he presents expansion as a cosmic law which has multifarious manifestations:

Expanding and swift, henceforth,  
Elements, breeds, adjustments, turbulent, quick and audacious,

A world primal again, vistas of glory incessant and branching,  
A new race dominating previous ones and grander far, with  
new contests,  
New politics, new literatures and religions, new inventions  
and arts. (186-187)

The poem leaves no doubt that this new domineering race is the American nation. In section 16 of “Starting from Paumanok,” Whitman prophesies that what will remain of “the past” will be names, just like the names of Indian origin on the map of America, which are often the only trace of the former existence of the Natives:

The red aborigines,  
...  
Leaving such to the States they melt, they depart, charging  
the water and the land with names. (186)

This is probably the closest Whitman ever gets to talking about the extermination of Indians. He evokes a conveniently elegiac picture of Native Americans:

Native Americans, unlike the subdued populations of the British Empire, always fell under the sign of extinction, and thus almost posed less a nagging problem than an ideological benefit. Commiserating over the Indian inexorable demise, and looking toward newly opened territories, reminded white Americans that they were, after all, the race of the future. (Harvey 243)

The point is that, for Whitman, this picture, well-entrenched in the cultural production of the day and most notably developed in Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*, has a broader significance. Namely, faced with “the future of the States... glad and sublime” (186), all other “races” are bound to follow the example of the “red aborigines,” which means that they can either “melt” or “depart.”

The ocean features prominently in Whitman’s imperial imaginings as a space of connections; thus, in “Song of the Exposition” (1871), the poet envisages “This earth all spann’d with iron rails, with lines of steamships threading every sea” (348), and in “Out of the Rolling Ocean the Crowd” (1865), included in “Children of Adam,” he metaphorically depicts the ocean as a realm of affectionate relations: “I too am part of that ocean my love, we are not so much separated, / Behold the great rondure, the cohesion of all, how perfect!” (263). The ocean signifies both boundlessness and closeness;

it naturally brings people together because it erases boundaries. In other words, the ocean annihilates distances. On the one hand, it is a powerful, determining force that accelerates historical processes, on the other, it reflects the poet's potential and anxiety: "You oceans that have been calm within me! how I feel you, fathomless, stirring, preparing unprecedented waves and storms" (187). In conditioning the essential course of the world as well as the great possibilities of the human kind, the ocean signifies the necessity of certain attitudes and activities and the irreversibility of certain processes. The ocean plays a significant role in global communication of which the poet is an agent. In the poem "In Cabin'd Ships at Sea" (1871) from "Inscriptions," the expansive ocean defines the territory which the poet aims to explore; in the meaningful line that reads: "The tones of unseen mystery, the vague and vast suggestions of the briny world, the liquid-flowing syllables" (166), he compares the sea water to the medium of poetry. Furthermore, Whitman combines the view of "cabin'd ships at sea" with the vision of his book: "Speed on my book! spread your white sails my little bark athwart the imperious waves" (166). He uses corresponding words to talk about the ships at limitless sea and the poems in the global space. This figuration is somewhat paradoxical because it highlights both the materiality of poetry, which "speeds on" and "sails on," and its liquidity: "bear o'er the boundless blue from me to every sea" (166). The characteristic logic underlying the combination of the oxymoronic concepts of materiality and liquidity results from the designation of the poet as the source of all meanings. It is in this figure that the meanings and the terms of conveyance originate. Needless to say, the poet has a privileged position in Whitman's poetry for two primary reasons: first, he enjoys the full mastery of "one common orbic language" (348), and second, he is a leading representative of America, "holding all, fusing, absorbing, tolerating all" (348).

Malini Johar Schueller explains Whitman's method of reconciling apparently contradictory ideas on the basis of his rhetoric of the Orient, which smoothly links the notions of colonialism and liberation:

The idea of the strong 'representative man' vigorously striding across countries, creating his own order, clearly echoes Emerson's laudatory biographies. But in Whitman's formulation the representative man had to also be the common, average citizen, who, because he embodied democracy, was always a threat to monarchic privilege. He made tyrants tremble and crowns become unsteady. That this populist representative man is also a colonizer with unlimited power over the natives is not seen as a contradiction. But Whitman could present colonialism as democracy only by dissociating it from questions about the freedom of Asians and other people of color. The narrative both resists and reifies this dissociation. Within the discourse of colonialism as eman-

cupation, the narrative of the godlike representative man exploring Africa is oddly ahistorical. However, as a mystification of the issues of slavery and power, the trope of exploration, thematized most often as freedom, works well. (180)

Schueller further argues that Whitman uses “a strategic language of political innocence” and she recognizes the following features of this political innocence: “earthy male[ness],” “an omnivorous appetite,” and “a desire to embrace all.” The critic describes Whitman’s poetic persona as “a nonchalant, amative self” and concludes that “while the imperialistic implications of this loving, embracing self are clear, the very idea of the nation as a lover necessitates us viewing it as a subject that necessarily derives its identity from interaction with the Other” (181).

The question arises as to the nature of the interaction with the Other, and by extension, as to the quality of global communication. First of all, communication is a process that parallels expansion insofar as it is characterized by an outward direction; in other words, when Whitman writes about ships, he envisages their departures, not returns, and analogically, when he writes about the poet’s encounter with the Other, he emphasizes the act of conveying messages rather than receiving them. In “Salut au Monde!,” the poem known for extended and detailed geographical catalogues – which Eric Wertheimer reads as Whitman’s “most blissful enunciation of global identities (165), while John P. McWilliams, by contrast, tellingly calls them “the absurd machinery” (233) – the poet, who has virtually circled the whole earth, meaningfully states: “I have look’d for equals and lovers and found them ready for me in all lands” (296). The persona’s assertion that he has found “equals and lovers” far and wide glosses over the implication of their passivity. The fact that the speaker is the source rather than the target of communication does not mean that he remains ignorant of the legacy of alien cultures. Quite on the contrary, he has a privileged cognitive status as the one who perceives and comprehends things first. In “Salut au Monde!,” the significance of cognition of which the poet is the subject is highlighted in the anaphoric sequences beginning with “I hear” and “I see.” The point is that the speaker hears and sees what he wants to, and not what others might expect him to. Thus, the essential condition of communication is a temporary co-presence but not a prolonged exchange; the reason for this is a large disproportion between the scale of America’s contribution to the general progress of the mankind and the extent of other nations’ contributions, which rather belong to the past. David Simpson argues that Whitman does not recognize the Other as “having different needs or interests” and forecloses the space for debate, therefore he does not have to worry about the consequences of “actions and words.” Simpson writes: “Whitman’s capacity to remain totally unaware of any difference between self and other marks him out as the

voice of manifest destiny, and of the most confident period of nationalist enthusiasm” (192). Tenney Nathanson’s description of Whitman’s addressee as “anonymous, generic... [and] defined by the participation in the codified transmission activated by the signature” (320) perfectly applies to the way the poet positions the Other in his writing.

The primary act of good will that America performs for the sake of other nations is remembrance, as Whitman makes it clear, for example, in the poem “Unnamed Lands” (1860), from “Autumn Rivulets,” where he writes:

Nations ten thousand years before these States, and many  
times ten thousand years before these States,  
Garner’d clusters of ages that men and women like us grew  
up and travel’d their course and pass’d on,  
What vast-built cities, what orderly republics, what pastoral  
tribes and nomads,  
What histories, rulers, heroes, perhaps transcending all others,  
What laws, customs, wealth, arts, traditions,  
What sort of marriage, what costumes, what physiology and  
phrenology,  
What of liberty and slavery among them, what they thought  
of death and the soul,  
Who were witty and wise, who beautiful and poetic, who  
brutish and undevelop’d,  
Not a mark, not a record remain – and yet all remains. (499)

Whitman’s imperial logic is expressed in a symptomatic way in the closing lines of “Salut au Monde!,” where the idea of the equality of nations is replaced by a new hierarchy of nations:

Toward you all, in America’s name,  
I raise high the perpendicular hand, I make the signal,  
To remain after me in sight forever,  
For all the haunts and homes of men. (297)

The poet’s commanding voice and overwhelming gesture evidently preclude any possibility of discord. As Betsy Erkkila puts it, “[t]he paradox of Whitman’s poetic democracy is that, at the very moment when he seeks to be most inclusive, universal, and democratic, his poetry becomes most powerful – and most powerfully dangerous – in silencing and denying the rights, liberties, and differences of others” (57).

Among the kinds of imagery that substantiate Whitman's imperial imaginings, technology plays a crucial role. *Leaves of Grass* as a whole can be seen as an example of what David E. Nye calls "the technological foundation story" (4). Essentially, the narratives of technological foundation depicted the processes of community-building on newly acquired territories, and thus they complemented the narratives of regeneration through violence. As Nye puts it, in foundation stories, the "dramatic action focuses on transforming an uninhabited, unknown, abstract space into a technologically defined place" (3-4), or in other words, on "creating society by applying new technologies to the physical world" (4). The invariable feature of the narratives of technological foundation was the attribution of important symbolic senses to certain man-made objects of general use which, in specific ways, corresponded to the successive stages in the establishment of human settlements in what used to be the wilderness. Nye mentions the following objects and constructions that acquired such symbolic significance: "the axe, used to create the log cabin and the clearing; the mill, the center of new communities; canals and railroad, used to open western lands to settlement; irrigation, which converted worthless desert into lush farmland" (4). Characteristically, because of their causal and sequential logic, the narratives of technological foundation helped to understand history as well as destiny, providing the inhabitants of new settlements in particular, and the whole nation in general, with a sense of being anchored in the past and of having a great task to accomplish in the present or the future. According to Nye, technological foundation stories produced a false idea of the essentially multifarious historical developments in reducing "a complex set of actions and experiences to an apparently simple assertion of facts" (4). The persistence of such stories resulted, on the one hand, from the adoption of the nostalgic tone to talk about obsolete technologies, and on the other, from the easiness of creating the imagery representing the new ones. As Nye observes, "[w]hen new, each technology represented a sudden increase in power. In retrospect, each is diminished" (19), becoming "naturalized" as an existing element of the environment transformed by changing technologies. It goes without saying that Whitman's poems contain numerous depictions of the national technologies and of the transformations of the land, the best single illustration of which is undoubtedly "Song of the Broad Axe" (1856).

In Whitman's poems, the narrative of technological foundation has a national as well as a global dimension. The transformation of America precedes the transformation of the entire world. The connections between America and distant territories have been strengthened as a result of the application of new technologies, most notably by the telegraph, to which Whitman makes repeated references. For example, in "Salut au Monde!," he writes: "I see the electric telegraphs of the earth, / I see the filaments of the news of the wars, deaths, losses, gains, passions, of my race" (290). Admittedly, the

figure of “the electric telegraphs of the earth” expresses Whitman’s ideal of global connections. Furthermore, the imaginary network thus created can be seen as the earliest historical variant of what Arjun Appadurai calls “technoscape,” that is the fluid “global configuration... of technology and the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now moves at high speed across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries” (325). In Appadurai’s view, technoscapes, alongside ethnoscapes, mediascapes, financescapes and ideoscapes, constitute the modern global cultural economy (324-326).

Whitman envisages the transmission of information on the largest possible scale as an inevitable phenomenon defining the special moment in history. The telegraph provides the medium not only for disseminating the news about defeats and victories, but also for sharing experiences of fundamental existential significance. Accordingly, the news, spread worldwide by means of recent technologies of communication, highlights particular events and concomitantly testifies to the continuity of historical processes and the lasting quality of universal laws. In “Song of the Exposition,” Whitman celebrates the technological inventions and constructions which epitomize the “triumphs of our time”:

With latest connections, works, the inter-transportation of  
the world,  
Steam-power, the great express lines, gas, petroleum,  
These triumphs of our time, the Atlantic’s delicate cable,  
The Pacific railroad, the Suez canal, the Mont Cenis and  
Gothard and Hoosac tunnels, the Brooklyn Bridge [...] (348)

In “Passage to India,” the poem composed around the same time as “Song of the Exposition,” Whitman once more pays tribute to the three great symbolic achievements of his age: the Pacific railroad, the Suez canal, and the Atlantic cable. What is worth noticing about both “Song of the Exposition” and “Passage to India” is an intense feeling of excitement that the very awareness of the existence of such advanced means of transport and communication arouses in the poet. The possibility of reaching the farthest corners of the globe bestows meaning on his idea of purpose.

Whitman has so much enthusiasm for the new technologies of communication because they reduce distances, for example through shortening the amount of time needed for the circulation of information or through making space appear to have shrunk. The idea of reduced distances harmonizes with the notion of the American imperial mission insofar as it facilitates the establishment of relations of scale between America and the rest of the globe and the emergence of new political hierarchies. In “Salut au Monde!,” Whitman writes:

I see a great round wonder rolling through space,  
 I see diminute farms, hamlets, ruins, graveyards, jails,  
     factories, palaces, hovels, huts of barbarians, tents of  
     nomads upon the surface,  
 I see the shaded part on one side where sleepers are  
     sleeping, and the sunlit part on the other side,  
 I see the curious rapid change of the light and shade,  
 I see distant lands, as real and near to the inhabitants of  
     them as my land is to me. (289)

While the extensive and continuous geographical catalogues suggest an impressive scope of vision, the poem, in fact, presents the world in miniature. Like the mythological figure of Atlas, Whitman's poet alone is larger than the Earth. Everything that his vision encompasses is "diminute." In the rapid succession of geographical names, very special places lose their uniqueness; as Walter Grünzweig observes, "[i]n their utilitarian compactness, these catalogues erase cultural differences and, through their very form, subject non-Western (or even non-Anglo-Saxon) cultures to Western standards" (304). The world outside the poet shrinks, while the world within him expands: "Within me latitude widens, longitude lengthens" (287); "Within me zones, seas, cataracts, forests, volcanoes, groups" (288). Obviously enough, such statements are imaginative constructions, but their spatial denotations create the impression of concrete, physical experience and thus legitimate the political program voiced by the speaker. Whitman talks about "a great round wonder rolling through space," employing an anaphoric structure that predominates stylistically in the poem, wherein several long sequences have lines beginning with "I see." In this way, the diminute world functions as a projection of the poet's mind and, at the same time, as an object of sensory perception. An equally meaningful example of Whitman's concretization of the imperial experience despite the use of figurative concepts is the act of incarnating the world by the poet: "Within me is the longest day, the sun wheels in slanting rings, it does set for months" (288). In other words, the speaker accomplishes what might be called a bodily annexation of the entire globe.

The poet's gesture of appropriation facilitates the articulation of the greatness of America; in "Song of the Exposition," Whitman thus prophesies:

Around a palace, loftier, fairer, ampler than any yet,  
 Earth's modern wonder, history's seven outstripping,  
 High rising tier on tier with glass and iron facades,  
 Gladdening the sun and sky, enhued in cheerfulest hues,

Bronze, lilac, robin's-egg, marine and crimson,  
 Over whose golden roof shall flaunt, beneath thy banner  
                   Freedom,  
 The banners of the States and flags of every land,  
 A brood of lofty, fair, but lesser palaces shall cluster. (344-345)

Indeed, it is quite generous of Whitman to say that around America, envisioned as “a palace, loftier, fairer, ampler than any yet,” “lesser palaces shall cluster,” while he implies that everything pales down in comparison with America, everything becomes inadequate. Images of superabundance recur in Whitman's descriptions of his nation's potential: “interminable farms,” “limitless crops,” “the endless freight-train,” “incalculable lumber,” “the inexhaustible iron” (349). In the short late poem entitled “The United States to Old World Critics” (1888), America becomes epitomized in the figure of “solid-planted spires tall shooting to the stars” (628). In the light of Whitman's figurations of America's magnitude, the nation's imperial project acquires self-justification.

David Marr writes that “Whitman's theory of history posits three stages: (a) the pre-American, feudal ‘ecclesiastical, dynastic world,’ encompassing ancient and medieval civilizations both east and west; (b) the American or modern and increasingly democratic, materialistic stage; and (c) the spiritualized democratic and imperial stage” (81). What undermines this view of the progressive course of history is that while the first two stages distinguished by Whitman are grounded, to a greater or lesser extent, in facts of the past and present, the final one, marking the ultimate point in human history, finds substantiation in the poetic vision exclusively. It is only in his imagination and, subsequently, in his rhetoric that Whitman can resolve or dismiss the tensions resulting from the very existence of national imperial plans, and deny the injustices inevitably entailed in the process of realizing such aspirations.

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Alicja Piechucka

## “Memory! You have the key”: On Memory, Transcendence, and Self-Mythology in Eliot, Nerval, Rimbaud and Mallarmé

T.S. Eliot’s road to temporal transcendence, one of the thematic and philosophical hallmarks of his *œuvre*, is a long one, and it is not until *Four Quartets* that he fully manages to go beyond the constraints imposed by time, reaching “The point of intersection of the timeless / With time” (*Complete Poems* 136). Nevertheless, Eliot’s efforts to achieve this aim are also manifested in the earlier poems, where the recurrent motifs of rebirth, resurrection and *chute aux enfers* are present. There is, however, another significant theme Eliot resorts to in his quest for transcendence: memory. The two relevant poems are, of course, “Preludes” and “Rhapsody on a Windy Night,” but memory is also an important element of the poetic vision in *Four Quartets*, though in a slightly different way. Whatever is the role and view of memory presented by Eliot in a particular poem, it is interesting to set his conception against the background of French symbolism.

It seems natural, in an analysis of memory and its functions, to start with “Preludes” and “Rhapsody on a Windy Night.” The latter contains references which are direct and explicit:

Midnight shakes the memory  
As a madman shakes a dead geranium.  
...  
The memory throws up high and dry  
A crowd of twisted things [...] (*Complete Poems* 14)

The centrality of the theme to the poem is marked by the exclamation “Memory!” (16) in the closing stanza. Due to the way the problem is treated in the poems, “Preludes” and “Rhapsody” are commonly regarded as *par excellence* Bergsonian. Indeed, it is difficult to ignore the analogies to the author of *Matière et Mémoire*, whose influence on Eliot was particularly strong at the time when he wrote both poems.

In part three of “Preludes,” a woman watches “the night revealing / The thousand sordid images” (*Complete Poems* 12) which make up her soul. At dawn, she has “such a vision of the street / As the street hardly understands” (13). It thus turns out that the

night-time images which “flickered against the ceiling” (13) make a vision of the street possible in the daytime. Nancy K. Gish explains this mysterious relationship in the light of Bergson’s philosophy:

Spirit, for Bergson, is pure memory. Matter is pure perception. The two unite in ‘memory-images’ which are memory beginning to materialise as a picture. Spirit and matter, then, connect in images, and none of these is ever wholly separate from the others. The woman’s mind and the street merge in the sordid images which constitute her soul. She is memory, perception and images combined, or body and soul, but she takes her images from contact with an external world. (5-6)

The same is applicable to the man in part four of the poem and the speaker in the first two parts.

Though it is not my intention to question or undermine the claim that such a concept of memory is Bergsonian, I cannot help seeing another parallel. It is one suggested by Eliot himself, if in a completely different context. The thesis he develops in his essay “The Metaphysical Poets” is, I would argue, relevant to his treatment of memory in the early poems. The essay praises the metaphysical poets in contrast to their successors in English poetry. The celebrated and oft-quoted passage points to the reasons for such critical appraisal:

Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet’s mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man’s experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes. (*Selected Essays* 247)

Eliot then goes on to state the regrettable “dissociation of sensibility” (247) which characterizes modern verse and singles out three poets who have managed to avoid it: Laforgue, Corbière and Baudelaire.

The French symbolists therefore embody for what Eliot admires about metaphysical poetry: the capability for association, the ability to “put the material together again in a new unity” (245). In all of Eliot’s *œuvre*, the fear of disintegration is detectable. It is this dread of being left with “[a] heap of broken images” (*Complete Poems* 38) that must

have drawn Eliot to the symbolists, with their gift for uniting heterogeneous ideas, feelings and impressions, for “telescoping of images and multiplied associations” (*Selected Essays* 243). This “mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience” (247) is, of course, manifested in the symbolist way of constructing the poetic image.

The desire for unity, for synthesis rather than analysis which underlies Eliot’s view of memory in “Preludes” and “Rhapsody” might be Bergsonian, for the French philosopher places “emphasis on memory as the only source of unity in a discrete world” (Gish 3) and points to human consciousness as the faculty which binds successive moments in memory, and is thus an enduring force in a discontinuous world. In this vein, each of Eliot’s two poems “suggests the capacity of consciousness for some insight transcending or unifying the fragmented images of the external world” (Gish 4). And yet, it is interesting to speculate whether the poems are not, on a deeper level, an expression of the symbolist quest for transcendence through a “unification of sensibility” (Eliot, *Selected Essays* 248). Though one might argue that “The Metaphysical Poets” concerns a particular poetic technique rather than the treatment of a particular motif, it must be remembered that to Eliot subject matter and technique are inseparable, and that this convergence is also part of the association of sensibility he argues for. Bergson’s theory is psychological, not poetic, but it is the psychological aspect of poetry that Eliot emphasizes in the very same essay: “One must look into the cerebral cortex, the nervous system, and the digestive tracts” (249).

The symbolist yearning for synthesis seems to underlie, from the very beginning, “Rhapsody on a Windy Night”:

Along the reaches of the street  
 Held in a lunar synthesis,  
 Whispering lunar incantations  
 Dissolve the floors of memory  
 And all its clear relations  
 Its divisions and precisions [...] (*Complete Poems* 14)

The moon seemingly synthesises the disparate elements of the street, uniting separate objects within its glow. However, it soon becomes clear that this unity is only apparent, as the moon is also the force behind the dissolution of memory. As it turns out later in the poem, the moon has perceptions but makes no connections, and in that is opposed to memory, whose chief ability is to connect. “The moon has lost her memory” (15), and hence is incapable of synthesis. It is memory which, in the Bergsonian vein, records and

orders miscellaneous events, as the mention of “clear relations” and “divisions and precisions” suggests. Memory is thus opposed to the moon and the streetlamp as the only real source of unity. The lights of the moon and the lamp present the world in a strange form, as either an unrelated jumble or isolated images, which are unlike the clear relations of daily action memory stores up. Memory is thus the only element in the poem whose role is similar to that played by the metaphysical or symbolist poet, for it too is capable of “amalgamating disparate experience” (*Selected Essays* 247) offering protection against the “chaotic, irregular, fragmentary” (247). It is thanks to memory that “experiences are always forming new wholes” (247). The sight of every object which the street lamp offers for observation stimulates memory, making the speaker think of related objects or events from the past. Memory thus plays an associative function. It does not enable “the ordinary man” to compose poetry, but it makes life possible for him, preventing him from a psychological, if not poetic, “dissociation of sensibility.”

There is, however, another way in which memory functions in Eliot’s poetry, relating him to French symbolism as represented by Nerval. It is the use of the poet’s own memories which he incorporates into his work. It is dangerous to refer to biography in a discussion of Eliot’s *œuvre*, as he, more than anyone, postulates the radical separation of the poet’s life and work. Eliot has a reputation of being a poet who “took the difference between ‘art’ and ‘life’ as axiomatic” (Perloff 46), backed by his famous doctrine of poetic impersonality, whose best expression is perhaps the statement in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” that “the difference between art and the event is always absolute” (*Selected Essays* 9). Given Eliot’s views on poetic depersonalization, objectivity and universality, as well as his connection with the back-to-the-text New Criticism movement, it seems advisable, in an analysis of his work, to avoid biographical interpretation altogether. Yet several critics of Eliot have been tempted to uncover the man behind the poetry, which results, for instance, in more personalized readings of *The Waste Land* (Moody 47). If not in the totality of his work then definitely in *Four Quartets* Eliot does draw on autobiographical resources, weaving, as does Nerval, elements of his and his family’s past into the rich tapestry of his poetry.

Lagarde and Michard claim that Nerval’s poetry owes its unique nature to its author’s extraordinary fate (272). This transmutation of personal experience into poetry is present in all of Nerval’s work, but it suffices to look at his most famous poem, “El Desdichado,” to see how it works. In the sonnet, the speaker refers to himself as “le Prince d’Aquitaine à la tour abolie” (693) (“the Prince of Aquitania whose tower is down”; Fowle 20), which is a fruit of Nerval’s passion for genealogy and the medieval knights whom he claimed to be descended from (Lemaitre 694; Lagarde and Michard 274). In fact, Nerval probably went so far as to identify himself mentally with his chivalrous

ancestors, asking “Suis-je Amour ou Phébus, Lusignan ou Biron?” (693) (“Am I Love or Phoebus, Lusignan or Biron?”; Fowlie 23). His belief in metempsychosis is undoubtedly behind the overall conception of “El Desdichado,” in which history and what he believed was his family’s history merge with Nerval’s own life story. If the eponymous Desdichado is a fusion of a character from Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe* (Lemaitre 693) and Nerval’s supposed ancestors, “East Coker,” the second of Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, owes its title to a village in Somerset from which Eliot’s ancestor Thomas Elyot emigrated to America in the seventeenth century. The poet made a sentimental journey to East Coker in 1937 and prayed in the local church, where his ashes were to be buried and the opening and closing words of “East Coker,” “In my beginning is my end” (Eliot, *Complete Poems* 123) and “In my end is my beginning” (129), were to be inscribed on the commemorative plate (Ackroyd 215, 228-29, 303). In an extension of the life-poem overlap, Eliot also uses a fragment from his ancestor’s book as lines 32-34 of “East Coker,” retaining the original spelling (Longenbach 185). The following is a passage from Sir Thomas Elyot’s *The Boke Named the Governour* incorporated into Thomas Stearns Eliot’s poem:

Two and two, necessarye coniunction,  
 Holding eche other by the hand or the arm  
 Which betokeneth concorde. (*Complete Poems* 124)

Eliot’s use, in *Four Quartets*, of his family history ranges from distant genealogical references to his childhood memories. In a note accompanying the poem, the author himself explains the title of the third quartet to his readers: “The Dry Salvages – presumably *les trois sauvages* – is a small group of rocks, with a beacon, off the N.E. coast of Cape Ann, Massachusetts” (*Complete Poems* 130). The poem thus starts with a reference to a place associated with the poet’s boyhood sailing trips, and the opening allusion to a river which “is a strong brown god” (130) may be read as referring to the Mississippi of Eliot’s St. Louis childhood. In the poem, other images from Eliot’s early years recur: “the rank ailanthus of the April dooryard” (130) in the first stanza is a reference to the courtyard of the Mary Institute, where he used to play as a child; the “Royal Rose” of part three (134) is the one that grew by his father’s summer home in Gloucester (Ackroyd 13-14, 235-36). The combined memories of holidays and sailing thus recur in “The Dry Salvages,” evoking past happiness and serenity. The title of the quartet which follows, “Little Gidding,” is also an evocation of a journey, but this time made by the adult Eliot in 1936. It is the name of a village in Huntingdonshire in which the seventeenth-century clergyman Nicholas Ferrar set up a religious community which focused

on family life, discipline and prayer (Ackroyd 214-15, 236). Again, the image evokes an ideal of blissful harmony, peace and human cooperation.

In his poetry, Nerval similarly fuses memories of his childhood and adult travels. The opening line of “El Desdichado” condenses the poet’s life in three words: “Je suis le ténébreux, – le veuf, – l’inconsolé” (693) (“I am the dark one, the widower, the unconsoled”; Fowlie 20). He refers to himself as a widower because of having lost the women he loved. The dead star mentioned in line 3 is interpreted as a reference to Sylvie and Adrienne (Lagarde and Michard 274), two female figures who poetically evoke Nerval’s childhood companions and first loves. They also appear in *Sylvie*, a poetic memoir of his early years spent in the Valois region (Lagarde and Michard 271-72), in which Nerval recreates the landscapes of his childhood the way Eliot does in “The Dry Salvages.” “Mon front est rouge encor du baiser de la reine” (“My forehead is still red from the kiss of the queen”; Fowlie 23), another line from “El Desdichado” (Nerval 693), is an evocation of a childish kiss also described in *Sylvie* (Lagarde and Michard 274). The star mentioned in the poem is also associated with Jenny Colon: the actress Nerval fell for in his twenties married another man, died young and became the prototype of the heroine of *Aurélia*, an autobiographical account of the love of Nerval’s life and the obsessions which grew out of this love (Lagarde and Michard 271). In the poet’s memory, all those women merge to become the poet’s eternal beloved, his now dead bride. The second quatrain of the sonnet contains references to Italy and a mysterious female presence:

Dans la nuit du tombeau, toi qui m’as consolé,  
Rends-moi le Pausilippe et la mer d’Italie,  
La fleur qui plaisait tant à mon cœur désolé,  
Et la treille où le pampre à la rose s’allie. (Nerval 693)

In the night of the tomb, you who consoled me,  
Give me back Posilippo and the sea of Italy,  
The flower that so delighted my desolate heart,  
And the trellis where the vine and the rose are entwined. (Fowlie 22)

The consolation Nerval speaks of is a reference to an Englishwoman who comforted the disturbed, suicidal poet during his Italian journey as well as to a Neapolitan embroiderer he encountered (Fowlie 22-23; Lemaitre XLVI). Both are linked, in the poet’s vision, with the image of a rose, the universal symbol of love, but also the flower embroidered by the Neapolitan girl on a religious vestment and the emblem of a town outside Naples where the poet and the Englishwoman arranged to meet.

This geography of the poet's love life makes one think of Eliot's "Burnt Norton." The title of the first quartet is the name of a seventeenth-century estate in Gloucestershire, which Eliot visited in the summer of 1934 with Emily Hale. Eliot had met Hale some two decades earlier. For many years, the poet stayed in touch with her, and the relationship evolved from youthful flirt to close friendship and even, as might be suspected, platonic love. This *amitié amoureuse* remained for Eliot a source of solace and support (Ackroyd 205-6), which might explain why he commemorated it in the title of his poem.

Nerval's poem is replete with autobiographical allusions, which makes it hard to decipher without any knowledge of the poet's biography. Almost every line, every image in the poem is a reference to some significant event in Nerval's life. Even when his memories merge with dreams to create the "souvenir à demi rêvé" ("the half-dreamed memory"; trans. A.P.) Nerval speaks of in *Sylvie* (597), his symbolism and surrealism are, according to Lagarde and Michard, an authentic transcription of the poet's experience, which is far from literary artifice and whose aim to attain a new form of knowledge by analyzing dreams born out of insanity (272). We find the same transcription of the poet's personal experience in *Four Quartets*, though from this particular work by Eliot the oneiric connotations are absent. Both Nerval and Eliot in *Four Quartets* draw on a map of personal reminiscences. In doing so, they write a kind of *poème à clef*, forcing the reader to look for keys to its interpretation. As a result, it is vital to refer to critical notes and commentaries to find out the meanings of vague and hermetic elements in the poem. The authors do not just find inspiration in their own lives, which one could argue most writers do, but create a kind of self-mythology, and, at the same time, make the reader's task more difficult, and the poem's meaning more ambiguous.

Such a use of poetically transcribed personal memories is by no means limiting. In a symbolist and Platonic vein, it allows for the discovery of the universal in the personal, the general in the individual, the multiple in the singular. For Nerval, the poet's memory is timeless, individual past merges with collective past, and the poet's *œuvre* expresses communion with all of human suffering (Lagarde and Michard 272). To paraphrase Eliot in *The Waste Land*, "all the men are one man": the individual experience of one human being comes to stand for all human experiences, a universal expression of man's destiny and condition. Eliot's reference to autobiographical material, particularly frequent in his later works, is not an "un-Eliotesque" departure from his theories of impersonality, but, paradoxically, a Nervalian attempt to unite the microcosm and the macrocosm in a bid to achieve poetic universality. Since in Nerval's case such efforts are based on the French poet's religious and mystical preoccupations, namely his belief in memory, dream and metempsychosis as the sources of timelessness, it comes as no surprise that towards the end of his poetic career Eliot undertakes a parallel venture, following a period of intense

religious experience and reflection. In his well-known essay “The Music of Poetry,” Eliot explains how a poet’s personal experience may be universalized by paralleling the experience of individual readers:

A poem may appear to mean very different things to different readers, and all of these meanings may be different from what the author thought he meant. For instance, the author may have been writing some peculiar personal experience, which he saw quite unrelated to anything outside; yet for the reader the poem may become the expression of a general rituation, as well as of some private experience of his own. The reader’s interpretation may differ from the author’s and be equally valid – it may even be better. There may be much more in a poem than the author was aware of. (*On Poetry* 31)

The point is that, for both Eliot and Nerval, the “peculiar personal experience” is *not* “unrelated to anything outside”: they realize that the individual encapsulates the general, as the present encompasses the past and the future, due to the universality of the human condition and the timeless, repetitive and paradigmatic patterns of human existence, manifested in metempsychosis and the periodic return of all things. When Eliot and Nerval incorporate the personal into their respective works, they are aware that they thereby express “a general rituation,” and the etymology of the word *rituation* is emblematic of the religious beliefs underlying their poetic visions. The conclusion of the above-quoted fragment seems to imply this oneness and unity: “The different interpretations may all be partial formulations of one thing” (Eliot, *On Poetry* 31). Eliot’s and Nerval’s tendency to intertwine their life stories with their families’ genealogy is a combination of memory and history, an effort to go beyond time by mixing past and present.

The same power to tame time is inherent in the association of memory with poetic creation, which is central to Eliot’s “La Figlia che Piange,” Rimbaud’s “Mémoire” and Mallarmé’s “Apparition.” One of the key themes in “Mémoire” is that of an abandoned woman. In section four, this motif is combined with memory and regret, with a sense of loss later made explicit in the mention of “Les roses des roseaux dès longtemps dévorées” (Rimbaud 152) (“Roses rise from long-dead reeds”; Mason 130). The solitary woman recalls the passion and sensual delight she used to experience in her lover’s arms:

Regret des bras épais et jeunes d’herbe pure!  
Or des lunes d’avril au cœur du saint lit! Joie  
des chantiers riverains à l’abandon, en proie  
aux soirs d’août qui faisaient germer ces pourritures! (Rimbaud 152)

Longing for strong young grassy arms!  
April's lunar gold, the holy bed's heart!  
Reveling in abandoned boatyards, prey  
To August nights that sow their rot! (Mason 131)

Those memories of a happy past are juxtaposed, in the stanza which follows, with the woman's present despair, as she is depicted crying amid the greenery which once witnessed her bliss. All the key elements in the section – the passage from memory to regret, the figure of a crying, solitary woman alongside references to her lover's painful and irrevocable absence, evocations of the unfulfilled promise inherent in love, beauty and sensuousness, the natural setting – are also present in Eliot's poem. Importantly, what is probably the most significant aspect of "La Figlia che Piange," namely the presence of a third person, the poem's speaker, who looks at the lovers' parting in terms of its artistic potential, endlessly recreating and re-imagining the scene, may be traced back to "Mémoire." Rimbaud's sentence "Qu'elle pleure à présent sous les remparts!" (152) ("Now, let her weep beneath ramparts!"); Mason 131) is an imperative statement. A parallel thus emerges between Rimbaud's phrasing and the overall imperative mood of "La Figlia," in particular the "would" and "should" constructions:

So I would have had him leave,  
So I would have had her stand and grieve,  
So he would have left  
...  
And I wonder how they should have been together!  
I should have lost a gesture and a pose. (Eliot, *Complete Poems* 20)

The Virgilian epigraph for Eliot's poem, "*O quam te memorem virgo*" (20), which could be translated as "O maiden, how may I recall thee?," points to the role memory plays in "La Figlia." The speaker's recollection of a scene marks the beginning of his attempt to turn this scene into poetry.

It might therefore be argued that the same authorial presence is detectable in both poems, the same desire, on the part of the poet-speaker, to control and transform reality. The notions of time and memory play a crucial role here: while for any individual recollections are a pretext for nostalgically moving between the past and the present, as does the woman in "Mémoire," for the artist they open up unlimited possibilities as the private memory turns into an artistic *tableau*. Memories of what one has seen or experienced are merely a starting point for the creative mind, a source of material which can be

appropriated and endlessly reworked. In the process, reality is as if detemporalized. What the creator ultimately controls is not just reality itself but, first and foremost, the time to which it is subject until it is liberated by being transmuted into art.

In poetry, memory leads to reality becoming secondary and being gradually erased. This is precisely what happens in Mallarmé's "Apparition," another poem of emotional recollection. The image of a lively, joyous girl the speaker runs into in the street gives way to a memory of his late mother. It is a turn away from reality that Mallarmé depicts: a living person is replaced by a dead one, who, moreover, connotes the ethereal by being referred to as a fairy. From the material world embodied by the girl, from the immediacy of the here and now, the poem nostalgically moves to a long-lost and seemingly irretrievable world. Yet it is the latter that triumphs in the speaker's consciousness and in the poem's conclusion: it is because poetry, like memory, can transgress spatial and temporal limitations. Unlike memory, it can also preserve this transgression in a material form. One way or another, the temporal distance, paradoxically, makes it possible to defeat time: in both "La Figlia che Piange" and "Apparition," unfulfilled earthly love is sublimated, through distance in both space and time, into a deeper, more elevated feeling, which is endlessly perpetuated.

Interestingly, both Eliot and the symbolists choose a female figure to symbolise a victory over time: it is so in "La Figlia," in "Mémoire" and in "Apparition." This is also the case with another Mallarmé poem, "Le phénomène futur," which perhaps most emphatically demonstrates the woman-time connection. The eponymous future phenomenon turns out to be a beautiful young woman, who appears before the degenerate inhabitants of a wasteland. The woman is "une Femme d'autrefois" ("a woman of yesteryear"), but "préservée à travers les ans" ("preserved through the years") and thus miraculously immune to the passage of time. Being a "vestige de quelque époque déjà maudite" (269) ("vestige of an already accursed epoch"; trans. A.P.), she survives it and continues her existence beyond the epoch to which she originally belonged. Mallarmé's woman is able to travel in time: having emerged from the past, she is livelier than the degraded present in which she finds herself and, as the very title indicates, points to a future. She is as if stretched between bygone days and the days to come, just as the vertical position of her body seems to indicate a link between the earth, the sea and the sky: "des seins levés comme s'ils étaient pleins d'un lait éternel, la pointe vers le ciel, aux jambes lisses qui gardent le sel de la mer première" (269) ("breasts lifted as if they were filled with eternal milk, pointed at the sky, smooth legs which retain the salt of primeval seas"; trans. A.P.). This perhaps explains why Eliot and the symbolists tend to associate femininity and temporality: to them, woman is the Mother Earth, as primeval and eternal as the elements, a guarantee of temporal continuity and therefore able to bypass time, return to the

origins and connect the end and the beginning. In a self-reflexive vein, Mallarmé concludes that the phenomenal woman of the future is an inspiration to the poets of the present, thereby stressing the poetic dimension of the memory-woman-eternity link: “les poètes de ces temps, sentant se rallumer leurs yeux éteints, s’achemineront vers leur lampe, le cerveau ivre un instant d’une gloire confuse, hantés du Rhythme et dans l’oubli d’exister à une époque qui survit à la beauté” (270) (“the poets of those days, feeling their extinct eyes light up again will head for their lamps, their minds momentarily drunk with confused glory, haunted by Rhythm and existing in the oblivion of an epoch which survives beauty”; trans. A.P.). The realms of poetry and memory overlap because inherent in both is a desire for transcendence and liberation from the limitations imposed by space and time.

In Eliot’s and the symbolists’ poetic vision, memory becomes another means of transcending temporal constraints. At this point, Bergson’s philosophy is relevant, but so is Eliot’s appreciation of associative sensibility, which the French symbolist poets exemplify for him. The power of memory to associate, synthesize and unite is particularly valuable in a fragmentary, disintegrating world, which leads Eliot to poetically realize Bergson’s philosophy in a symbolist vein. Following Nerval’s example, the author of *Four Quartets* uses his own memories and family history in his work. Drawing on autobiographical resources, which are transcribed and transmuted into poetry, Eliot and Nerval evoke the bliss and harmony of childhood and the splendor of the past. More importantly, by incorporating into their works allusions which are virtually impossible to decipher without knowledge of their biographies, the two poets create a kind of self-mythology and succeed in making their poems vague and hermetic. This anamnestic practice is part of the Platonic-symbolist endeavor to discover the universal and the general in the personal and the individual, thereby evoking the timelessness of the human paradigm. Eliot and the symbolists mix past and present and bypass time by combining memory and history as well as memory and poetic creation. The artist uses memories as material and is able to control and stop time. What unites memory and poetry is the power to recreate, transform and detemporalize reality. Like memory, art enables liberation from time and, unlike memory, it preserves it in a material form.

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Julia Fiedorczuk

## “Death as Death”: Laura Riding and the Limits of Poetry

Beyond this *Atè*, one can only spend a brief period of time.

Jacques Lacan

In a famous passage of the seminar on the ethics of psychoanalysis Jacques Lacan proposes a reading of *Antigone* in which Sophocles' heroine becomes the embodiment of pure drive. In Lacan's view, Antigone, taking full responsibility for her desire, manages to move beyond fantasy, beyond repetition automatism or what Sophocles repeatedly denotes as *atè*, fate. As a result of her uncompromising stance, Antigone finds herself in a space between life and death, or rather, between two deaths – the symbolic death (Creon's verdict) and the real death (the heroine's suicide). In that impossible space Antigone encounters what for Lacan counts as the ultimate reality, or the “what is”:

Antigone invokes no other right than that one, a right that emerges in the language of the ineffaceable character of what is – ineffaceable, that is, from the moment when the emergent signifier freezes it like a fixed object in spite of the flood of possible transformations. What is, is, and it is to this, to this surface, that the unshakeable, unyielding position of Antigone is fixed. (*The Ethics* 279)

She thus becomes an ethical figure *par excellence* in that she confronts the truth of her subjectivity, that which *is*, which is “ineffaceable” beyond symbolic representations. In other words, she is brought face to face with what Lacan earlier in the same seminar calls the Thing. It is from that impossible place, “the kingdom of the dead” that Antigone can approach life, “from the place of that limit where her life is already lost, where she is already on the other side” (*The Ethics* 280). In Lacan's view, it is precisely her position between two deaths, at the limit of *atè*, that endows Antigone with “the glow of beauty” (281) the audience of Sophocles' tragedy finds so arresting. I claim that such a confrontation with the emptiness of the drive, followed by a resubjectivization, is what lies at the heart of some of the greatest avant-garde projects of the first half of the twentieth century. The present article examines the work of Laura Riding in the context of Lacanian theory of the subject in order to demonstrate the rhetorical complexity of her poetry and

to point to a paradigmatic character of some of the problems involved in her writings, such as her preoccupation with death, her awareness of the limitations of language and her search for redemption through art.

Laura Riding's early writings, both poetical and essayistic, reveal the author's conviction that poetry is a very special form of expression, a form of truth of such a general and all-encompassing character that it exceeds science and philosophy as truth-searching discourses. For instance, in the preface to her *Collected Poems* (published in 1938) she wrote:

Knowledge implies specialized fields of exploration and discovery; it would be inexact to call poetry a kind of knowledge. It is even inexact to call it a kind of truth, since in truth there are no kinds. Truth is the result when reality as a whole is uncovered by those faculties which apprehend in terms of entirety, rather than in terms merely of parts. (*The Poems of Laura Riding* 406)

A little further she concludes: "A poem is an uncovering of truth of so fundamental and general a kind that no other name besides poetry is adequate except truth" (407). Though her stance is radical, the general claim that poetry is a privileged form of discourse is rather frequently encountered in the writings of modernist poets -- one might, for instance, mention Pound and Yeats in this context. This unique status of poetry is expressed by Riding in almost religious terms, as when she suggests that "existence in poetry becomes more real than existence in time" (406). The theological or moral rhetoric of her meta-poetical writings reflects the author's belief in a redemptive power of poetry, in its potential to make one "exist well" (413).

The idea of redemption, regardless of whether one understands it in religious or in existential terms, implies the perception of reality as somehow "fallen." In fact, both modernist art and psychoanalysis (which in fact constitutes part of modernism) offer various reinterpretations of the Judeo-Christian myth of the Fall. The most essential elements of that myth are the following: the withdrawal of God from the human universe (there is no "big Other"), loss of referentiality in language after God decided to "confuse the language of the whole world" and scatter people "over the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11:9), and the substitution of knowledge (the knowledge of sexuality and death) for being. In the psychoanalytical view, human subjectivity is founded on this fundamental loss of being (what Dominic LaCapra labels as "structural trauma"<sup>1</sup>): there is no subject prior to the loss, the loss, or absence of being constitutes the ultimate truth of the subject -- the truth encountered so fearlessly by radiant Antigone. The place of being is taken up by the letter, and, in Lacan's formulation, "the letter kills" (*Ecrits* 150), in that it de-

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, LaCapra's *History and Memory after Auschwitz* and "Trauma, Absence, Loss."

prives the subject of its substance. As Lacan further explains, “...the symbol first manifests itself as the killing of the thing, and this death results in the endless perpetuation of the subject’s desire” (101). The loss of being administered by the letter is compensated by the pleasures of symbolic repetition appreciated by Sigmund Freud in his famous account of the *fort-da* game played by his grandson. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud described the game – which consisted in throwing various small objects out of reach with the exclamation *fort!* and then reclaiming them with a joyful *da!* – as the child’s “great cultural achievement – the instinctual renunciation... which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting” (600). In Freud’s interpretation, the child compensated himself for the loss of his mother by staging her disappearance and return. Freud thus demonstrated that language, the symbolic order, begins with the negation (or the suppression) of loss, and that it usurps the place of that which has been lost. At the same time, however, this symbolic structure protects the subject against melancholia, making life possible. This line of reasoning is taken up by Julia Kristeva in *Black Sun*. She discusses the mechanism of a symbolic defense against melancholia using Freud’s concept of mourning:

[T]he possibility of concatenating signifiers... appears to depend upon going through mourning for an archaic and indispensable object.... Mourning for the Thing – such a possibility comes out of transposing, beyond loss and on an imaginary or symbolic level, the imprints of an interchange with the other articulated according to a certain order. (40)

Mourning is structurally built into language. Language, or “the possibility of concatenating signifiers,” requires that one stops inhabiting the space of one’s imminent death. Thus, though it is in fact language that infects human subject with mortality, it also alienates us, not only from our own being, but also from our death, offering a little symbolic pleasure in exchange.

Is “mourning for the Thing” the only form of redemption available to human beings? Is clinging to the little *jouissance* left one after the castrating encounter with language the only sort of life available to human subjects? I believe that Laura Riding’s poetry repeatedly poses and problematizes these questions attempting to address the issue of how to “exist well” in language. Inevitably, there exists a strong tension in Riding’s work between a desire to move beyond symbolic representations (what one could classify as Antigone’s desire) and the urge to keep on writing (what might be described as Kristeva’s therapeutic strategy). “Death as Death” will serve as the first example. This is the opening of the poem:

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To conceive death as death  
 Is difficulty come by easily,  
 A blankness fallen among  
 Images of understanding,  
 Death like a quick cold hand  
 On the hot slow head of suicide.  
 So it is come by easily  
 For one instant. Then again furnaces  
 Roar in the ears, then again hell revolves,  
 And the elastic eye holds paradise  
 At visible length from blindness,  
 And dazedly the body echoes  
 ‘Like this, like this, like nothing else.’ (89)

The poem begins with the representation of death as a crisis of sense, “A blankness fallen among / Images of understanding.” Such a blankness, or nothingness, cannot be conveyed in language. Therefore, “death as death,” death as such, is immediately replaced by its symbolic representations: hell with its roaring furnaces, or paradise. Death is “*like this*,” which means, primarily, that it is *not exactly* “this,” it is not identical with its representation. In the next part of the poem Riding further elaborates this problem:

Like nothing – a similarity  
 Without resemblance. The prophetic eye,  
 Closing upon difficulty,  
 Opens upon comparison,  
 Halving the actuality  
 As a gift too plain, for which  
 Gratitude has no language,  
 Foresight no vision. (89)

The actuality of death is “a gift too plain.” There is no language in which one could express “gratitude” for the gift of death. As a result, “the prophetic eye,” that is to say, the eye oriented towards this inevitable human future, has no choice but to open “upon comparison,” to go on speaking. In order for speech, the space of comparison, to be opened up, something else must be closed off. The difficulty of death, of the Thing, is that it is, by definition, excluded from representation – that is the very condition of the existence of language. Language is thus a mixed blessing: it calls the subject into being

while depriving it of the substance of enjoyment; it protects one against the fundamental meaninglessness of existence but at the same time it stakes out the scope of one’s life.

I claim that Laura Riding’s poetic project consisted in taking poetry to its logical limit, to the place beyond meaning, where it would be forced to confront its own limitations as a linguistic practice. The encounter with that limit eventually led to Riding’s renunciation of this form of language-use.<sup>2</sup> Riding discussed the problem of poetry’s relation to what in Lacanian terms would be called the symbolic order or the big Other in an early book of criticism titled *Anarchism is not Enough*. In her view, poetry was the only discourse which could transcend the sphere of what she referred to as “Myth.” “Myth” was defined by Riding as a “permanent altar to ephemerality,” that is, a kind of fictitious structure put up in order to produce a sense of coherence and meaningfulness in life (*Anarchism* 9). The purpose of the altar, or “scaffolding” as she also called it, was simply to make life bearable. It did not matter, Riding claimed, that people eventually discovered the imaginary nature of the protective scaffolding, the fact that it is self-sustaining and in no way justified. As long as one went on pretending that “what is ephemeral is permanent,” life went on. Myth prevented people from getting to know the truth about themselves and simultaneously it organized their existence: “It is the repository for whatever one does without knowing why; it makes itself the why” (10). But poetry, Riding went on to explain, was “in opposition to the truth of the Myth”:

It is all the truth it knows, that is, it knows nothing. It is the art of not living. It has no system, harmony, form, public significance or sense of duty.... Whatever language it uses it makes up as it goes and immediately forgets.... In the art of not living one is not ephemerally permanent but permanently ephemeral. (11)

One can perceive two logical moves in the quoted passage. Firstly, poetry is supposed to be that which demystifies, that which destroys the illusion of sense and destabilizes the false order. But secondly, it offers its own truth – one that is in opposition to the truth of the “Myth” – the truth of being “permanently ephemeral.”

The same twofold logic of liberatory destruction followed by construction is to be found in the works of other modernist writers. Terry Eagleton, while excoriating post-

<sup>2</sup> Laura Riding eventually stopped writing poetry. After her *Collected Poems* appeared in 1938, she published virtually no more poetry till the end of her life in 1991. She made several statements in print as to the reasons behind her decision to discontinue the writing of poems, each time explaining that poetry failed to fulfill what it promised: while creating in one the expectation of truth, it gave one only a semblance of truth. In fact, Riding’s prolonged silence after the publication of her most substantial poetic achievement ought to be seen as an integral part of her project. Moreover, Riding’s refusal to speak should be interpreted in the larger context of modernist poetry’s preoccupation with silence and negativity.

modernism in the essay “Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism,” notes that modernism, though it contributed to a crisis of “traditional ideology of representation,” never abandoned the search for truth (395). It was born in the world “posterior to... metaphysical humanism” which it continued to deconstruct (395). But it was “a deviation still enthralled to a norm, parasitic on what it [set] out to deconstruct” (395). Thus, while radically anarchic with regards to the old order of reality, modernist art sought to install a new kind of order, to discover new meanings, perhaps truer, more ultimate than the former ones.

But in fact, the new truth turns out to be of the same order as the old one: one symbolic construction is replaced with another one, repetition is not arrested. The limit of *atè* can be reached only momentarily, and from that place of emptiness the subject must begin anew the process of constructing meanings, the poem must resume its task of weaving the symbolic reality, just like a dream weaves its fabric around the inaccessible center famously described by Sigmund Freud as its navel. Poetry thus becomes a repeated attempt at confrontation with the truth followed by a relapsing into the vaguely pleasurable repetitiveness of the symbolic order.

One finds this pulsating rhythm in Riding’s poem “Originally.” The first stanza reads:

Originally being meant  
In us no sense of us.  
No guiding sense meant  
Minds ruled by hearts,  
Those brash foreminds  
Minds questioning and answered:  
‘This way, death following.’ (97)

Because of the omission of punctuation, the initial lines read almost as a random collection of elements that can be concatenated in many different ways. The elements are these: origin, being, meaning, “ourselves,” sense. Originally, one might say, there is no clear connection between these elements, the links between them have to be established in the act of interpretation. As we read on, things become clearer, and it is possible to paraphrase the stanza as follows: originally, whenever that was, being did not in any way entail self-awareness, there was no “guiding sense,” and, as a result, “minds” were ruled by “hearts” (in this conflict of “mind” and “heart,” the poet definitely supports the latter). The “brash foreminds” are guilty of disturbing the original harmony by questioning. This desire to know is lethal, because the answer that the questioning mind receives involves death: the knowledge available to the subject is primarily the knowledge of the

subject's own mortality. Thus, the movement of this stanza is from the original innocence and lack of self-awareness towards sense. This shift involves the Fall, which brings about the inauguration of mortality.

The second stanza of the poem confirms this reading:

Hearts faded, minds knew,  
Death led from chaos  
Into sense of us,  
And no remembrance,  
Save death behind. (97)

Once more, what is emphasized in this fragment is the deadly aspect of "sense," or knowledge. This crucial paradox is elaborated in the final lines of the poem:

If now seems little known  
Of joys of origin,  
It is **that** there were none. (97; my emphasis)

From the position of the human subject, the post-lapsarian (castrated) existence in language is all. There were no "joys of origin" because there were no subjects who could enjoy the original undivided being – subjectivity begins at the very moment of Fall. The poem thus confirms the psychoanalytical insight that the mythical oceanic fullness of being has always already been lost. The syntax of these three lines is complicated by the word "that" which seems to act as a substitute for the conjunction "because" which would be more natural in this context. This substitution introduces another layer of meaning. We know little about the vanished Paradise, because this Paradise never existed in the first place. On the other hand, however, what we do know about the "joys of origin" is precisely the fact that "there were none." Paradoxically, this knowledge, though "little" and negative, is our legacy of the mythical time before the Fall, and it is poetry's mission to preserve and articulate this knowledge, in a gesture evocative of Antigone's great complaint, the speech she delivers when she "crosses the entrance to the zone between life and death" (Lacan, *The Ethics* 280).

But Antigone dies, and poetry continues, remaining on the side of life, of repetition automatism. In "Yes and No" ridiculous rhymes underscore the structural emptiness of language. The poet compares the human being to "an animal unzoological" and asks:

Not visible not invisible,  
Removed by dayless night,

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Did it ever fly its ground  
Out of fancy into light,  
Into space to replace  
Its unwritable decease? (30)

Once again, the “unwritability” of death is emphasized in the stanza. Flying into light, or space, is how death is often imagined, but these visions have as little to do with actual decease as “images of understanding” from “Death as Death.”

How does a poem such as “Yes or No” relate to Laura Riding’s notion of poetry as truth? One ought to remember that Riding never understood truth as a specific idea that could be recounted in an expository way (in the case of poetry, she warns the readers against the “heresy of paraphrase” or what she calls the “frequent vulgarism” of the question: “What is the poem *about?*”). If truth were reducible to data there would be no need to write poetry in the first place. Truth cannot be told, it can be experienced (albeit only through language). It signifies a mode of being and Riding does not hesitate to designate this mode of being as poetic. People who go to poetry for the right reasons – Riding was convinced that there are right and wrong reasons for turning to poetry – whether as writers or as readers, become “equal companions in poetry,” that is, in the experience of “truth” (*The Poems of Laura Riding* 411). Poetry is, therefore, a quest for self-understanding. Ultimately, the self-understanding that can only be gained through the experience of poetry should lead to the transformation of one’s being, or what in the language of psychoanalysis would be referred to as a reconfiguration of subjectivity, a reorganization of the structural elements of one’s subjectivity around the foundational void. The logic of this reconfiguration is in keeping with Saint Paul’s doctrine of “becoming what one has always been” adopted by Heidegger in elaborating his concept of “alreadiness.”<sup>3</sup> In Lacan’s terms, one must confront the imaginary/symbolic character of one’s subjectivity and “traverse” it, to reach the place where one is already dead.

Was that confrontation too much for Laura Riding or was it not enough? Did she hope for a more positive kind of redemption, one that would avoid the negativity of the Thing AND the repeatability of the symbolic order? Whatever the answer to these questions is, it is impossible to overlook that an important aspect of her work is a pervasive sense of failure. To refer to Kristeva’s theory outlined above, Riding’s poetry could be read as performing a work of mourning for its own constitutive and unrealizable aspiration. Understood in this way, as a kind of rhetorical device, mourning becomes a trope comparable to that of parabasis, which, according to Walter Benjamin, leads to the “ironiza-

<sup>3</sup> See Zimmerman, *Eclipse of the Self*.

tion of form” (de Man 183). Discussing Benjamin’s understanding of parabasis in “The Concept of Irony,” de Man emphasizes its negative, destructive power but at the same time notes that this destructive force is only a stage in a dialectics: “At the moment when all seems lost, when the work is totally undone, it gets recuperated” (183). Such a rhetorical recuperation, a “negative redemption,” is to be found at the heart of the modernist aesthetic as such.

The failure of poetry is expressed in a number of poems by Laura Riding but “Nearly” is perhaps the most outspoken example:

Nearly expressed obscurity  
That never was yet but always  
Was to be next and next when  
The lapse of to-morrow into yesterday  
Should be repaired at least till now,  
At least till now, till yesterday –  
Nearly recaptured chaos  
That truth, as for a second time,  
Has not yet fallen or risen to –  
What news? And which?  
You that never were yet  
Or I that never am until? (115)

“Never yet but always / was to be” – the speaker seems to be complaining about a promise that was not fulfilled, perhaps the words’ promise of reference. “The lapse of to-morrow into yesterday,” the passage of time, “should be repaired” but is not. The syntax of the poem makes it difficult to reconstruct the logical links between the elements. For instance, what is it that “truth... Has not yet fallen or risen to”? Is it chaos? How are we to understand “that” which precedes the word “truth”? Is it a determining pronoun, or a conjunction (in which case “That truth... Has not yet fallen or risen to” would be a subordinate clause linked with the rhetorical question “What news?”). This complicated syntax reflects the main idea of the poem – its meaning is only approximate, the indeterminacies point to the fact that one can only “nearly” say what one means.

As a result, poetry can be true only in the act of negating its own *raison d’être*. It is a paradoxical and tantalizing space described by Jerzy Jarniewicz in his article on Michael Longley as “that particular marriage of mourning and naming” (154). Notwithstanding the poets repeatedly formulated intentions, Laura Riding’s best poems know not only their own failure but also the pleasure of non-fulfillment. The piece of the telling title “Celebration of failure” sums up most of the above reflections with elegant economy:

And haughty judgement,  
That frowned upon a faultless plan,  
Now smiles upon this crippled execution,  
And my dashed beauty praises me. (132)

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## Miron Białoszewski and Gertrude Stein: The Avant-Garde Poetics as an Insight into Historical Traumatic Experience

Let me start with a reader's intuition. The more one reads the work of writers who are commonly assessed as difficult, or interested in furthering the cause of the "avant-garde" understood as a purely "artistic" enterprise, the more one comes to suspect that these assessments must be missing some important point. The most shaky assumption would be that the art of such poets is deliberately and splendidly useless. Especially in the American avant-garde tradition – including such poets as, for example, William Carlos Williams or Gertrude Stein – the notion of art as something separate from life, the notion of art for art's sake, should be understood as increasingly untenable in the developments of the twentieth-century avant-garde. In fact, these developments show avant-garde to have produced a very "useful" formula – useful for a traditional task: that of telling poets, readers, and communities how they are living or what they have lived through.

Such intuition is not very original. Rather, I would risk saying that it will be a common ground nowadays for most readers of the "difficult" poets, especially in the American tradition, and especially if reading them can be backed up by the illuminating work of such critics as Marjorie Perloff, Charles Altieri, and many others.<sup>1</sup> But it seems that there is a high price that the "difficult" poetry has had to pay for being brought closer to the life of the language users. Paradoxically, in order for this poetry to appear as much a part of life as a part of art, it has had to be packaged by all kinds of discourses which highlight such qualities as indeterminacy, lack of referential value, deferral of meaning, or even the impossibility of reading. For example, Perloff's work relied heavily on "indeterminacy" and lack of referential connections in order to distinguish the work of such poets as Gertrude Stein, Charles Bernstein, John Ashbery, or Lyn Hejinian, from other, more "referential" or traditional poets. For Perloff, the life-like quality of these artists

<sup>1</sup> In the American tradition, the usefulness of the avant-garde is a result of the influence coming from pragmatic thinkers, notably John Dewey, whose ideas on the relations between art, experience, nature, and everydayness help shift the position of art and artist from a rebellious or elitist outsider to a creative participant of the processes making up the life of the community. The situation is not so clear in the Polish poetic tradition. Characteristically, many young Polish poets, writing nowadays in the modes that derive from the broad heritage of the twentieth-century avant-garde, often American, still link the prestige and aesthetic value of poetry with its utter "uselessness."

lies in how they manipulate and expose the linguistic codes that make up the beliefs of the community. The danger of such approach is that the avant-garde poem may appear to be an instruction manual for avoidance of linguistic naivete. But one does not live by instruction manuals. Thus, with varieties of indeterminacy being undoubtedly at work in avant-garde writing, the intuition of its proximity and usefulness for life must re-evaluate the “indeterminate” qualities of language; these must be shown, somehow, to actually give us more of life than traditional reference.

But how is that to be achieved? The situation is not made easier with those critical formations which treat literature, indeed *define* it, as *the* ground on which the aporetic, meaning-thwarting nature of language is exemplified. Deconstruction, for instance, has insisted that either reading itself is impossible (the claim of the early deconstructive critics), or, on a more advanced level of understanding the work of Derrida, that the meticulous study of how the work of literature problematizes reference is the richest critical insight to be achieved, leading the philosopher-critic to a renewed meditation on the presence of the present, trace, source, etc.<sup>2</sup> But if avant-garde, according to my opening intuition, is to be shown as realizing successfully its twentieth-century program of obliterating the artificial borderlines between ordinary life and art – not through simplistically understood mimesis – then deconstruction, understood as a philosophical description of the “nature” of the literary text, may not be the most exciting game to play when dealing with literature, at least its experimental branch. However complex and ingenuous the deconstructive analysis of the work may be, however rich inventory of terms it uses, it usually reduces the text to the same set of conclusions, which will show how the work cannot be identical with itself, or how its sense cannot be totalized. It is undeniable that

<sup>2</sup>A collective example of the early application of deconstruction to literary studies is, of course, found in the work of Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller. Here is an apt summary of that stance offered by Anna Burzyńska: “‘The expression of sense,’ understood as obvious, is in fact impossible. To say the least, everything there is to express is another rhetorical figure. Thus criticism... can only ‘make visible’ the process in which the literary texts ‘annul their own foundations’” (52; trans. K.B.). But what if the lack of foundations of “sense” is avant-garde texts’ departure point? In that case, doesn’t the early deconstructive critical standpoint sound misused when applied to avant-garde? A more interesting option is offered by Derrida himself. Michał Paweł Markowski, one of the French philosopher’s most apt commentators, insists that for Derrida the main preoccupation of literature is not the cancellation of reference but a “negotiation” or “suspension” of it. In his recent comprehensive study of deconstruction, Markowski writes: “a literary work simultaneously sends the reader outside itself and questions that gesture; it assumes a ‘thetic’ metaphysics (a content, a sense, in a word ‘logos’) only to show it as something impossible” (192; trans. K.B.). As Markowski illustrates extensively, Derrida is interested in literature as a sphere in which these “laws of deconstruction” are most readily seen at work. But it also ensues from Markowski’s argument that the exposition of this law in the work of literature serves the purposes of a philosopher, especially if the commentary shifts from literature in the narrow, traditional sense to Derridean arch-Literature: the space of inscription, the ground of reality. The problem, though, is that in the shift the critic abandons literature for Literature and becomes a philosopher: someone engaged in an ongoing debate with Plato over issues of ontology.

deconstruction is a genuinely original reading/writing practice. But it is equally important to realize that the main bearing of this originality is on the internal debate of philosophy. In other words, it seems that within Derridean deconstruction literature is a special sphere, illustrating the work of necessities that can speak against a certain tradition of thinking, or, simply put, a certain philosophical tradition. Not even the blurring of the division between literary and philosophical discourses changes this fact: the blurring helps Derrida to show how literature addresses issues that are strictly “philosophical.”

As for experimental poetry, it has always operated on “deconstructive” intuitions. The idea of art becoming a part of life – not of the stillness of a museum – can be realized only by showing the not-to-be-avoided reality of the constant play of absence, trace, and interpretation. If this is the case, deconstruction, just like Perloff’s “indeterminacy,” should be treated, within commentary on literature, as a gesture that is very useful with the usefulness of an initial clearing of the ground. But the continuous and persistent showing of the deconstructive logic at work at the very basis of demanding poetic texts may be exactly what deconstructive critics want most to avoid – thematizing literature; specifically thematizing it as a locus of deconstruction. Such practice may be fruitless for showing how poetry addresses its non-philosophical, vital preoccupations. If avant-garde is truly to be a counterpart of life, the avant-garde poem must surely be an instance of life’s unpredictability. But one does not show how a poem is such an instance by relying on predictable lines of argument that pertains to philosophy; rather, one treats the poem as an interlocutor in real life, by testing it against unpredictable contexts: those that the reader brings into the reading process. What I would urge, then, is that the critic nod thankfully toward the deconstructive findings as a given of the text – as a certain banal reality of the avant-garde text that it is useful to be aware of – and then proceed beyond the talk of how the text manipulates referentiality to examine how it behaves in unexpected circumstances, thus telling us something about our own behaviors.

In what follows, I am going to attempt such a description – one in which deconstruction would not be interesting as a major player – in illustrating how the work of Miron Białoszewski, one of Poland’s most notorious “other” artists, is a passage to the traumatic historical experience of both the author as an individual and the whole community of language users. In Białoszewski’s poetry, the processes that deconstruction *exposes* at work in literature are poetry’s daily bread. Yet, his poetic prose, without engaging in theoretical deliberations, gives the reader a chance to participate in a literary experience that is as alive as literature can be. If the life of the text happens to be part of a historical trauma, then Białoszewski, without mourning the lack of the “totality of meaning,” gives us a most engaging and authentic insight to the historical events, even though these are too dramatic to be rendered by traditional mimesis. Because I think that Białoszewski’s

poetic breakthroughs are very much akin to what the American poets had been finding exciting about their work slightly earlier, I will discuss Białoszewski's work in a sketched comparison to the poetics of Gertrude Stein.

Białoszewski's first poems were published in the 1940s, but his book debut occurred in 1956. Till his death in 1983 he published many volumes of poetry and prose, with the latter preoccupying him more extensively in the second part of his career. His output realizes a consistent project: to get away from literature as convention and to imitate the flow of life in its ordinary, everyday contexts. His, like Gertrude Stein's, is the avant-garde of everydayness – a deep belief in an inexhaustible mystery of our most familiar surroundings that can only be approached poetically. The focal point of his oeuvre is the publication in 1970 of *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*, which shows the trauma of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising to be the formative experience for the poet. For Białoszewski, the experience of working on this extraordinary book is a psychological breakthrough and a consolidating boost for his creative life.

*A Memoir* presents the Warsaw Uprising – one of the most controversial and tragic events in the Polish history – from a perspective that is rather rare among those Polish literary works which in one way or another are concerned with the critical moments in the history of the nation: the perspective of a civilian survivor. This perspective is intentionally narrow; Białoszewski wants to understand what happened by speaking from within the event. Although he does make use of reflection and hindsight, *A Memoir*'s most powerful and constitutional layer is a relentless, excruciating relieving of the most basic feel of the survivor experience. Such positioning of the narrative voice works against the grain of the Polish literary tradition. Maria Janion has discussed at length the scandal of *A Memoir*: it refuses to generalize about the war, or to glorify the patriotic military effort (231-233). As a critic noted, *A Memoir*'s protagonist is “a human being in a given situation, not a Pole in History” (quoted in Janion 231; trans. K.B.).

This is to say that Białoszewski speaks against placing war in the sublime of the demonic, the unrepresentable, the unspeakable, or the deeply subjective. Paradoxically, by sticking to the minutiae of the personal experience, and giving us what critics called a “microhistory,”<sup>3</sup> Białoszewski presents the experience of the many. My intention is to outline Białoszewski's technique of a continuous linguistic navigation amidst chaos by which he offers sharable experience.

The comparison between Białoszewski and Stein is not original. Krzysztof Ziarek has already noticed the affinities between the two, placing Białoszewski somewhere between

<sup>3</sup> The phrase was coined by Kazimierz Wyka, who says that microhistory is “more difficult to grasp and remember than big History, as it does not follow any scheme” (quoted in Janion 227-228; trans. K.B.).

Stein's avant-gardism and contemporary American LANGUAGE poets. Discussing Stein and Białoszewski in the context of Heidegger's discourse on art, Ziarek emphasizes the radical inessentiality of experience as the poietic site of the "now." It is this "now" that Stein activates, as she pursues its "intense existence" in a language that questions the essentiality of the grammatical rule. Commenting on "Stanzas in Meditation," Ziarek writes: "The tireless repetition of... phrases, combined with the absence of punctuation marks, creates the impression of language in a melted state, free to combine... in ways unexpected, or even repressed by discursive practices" (163). Ziarek demonstrates aptly how Stein's cryptic repetitions manage to highlight those aspects of language and the reading processes that are usually repressed, thus bringing language closer to life's mercurial ways, its very element of unpredictability. It is this avoidance of objectification and stasis that, according to Ziarek, places Stein's texts at the heart of the "event," i.e. "the ever shifting matrix of relations"; and it is in this sense that the texts are both imitative and partaking of "intense existence" (164).

Similarly, Ziarek highlights flexibility and unpredictability as the primary features of Białoszewski's poetry and prose. Like Stein, Białoszewski avoids submitting his language to the censoring machine of grammar or literary convention. Citing an earlier, seminal study by Barańczak, Ziarek re-emphasizes the colloquial and spoken layers of Białoszewski's works as a tool that returns the word to its living dynamic, its endless capacity for transformation (249).

The reading of *A Memoir* is a difficult experience. For the poet's English translator, Madeline Levine, his form is, as she puts it in the introduction to the American edition, "a rambling monologue which wanders from incident to incident, with frequent digressions from a basically chronological structure" (13). Apart from this intent – to order events chronologically – the text foregrounds no other organizational principle, swamping the reader with a tireless, uninterrupted avalanche of details, disjointed remarks, descriptions of scenes, or actions. No generalizing superstructure, no comprehensive overview emerges. Levine comments: "Białoszewski eschews the historians' attempt to create a pattern out of, or impose a meaning on, the random incidents which are for him the only reality of the uprising" (15). On the grammatical level, the text may resemble Stein's cubistic angularity and flexibility. In Ziarek's description "the chatter prose... of *A Memoir*... is composed mostly of fragments, one word sentences or sentence equivalents which effectively heightens the sense of increasing disorder and destruction" (253).

As numerous studies have already noted, Białoszewski's purpose is to retain the spoken qualities of delivery in the text. From the poet himself we learn that the creation process was a succession of writing, later dictated and tape-recorded, finally transcribed. Thus, each page of *A Memoir* presupposes the presence not so much of the reader as of

a listener.<sup>4</sup> Having searched for years for a form that would render the uprising adequately, Białoszewski is surprised to find out that the form he needs is already there, lurking in his numerous, if random, retellings of the event to chance listeners, usually friends:

For twenty years I could not write about this. Although I wanted to very much. I would talk. About the uprising. To so many people. All sorts of people. So many times. And all along I was thinking that I must describe the uprising, somehow or other *describe* it. And I didn't even know that those twenty years of talking (I have been talking about it for twenty years, because it is the greatest experience of my life – a closed experience), precisely that talking, is the only proper way to describe the uprising. (*Memoir* 52; Polish version 39; author's emphasis)

This realization links Białoszewski again with Steinian spontaneity which, as we learn from Marjorie Perloff, can be illuminated further by the context of Wittgenstein's ideas about language. Białoszewski's amazement at finding his form already at hand, for example, echoes Wittgenstein's choice of method for his *Investigations*:

After several unsuccessful attempts to weld my results together into... a whole, I realized that I should never succeed. The best that I could write would never be more than philosophical remarks; my thoughts were soon crippled if I tried to force them on in any single direction against their natural inclination. (quoted in Perloff 65)

Perloff comments: "Wittgenstein himself understands that this mode of 'investigation' cannot have... an underlying theme or master plot" (65). Instead, there is "sudden change, jumping from one topic to another" which Perloff sees as similar to Stein's method of "beginning again and again" (65). For all three writers the intention is the same: to pay attention to the singularity of each situation, and to avoid the essentialist model of language in which meaning results from stable referentiality and rules that are antecedent to the event. Just as Wittgenstein realizes that he must allow the thought to flow freely in a fragmentary rhythm, so does Białoszewski realize that there is no encompassing, coherent, unifying narrative of the uprising, and that his form has already happened to him – in random exchanges with chance listeners. In other words, the three poetics – Stein's, Wittgenstein's, and Białoszewski's – are similar in their insistence that no pre-given rule determines meaning. The ordinary situations are watched and studied as "complete," authoritative, always having advantage over theoretical prescriptions.

<sup>4</sup> Białoszewski said in an interview: "Talk is better [than writing].... *A Memoir* as a whole went through the ear" (quoted in Janion 221n; tans. K.B.).

Janion has pointed out how Białoszewski brings war down from ideological pedestals, examining it in surprisingly un-heroic and mundane sequences, day by day and night by night, profaning the war's mythologies and "saving life" (223). In this regard, Białoszewski's work corresponds clearly to Stein's pursuit of "intense existence."

And yet, with all these similarities among them, the two projects differ as well, *A Memoir* emphasizing a different context, goal, and outcome of linguistic experiment than Stein's. As Perloff has illustrated, Stein's playful repetitiveness questions the totalizing orders and schemes of thinking. The American poet's angular syntax is subversive, proposing utterances that cannot be explained by grammar, performing an artistic defamiliarization, a healthy dismantling of the scenes she comes to. This strategy has artistic as well as theoretical and political resonance. Now, although Białoszewski also values the subversively authentic usage over grammatical convention, we have to mind the fact that he approaches a different kind of linguistic scenes: those in which the dismantling is already performed for him, in a violent way. "Life saving" is a rich phrase that has undertones going beyond the discussion of literary form: it can, and should, be understood literally. Thus, there is a tonal, contextual, and structural difference that the critic should discern approaching Stein's "intense existence" and Białoszewski's "life-saving," a difference that stems from their identical approach to language – language as an inessential faithfulness to the event.

"Eventfulness" of literature works differently for Białoszewski, at least in his *Memoir*. Here, the poet's task is to try to keep pace with the process in which reality is dismantled *for him*, in which the reduction of reality to its basic elements is not an act of artistic innovation or daring, but a violent imposition from without. If Białoszewski takes apart his language in a fashion reminiscent of Stein, he does so for re-constructive purposes: his ambition is to render, as faithfully as possible, the feel of life under constant threat of annihilation. The poet's language travels back in time and, at the instant of the telling, lives the life of a besieged and hunted civilian around whom the contexts of meaning-making are shifting and crumbling literally. Similarly, the language, or the subject in language, progresses in fits and starts, hesitates, errs, changes directions, always seeking and miraculously finding passages in which to escape death: death of language, death of experience, and, most importantly, death of the author. In other words, Białoszewski's operations catch up with the pace of destruction and save more permanently habitable spaces, in which the tricky ways of physical survival can occur, and in which memory can get back to those instances. Just as the main character copes with reality that is violently falling apart, so does the language work toward reconstruction, primarily the activation of memory, and the imitation of the actual experience.

The difference between Białoszewski and Stein can be elaborated further by focusing on the American poet's famous decision to diminish the role of nouns in her writing. For her, the traditional dominance of nominalization is a trademark of the "discourse of patriarchal culture." Ziarek provides relevant commentary: "Stein's implicit critique of the exclusion of domesticity and ordinary language from high modernist art takes the form of undoing definitional and descriptive patterns in reference to everyday objects" (165). However, while Stein *re-introduces* domesticity into art by removing the most stable parts of speech and withdrawing the obvious referential impulse inherent in them, Białoszewski must re-establish habitable spaces, notably domestic ones, by, paradoxically, active *re-construction* of points of reference. Even though, just like Stein's, Białoszewski's goal lies in avoidance of linguistic petrification, it is not in his interest to eliminate substantives from the language. It is not stable *reference* that is a problem in *A Memoir*, but the very *reconstruction* of reality, language, and self. In the process, these elements – physicality of the world, linguistic searching for points of reference, and a sense of the self – become aspects of one whole, a larger entity that we could perhaps call *living*. Thus, Białoszewski will take all parts of language as they come to him, just as a survivor gladly accepts whatever the waves wash upon the shore, not reflecting on the political or theoretical status of the life-saving flotsam jetsam.

Interestingly, it is nominalization that his narration often foregrounds. The gerundial nominal form is very frequent in *A Memoir*, even obsessive, often a result of Białoszewski's notorious colloquialisms or word deformations: "latania," "rozejścia się," "palenia," "przechodzenia," "przesiadania," "przepojęciowania," "popalenie się," "bez mienia powodu," "najtrudniejszy do iścia" etc. Janion comments on the frequency with which the word "latanie," in a variety of its derivations – approximated by Levine variously, for example as "scurrying" or "running" – occurs in the text (234). The semantics point to chaos and shiftiness; but the word-formative impulse works against it, searching for something substantial. The gerundial forms both make the text more dynamic and, paradoxically, try to control the dynamics. This tendency to turn verbs into nouns can be seen as one of the adaptive features of language that copes, the poet trying to slow down reality that is becoming a dangerously speeding verb and hold on to temporarily created substances. As we shall see further, the anchoring quality is especially conspicuous with those nominalizations that engage the bodily. Speaking of such other gerundial forms as "kucanie" (crouching) – which functions as an opposite to "latanie" – and "leżenie" ("laying down") – occurring in Białoszewski's poetry – Janion points out how these forms serve to create not so much *reference* as a sense of temporary anchorage (237). While Stein re-introduces domesticity by avoiding nouns as the most "referential" parts of speech, Białoszewski reconstructs this human sphere by getting around

the problem of referentiality and using his idiom as a spontaneous tool whose use is discovered on the go.

Let us now take a closer look at a few passages from *A Memoir*, which will allow us to examine in more detail the way Białoszewski's language achieves its reconstructive powers. The coping of his language is operative on a few levels, engaging, and ultimately combining into one expressive form, a number of spheres, the most important of which are memory, language, and the physical layer of existence that engages the bodily.

In one of the passages we encounter the following event:

All of a sudden – bombers. They are diving at the rooftops, scattering their bombs. Now they're gone. Now they're back again. Farther. Nearer. Now they are flying into Baroque Street. We do too. They fly blindly. We too. We is I. And someone else. Like me. We. Two of us. Here. Only. Neither here nor there. Because now. They're here! We run. Into some one-storied what (?)... empty... it races, we race along (?) the downstairs rooms (?) of something's halls (?), which already is changing, howling, clanking. We rush on, bricks are flying, the bombers harry us. A proverbial brick. One. And there are so many here: ping! ping! We raise our collars. What kind of stupid instinct?! We jump. Ping! ping! Just don't yield. To chance. Everything's important. Because he is flying in zigzagz. In spurts. Between the walls. Sssshh-boom. Falling plaster. Whitewash. Something. From the rain gutters. Wait? No. Don't stand still. Zoom. That hill is flying, maybe we can sit down... I don't know how many times we jump; suddenly ping! ping! Nothing. Feints. Only... As was necessary, in my opinion. (78; 66)

As the survivor keeps on moving, the language that copes uses whatever resources are handy. There is no difference in the fragment between its "literary" and strictly descriptive or relational values: the literary tropes become tropes of survival. The fragment uses all sorts of figurative movements: it has a rhythm, it uses repetition, onomatopoeia, indeterminacy, metaphor ("proverbial brick"), elements of internal dialogue ("Wait? No. Don't stand still"), editorial omniscience ("as was necessary in my opinion"). The word use in the fragment is unusual, slanted, diverting from expectable collocative patterns, or even ordinary semantics. For example, for the Polish version's narrator, the bombers "kucają na dachy." A word for word translation would produce: "the bombers are crouching onto the rooftops." Levine's translation ("[the bombers] are diving at the rooftops") is unable to render Białoszewski's diversion from use: in English bombers can "dive," whereas in Polish it is only the idiom imposed by the event that makes the narrator talk about the bombers by using the terms that really apply to his own body –

“kucają” (“they are crouching”). Usually, in Polish, bombers do not “crouch.” Typically in the fragment, words are wrenched from referential sockets: “what (?)... empty... it races, we race along(?)” (“co? puste, lata, latamy”). Instead of reference we have “free talk” based on intuition, and impromptu creativity so typical of colloquial encounters. It is characteristic of such exchanges that they continue even if the interlocutors are temporarily lost. It is because the interlocutors create a space in which they make allowances for the other participant’s attempts to *make* sense, however clumsy, ineffectual, or bizarre they may be. Such is the situation of the reader of the above passage. When the narrator says: “That hill is flying,” readers must enter such a space of charitable allowance and rely on surmise and conjecture.

The point here is not to *suspend* or *problematize* reference, but, indeed, to *re-find* reference. But now reference is not a term burdened with a history of philosophical inquiry but a matter of poetic creation and pragmatic survival. And an even more crucial point is that, despite Białoszewski’s erratic conduct in the passage, communication with the reader/listener is possible; reference is re-found, even if only temporarily, in the reading process. Neither reality nor the possibility of reading – the narrator’s “reading” of his situation and the reader’s reading the text – is negated. In fact, the text works *against* such impossibility. Dissemination, dispersal of meaning, Mallarméan “blank,” deferral of meaning, do not have to be “exposed” in this text, since the text has no pretense to any totalization of sense or arrest of the signifying play. Lack of totality and an ongoing “play” – play of life against death – are the very *reality* here. And yet, reading, understanding, and sense are possible; indeed, are the crucial bid of the text. In relation to such passages, it would be banal to work with the tools of *deconstruction*; applied to poets like Białoszewski, the talk of deconstruction would be sheer paraphrase.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, such fragments question the division into reality, human subject, and language as a tool of representation. Instead, these three are shown to be a continuous entity: just as reality is blurred, so is language and the sense of the self: “We too. We is I” (“My też. Ja to my”). Not just *reference* is suspended: the basic entities that make up human life are spun out of stability. Such is the language that matches disintegration. There are moments here in which the language literally, “does not know” what it is describing, or doing. What matters, however, is that the state of unknowing is inscribed in the prose, and that the prose works against it.

<sup>5</sup> Analyzing a poem by Białoszewski, one that develops over surreal, vertiginous word play dominated by complex sound relations and the use of nonsense, a critic concluded: “Paradise for a deconstructionist? No, rather hell. One deconstructs structures. Here, it would be necessary to reconstruct deconstruction” (Balcerzan 24; trans. K.B.).

The technique of inscribing uncertainty in the process of writing/talking is also operative in the following passage:

We take off. We run. Barefoot. Along Ogrodowa Street. A barricade. We squeeze past. To Solna. Something's burning. Explosions. Beams are sailing through the air. Noise. They fall into the fire. With a thud. We dash along Solna. To Elektoralna. A barricade. We squeeze through... Somewhere beyond Orla Street a whole house is on fire on the left. Actually, it's being consumed by flames. There are hardly any ceilings left. Or walls. Again *the beams groan*, collapse. It's hot... The cornices again, but not as gray. Yellow. Which means in this dawn (it was barely dawn) they seemed to be covered with gold leaf. Perhaps this is where I saw the *pigeons*. The ones which *flew* up. Or just those cornices. In a different style. With little *Corazzi angels*. With garlands. Tympanums... Suddenly it is really dawn... On the left, on a gentle curve of Długa Street, is the Palace of the Four Winds. The whole building is on fire. It's already destroyed. The flames are howling... *The beams groan*, collapse. The tympanum, with its bas relief, is still standing. The twinkling medalions. The carved gates of the inner courtyard. And those *Four Winds*. On the pillars of the gate. They have gilded *wings*. *They gambol, shine*. They seem to be dancing even more gaily than usual. We run on. (39-40; 25-26; emphasis added)

Here, retaining the error and accident of impromptu composition activates memory: the poet bumps into associations that disclose the scenes of memory. Running through the fragment is a thread of auditory associations that link the sounds of the raging flames, crumbling architecture, the sound of an imaginary wind, and the flight of the pigeons (see the emphasis added in the quoted fragment). Again, it is the strained collocations that activate memory. In the original, burning beams give off a sound that is collocatively reserved for the sound of the wind – “szumią” (26), thus anticipating the find of the architectural decoration – the “Four Winds” – later in the fragment. Also, the winged statues of the Four Winds, animated by the flames, correspond to scattered fluttering of the pigeons' flight. The auditory imagery – both consistent and idiomatic – returns and binds the shifting scenes. Thus, the poet's idiosyncratic usage – his erratic, hardly referential utterance – actually succeeds in constructing an amazingly complex net of associations, in which the singularity of the event – a dramatic chunk of personal history – integrates effortlessly with the system of larger, historical imagination of the whole nation, if not the whole European culture. Białoszewski deals simultaneously with the very minutiae of the personal experience – the question of where and when he saw the pigeons, what it felt like to be amidst the pandemonium, where they ran, etc. – and with the global significance of the scene. Here, it is the whole storage of western cultural ideals that is being destroyed.

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But for Białoszewski the work of association is not a matter of mere psychology or memory. The primary reason why reference, or *correspondence* of language to reality is not an issue for Białoszewski is that in his poetic imagination there is no division between the psyche, the language it uses, and the so-called external world. Białoszewski does not *represent* what happened to him; he re-lives it textually, drawing as much on his psychic impressionism and linguistic mastery as on something we can tentatively call the “memory of the bodily.” Consider the following commentary, which, for its brevity, I quote in both versions:

I am speaking of changes sensed by smell, by touch, on the run, by extending your hand, with the powdered ruins and smoke in your breath; in general, things sensed in profile, because after all it was night. (103)

Mówię o zmianach na tak zwany niuch, dotyk: od dreptania, wyciągania rąk i wpadania kaszy gruzowej i dymu w dech; w ogóle coś w sylwecie – bo przecież to noc. (89)

There are many such passages in the book. It is because the scenes of the uprising are reductive. They reduce the so-called reality to a number of elementary sensations, or to handfuls of sensory data. The poet does not observe emotions, but merely gestures, movements, the constellations of the body, the air, the space, and the walls – a choreography of survival. The body, as much as language, is a locus of memory and, seeking to activate it, Białoszewski must recreate the network of bodily sensations. The language finds its bearings through the bodily, as did Białoszewski himself, when he had to get more permanent holds on reality.

In the most formative layer of his prose, Białoszewski combines the idiomatic nature of the event, language, thoughts and bodily actions into one whole. For their powerful effects, the passages rely on referential and collocational dislocations, uncertainties, and chopiness. In those fragments, the world is literally an unknown: its properties can only be surmised, and life is a matter of the success or failure of such continuous effort. Just as in the poetry of Stein, the meaning for the reader resides not in decoding the referential value, but in the following of the rhythms of not-knowing, in making a textual living out of permanent play of guesses. Like the narrator, the reader must perform something that John Ashbery, writing of Stein’s *Stanzas in Meditation*, called: “the painful continual projection of the individual into life” (13).

Let us pause at this remark. In his review Ashbery makes it clear that he thinks Stein’s unusual poetic procedures to be a perfect counterpart of life, in its unfathomable rhythms: “Just as life is being constantly altered by each breath one draws, just as each second of life seems to alter the whole of what has gone before, so the endless process of

elaboration [in Stein's work] seems to obey some rhythmic impulse at the heart of all happening" (13). It is interesting to observe that this formulation comes from a writer famous for his opacity, difficulty, and the avant-garde stance. Clearly then, the avant-garde poetic that Ashbery captures so aptly does not consist of creating gaps between language, language users, and their circumstance. For Ashbery, and apparently for Stein too, these entities co-create a space that, although it cannot be totalized or reduced by any final statement in the language, is the only reality there is. If Stein's work could be commented on by pointing how it cancels referentiality, this approach will not be interesting in itself; it should only be a beginning to a further speculation on how avant-garde poetics is in fact closer to human daily existence, by exposing the process in which humans, thrown into their shifty "realities," are continuously engaged in making up their habitats. It would be fascinating, for example, to have a diversion from the language of negativity and bump into a new language, one that, having absorbed the negativity, could help us see how, in poetry, we are disclosed as different individuals by various contexts of landscapes, objects, or people. It would be even more fascinating if such language helped us understand how our life, our decisions, are affected by such disclosures.

Such language would demand that the discourses of negativity, such as deconstruction, are applied in the discourse on literature on different basis than so far. Much has been said about how the "economy of différance," or the "deferral of meaning" are *essential* to literature. But thus taken – as a form of grounding discourse – some potentials of deconstruction may be wasted. When dealing with Stein, Ashbery, Białoszewski, and many contemporary poets working with their legacies, the often hypertrophic apparatus of deconstruction is useless if treated as a method of returning literature to philosophy by revealing something *essential* about poetic enterprise. More interestingly, deconstruction is treated by poets themselves as a certain companion voice to their endeavor. These implications, however, cannot be examined here. Thus I propose to conclude by discussing Białoszewski from an alternative critical platform, one that is much less prone than deconstruction-as-method to making overarching claims that appropriate literature. The platform – a broadly understood pragmatism – belongs to the American critical tradition that was among Gertrude Stein's formative fascinations.

According to the philosopher Donald Davidson, language that has no essence – that is the language that Derrida also describes – thrives on "wit, luck... private vocabulary and grammar... on rules of thumb for figuring out what deviations from the dictionary are most likely" ("Derangement" 446). Such language is not separate from the palpable reality; it is simply a part of it, as is the subject. Instead of reference, which presupposes stable values, both linguistic and ontological, we have linguistic coping and dynamic finding of one's bearings in the world. Here, language is a skill which, alongside other

skills such as, for example, simple body movements, belongs to the adaptive repertoire of the organism. The task of such language is not to *represent*, but to *move on*. Using a term from Davidson, we might say that Białoszewski's language gives us "reality without reference."<sup>6</sup> Echoing Wittgenstein's critique of the magical view of stable reference, Davidson's model of conversation gives us a continuum of the language users and their environment. This view, as Davidson says: "erase[s] the boundary between knowing a language and knowing our way around the world generally" (445-446). As such language happens, the issue is not the adequacy of its correspondence to *reality*, but its adaptive success. But within the pragmatic tradition, to which Davidson can be provisionally linked, there is no difference between the successful adaptive operations we perform in life and the operations of the artist. Whether Białoszewski succeeds as an individual – in overcoming the trauma and grappling with the crucial experience of his life – is the same issue as whether he succeeds artistically. This question, it seems to me, is much more interesting in case of Białoszewski – and in case of Stein – than the question of how the text thwarts, or exposes the aporias of meaning-making. If Białoszewski knows his language – if he re-learns it successfully – he survives, and he saves the experience for the reader, regardless of the indeterminacy that is at the very heart of it.

Does Białoszewski know his language? If we agree that his technique leads to a successful "projection of the individual into life," to recall Ashbery, or a successful finding of one's "way around the world generally," as Davidson puts it, we must follow up and say that *A Memoir* overcomes the problem of representability. Events such as the Warsaw Uprising do not need to be "represented" – they have to be poetically recuperated from unspeakability. *A Memoir* is fueled by the faith in the possibility of doing just that. Maria Janion quotes a remark by Białoszewski which functioned as authorial commentary to the first edition:

And maybe it is possible. Because they say it isn't. To tell about it. About what one has lived through. That is – about what happened. Because if we know about anything, we do so only through telling about things, from descriptions, from pictures. Actually we know twice as much, because we also know about what did not happen, and was made up by those who ascribe a certain inconvenience to reality. I don't ascribe it. (quoted in Janion 227)

As we know from numerous studies, such inconvenience, when it occurs, is psychological in nature. In such cases the trauma blocks the language, incapacitating the wit-

<sup>6</sup> This phrase is a borrowed title of Davidson essay from 1977, collected in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*.

nesses. But this shows that the problem is not of philosophical or strictly *linguistic* nature. Białoszewski operated on a simple belief that beats all sorts of skepticism, epistemological or linguistic. We know about the world through what we say about it, he insists, thus displaying an attitude that eschews the artificiality of philosophical problems, such as, for instance, skepticism in its various forms.

If Białoszewski manages to find form for his witnessing, it is also a form of overcoming the trauma. The narrator of *A Memoir* functions on two temporal levels, the past and the present, and if he “saves life,” the feat applies to both levels. By activating memory in fragmented colloquial rhythms, Białoszewski learns his language again, reclaims it and his world – indeed the world of the community – from the speechlessness of trauma. As a witness of trauma, he is caught between the unspeakable and the need to speak out, and his task is one of re-finding his own self amidst such pressure. Białoszewski does that in conversation since this form poses the constant need of understanding oneself and sharing this understanding with others. As Davidson would put it, it is a matter of “triangulating”<sup>7</sup> one’s meaning-making against other participants of the scene and the physical circumstance. By doing that, Białoszewski’s poetry evokes a sphere in which a minimum of communication is possible.

But the final conclusion is that this minimum is enough. The sharable reality is a result not of stable reference, but of communicative work, which does not violate what must remain unspoken, but makes the sphere of the unspoken clearer and more available to us, by the same token clarifying what can, and should, be said.

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<sup>7</sup> Davidson developed the idea of “triangulation” in a number of essays. For a good discussion of this term, see Thomas Kent’s “Interpretation and Triangulation.”

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Rafał Dubaniowski

## Pain, Patience, and the Self in James Merrill's Poetry

It does not come as a surprise that out of many poets he admires, James Merrill chooses Auden to represent a central voice of the literary past in "The Book of Ephraim" included in *Divine Comedies*. In his poetry, Auden distrusts the American democratic style; and so does Merrill. The democratic or classless style inevitably implies some ideological alliance, which seems to be especially true of those contemporary American poets who, as Robert von Hallberg points out, "under the influence of Merwin were pursuing styles that apparently disowned social relations" (112). Merrill, however, believes in a style because he believes in the significance of the individual self that tends to be suppressed under claims of democracy, ideology, philosophical dogmatism, or any kind of intellectual framework that rests on universalizing generalizations. In so far as the democratic style eventually subsumes difference in the name of dominant sameness, Merrill's pursuit of style reflects his need to cultivate what is idiosyncratic and private, which makes it possible for his distinct voice to be recognized as one of the more conspicuous voices, for example, in contemporary love poetry.

Merrill's distrust of the democratic style translates into renewable pleasures his lyrics offer the reader, pleasures that can be attributed to his honesty in not promising to do anything more in his texts than to be faithful to the language by which he decides to live. Choosing words around and through which one can organize one's experience and understand better one's longing becomes a serious task for someone who knows that at some point, as Merrill puts it in one interview, "there comes a time when everyone, not just a poet, wants to get beyond the self" and "to reach... 'the god' within you" (*Collected Prose* 107). His faithfulness to and reliance on words partly express his need to distance himself from ideas and concepts that Merrill consistently avoids as elements that threaten to thwart and erase particulars of individual experience, and which obliterate their value in one's attempts to construe and live a meaningful life. In his insistence on language as a means "to get beyond the self" he refuses to acknowledge the authority of concepts and ideas because they establish boundaries of the self that Merrill prefers to see as a domain expanding through personal choice in what is worth following. His strong aversion to the ideas and concepts defining the self should also be seen as a reac-

tion to the realm of politics where language becomes inevitably debased and where interpretations of personhood are already given and imposed.

Choosing to be a person who lives by his language, Merrill is after his own interpretations and revisions of who he aspires to become, as he finds his sources in mundane autobiographical detail and translates it into cherished constituents of an evolving self. In this respect, he may be said to undertake the task set by Rilke, the poet whose influence on Merrill was not strictly aesthetic. "What I got from Rilke," he said, "was more than literary; that emphasis on the acceptance of pain and loneliness. Rilke helps you with suffering, especially in adolescence" (Brown 9). In Rilke, pain and loneliness are necessary modes of being in a world where interpretations are not granted and become both a burden and a blessing for consciousness convalescing through language that is hoped to give shape to experience and make the self habitable. This is one of central thoughts in the first of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*:

Alas, whom can we turn to  
in our need? Not angels, not humans,  
And the sly animals see at once,  
How little at home we are  
In the interpreted world. That leaves us  
some tree on a hillside, on which our eyes fasten  
day after day; leaves us yesterday's street  
and the coddled loyalty of an old habit  
that liked it there, stayed on, and never left. (*Divine Comedies* 5)

Like Rilke, Merrill finds his consolations and directions in a private language that can sustain his search for meaning and for some stronger being, a language that can do justice to his aspirations to negotiate his place among dominant interpretations of the world. This attitude turns his poetic attention more to how words and syntax come to form and encapsulate experience than to particular external events that act on consciousness. Trusting in images and symbols he creates, Merrill becomes distanced in the impressionistic sense from the objects he perceives so that he can better concentrate on the atmosphere surrounding them. He describes this preference of impressions to the knowledge of solid objects in his early unpublished essay on Proust and impressionism where he stresses "the assumption that the true existence of an individual lies in his mental processes rather than in the external incidents of his life" (Labrie 12).

Delving into his impressionistic sensibilities, Merrill renews his interest in daily habits of poetic observation by moving among subjects and objects that incessantly

demand his attention and to which he diligently responds. He sustains this observation with an ever fresh hope for impressions that may reconfigure the contours of the self struggling to make its solitude habitable by adjusting its capacities to endure pain of not being quite at home in “the interpreted world.” Out of the attempts to maintain distance from the objects of experience and to continue negotiations of meaning that resist closures provided by ideas, there emerges a quality that one may consider to be central in Merrill’s lyric pursuit, and that seems to inform his ambitions to secure the very continuity for the search for meaning rather than for the search’s final conclusions. I propose to identify this quality with patience as a specific orientation of the mind towards persons, events, and objects that are perceived as standing in the way of the mind’s satisfaction.

Patience may be perceived as an existential mode that enables one to relate to hope. The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition refers patience to “calm endurance of hardship, provocation, pain, delay etc.,” to “tolerant perseverance or forbearance,” and to “the capacity for calm self-possessed waiting” (“Patience”). As an existential orientation, patience allows one to see suffering as a terrain that may be modified by reason. Being patient promises a meaning that can be eventually teased out of pain and suggests an enduring quality of the mind that exercises resilience to whatever hampers its engagement with the world and thus thwarts its satisfactions. In this respect, patience in Merrill can be seen as a stance toward the mode in which, as Spinoza teaches us in his *Ethics*, “the mind’s power of thinking is diminished or hindered... and therefore the mind in so far as it feels pain has its power of understanding, that is, its power of acting... diminished or hindered” (124). In Merrill’s poetry, patience is a redeeming attitude of the mind that affirms its freedom to conceive its own satisfactions confronted with the pressure of daily occurrences and of Merrill’s unresolved past. Seeking in language forms that can translate pain into the mind’s, however illusive, pleasures of comprehension, Merrill seems to display in his texts what may be called “poetry of waiting.”

The task of orientating oneself towards patience underlies his “Lost in Translation,” the poet’s first mature lyric from *Divine Comedies*, where he attempts to comprehend his situatedness by means of translating his past into meaningful aspects of the present. The present is structured around Merrill’s life in his home in Athens, and by his search in local libraries for Rilke’s translation of Valéry’s sublime poem “Palme.” The reading of Valéry’s poem shifts Merrill’s attention to childhood memories around the time of a lonely summer without his parents, when the poet is left in the care of “His French Mademoiselle” that becomes his surrogate parent. The lyric begins with a scene of calm resistance that the mind builds by waiting in response to deprivation:

A card table in the library stands ready  
 To receive the puzzle which keeps never coming.  
 Daylight shines in or lamplight down  
 Upon the tense oasis of green felt.  
 Full of unfulfillment, life goes on.  
 Mirage arisen from time's trickling sands  
 Or fallen piecemeal into place:  
 German lesson, picnic, see-saw, walk  
 With collie who 'did everything but talk' –  
 Sour windfalls of the orchard back of us.  
 A summer without parents is the puzzle,  
 Or should be. But the boy, day after day,  
 Writes in his Line-a-Day *No puzzle*. (*Divine Comedies 4*)

Intended to stand for Merrill's former self, the boy exercises his childish waiting by repeated entries in his diary registering the fact that his puzzle has not arrived yet, although one knows that the real cause of the boy's frustrated desire for order and fulfillment lies in the fact that it is a "summer without parents." When the puzzle finally arrives, the boy's putting its elements together acquires the significance of making sense of a life whose disparate painful elements he expects to fall into place. As the assembling of the puzzle progresses, the boy is confronted with an image of grown-up life whose meanings become illusive and paradoxical, as illusive and paradoxical is his childhood. Disclosing a picture taken from a painting that has an oriental theme, the puzzle enforces on the boy's mind a fascination with the emerging meanings that, much like the events compounding his own life, do not entirely satisfy his craving for order:

This World that shifts like sand, its unforeseen  
 Consolidations and elate routine,  
 Whose Potentate had lacked a retinue?  
 Lo! it assembles on the shrinking Green.  
 Gunmetal-skinned or pale, all plumes and scars,  
 Of Vassalage the noblest avatars –  
 The very coffee-bearer in his vair  
 Vest is a swart Highness, next to ours.

Kef easing Boredom, and iced syrups, thirst,  
 In guessed-at glooms old wives who know the worst

Outsweat that virile fiction of the New:  
'Insh'Allah, he will tire --or kill her first!' (8)

The shifting world of the puzzle corresponds to the shifting world of the boy engrossed on a playful level in the activity of sense-making whose object reminds him of the source of his pain.

As the reminiscing adult, Merrill self-ironically recalls the final stages of the patient assemblage to the effect of their visual presence that emphasizes the futility of his childhood goal as well as his present striving to structure and cultivate meanings despite suffering:

Then Sky alone is left, a hundred blue  
Fragments in revolution, with no clue  
To where a Niche will open. Quite a task,  
Putting together heaven, yet we do. (8)

Merrill's "heaven" and "Sky" do not serve here as destinations he may choose to follow. He rather seeks departures that may be continued in the mind's projections that, when thoroughly performed, become emblems of order fashioned out of "fragments in revolution" that ask for the arduous task of putting together a life. For Merrill, the activity of assembling those fragments means incessant struggling for patience that, as the quality of the mind, lies at heart of Valery's poem for which, in the present time of "Lost in Translation," "[r]ansacking Athens," he spends the last days of his stay. Merrill's fascination with Valery's lyric is reflected and emphasized by what he seeks to achieve in his poems – a calm self-possession and persevering superiority to time that he attends to through particular forms of waiting. A fragment from Merrill's fine version of "Palme" may be useful here for elucidating the poetic focus of "Lost in Translation":

Patience and still patience,  
Patience beneath the blue!  
Each atom of the silence  
Knows what it ripens to.  
The happy shock will come:  
A dove alighting, some  
Gentlest nudge, the breeze,  
A woman's touch – before  
You know it, the downpour  
Has brought you to your knees!

Let populations be  
Crumbled underfoot-  
Palm, irresistibly-  
Among celestial fruit!  
Those hours were not in vain  
So long as you retain  
A lightness once they're lost;  
Like one who, thinking, spends  
His inmost dividends  
To grow at any cost. (74)

If Valery's poem may be said to underlie the poetic enterprise in "Lost in Translation," it is because Merrill addresses the human condition from the perspective set by "Palme," namely that of patience that enables one to build horizons of expectations and regions of salience where a reality of order is feasible. "Growing at any cost," achieved in patient waiting means ultimately to be willing to depart from former incarnations of the self towards new meanings that can translate those incarnations into fuller versions of life. With the fullness promised by those departures in view, Merrill pursues his goal of translation which helps him to annihilate a sense of loss by his careful refusals not to be trapped in the contexts that have created it.

The poem's ending recapitulates Merrill's attraction to the results of his patient translations:

But nothing's lost. Or else: all is translation  
And every bit of us is lost in it  
(Or found – I wander through the ruin of S  
Now and then, wondering at the peacefulness)  
And in that loss a self-effacing tree,  
Color of context, imperceptibly  
Rustling with its angel, turns the waste  
To shade and fiber, milk and memory. (*Divine Comedies* 10)

As Merrill walks in his adulthood through "the ruin of S" (which seems to suggest the ruins of Stonington that he perceives as having undergone an undesirable change of aura since he chose it as a place of his residence for its quiet unpretentiousness), he wanders at the same time among the ruins of his former self, when as a child he once undertook the task of putting his toy puzzle together. Through "wandering" and "wondering," the

two activities that seem to emphasize how Merrill uses the resources of language to transcribe and comprehend experience, he can “find” and relocate himself on the map of being yielded by patience that brings about a fresh “color of context.” His mind, itself “a self-effacing tree,” achieves now an orientation that does not promise the erasure of pain, but most important, its subsumption within the continuity of translation that is itself embraced as a goal. “Shade and fiber, milk and memory” are poetic correlates of relevance, “turning the waste” of pain into parts of a puzzle waiting to be reshuffled by Merrill’s pursuit of meaning.

Yet patient attentions with which Merrill attends to the shifting contours of the self are not exclusively aimed at making loss and pain cohere with the economy of behavior that translates frustrations of desire into acceptable positions enabling him to construe a fulfilled life. Merrill repeatedly sets out to renegotiate contexts of personhood not only to dispense with pain, but also to sustain patience as an existential orientation that can shape his contexts of salience. Waiting in Merrill is not only a way in which to comprehend and cope with suffering but, more important, a mode that makes orientations possible at all, since it is by and in waiting that structures of care and of what one finds worth pursuing can be grasped.

It is not my intention here to raid philosophy for ideas to make a point about satisfactions offered by literature, but I can still imagine Merrill not protesting against expanding on the significance of waiting from Heidegger’s perspective on this attitude. For my purposes here, Heidegger seems a most helpful thinker for two major reasons. First, he is the only philosopher that I know of who devotes a considerable amount of reflection to the mode of waiting; and second, the subtlety and complexity of his thought may be claimed to correspond to the subtlety and complexity of Merrill’s translations of the self in ways that can help one to avoid temptations of closure on the level of ideas as far as ideas, persistently mistrusted by Merrill, posit a threat of becoming final knowledge.

In Heidegger, the state of waiting is a mode that participates in shaping the present by establishing the “then” allowing care to express itself. Along with the “present moment” and “on the previous occasion,” the “then” compounds a domain of temporality where existential directions can be demarcated. “In the ‘then,’” Heidegger claims, “taking care expresses itself in awaiting” (373). As a tight unity and interdependence of past events, present moments, and the “then” structured by waiting, temporality opens a territory for “interpretedness” that equips a being with a possibility to establish a direction for care. Put differently, waiting prepares a background of delays, making it possible for objects of care to emerge out of the present. A being or the self that waits can embrace a position, a “there” that initiates acts of interpretation manifesting themselves in time and modifying objects of care. The establishing of a “there” marks a projection of the self in

the world: “The being which is essentially constituted by being-in-the-world is itself always its ‘there’” (125).

By waiting, a being significantly realizes its existence, that is, it begins to live ahead of itself by reaching out towards its possibilities. As Heidegger understands it, an existing being “has always already made room for a leeway. It determines its own location in such a way that “it comes back from the space made room for to a ‘place’ that it has taken over” (336). And taking over of new places that reaffirm the being’s existence is made possible precisely by the mode of waiting. The movement of the self along the lines of projected care sets up a context of relevance. For Heidegger, in taking care, one lets something be relevant by projecting and setting up a relation of usefulness:

Letting something be relevant lies in the simplest handling of a useful thing. Relevance has an intentional character with reference to which the thing is useable or in use. Understanding the intention and context of relevance has the temporal structure of awaiting. Awaiting the intention, taking care can at the same time come back to something like relevance. Awaiting the context and retaining the means of relevance make possible in its ecstatic unity the specifically handy way in which the useful thing is made present. (324)

Waiting then appears to help a being shape an orientation in the world in three central ways: it opens a space for motivation to pursue the present; it inaugurates interpretation through positing a “there” in as much as “[b]eing-in-the-world that takes care of things is directed, directing itself” (337); and finally, it lets one be engaged in contexts of usefulness and salience by seeing things as relevant.

Approaching Merrill’s poems from the perspective of Heidegger’s “awaiting” promises a finer attunement to the contexts which Merrill relies on in his lyric translations of the self. Seeking for more capacious ways in which he can use his memory and powers of observation in order to do justice to the enlarging nature of the self, Merrill may be said to do what Proust discovers in his retrieval of the self through remembering. A passage from *Remembrance of Things Past* may be useful here for grasping the essential qualities of the self as constructed in Merrill’s poetry. The process of change that Merrill responds to in his waiting is redolent of what Proust’s Swann experiences as the shifting contours of his affective investments. Toward the end of “Swann’s Way,” one witnesses Swann’s falling out of love with Odette. For years tormented with jealousy, Swann feels now a change in his desire that announces a relief from his sufferings. Proust thus describes him:

In the past, having often thought with terror that a day must come when he would cease to be in love with Odette, he had determined to keep a sharp look-out, and as soon he felt that love was beginning to leave him, to cling to it and hold it back. But now, to the diminution of his love there corresponded a simultaneous diminution in his desire to remain in love. For a man cannot change, that is to say become another person, while continuing to obey the dictates of the self he has ceased to be. (410)

One can become another person not only by simply leaving behind what has become unattractive, unpleasant, or dull; a new person is feasible in as much as there can be conceived new forms of satisfaction and new forms of love. In Merrill's lyrics, one can point to a similar aspiration to change forms of desire and forms of the self in relation to objects that may freshly stimulate the mind in its search for novel manifestations of care.

Merrill sustains his patience as the attitude to the pain of becoming a new self through words and images that provide the very resistance to pain in that they act as vehicles of thought refusing to be trapped in the present and thus seeing the self's satisfaction in its striving to live ahead of itself. Built patiently of words, in the solitude of quiet observation, his waiting enables him to create images of life that seem to promise more fulfillment than the ones already encountered. This is the case, for example, in "River Trip," an account of Merrill's trip to a shrine on his visit to Japan. The poem markedly focuses not on the trip's destination, but on the boatmen whose activities create a space where the visit to the shrine acquires its significance. Taking Merrill upstream, the boatmen are described as selves positioned by routine of dull work that epitomizes uneventfulness:

One man pulls  
the single oar, another poles, a third steers, a fourth stands by  
to relieve the first...  
Years of this have tanned and shriveled the boatmen. For after  
all, the truly exhilarating bits  
  
Were few, far between  
-boulders goaded past, dumb beasts  
Mantled in glass-green  
  
Gush – and patently  
Led where but the landing,  
The bridge, the crowds. We  
  
Step ashore, in our clumsiness hoping not to spill these brief  
Impressions. (*The Inner Room* 59)

The image of the boatmen points to pain and fading away, but more important, it also becomes an epitome of patience and of a triumph achieved in quiet waiting. Merrill's perception here shifts from his pity brought about by the paucity of exhilaration in the boatmen's work to his admiration of their calm form, leading him to discover his own clumsiness felt in the presence of some stronger being exhibited by the boatmen. The fragment seems to have the adverbial culmination in "patently" that instantly brings to mind another adverb, "patiently." The contrast between his own need for exhilaration sought in the trip upstream and the boatmen's calm resistance to their work achieved in the "patent" of patient repetitions produces a context in which the self experiences some kind of shame at its way of living, as a new image seems to come into view claiming a revision of one's perception.

As far as waiting is a condition of relevance and of making things present, Merrill continues to live in the present by not investing the objects of his perception with final meanings. He may choose though to treat emphatically those elements of his calm visions that forward his goal of waiting, and that provide him with occasions to contemplate and satisfy, however briefly, his need of order in the interpreted world. Such seems to be the case, for instance, of the fine lyric "Rescue" organized around a single incident of saving a turtle. The very fact of noticing and rescuing the turtle may be seen here as a Heideggerian moment of "clearedness" inaugurating a "there" and initiating the efforts of care:

Dusk. Rain over        but asphalt hissing  
flooded clear        with sea light.  
Sharply, sweet heart,        you swerved, pulled off,  
ran back and snatching        the three-inch turtle  
we almost hadn't        missed as it started  
its perilous crossing        deposited it  
there! At the far        pasture's edge –  
mission so nimbly,        raptly accomplished  
where dizzying beams        rushed both ways  
and tears broke        from the tall trees  
that I who saw        the marvel simply  
filed it away        for future use.  
We had seen so many        marvels those days... (*A Scattering of Salts* 35)

96 It would not be an exaggeration to claim that the opening stanza's layout with clear mid-line spaces is suggestive of the emergence of some clearing, a kind of light that the mind

uses to decipher the contours of objects motivating its care. Designating a position of safety, the emphatic “there!” corresponds to a moment registered by consciousness as the inception of care that enables Merrill to “see clearly” and contemplate the turtle’s significance with the exclusion of other “marvels” and impressions competing for his attentions. The saved turtle acquires its central place in the poem as it evokes contexts of pain, waiting, and deliverance that underlie our own attempts to live a human life. Merrill lets the turtle play its principal role of claiming our attention precisely because of its neediness and insecurity that are also indelible marks of human waiting and wanting. The final stanza reveals the shared predicament through qualities that circumscribe a realm of human care whose contours are sustained and redrawn by telling:

Back to turtle,        here’s a tale  
*it* can tell        till the end of time:  
‘Night was falling.        Too frightened to shrink  
into my shell,        as the shattering lights  
hurtled past        I took despairingly  
slow steps        to appease them.  
Upon chelonian        powers that shouldered  
Terra herself        from a waste of waters  
childlike I called        for help. Was heard!-  
only then turning        to instinctive stone.  
Shame upon me:        I had shut myself to  
Life even        as it uplifted  
And heaved me into        a green haven. (*A Scattering of Salts* 36)

Fear, slowness, despair, helplessness, shame, a need to appease and please – these defensive elements enter the domain of activity circumscribed by the turtle, and are reminiscent of a Rilkean quiet cry for help in a consciousness situated in the interpreted world and putting together its puzzles of being. The exclamatory “Was heard!” provides a structural and semantic completion of “there!” in the first stanza, both suggesting Merrill’s relying on language as his means of convalescing from states of deprivation and loss inevitably confronting him in human translations of experience.

By looking at the turtle as an emblem of his care and giving it a place, a “there,” Merrill seems to listen to his own projections of the self and “is heard.” The turtle’s paralyzed being enables the poet to demarcate these components in his own waiting for fulfillment that may tempt him to turn “into instinctive stone” and thus frustrate his desire to acknowledge a need for change and new destinations of the self. That is why the

turtle can go on telling its tale “till the end of time,” time revealing one’s forms of care as achievements of one’s waiting. As the turtle finds its help, so does Merrill find his rescue, in words that can purge him of his fear and that may continue to heave his unfulfilled being into green havens of patient translations.

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Andrew S. Gross

## William James and Frederick Jackson Turner: Nature, Corporate Expansion, and the Consumption of Space

One model of the environment prevalent in nineteenth-century philosophy posits a rigid, epistemological correspondence between identity and place. In “The American Scholar” (1837), for instance, Emerson argues that “Know thyself” and “Study Nature” are actually the same “maxim” (55). However, social and economic developments in the middle of the century made this model untenable. First, the construction of interstate trains destroyed the sanctity and isolation of place. Second, the corporations needed to finance the trains undermined the economic – and by extension the philosophical – independence of the individual. Corporate expansion shifted the terms of the environmental discussion, replacing the traditional rhetoric of place and identity with an economic system based on access, mobility, and distance. In the evolving corporate landscape of the late nineteenth century, the personal relation to nature gave way to the impersonal forces of naturalism. Knowledge ceased to be an epistemological problem of recognizing the self in nature and instead became a technical and managerial problem of using nature as a resource to propel the body forward in space.

The growth of corporations had a profound effect on those psychological and historical theories that helped define the terrain of twentieth-century politics. This paper will analyze the way William James and Frederick Jackson Turner redefine the relation of the body to its environment as they grapple with incorporation as a fact and a concept. The differences between these two theorists are significant: Turner is a corporate apologist and an imperialist; James is opposed to “bigness” in all of its forms. Of equal significance, however, is their common assumption about the range of the debate. Both thinkers are anti-environmental in the current sense of the term; they advocate treating nature as a resource, something to be consumed, even used up, for personal and political ends. While this is not necessarily a corporate way of thinking, it does mark a divergence from the proto-conservationism implicit in the Emersonian model. What James and Turner have in common, despite their profound differences, is the belief that the environment is something to move through and consume.

While it is often overlooked, William James is above all a theorist of movement. His first book, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), maps out an impersonal but highly

regimented space made up of overlapping trajectories, some intentional (thought), some sensational (perception), but all of them natural. Early in his career James rejected the absolute mind/body distinction assumed by his predecessors, instead elaborating a theory in which the stream of consciousness overlaps with and emerges out of the stream of sensations. In this fluid space the boundaries of the body are posited, not given. James says, for instance, that a baby learns where its toe is by seeing it, grasping it, and ultimately defining its position in relation to the rest of its anatomy (*Psychology* II 187-188). The baby maps out its environment in an analogous way. In James, the body not only moves through space, it moves through itself as space.

James's innovation was to treat the starting points of traditional physiology – the body and its environment – as heuristic fictions posited in the wake of the only given in experience: movement. In “Does ‘Consciousness’ Exist?” (1904), James defines the relation of the body to its environment along the trajectory of cognition, i.e. the movement of a thought towards its object. Thought is defined as that which can be penetrated by itself. The body puts up some resistance to thought, but it is less resistant than the environment; conversely, the body is the instrument through which thought modifies its environment, or senses where obstacles in the environment must be avoided. All discussion of bodily integrity is irrelevant here. The difference between the body and its environment is one of relative inertia. (As we shall see in a moment, this theory of inertia allows James to account for specific corporeal differences – e.g. race, class, gender – according to a coefficient of resistance. His sympathies go towards those who encounter more resistance.)

Identity too is understood along a trajectory of experience. In “A World of Pure Experience” (1912), James says that the “starting point [of a stream of experience] becomes a knower and their terminus an object meant or known” (*Writings* 201). These terminal points are literally re-membered, or put together in retrospect. Identity is not a given in James; it is incorporated, this being a figure not of ownership but of assemblage. Walter Benn Michaels argues that for James “selfhood... consists neither in having a body or in being a body but in being embodied” (22). Identity is not a starting point; it is the narrative of the body's continuous effort to move through space, and through itself as space.

The continued appeal of James, at least for literary critics, is probably based on his emphasis on narratives over statements or positions. I will limit myself to two further examples. Semantics: the object of a thought is that thought's “entire content or deliverance” (*Psychology* I 275). Theory of truth: a statement is true “in so far forth.” What is important in James is the direction of a statement, its semantics as opposed to its syntax and substantives. This emphasis on movement got James in to trouble, even in his own formulations of his theories. In *Pragmatism* he expressed his theory of truth in a highly

controversial way: “‘The true,’ to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as ‘the right’ is only the expedient in the way of behaving” (*Pragmatism* 106). At first this emphasis on changing truth, and the relativism it implies, was seen as a justification of imperial expansion. Bertrand Russell, after reading *Pragmatism*, said that James’s philosophy was “Bismarkian” in its emphasis on force. I would argue, however, that James’s emphasis on movement represents an important step away from the racism, sexism, and nationalism implicit in traditional concepts of fixed national identity. This is the position taken by Cornel West in *The American Evasion of Philosophy*: “Just as his cultural mission is one of reconciliation, so James’s conception of truth attempts to unite the novel and the familiar with a minimum of friction and a maximum of openness to the future” (64).

There is a deep connection between James’s philosophy and his politics, and contrary to Russell neither provides a ready apology for force. James’s politics were progressive. He was Vice President of the Anti-Imperialist League; he spoke out against racism and lynching in the South; he argued that women should be allowed into medical school; he sympathized with the plight of laborers and gave lip service to the desirability of a gradual redistribution of wealth. A recent biographer argues that we should understand James’s philosophy as a form of activism or “public thought,” though most simply see him as a moralist with his heart in the right place and an occasional letter to the editor to back it up (Cotkin 4, 11; West 58). However we measure his activism, his politics are the natural expression of his theory of the relation of the body to its environment. Ralph Barton Perry, James’s first biographer, argues that “James’s standard of international politics was an application of his individualism,” and he quotes James as saying “Damn great Empires! including that of the Absolute.... Give me individuals and their spheres of activity.” Perry supplements this statement with another taken from James’s famous letter to Mrs. Henry Whitman (June 7, 1899):

I am against bigness and greatness in all their forms, and with the invisible molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual, stealing in through the crannies of the world like so many soft rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, and yet rending the hardest monuments of man's pride, if you give them time.... I am against all big organizations as such, national ones first and foremost; against all big successes and big results.... (315-316)

This eulogy of “rootlets” is an important precursor to Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of “rhizomes.” Both theories prioritize movement and experience over fixed concepts of identity; both advocate disorganized forms of revolt. Perry is right to define James’s

anti-imperialism as an expression of his individualism, but James's is a particular kind of individualism, one in which the individual is an enabling fiction, not a sovereign entity that defines itself through its possessions. Again, James does not posit an embodied self, but the self always in the process of being embodied.

This conception of the body is central to James's politics. James often expressed his political views through corporeal metaphors. In his 1903 "Address on the Philippine Question," James compares imperialism to the natural process of digestion:

We prehended our prey, or took it into our mouth, when President McKinley posted his annexation edict, and insalivated with pious phrases the alternative he offered to our late allies of instant obedience or death. The morsel thus lubricated, deglutition went on slowly during those three years and more when our army was slaughtering and burning, and famine, fire, disease and depopulation were the new allies we invoked. But if the swallowing took three years, how long ought the process of digestion, that of teaching of the Filipinos to be 'fit' for rule, that solution of recalcitrant lumps into a smooth 'chyle,' with which our civil commission is charged – how long ought that to take? (*Essays* 81-82)

James's answer is "never." He characterizes imperialism as a crisis of incorporation. The Filipinos can never be assimilated into the American political body no matter what policies are developed to gobble them up. The impossibility of digestion is reaffirmed a few pages later by an act of historical regurgitation:

The country has once for all regurgitated the Declaration of Independence and the Farewell Address, and it won't swallow again immediately what it is so happy to have vomited up. It has come to a hiatus. It has deliberately pushed itself into the circle of international hatreds, and joined the common pack of wolves. (*Essays* 85)

Imperialism leads to a crisis of incorporation on two levels: first, it involves biting off more than the country can chew; second, it requires the expulsion of fundamental American ideals. There are organic limits to expansion – limits that have nothing to do with economic, military, or political power, and nothing to do with a stable concept of American identity. The model is one based on management or self-governance on a very local scale – a sustainable body as a field of inertia between ideas (like the Declaration of Independence) and environment ("the circle of international hatreds"). James's politics are grounded in a model of efficient movement rather than in a model of the pure, self-sufficient self.

The body politic in Frederick Jackson Turner is, on the contrary, essentialized, though Turner, like James, emphasizes movement in his account of the way the body interacts with its environment. His famous Frontier Thesis (1893) decouples identity from place in order to re-deploy it as a trajectory in open space. Turner argues that the so-called democratic spirit is not an outgrowth of the American landscape but the product of moving through it. While the frontier was open, those fed up with the corruption of the city could simply light out for the territories. This freed their spirit and helped produce free institutions. By an irony of history, however, these same pioneers became vanguards of the civilization they were trying to flee. Eventually, the pioneering spirit that made for strong individuals led to the trusts and monopolies that spelled the end of free movement in open space.<sup>1</sup> In “Social Forces in American History” (1910) Turner says:

In a word, the old pioneer individualism is disappearing, while the forces of social combination are manifesting themselves as never before... The world has never before seen such huge fortunes exercising combined control over the economic life of a people, and such luxury as has come out of the individualistic pioneer democracy of American in the course of competitive evolution. (125-126)

Turner’s story is as familiar as it is inaccurate. Numerous historians have shown that the criteria Turner used to assess the presence of the frontier – including the 1890 census – are not credible indicators of social behavior or geographical fact.<sup>2</sup> Also, we now find suspect Turner’s efforts to define the “character” – a notoriously vague concept – of individuals, institutions, and the nation in relation to a line that no one can see. Turner was attempting to locate, both historically and geographically, the transition point between nature and society, Western expansion and industrial consolidation, individualism and the huge corporations that dwarfed individual effort (125-126). Like James he speaks of movement, but his theory is really a matter of borders and frontiers, not the trajectories that traverse them. Certainly, the frontier can be seen as the outer edge of a trajectory,

<sup>1</sup> “In a word, the old pioneer individualism is disappearing, while the forces of social combination are manifesting themselves as never before.... The world has never before seen such huge fortunes exercising combined control over the economic life of a people, and such luxury as has come out of the individualistic pioneer democracy of American in the course of competitive evolution” (Turner 125-6).

<sup>2</sup> In his introduction to *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner* (1994), John Mack Faragher says, “Turner’s argument for the closing of the frontier has not held up well. His critics have long pointed out that far more public land in the trans-Mississippi West was taken up in the years after 1890 than in the years before. Western settlements continued to expand in the decades after the 1890s, yet on the census maps of 1900 and 1910 the ‘frontier line’ made a mysterious reappearance. Frank and Deborah Popper recently pointed out that using Turner’s own definition of ‘unsettled,’ there are in the late twentieth century 149 ‘frontier’ counties in the West, and that many areas of the western Great Plains are steadily *losing* population. The cartography that so inspired Turner, it turns out, was less a work of science than of the imagination. A century later, the West has yet to fill up” (6).

but Turner's trajectory is the expression of the supposedly innate American character. When the boundary reaches its outer limit in Turner's analysis, and the frontier runs into the Pacific, the corporate concerns – both business and political – become the “safeguards” of American character by usurping this same trajectory. Though Turner sympathizes with those who oppose corporate control – he calls them the “sectionalists” – he reserves his respect for the “self-made men” like Morgan and Harriman who use corporations to amass great control and wealth (126).

The corporate ideal quickly becomes racialized. Turner says that “the sympathy of the employers with labor has been unfavorably affected by the pressure of great numbers of immigrants of alien nationality and of lower standards of life” (124). The racial border between labor and capital is recapitulated as the national border between the U.S. and its colonies. Thus the Filipinos, whose struggle against Spain might have suggested them as freedom fighters according to the American model, become perfect targets for colonial expansion. Turner's lament for the vanishing independence of the cowboy becomes an apology for those profoundly non-individualistic imperial and economic forces supposedly engaged in establishing new frontiers, both national and racial. In “Social Forces in American History” (1910), Turner says that the “extension of power” into world affairs was “in some respects the logical outcome of the nation's march to the Pacific, the sequence to the era in which it was engaged in occupying the free lands and exploiting the resources of the West.” And more problematically: “[The United States] was obliged to reconsider questions of the rights of man and traditional American ideals of liberty and democracy, in view of the task of government of other races politically inexperienced and undeveloped” (123).

While Turner's theory turns away from the blood and soil essentialism typical of other nationalist ideologies, it transforms movement into a new essential metaphor of identity. Turner represses the actual locus of movement – the body in all of its specificities of gender, ethnicity, location, and class – only to have it return in a totalized form as the body politic. The result is a politics that advocates imperialism as a way of preserving national identity. If this is individualism, it is the individual writ large. Like James, Turner laments corporate expansion, since corporations rob men – especially white men – of independence, but unlike James he advocates imperialism, since natives are not “fit” to manage themselves.

Turner's politics are based on his theory of incorporation. This theory is a pendant piece to his more famous Frontier Thesis; he sees the development of a transportation network as the driving force behind Western expansion. More specifically, he characterizes the nation as a slowly evolving body whose circulatory system is the road system and whose skin is the famous frontier:

Thus civilization in America has followed the arteries made by geology, pouring an ever richer tide through them, until at last the slender paths of aboriginal intercourse have been broadened and interwoven into the complex mazes of modern commercial lines; the wilderness has been interpenetrated by lines of civilization growing ever more numerous. It is like the steady growth of a complex nervous system for the originally simple, inert continent. If one would understand why we are to-day one nation, rather than a collection of isolated states, he must study this economic and social consolidation of the country. (41)

Turner's geographical metaphor was not new even in 1890.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, he uses it towards a novel end. The anatomical account of transportation essentially naturalizes the incorporation of the landscape, depicting it as the inevitable culmination of personal evolution. The huge body is the displaced figure of incorporation. Turner corporealizes the transportation system, which for him meant the end of the pioneer, only to have it become a giant individual, the monstrous double of that same pioneer. Alan Trachtenberg argues that Turner's notion of character is a way of "incorporating" nature under the guise of individualism (Trachtenberg 16). Threatened by large concerns and the disappearance of his frontier, Turner manages to preserve the shell of individualism by projecting it on an impossible scale. This is precisely how movement, defined as an individual right, becomes a prerogative of the larger political and economic body. Turner's theory of movement becomes an apologetic for imperialists like Roosevelt, supplementing and coming out of social Darwinism as philosophy of corporate expansion. James's movement is narratological or retrospective, but Turner's is evolutionary and teleological. In "Social Forces" he recommends judging the past in light of the present – not as a source of historical models or an opportunity for self-reflection, but as the end of streams or currents that might have seemed unimportant when they began (129).

While Turner and James have opposite political agendas, they are both anti-environmental in the current sense of the term. In "The Moral Equivalent of War," James prescribes a war against nature as a corrective to bellicose emotions. Turner advocates conquering new frontiers, and other peoples, to keep the "democratic" spirit healthy. These alternatives define the range of choices available to early twentieth-century politics – a politics that treats the environment not as a place, but as a resource to be managed for social ends.

<sup>3</sup> In 1850, Thomas Hart Benton gave a speech on the senate floor claiming that road building did not require professional engineers. He said, "[wild animals] are the first engineers to lay out a road in a new country; the Indians follow them, and hence a buffalo road becomes a war-path. The first white hunters follow the same trails in pursuing their game; and after that the buffalo road becomes the wagon road of the white man, and finally the macadamized or railroad of the scientific man" (Stewart 17). While Benton's aim is very different from Turner's, his notion of the natural evolution of roads is strikingly similar.

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Jerzy Sobieraj

## “Pure Americanism”: The Ku Klux Klan, Nativism, and the Moral Crusade in the Jazz Age

The rebirth of the Klan in 1915 could have been easy and smooth, but W. J. Simmons, who established the second Klan, together with many supporters of that idea, had to work hard to bring the Invisible Empire to its unbelievable growth in the 1920s. The old enemy, the African American population of the USA, was not enough to warrant building a strong and sizeable organization. Thus, the Klan had to focus on new enemies and draw attention of as many Americans as possible to the new “threats.” To be successful the organization had to spread beyond the South, the territory of the activity of the original Ku Klux Klan.

The Klan was extraordinarily present and conspicuous, very well advertised, and it often inflated or, alluding to the burning cross, rather inflamed the fears expressed by many Americans. W. J. Simmons employed professionals led by Edward Young Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler who helped promote the Klan as the defender, protector and fighter for true America. The enemies of America were the enemies of the Klan. America, as promoted by the Klan, had to, traditionally, keep African Americans in their place, and, now also, fight new immigrants, mostly Catholics and Jews, trace Communists, and strongly oppose any manifestation of immoral behavior.

In the light of the last postulate the Klan emerged as a defender and guardian of the conservative, Victorian civilization, of the traditional America in the era of modernity. The activities of the Klan in this field made a significant chapter in the history of the moral revolution fed by the growth of relativity. What had been certain yesterday was not necessarily certain today. As Henry Steele Commager wrote in his classic work: “Marriage came to seem more tentative, virtue more relative, and parental control less authoritative than have been assumed even a generation earlier, and the Seventh Commandment, long the most rigorously enforced, came to be regarded almost as irreverently as the Third and the Fourth” (428). And the Klan fighting this wave of immorality was strongly supported by religion as always organically connected with the sphere of ethical living. The Klan list of the immoral behavior to be fought included, first of all, heavy drinking, bootlegging, visiting nightclubs, scandalous sexual behavior of any sort, wearing obscene clothes and improper interracial relations, especially between people of opposite sex.

To learn about and act against immorality local Klan organizations first examined the community in which they existed and, next, reacted accordingly. The mechanism of that scrutiny and adequate action is well described by Arnold S. Rice:

Every Knight considered himself a detective whose duty it was to do about the community spying on the morals of his fellow residents, the objects of the surveillance being entirely unaware of it, as only Klansmen knew who the members of the order were. When the chapter met, every Knight reported the information he had collected on his neighbors' morals. The assembled body then passed judgment on each case, after which it decided the course of action necessary and proper for the reforming of immorality. (27)

As far as bootlegging, moonshining and drinking were concerned, certain areas and communities proved especially sensitive to that kind of evil. A good example is oil boom places. As one of the papers reported, "[b]ooze has been sold right over the bar, and every known kind of vice has been going full sway.... All night long... women can be seen on the downtown streets with men in a drunken condition."<sup>1</sup> In one of the songs devoted to the actions of the Invisible Empire, entitled "Ku Ku: The Klucking of the Ku Klux Klan," the author of the lyrics alluded to the so-called "tar and feathers" applied as a punishment to those who drank alcohol, breaking the prohibition law. The lyrics published in 1922 contained the following fragment:

They'll dress you like a chicken put feathers on  
your chest,  
Ku, Ku, Ku, Ku  
They will get you if they can,  
So don't drink wine and don't drink home-  
made beer  
if you do you're surely going to hear  
Ku, Ku, Ku,  
That's the klucking of the Ku Klux Klan. (Crew 270)

All sins related to alcohol were condemned by Protestant clergymen who often supported and almost always got the support of the Klan. In Texas, one of the local ministers emphasized the hypocrisy of the citizens who officially supported prohibition but at the same time turned their town into "a wide open gambling city and a wide open saloon.

<sup>1</sup> El Dorado *Daily Tribune* quoted in Alexander 31.

And our daughters are going with young men who are drinking and our sons are fast becoming gamblers” (quoted in Lay 63). El Paso, a city booming in the 1920s, like many others, due to the new oil resources, had to deliver fun to the hard-working men. As a cradle of immorality, it soon became a perfect target for the Klan. Though the local officials, many of whom made big money on alcohol and gambling, tried to suppress the Invisible Empire announcing it illegal, the Klan responded with a recruiting action in the town finding quite satisfactory response from a group of new supporters. After that success the Klan sent some letters to local newspapers announcing itself as a “‘moral correction agency’... whose sole purpose was ‘to make El Paso a better and cleaner city’” (quoted in Lay 75). The Klan was wise enough to examine legal and moral problems of the community, to place them in a letter, and to publish the list in the *El Paso Herald*. Among such vices as prostitution and burglary there was also bootlegging flourishing on the border nearby. The members of the Klan appealed to the local ministers trying to convince them that what they did was nothing but the same what the Klan did: both took care of decency and morality.

The second Klan, backed by many Protestant ministers, was a strong

bulwark against ‘modernism.’ The wearing of short skirts by women and the ‘petting’ in parked automobiles and dancing in smoke-filled rooms by both sexes were indications of an erosion of traditional customs and values. At the root of the problem was ‘Demon Rum.’ The Eighteenth Amendment had supposedly banished liquor from the United States forever; in actual practice the Volstead law lacked adequate enforcement provisions.... The illicit manufacture and sale of intoxicants assumed immense proportions.... The Invisible Empire unhesitatingly affirmed that it stood foursquare for law enforcement and against bootleggers, moonshiners, and ‘wild women.’ (Jackson 17)

“Wild women,” as the author of the above statement called them, were under close inspection of the Klan. Prostitutes, women drinking to excess, white women befriending black men, and those who wore short skirts captured meticulous attention of the Empire. In 1921, “in Tenaha, Texas, a woman believed to have been committing adultery was seized, stripped of her clothing, and tarred and feathered.... A woman from Goose Creek, was kidnapped by hooded and robed men who cut off her hair and tacked the tresses to the post in the center of town” (Rice 28). In fact what the Klan, the Protestant ministers, and many conservative housewives and husbands witnessed in the twenties was what Kathryn Lee Seidel called “[t]he new morality of the Jazz Age” (26), a morality “which presented the flapper and the career woman as radical alternatives to the traditional roles of wife, mother, spinster, and belle” (29). And the Klan publicly de-

fended those traditional roles. “Klan publications condemned ‘women [who] blaspheme God by disobeying their husbands,’ stating that ‘citizenship for our young American women includes the essential duty of motherhood,’ advising ‘5 or 6 children’ per family” (Newton 47).

The Klan’s traditional picture of the woman, the picture it tried to save and defend was the same as one could come across in “The Southern Belle Primer”:

1. Accept the natural distinction between sexes, e. g. women as weak, men as strong....
2. Be virginal until you have targeted the Lord and Master of your choice and then practice chaste, which is to say coy, sexuality.
- ...
3. Always remain pious, polite, charming, enthusiastic, forgiving of nature, and sunny of disposition with a soupcon of sentimentality. (Swift 4)

In 1923 a new organization emerged, the Women of the Ku Klux Klan (WKKK). And soon the membership of the ladies’ chapter of the Invisible Empire reached 250,000, being close to 500,000 in its heyday. Many women of the Klan, among them a great number of spinsters and widows, shared their Klan friends’ and husbands’ opinions on tradition and morality but, one should admit, there were also those who supported more independence for America’s fairer sex.

The male Klan members usually showed much reserve towards any participation of women in the organization, or openly opposed such ideas. As Kathleen M. Blee put it, “[i]n the 1920s, the incorporation of women into the Klan, even in gender-segregated Klan groups, was met with derision and hostility by many Klansmen who saw the Klan as a bulwark against all forms of ‘immoral modernism,’ including the expansion of women’s rights” (107). The incorporation of women in the Klan was also criticized by the opponents of the Empire who simply “ridiculed the KKK for bringing women into politics, out of the home where they rightfully belonged” (107). Women of the Klan focused on fighting vice and immorality, at the same time reminding Americans of the significance of family life. In a 1924 song devoted to the women of the Klan, they are “Daughters of America protecting Liberty / Chastity of woman and the white supremacy” (Crew 125). In these lyrics published in 1928 one saw the ladies of the Invisible Empire as true protectors of virtue and morality:

**Chorus**

We are the ladies of the Ku Klux Klan,  
Fighting the immorality of man;

...

All true Americans are knocking at our doors,  
 Soon devils will howl and imps bend the knee,  
 To the Ku Klux ladies and morality.

**Verse 2**

If you love virtue help us increase  
 And then in the future immorals will cease;  
 Virtue will sit on the throne with love,  
 And angels will bless us from heaven above;  
 For upholding virtue and true womanhood.... (Crew 220)

The Ku Klux Klan’s fight for a moral America was, as a matter of fact, a fight for an America that was Protestant, Anglo-Saxon and White; in other words, an America that was one hundred percent clean. The idea of cleanliness and true Americanism took on the proportions of an obsession. R. S. Ezekiel, in the introduction to his study of racism, puts into words the following way of thinking of a Klansman and a Nazi:

I am a member of the white race. My people built this civilization, built this country. We have the intelligence and the initiative for the task. Our blood is different and special. Our heritage has been taken from us.... The enemy plans the full destruction of my race’s genius – its blood – through racial mixture. (xvii)

The fear of “evil” Germans after America entered the Great War as much as the fear of immigrants, communists and advocates of social liberalism led the Klan to become a devoted propagator of the idea of defining and defending their 100% Americanism. Many, driven by a big thirst to belong to some larger group, bought the idea of “100% pure.” The songs praising the Invisible Empire more and more frequently alluded to “true Americanism”:

Here’s to the Klan,  
 Here’s to the Klan.  
 Loyal Knights of Ku Klux Klan,  
 Loyal Sons of Uncle Sam,  
 One Hundred Percent American.... (Crew 41)

In 1924 some song writer supporting the Klan entitled his lyrics simply *100%*. In the final verse the Klan becomes a synonym of all Americans:

Come on ye loyal Klansman,  
 We’ll show them we will stick,  
 And save this land of liberty, in spite of every trick;

The Klans are all Americans, the Klans are here to stay,  
We'll fight to keep our freedom,  
In the good old U.S.A. (Crew 124)

The same year in a song book entitled *A Few 100% Selections*, the Chorus is supposed to sing the following:

It is not our consolation,  
Heart to heart, hand to hand,  
'Till the polls we reach together  
To vote for clean Americans. (Crew 71)

The song persuading the people to vote for “clean Americans” is a part of the political propaganda in which the Klan appears as a significant adviser for whom Americans should vote. Historians often emphasize the unprecedented role the Klan played in various elections; local, state and national. In the 1920s, the heyday of the organization, the influential Klan was able to make the voters choose the candidates it strongly supported, “to put men who are 100 per cent American in charge of the affairs of the nation...” (quoted in Rice 33). The Grand Dragon of the Realm of Kansas advised on the state elections in the following way:

Of course you realize that it is necessary for us to move in solid formation if we [are to] bring about the results we all desire. Therefore, it is considered best for all of us to refrain from pledging our support as an individual to any candidate, until after all information has been assembled, and the Klansmen in the state have expressed a sentiment for certain candidates. After this has happened it will then be very essential that we all support the same candidate, in so far as political party alignment will permit. (quoted in Rice 33)

Even President Coolidge, who was far from racism, was likely beguiled into the idea of true Americanism when he announced: “America must be kept American.”<sup>2</sup> Signed in 1924 by Calvin Coolidge, the Johnson–Reed Act, which significantly limited immigration, was designed not without the influence of the Invisible Empire.

On August 9, 1925, the Klan, convinced of the support of many white Americans managed to organize a big marching parade in the capital of the United States. The Klansmen, many of them carrying American flags, were proud of the great day, in fact,

<sup>2</sup> Miller 148. See also the description of the 1923 Kokomo Klan revival meeting, during which the motto “America for Americans” was accentuated; Coughlan II, 170, 171.

the last such great day in the history of the Empire. The time that followed was marked by the growing crisis and gradual shrinkage of the organization.

One can think about the reasons for the final crisis of the Klan that brought to an end its unbelievable popularity and influence. The success achieved in the first half of the 1920s under the banner of morality and true Americanism became meaningless towards the end of the decade. The reason for the breaking up of this once enormously strong institution comprises both the Klan and the Nation. Many problems of the early twentieth century lost their significance in a more and more prosperous America. Americans finally accepted the offers of modernism as set against the conservatism of the Klan. The Klan also lost its believers due to its own bigotry and cynicism. The reasons for the decay of the Klan corresponded to the general characteristics of the jazz age as described by Henry Steele Commager who saw it as the decade of “prosperity, materialism, and cynicism” (433). Some influential Klan members perverted the ideals they publicly advertised, especially in the sphere of morality. Chester L. Quarles, in his study of the Klan, entitled one of the sections “Klan Immorality,” focusing on the bigotry and hypocrisy of the leading Klansmen. He described the famous or rather infamous case of the Grand Dragon of Indiana, D. C. Stephens, who, being “known for his frequent parties and libertine attitude towards girls and women” (70) was formally accused of kidnapping and raping Madge Oberholzer, a young woman he was strongly attracted to. When two weeks later the woman died, the charge was changed into murder (70). Caleb Ridley, a popular spokesman of prohibition was arrested for driving under influence.<sup>3</sup> “The *World* also reported that King Kleagle and Mrs. Tyler [the people who turned the Klan into a well-operated business institution] had once been arrested in their bedclothes in an Atlanta disorderly house operated by the lady” (Miller 144).

One of the persons who traced the wrongdoing of the Klan was Henry L. Mencken, a literary critic, essayist and editor. *The American Mercury*, an influential and innovative journal run by Mencken, dared publish numerous articles about and by Afro-Americans, though Mencken’s “attitude towards blacks was a mixture of egalitarianism and patronizing superiority (Miller 244), and also denounce the Invisible Empire. In March 1928 the journal published a short story by a W. A. S. Douglas entitled “Ku Klux.” The story focused on and summed up several significant aspects of the Second Klan which are at the core of our interest.

The narrator returns to a small, now deserted, Oklahoma village he used to inhabit for some time during the oil boom. He wants to learn about Adam Kapechik, a Polish man whom he remembers well from his last stay. Lizzie, who runs a place in which it is

<sup>3</sup> See MacLean 98, Sobieraj 87.

possible to buy some beer in spite of the Anti-Saloon League activity, suspects him of belonging to the Klan, but he denies: “‘Not by a damn sight’.... ‘In the first place I am ineligible – born in the Old Country and therefore not a 100% American. Second place, I’m agin ‘em’” (Douglas 272). The woman informs him about the death of Adam, killed by the Ku Klux Klan. The narrator, inquiring about the man, walks to the cemetery where on a granite shaft he notices the following inscription:

Sacred to the Memory of Adam Kapechik,  
Late Private, United States Marine Corps.  
Born in Poland, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1894.  
Died in this City, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1924.  
He fought as a volunteer in the army of his  
adopted country during the World War and was  
severely wounded in the engagement with the  
enemy at Chateau Thierry. He was twice deco-  
rated for individual heroism. (273)

The local Klan that so often punishes people for immoral behavior is led by a man named Faulkner who loves women and booze, and who finally lands in prison for murder. Once ignored and humiliated by a pretty young woman he is attracted to, he takes revenge on the girl who is severely beaten by the Klansmen. The girl is found by the roadside by Adam who carries her to town, thus probably saving her life. Next morning, a day before the 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade, Adam got “‘completely out of his mind: ‘He had swiped an old machine gun, pretty well shot. And one of the packages was a hundred rounds of ammunition. Also, he took his rifle and bayonet out of the company rack’” (278). The parade was led by the Klansmen and after Adam had shot two of the robed men his machine-gun jammed. That enabled the sheriff to take off “‘his nightie and pillow-case’” and run after Adam, finally killing the Polish war hero.

Instead of delivering one more article on the Invisible Empire, this time *The American Mercury* published a short story which probably attracted more readers. The Klan as the protector of 100% Americanism and the savior of morality was ridiculed. The readers could see clearly that what the Klan publicly advertised was a mask. Under the mask one could recognize the faces of bigots and hypocrites greedy for power and influence. The Polish hero, furious about the action of the Klan, was killed by the Sheriff – a Klansman, symbolically, on the Fourth of July, the national holiday, the day celebrating American ideals. The song sung by the participants of the parade, including the Klansmen, now seems bitter, false and blasphemous:

God of Eternity,  
 Guide, guard our great country,  
 Our homes and store.  
 Keep our great state to Thee,  
 Its people right and free,  
 In us Thy glory be  
 Forevermore. (279)

Willa Cather, an outstanding American fiction writer, dramatically noticed: “The world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts” (Miller 171), or, one should rather say, the old order based on tradition was gone, the new one fed by prosperity and materialism emerged. The jazz age was a stage on which extremely conservative defendants of the old, with the Klansmen as significant exponents, failed trying to limit the space of the new stars who believed in freedom of all kinds, and among them the stars who also, literally, played their roles in Hollywood, “a colony of... people [who commit] debauchery, riotous living, drunkenness, ribaldry, dissipation [and] free love” (quoted in Miller 242), as one of the U. S. Senators, surely a conservative defendant of the passing world, desperately announced.

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## Halfway Through: The Porch as a Metaphor for the Southerner's Transcultural Identity

“One place comprehended can make us understand other places better,” wrote Eudora Welty in her famous essay “Place in Fiction” (782), thus suggesting that the ability to grasp the sense of the local facilitates the understanding of the global and so can be a foundation for what, in the contemporary cultural perspective, is referred to as a reflective, or hybrid identity.<sup>1</sup> In contrast with the essentialists and the proponents of globalization, for whom the creation of such an identity is but a destructive process of “boundary blurring” (Baldwin et al. 187-9), Welty, a writer “globally” recognized for her lifelong commitment to the one and only locality, the American South (Reagan and Ferris 899-900), presents this process as truly creative. If a writer, like Welty in her fiction, communicates the experience of a particular communal ritual in the language of storytelling (rather than the language of preaching or teaching), he or she makes the experience comprehensible to a broader audience – as readers, we connect “one place” to “other places” instead of setting them against one another. We thus avoid what Tara McPherson refers to as a “lenticular image,” a separatist (or integrationist) vision of the world, which is capable of representing “one” as well as the “other” place yet unable to show how the two are related (24-28). Welty’s texts transform (much as she did with “her” South) an image of the world that keeps others “in place” or is itself being kept “in place” into what Richard Grey calls a “privileged meeting place of collective life” (500). This meeting place is an imagined community, a metaphorical construct, a third dimension situated between the local and the global. Like human imagination, it is always in motion, and does not constitute any scientifically defined social, geographical or ideological group.<sup>2</sup>

This paper aims to demonstrate that the American South is such an imagined community and thus boasts of the reflective, transcultural identity. In the emblematic depictions of the human space, the particular place which has greatly contributed to the region's

<sup>1</sup> The reflective character of identity means that it is not a rigidly structured, absolute entity but rather a project that an individual can shape according to his/her current needs and in confrontation with the possibilities and challenges the contemporary world offers. For more on the subject see e.g. Baldwin, Longhurst, McCracken, Ogborn, Smith, 256-7.

<sup>2</sup> For an extended discussion of imagined communities, see Anderson.

becoming a “privileged meeting place of communal life” seems to be the front porch. According to *The Britannica Concise Encyclopedia*, the porch is a “roofed structure usually open at front and sides, projecting from the face of the house outside and used to protect an entrance” (1530). Such a description immediately creates an intertwined vision of both the private (the house itself) and the public (the outside), and points to the porch as, fundamentally, a liminal space. Therefore, on the one hand, the private / public remains the basic dichotomy defining the significance of the porch and determining the boundaries in the community and in culture: the “private” becomes the “familial / individual / local,” whereas the “public” come to represent the “other / collective / global.” On the other, however, due to the function of protection / projection, the porch also seems to foster the policing of those boundaries so that they become mutually permeable (e.g. the “familial” becomes “other”). The result is, as Gloria Anzaldúa would say, a boundary struggle (*una lucha de fronteras*). This struggle is triggered off within actual physical space and subsequently catalyzes a larger transcultural exchange.

The hybridizing effect of the porch has to do with its origins, marked by West African and Caribbean as well as European and Indian influences (“Porches”). With such diverse roots, the porch epitomizes the *mestizo* culture phenomenon, to use Gloria Anzaldúa’s term once more.<sup>3</sup> The fruit of cultural “miscegenation,” the porch has always represented a social structure which brings together a mix of peoples and cultures, so as to rearticulate the rules of a larger culture, distinguished by the phenomenon of creolization. In American Southern culture, the porch fulfills a role tantamount to that of a vernacular structure,<sup>4</sup> which means that the architecturally complicated “creolization” of the porch expresses the hybrid aspect of the culture of the South.

The porch as an emblem of the social interactions reflects the idea of space which is “shared-yet-separate.” The main function of the porch is to be the “modifier to hot and humid summer climates” (“Porches”), characteristic of the South to the extent that, as Ulrich Bonnell Phillips writes, they make “heat” the region’s principle of organization and thus its metaphor.<sup>5</sup> By providing relief from the heat, which is the essence of the Southern experience, the porch metaphorically constitutes a stage where all kinds of the

<sup>3</sup> With reference to culture in general the term *mestizo* (that in Spanish means a “halfbreed” and was originally used in biology and chemistry to refer to crossbreeding) appeared to depict the South American-originated mixture of cultures: African, Indian and European. In the American context, the term was introduced by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherie Moraga to denote the multiple and flexible identities taking shape on the American-Mexican border (particularly in California). For a detailed discussion of this phenomenon see Anzaldúa.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. “The Stylistic Evolution of the American Front Porch.” <http://xroads.virginia.edu>. Accessed 11/08/08; Donlon, 57-97.

<sup>5</sup> Phillips’s 1929 classic entitled *Life and Labor in the Old South* opens with the line: “Let us begin by discussing the weather, for that has been the chief agency in making the South distinctive” (quoted in Donlon 23).

culturally “heated” Southern images, such as the Ku Klux Klan, the voodoo, the Civil War, the Peace Marches, or even rock-and-roll, can be successfully moderated. Thanks to the metaphorical “shades” that the porch casts, the “hot,” allegedly insoluble, Southern issues of class, race, and gender, after “cooling” and “ventilation,” confront the mainstream cultural questions.

An example of such metaphorical “shade” or “breeze,” found on the Southern porch and moderating the Southern “hot” folklore is oral storytelling. Naturally associated with the porch (Beckham, “Porches” 515), oral storytelling is linked with the deficient Southern agrarian economy. For the majority of Southerners, such economy meant the need to learn how to live “in andante” (Goldfield 71), or, as Paul D. Escott puts it, the need to “sit back and observe the spectacle of life instead of constantly pushing towards a self imposed goal” (8). In the “oppressive heat of the South, particularly the Deep South” where it is “hard to muster the energy to move more than lips and arms for conversation” (Donlon 39), storytelling turns into a form of leisure or work-wisdom. In the end, the front porch, as the celebrated Southern site of storytelling, helps to conjure the Southern identity into art. The awareness of the transcultural Southern identity has influenced the way Southern fiction has construed the porch as a literary and cinematic image. From *The Birth of a Nation* to the films by David Gordon Green, and from *Swallow Barn* to the books by Tina McElroy Ansa, there have been very few narratives by Southern writers or film-makers which do not fictionalize the porch in one way or another. A frequent common feature of texts and films about the South is their concern with ideological contention.

The presentation of the Southern front porch in Zora Neale Hurston’s novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) illustrates the idea of “boundary struggle.” Set in Florida during the 1930s, the novel tells the story of Janie Crawford, an African American woman in her late thirties. Janie struggles to define herself within the all-black, self-governing community of the town of Eatonville – one of the few such towns that existed in the Jim Crow South – which Hurston calls “the porch.” Naming the site where the people of Eatonville meet in groups, the word “porch” suggests that the town creates its community ties through the typically Southern collective activity of watching and gossiping. This is a ritual also found in the all-white societies, which implies that Eatonville’s all-black community is not so independent, because actually it follows the white practice of protecting and projecting the unique racial status. Moreover, the people on the Eatonville “porch” pay attention to and talk about Janie’s light skin and her long, almost straight hair, stressing that she is a “bell cow,” unlike the rest of the “gang.” In other words, she is the town’s Other, bound to be “classed off” rather than to remain its part (39, 112).

Janie's "otherness" within her own community has a rather drastic manifestation when Joe Starks, the mayor of Eatonville and Janie's husband, removes her from his store porch, the town's chief meeting place. He orders her to either go inside the store he owns or sit alone on the front porch of their house. There, detached from people who "sat around on the porch and passed around the pictures of their thoughts for the others to look at and see" and who made these thoughts "crayon enlargements of life" (51) – and excluded from the process of changing "gossiping" into "storytelling" – Janie is supposed to play the role her husband envisaged for her and be a "pretty doll-baby," "rock and fan yo'self and eat p'taters dat other folks plant just special for [her]" (29). In other words, she represents but a "crayon enlargement" of black male fantasy about his own power and status. Characteristically, "sittin' on porches lak de white madam" (114) was what Janie's grandmother, born in slavery, hopelessly aspired to and dreamed of for her granddaughter. In succumbing to Jody's vision of her on their front rather than on the store porch, Janie symbolically helps to reinforce the old Southern order which had enslaved people in its "exclusive" social practices that sustained class dominance and male hegemony. In the eyes of the people on the store porch, she is the one who only "sle[eps] with authority and so [is] part of it" (46), and thus she is neither an individual person in her own right, nor a typical community member.

Feeling pacified rather than accepted or loved, Janie begins to quest for her own self soon after the death of her oppressive husband. She is now the owner of Jody's both porches and decides to occupy, on a regular basis, the store porch. After placing herself in the middle of community life and reinventing male relations in female terms, Janie begins to assert her power by inviting some people to the front porch of her house and at the same time limiting its availability to others. By the end of the book, Janie is no longer a mere fixture in someone else's "crayon enlargement of life" but a living and loving human being, and she tells her life story to her cousin Pheoby while sitting on the back porch of her own house, a true story-teller rather than a mere gossip or gossip listener. The fact that Janie eventually allows Pheoby to retell her story to the townspeople suggests Janie's conscious consent to confront her newly discovered self with the norms symbolized by the porch and, in effect, to change the porch from a place of control into a space for self-liberation.

The liberation of the voice of a Southern community storyteller is also thematized in Dorothy Allison's novel *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1993). "Born on the wrong side of the porch," as one of her colleagues said, using a phrase applying to black people and meaning "to be an illegitimate child" (54), Bone Boatwright, the novel's narrator, is in the beginning as alienated from the community as Hurston's Janie. In the South Carolina of the 1950s, where people observe the strict rule of racial segregation, Bone, a poor, white,

ten-year-old girl, whose mother does not even want to mention her father's name, plays a role of the white community's own "nigger" (84). Abused sexually and physically by her step-father, Daddy Glen Waddell, she resembles black female slaves, who went through similar ordeals. She becomes a "black sheep" in the family, which aggravates the contempt with which the community treats her. When Bone's mother, Anney, learns about the abuse, she chooses to live with Daddy Glen and sends Bone to Aunt Raylene, Anney's lesbian sister. Bone's femininity is thus recognized as a threat to white heterosexual norms. Allison portrays a white girl who, in the eyes of the white community, the "right side of the porch," has the courage to question the communal standards, and hence she is the community's "bone of contention."

Similarly to Hurston's Janie, from the perspective of the porch, Bone is the Other, which, paradoxically, gives her the power to transgress the boundaries determined by stereotypes. For example, when she watches three black children from the porch of her Aunt Alma's downtown apartment, Bone thinks that they are prettier than white kids:

The cheekbones were as high as mine, the eyes large and delicate with long lashes, while the mouth was small, the lips puffy as if bee-stung, but not wide. The chocolate skin was smooth, so polished, the pores invisible. I put my fingers up to my cheeks, looked over at Grey and then back down. Grey's cheeks were pitted with blackheads and flushed with sunburn. I'd never thought about it before, but he was almost ugly. (84)

The transgressive idea expresses Bone's ability to come to terms not only with her own "white nigger" status, but also with the Southern craze "on the subject of color," as Bone herself puts it elsewhere (54).

When Bone takes family pictures on her Granny's porch, the place which "has ever seemed so sweet and quiet... so much like home" (22), she realizes the toxic relationship between her mother, a "white trash" girl, and Daddy Glen's, a wealthy white man:

I stood and looked back at them, Granny up on the porch with her hesitant uncertain smile, and Mama down on the steps in her new blouse with Glen in that short brush haircut, while Alma posed on the walkway focusing up at them. Everybody looked nervous but determined, Mama stiff in Glen's awkward embrace and Glen almost stumbling off the steps as he tried to turn his face away from the camera. It made my neck go tight just to look at them. (39)

Bone's Mama's is stiff in the arms of her man, and he looks away from the camera, which suggests their mutual lack of openness and the reluctance to share life together,

even though they seem to represent the “right side of the porch.” Bone, then nine years old, is the only person in her family who notices this; she thus reveals her potential to undermine the mythical racial solidarity.

Bone loses her illusions about the Southern porch and her place on it, but she learns to articulate her true identity. In the final scene of the novel, abandoned by her mother, Bone sits on her lesbian aunt’s porch with her “blank, unmarked, unstamped” bastard birth certificate in her hand and ponders her present and future:

My eyes were dry, the night a blanket that covered me. I wasn’t old. I would be thirteen in a few weeks. I was already who I was going to be. I tucked the envelope inside my pocked. When Raylene came to me, I let her touch my shoulder, let my head tilt to lean against her, trusting her arm and her love. I was who I was going to be, someone like her, like Mama, a Boatwright woman. I wrapped my fingers in Raylene’s and watched the night close in around us. (309)

The fact that she does not belong to one social or ethnic category, but rather is a part of many worlds, which Bone realizes on the porch and in the arms of her notorious aunt, attests that she is much more than just a survivor, as some critics have pointed out (Donlon 150). Rather, Bone is an explorer of threshold spaces, which, albeit traditionally seen as “impure” and “unsafe,” give her safety and confidence. On the porch, she becomes a conscious transgressor, ready to face the world on her own terms.

The temperament for transgression helps Bone to combine her “white nigger” identity with her own voice, which ultimately liberates her from the status of “white trash,” whether in life or in literature. A similar kind of temperament has dramatically opposite effects in the case of Thomas Sutpen, the hero of William Faulkner’s novel *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). Sutpen is a “white trash” boy from West Virginia, who lives there without any awareness of the divisions in the South. The discovery of those divisions comes to him as a shock, when his father sends him with a message to the house of the wealthy plantation owner. Standing on the “portico” (229), he is not allowed in by the “monkey-dressed nigger butler” (231) and instructed to “never to come to that front door again but to go round to the back” (232). At the sound of these words, thirteen-year-old Sutpen “kind of dissolve[s] and a part of him turn[s] and rush[es] back through the two years they had lived there” (229-30). Later on, having improved his social position and acquired a portico on his own, he, too, orders people like Wash Jones and Bon, two witnesses of his “threshold transgressions,” to leave his porch and house. The discovery of the thresholds in the Southern system arouses Sutpen’s determination to defend the existing boundaries, which is

not what he wanted to do but what he just had to do, had to do whether he wanted to or not, because if he did not do it he knew that he could never live with himself for the rest of his life, never live with what all the men and women that had died to make him had left inside of him for him to pass on, with all the dead ones waiting and watching to see if he was going to do it right, fix things right so that he would be able to look in the face not only the old dead ones but all the living ones that would come after him when he would be one of the dead. (220)

Ironically enough, people who are descendants of the Southern white elite tell Sutpen's story, the story which Sutpen himself repudiated in his chase for the unattainable, if at all existing, aristocratic ideal of the Southern life.

Another character who believes that a particular class represents the "salt of its earth" and who fails to "cross the threshold of her family history" (Donlon 19) is Jennifer Bingham, the heroine of *Oral History* (1983) by Lee Smith. A contemporary urban, middle-class descendant of the Cantrell family from Hoot Owl Holler in West Virginia, Jennifer visits her relatives, but not out of family sentiments. She wants to complete a project on oral history and she wishes to do well in her course, therefore she equips herself with a tape-recorder to record the stories about a ghost that haunts the family home. She hopes she will attract the attention of her oral history instructor who takes great interest in folklore.

Jennifer hears the stories about her family on the Cantrell porch rather and considers them as sheer romantic lore with a pastoral tinge. Thanks to the "ghost" tape, Jennifer earns the highest grade and fascinates the instructor, whom she marries right after graduation. She never returns to the Cantrell porch or meets any of her Appalachian relatives again. Accordingly, Jennifer, a modern Southern woman, in the history of the porch is just another ghostly presence. Yet, her voice, like the "banging and crashing" voice of the ghost, reverberates within the walls and pillars of the porch so as to "satisfy even the most hardened cynic in the class" (284).

However, Jennifer's ghostly presence on the porch of the Cantrells's rural house does not need to be read as the end of this porch's role as an important transcultural space. On the contrary, such a presence implies that the contemporary porch has accommodated itself to the changing conditions of Southern culture and embraced the development of the varied regional traditions. Such a possibility is also highlighted in Tina McElroy Ansa's 1989 novel *Baby of the Family*, the story of the prosperous African American family of Lena McPherson. Symptomatically, the real front porch of the McPherson house does not face the street but is situated "on another side of the house... directly opposite the formal front porch" (65) and serves as a "private retreat" (63), whereas in

the place of the front porch proper there is a “small open porch with two painted wooden posts supporting the roof” (63), where potted ferns are left to wither in wintertime. Such an inversion in the use of an important spatial element sheds new light on the dual symbolic function of Southern porches: they allow for separation and for exchange in the same degree.

There are two other porches in the McPherson house: one extends from the kitchen and serves a storage place, and the other, described as “really more a small covered patio than a porch” (65), with a glazed door, offers an unobstructed view of the house’s inside and outside. With four different porches, the house appears to be a “community unto itself with a mind of its own” (63). The porches mark the limits of Lena’s living space. Because of a caul over her face, she is considered a “special baby” (6), who can see ghosts and spirits and communicate with them. Lena’s unique gift epitomizes the contemporary South’s capacity to connect itself to other places, to transcend its own limits, and ultimately to function as a “space.” The region becomes a “privileged meeting place of collective life,” an imagined community, America’s “special baby,” whose transcultural legacy, as Lena’s dead Grandmother once explained to her, must be “take[n] on faith” and cannot be “throw[n] away (265). However, if Southerners were to turn away from such a legacy, “it’s like telling somebody who love you to kiss your ass” (265), to quote Lena’s Grannie again.

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Hanna Boguta-Marchel

## Biblical Undertones of the Father-Son Relations in the Fiction of Cormac McCarthy

The work of the increasingly renowned, Pulitzer-prize-winning American novelist, Cormac McCarthy, for all its grim, dismal, and at moments genuinely macabre implications, strikes the reader with a number of biblical themes and undertones. One of the topics prevalent in McCarthy's fiction and imbued with allusions to the biblical archetype is the motif of fatherhood and sonship as well as the matter of the father-son mutual relations. The biblical paradigm of this bond may be recapitulated as a string of seemingly irreconcilable paradoxes: undivided unity and absolute autonomy, total submission and unmitigated freedom, constant concurrence and each-time independence, being a child (Jesus) and a father (God) at once. In my paper I discuss this motif with regard to the biblical prototype in three of McCarthy's novels: *Blood Meridian*, *Child of God*, and *The Road*.

### ***Blood Meridian: The Death of the Father***

*Blood Meridian, Or the Evening Redness in the West* (1985), set on the borderlands between Mexico and the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century, recounts the bloody passage of the – historically factual – Glanton gang of brutish and inhumanly violent outlaws and scalp-hunters who have a contract with local governors to provide Mexicans with the scalps of Apache Indians who terrorize the isolated borderland villages and towns. The novel begins with the sentence “See the child” (3) – seemingly an ironic echo of Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*: “Behold the child, by Nature's kindly law / Pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw.” Obviously, the image of the protagonist (“the kid” as he is namelessly referred to) that McCarthy offers at the beginning of *Blood Meridian* has nothing in common with the idyllic vision propounded by Pope. Its predominant mood is a deeply tragic sense of loss: the father lost the mother of his child when she was delivering it into this world. Of the “night” of his son's birth he says, “God how the stars did fall. I looked for blackness, holes in the heavens” (3). The kid lost not only his mother, whose name he does not even know and his sister “that he will not see again,” but ultimately also his father who now “lies in drink” and is unable

to provide his son with the most basic nurturing. The father-son relationship therefore becomes peculiarly reversed at the very outset: “the child,” compelled to take upon him obligations going far beyond his age, comes to be “the father of the man” (3). This situation is obviously far removed from the biblical ideal, in which the Son gradually comes to form a transcendental oneness with the Father through radical submission and profound freedom.

The theme of fathers and sons recurs on different levels a number of times throughout the novel. It appears most explicitly in one of the stories Judge Holden (the most brutish of all the scalp hunters) relates to his companions (142-145). It is a tale about the father who is unable to provide for his family other than by dressing as an Indian and robbing those who pass the road near his house yet without inflicting any kind of physical injury on them. One day he tries to rob a young traveler, who nevertheless manages to show him how shameful his way of living is and encourages him to repent and “take his brother into his heart.” The traveler is then invited to dine with the family; they all talk and become quite affectionate towards one another. In any event, when the man walks the traveler to the crossroads, he kills him with a rock, takes his clothes, his watch and his money, buries him by the side of the road, bloodies his own body with a flint, comes back to his family and tells them that they have been attacked by robbers and that the young wayfarer was murdered. His wife time and again comes to visit the traveler’s grave, bringing flowers and grieving over his tragic fate as if he were her own child. On his death bed the father of the family reveals the truth to his son, upon which the boy with jealousy and hatred scatters the bones of the dead traveler, leaves his family, and himself becomes “a killer of men.” Yet the vital import of the judge’s story concerns the destiny of the young traveler’s son who was at that time still in his mother’s womb and was therefore born and raised without his father:

All his life he carries before him the idol of a perfection to which he can never attain. The father dead has euchered the son out of his patrimony. For it is the death of the father to which the son is entitled and to which he is heir, more so than his goods. He will not hear of the small mean ways that tempered the man in life. He will not see him struggling in follies of his own devising. No. The world which he inherits bears him false witness. He is broken before a frozen god and he will never find his way. (145)

Judge Holden’s claim is that witnessing the father’s struggle with his own weaknesses as well as gaining independence through the experience of the father’s death are essential elements of the son’s upbringing.

Interestingly (and quite ironically since it turns out that no one is “entitled” to his death), it is the judge himself who functions as the major father figure in the novel, and it is the kid who seems to be both most attracted to and most subjugated by the judge’s fatherly influence. All throughout the book, the judge manifests a peculiar interest in children (usually deplorable and terrified survivors of the massacres carried out by the gang) and coming into confidential contact with them belongs to his numerous “gifts.” Yet this contact invariably proves to be noxious and ultimately deadly for the young ones: the narration either explicitly describes their violent murdering by the judge (“in the morning the judge was dandling [the Apache boy] on one knee while the men saddled their horses. Toadvine saw him with the child as he passed with his saddle but when he came back ten minutes later leading his horse the child was dead and the judge had scalped it”; 164), relates the finding of their mutilated bodies (“In the meantime someone had found the boy. He was lying face down naked in one of the cubicles”; 118), or simply tells of their obscure missing (191, 239, 333).

Although there is scarcely any exchange between the judge and the kid until their two final encounters in San Diego and in Griffin, the kid is repeatedly reported to be carefully “watching” the judge (5, 243, 281, 282), and when the ex-priest Tobin tells him to “study the judge,” he answers, “I done studied him” (122). He knows that the judge poses lethal danger to his own self, yet he is compelled to listen to his speeches and unable to shoot him despite being granted a few singular occasions to do so (285, 291, 298). The judge’s exceptional treatment of the kid is also merely suggested throughout the novel by his querying glances across the fire, to be fully revealed only at its closing. When Holden visits the kid in the San Diego prison, he asks with well performed bitterness, “Don’t you know that I’d have loved you like a son?” (306). He accuses the kid of being the sole cause of the tragic finale of the gang’s venture: “You put your own allowances before the judgments of history and you broke with the body of which you were pledged a part and poisoned it in all its enterprise” (307). The kid’s fault, according to the judge, consisted in the unwillingness to participate in the mission wholeheartedly, in an insufficient degree of ingenious cruelty and forthright ruthlessness: “There’s a flawed place in the fabric of your heart. Do you think I could not know? You alone were mutinous. You alone reserved in your soul some corner of clemency for the heathen” (299). Holden owns up to his singular attitude to the kid and bewails the frustration of his prospects toward his person: “I recognized you when I first saw you and yet you were a disappointment to me” (328).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In this case, like in his many other utterances, the Judge’s rhetoric echoes biblical wording – here alluding to Jesus talking to Nathanael: “Nathanael saith to him: Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered, and said to him: Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee” (John 1.48 Charles Thomson Septuagint Bible).

Before they meet in Griffin for the very last time, the kid, already referred to as “the man,” comes to participate in another father-and-son exchange, this time acting the part of the destructive parent. He encounters a group of ragged boys, “violent children orphaned by war” (322), and is humiliated by the oldest of them who refuses to believe in his scalp-hunting past. Notably using rhetoric resembling that of the judge, the fifteen-year-old boldly asserts, “I knowed you for what you was when I seen ye” (322). The kid did not dare to shoot the father-judge, but this time, given the chance to act out the role of the deadly parent, he kills the boy who repudiated his authority and protested at being called “son” (“You aint callin me a liar are ye son? / I aint ye son”; 321). This way he only extends the fatal succession of sons-without-fathers by in turn orphaning the boy’s younger brother. “Randall you take a good look at the man that has made you an orphan,” the other boys tell him. “The orphan turned once to look back at him and then he hurried to catch up” (323).

When the man reaches Griffin, which, as the boys boastfully proclaim, is “full of whores” and “set up to be the biggest town for sin in all Texas” (319), he notices Judge Holden in the first tavern he enters. The judge immediately takes up the fatherly discourse he used in the San Diego prison thirty years before: “Do you believe it’s all over, son?” (327). The man makes inept attempts to withdraw from the father-son exchange, yet he is overwhelmed not only by the judge’s enormous figure, his “great corpus” which “enshadowed him from all beyond” (327), but also by his powerful speech. He speaks of order and agency, of the dance, the war, and the game, of ceremony, ritual, and death. He speaks as the one who found his destiny, who fulfilled the role of agent and executor of order, and the only one who will ultimately prevail since he “has offered up himself entire to the blood of war... has been to the floor of the pit and seen horror in the round and learned at last that it speaks to his inmost heart” (331). The man, since he failed to wholly give himself up to that gory game, must be sacrificed in a sanguinary ceremony, a ritual that “includes the letting of blood” (329).

What actually happens in the final scene of the novel, remains a mystery. The man enters the jakes at the back of the tavern and sees the judge “seated upon the closet.” He is taken in and “gathered” against Holden’s “immense and terrible flesh” (333). The doors close and we are not authorized to witness the episode that takes place inside. The narration only relates the conversation of three men who meet in front of the jakes.

In the mudded dogyard behind the premises two men went down the boards toward the jakes. A third man was standing there urinating into the mud.

Is someone in there? the first man said.

The man who was relieving himself did not look up. I wouldnt go in there if I was you, he said.

...  
 The first man watched him go and then opened the door of the jakes.  
 Good God almighty, he said.  
 What is it?  
 He didnt answer. (334)

In the last paragraph of *Blood Meridian*, the narrator, with a telling use of the present tense, presents an image of the triumphant judge: “Towering over them all is the judge and he is naked dancing, his small feet lively and quick and now in doubletime and bowing to the ladies, huge and pale and hairless, like an enormous infant. He never sleeps, he says. He says he’ll never die” (335).

Interestingly, the final image of the judge compellingly underscores his paradoxical child-like attributes; he is “pale and hairless, like an enormous infant” (335). This double nature of Holden as both an immense, massive, and savagely callous giant and an eerily puerile, soft-skinned neonate has been repeatedly hinted at throughout the whole novel. When the kid sees him for the first time in Nacogdoches, the judge is depicted as “an enormous man... smoking a cigar,” “his face... serene and strangely childlike,” “his hands... small” (6). When the members of the gang enter Chihuahua as triumphant victors and are invited to use the public baths, the judge makes his typically effective entrance, disrobing “last of all.” He “walked the perimeters of the baths with a cigar in his mouth and a regal air, testing the waters with one toe, surprisingly petite. He shone like the moon so pale he was and not a hair to be seen anywhere upon that vast corpus” (167). As he approaches the desert wells together with the “idiot” he appropriated, what strikes in the image of the judge is the “pale pink beneath his talc of dust like something newly born” (282).

I therefore suppose that, having in mind the significance of the father-son relationship in the novel, we may risk reading the final scene as a kind of circular return to the image with which *Blood Meridian* commenced. As I have already noted, at the beginning of the book we are told that the mother died giving birth to her child and we witness a reversal in which the son takes on the position of the father. At its ending, we again testify to an exclusion with a simultaneous replacement: the grown man is in turn “eliminated while metaphorically giving birth to his own enormous infant, his father.”<sup>2</sup> He is explicitly “the child the father of the man,” and “all history [is] present in that visage” (3).

The kid is a son who had been deprived of the developmentally crucial experience of witnessing his own father struggling with his weaknesses. The father’s untimely surren-

<sup>2</sup> This is John Vanderheide’s depiction of the situation though his text is wholly concerned with the judge as artist-creator, not as father; 182.

der and death led to a premature father-son replacement, never giving the kid a chance to acquire the necessary ability of accepting the child in himself. In a sense, *Blood Meridian* may therefore be read as a constant search for the lost father. The members of the Glanton gang all somehow sense the graveness of the judge's words when he says that the son without the father "will never find his way" (145); although their own drives and desires are mostly unidentified, they are also compelled to submit to Holden's authority and go on with the continual obscure pursuit which will cease only with their deaths.

### ***Child of God: Ill-Defined Roles***

Lester Ballard (*Child of God*, 1973) is another fatherless figure whose early years are marked by traumatic loss. However meaningful they must have been for his subsequent anomalous development, the facts concerning his childhood period are recounted with surprising, though typically McCarthyian, scantiness. From the relations of anonymous narrators we merely learn that Lester's mother abandoned the family ("They was just the one boy. The mother had run off, I don't know where to nor who with"; 21), after which the father committed suicide by hanging himself in the attic of their family house. The senior Ballard is therefore more explicitly a victim than the father of the kid from *Blood Meridian*, and Lester, in his "chronically perverse childishness," will repeat an analogous pattern of "holy victimization" (Ciuba 168-169). In a warped imitation of his parent, in a kind of wayward, "prolonged homecoming" (Ciuba 170), Lester senses the degradation and self-depreciation of suicide, and thus inverts the same aggressive impulses against others, himself becoming a serial killer.

Just like the kid, Lester Ballard is deserted by his father abruptly and too early, and, similarly to the kid, he is never able to fully mature into an independent grown-up – an adult capable of accepting and parenting the child within himself. It is only at the ending of the novel, when, after committing his macabre murders and collecting the bodies of his female victims in deep caves, he experiences a symbolic rebirth. Emerging from the underground "swaddled up in outsized overalls and covered all over with red mud" (192), he finally seems to feel in place. "I'm supposed to be here," he says entering the county hospital (192). Yet, as in the case of the kid, Lester's obscure quest must end in death, after which he is returned to the earth ("Ballard was scraped from the table into a plastic bag and taken with others of his kind to a cemetery outside the city and there interred. A minister from the school read a simple service"; 194) – to the womb that symbolically brought him back to life.

This destructive lack of clear boundaries between parent and child (with both the kid and Lester forced to act out adult roles before becoming properly mature) is dismayingly

represented in the scene of incest between the primitive dump keeper and one of his promiscuous teenage daughters. Reubel, with whom Ballard occasionally drinks bootleg whiskey and exchanges casual remarks about recent local events, “had spawned nine daughters and named them out of an old medical dictionary gleaned from the rubbish he picked.... Urethra, Cerebella, Hernia Sue.” Yet they seem so much alike that he is unable to track their maturing and is never certain which is “the oldest or what age” and which is ready to “go out with boys” (26-27). In their complete lack of distinctiveness or individuality the daughters indiscernibly merge with the all-surrounding rubbish, the “levees of junk and garbage,” the upturned cars, “the trash and carpets,” the “chairs and crates,” and the “assortment of cats taking the weak sun” (26). They are themselves catlike in their slow, lazy movements and “like cats in heat” they attract “surrounding swains to their midden” (26). “Old lanky country boys with long cocks and big feet” continuously come and go “in all manner of degenerate cars, a dissolute carrousel of rotting sedans and niggerized convertibles... all patched up out of parts and lowslung and bumping over the ruts” (27), also perfectly commingling with the undifferentiated landscape of the dump.

The undefined daughters imitate their father in their unrestrained sexual activity, falling “pregnant one by one” and filling the dump keeper’s dilapidated shack with equally indeterminate babies. Yet the unruly imitation goes in both directions: one time Reubel encounters “two figures humping away” in the woods and upon closer observation recognizes one of his daughters. After the girl’s boyfriend hurriedly escapes “hauling up his breeches,” the father begins beating his promiscuous daughter with a stick, but soon has his own trousers “about his knees” and finishes the interrupted coitus (27-28). Reubel’s incestuous rape is a manifestation of his basic failure to discriminate between parent and child – a negligence that will inevitably lead to a total collapse of his family life. Again basing his argument on Girard’s anthropology, Gary Ciuba concludes that “such lack of differentiation between parent and child violates one of the fundamental taboos designed to keep the outbreak of primal violence from ever being repeated.... In committing this primal transgression the dump keeper... assaults difference itself” (185-186).

The sons (and daughters<sup>3</sup>) without fathers or those whose fathers are unable to define and clearly circumscribe their own fatherly roles are irrefutably unfit to take up the responsibilities of adulthood and incapable of parenting the child that resides in them.

<sup>3</sup> Obviously, there are far less father-daughter (or mother-daughter and mother-son) relations depicted in McCarthy’s novels, and the father-son bond is openly treated as the most primal and emblematic one. Yet the gender issue in McCarthy’s output (which is a whole broad and undoubtedly neglected area requiring separate investigation) falls outside the thematic scope of my thesis. The most prominent scholar who deals with the problem of gender in McCarthy’s prose, employing a moderate feminist perspective, is undoubtedly Nell Sullivan.

Undeniably, the typical pattern of the father-son relationship as it is depicted in McCarthy's novels is far removed from the biblical paradigm in which unity perfectly coincides with autonomy and obedience with liberty, and in which the process of role-exchange is a well-ordered and smooth development from sonship to fatherhood. In the reality populated by McCarthian characters, these binary oppositions blend into a disfigured and indeterminate dump, where none of the attributes defining the biblical bond find distinct expression. What remains is elemental obscurity and inconclusiveness, a destructive confusion of roles as a result of which the sons inevitably follow their vanquished fathers and themselves die untimely deaths.

Nevertheless, both *Blood Meridian* and *Child of God* can be read as narratives of the constant search for the lost father. Such deep longing for closeness and intimacy with a father figure could serve as an explanation for the kid's strong and, to some extent, unwilling propensity to observe, listen to, and in the end follow Judge Holden's satanic doctrines. It may also be taken up as a key in interpreting McCarthy's depiction of one of the rare moments in which Lester Ballard experiences some profound human emotions. He is lying awake in his cave in the dark when he fancies hearing "a whistling as he used to when he was a boy in his bed in the dark and he'd hear his father on the road coming home whistling, a lonely piper" (170). Lester is apparently deeply moved by this recollection, and that same night he has a dream in which he seems to finally acknowledge and reconcile himself to the prospect of his own approaching death: "He had resolved himself to ride on for he could not turn back and the world that day was as lovely as any say that ever was and he was riding to his death" (171).

### ***The Road: Father and Son Reconciled***

When all is extinct, all plants burnt down and covered with grey ash, all animals poisoned or killed for meat, all colors faded and forgotten, and most human beings turned into "mummied dead," "the flesh cloven along the bones, the ligaments dried to tug and taut as wires," "shriveled and drawn like latterday bogfolk, their faces of boiled sheeting, the yellowed palings of their teeth" (20), what remains is the most rudimentary division into good and evil and the most elemental relationship between father and son. As most critics note, the focus in *The Road* (2006) differs from what is underscored in McCarthy's earlier novels.<sup>4</sup> This time, paradoxically, it is rather a yearning to survive

<sup>4</sup> See for instance William Kennedy's review of *The Road* in *The New York Times*. Kennedy writes: "The overarching theme in McCarthy's work has been the face-off of good and evil with evil invariably triumphant through the bloodiest possible slaughter. Had this novel continued his pattern, that band of marching

and not the impulse to destroy, the wish to help and share and not the drive to acquire and seize, steadfast and loving devotion rather than blind and mindless hatred, and a devoutness to “grace and beauty” and “goodness” despite their “common provenance in pain” (46, 109) rather than a penchant for the grotesque, the grim, and the ugly that permeates the whole narrative.

In the novel’s presentation of apocalypse in its becoming, of “the world’s destruction” in which “perhaps... it would be possible at last to see how it was made” (230-32), we witness existence stripped down to its most primary forms. One of these is the relationship between father and son, which in McCarthy’s most recent novel may be said to come as close to the biblical paradigm as a human bond possibly can.

This time it is the mother who abandons the family – a few years after the enigmatic global catastrophe, she decides to commit suicide with “a flake of obsidian” (49). Unable to passively wait for the scenario that she foresees as irrevocable: “Sooner or later they will catch us and they will kill us. They will rape me. They’ll rape him. They are going to rape and kill us and eat us,” she decides to choose death – to take “a new lover” (48) who can give her what her husband is unable to provide: final peace in “eternal nothingness” (49). The father and son are therefore left to themselves, and it is clear that they survive only thanks to one another, sustaining each other in hope, when hopelessness prevails, and in the determination to go on, when there is clearly nothing to go on towards.

The father looks upon his son as the “word of God,” as the sole “warrant” that God ever spoke (4), and as “all that [stands] between him and death” (25). It is only by maintaining a sense of mission that they are able to preserve the awareness of some kind of higher purpose to their thoroughly purposeless and altogether hopeless struggles. The errand that the father and son undertake is “carrying the fire” (70),<sup>5</sup> and it is a mission in which they must “keep trying” because, as the father explains, that is what the “good guys” do – “they don’t give up” (116). Yet the man intuits that in this dead and dark world his son is unique in an absolute and nearly transcendental sense – he is “the best guy” (235), “God’s own fire-drake” (26), “glowing in that waste like a tabernacle” (230).

In the deeply poignant scene of the father’s death, he comes to clearly see that “there [is] light all about” the boy, and “when he move[s] the light move[s] with him” (233). That is what he tells his son when they talk for the very last time: The fire is “inside you.

thugs would have been the focus — as it was with the apocalyptic horsemen of death in his second novel, *Outer Dark*, or the blood-mad scalp-hunters in his masterpiece, *Blood Meridian*, or the psychopathic killer in his recent novel, *No Country for Old Men*. But evil victorious is not this book’s theme” (“Left Behind”).

<sup>5</sup> The fire in this case may, I suppose, be read as a commonly accepted symbol of the divine, a spark of spirituality in the material world.

It was always there. I can see it” (234). In fact, the basic purpose of the sparse dialogues that the father and son exchange is precisely a mutual confirmation of this necessary sense of mission. The errand requires that they both constantly nourish a physical and spiritual closeness and steadfastly reassure one another of their devoted presence. Exchanges similar to the following appear time and again throughout the whole novel:

I cant see.  
I know. We’ll just take it one step at a time.  
Okay.  
Don’t let go.  
Okay.  
No matter what.  
No matter what. (197)

Don’t go away, the boy said.  
Of course I wont go away.  
Even for just a little while.  
No. I’m right here.  
Okay. Okay, Papa. (208)

Despite these continuous, often deeply dramatic, attempts to provide one another with a modicum of confidence and comfort, both the man and the boy have their moments of great doubt and profound despair – instances of weakness that they usually try to conceal from one another. When the boy is asleep, the man walks off to bitterly curse God (“Are you there? he whispered. Will I see you at the last? Have you a neck by which to throttle you? Have you a heart? Damn you eternally have you a soul? Oh, God, he whispered. Oh God”; 10) or to cry in helpless anger (“He walked out on the beach to the edge of the light and stood with his clenched fists on top of his skull and fell to his knees sobbing in rage”; 211).

The son, in turn, from time to time hesitantly asks questions which testify to his deep-seated doubts about the authenticity of the purpose of what they are doing – questions which he knows his father is ultimately unable to answer. When he asks about their “long term goals” (135), the man is impressed by the overdone sagacity of the formulation, yet he can offer no sensible, convincing reply. Once one of their “short term” goals – reaching the south coast – is achieved and it turns out to be a grievous disappointment (the sea appears to be equally dead, gray, and cold as the mountains and plains they laboriously crossed to reach it), the boy unwillingly owns up to his grave skepticism, telling his father that in truth he did not know “what they were doing.” “The man started

to answer. But he didnt” (206). The father refuses to provide facile answers not only because he is unwilling to dissemble something that is not true but also because he senses that his son knows more than he is told: “The frailty of everything revealed at last. Old and troubling issues resolved into nothingness and night. The last instance of a thing takes the class with it. Turns out the light and is gone. Look around you. Ever is a long time. But the boy knew what he knew. That ever is no time at all” (24).

The boy’s degree of self-awareness and sense of responsibility clearly exceed the man’s suppositions. When the father fixes the last portion of cocoa for his son and pours only hot water for himself, it is an unfairness that the boy does not fail to notice.

You promised not to do that, the boy said.

What?

You know what, Papa.

He poured the hot water back into the pan and took the boy’s cup and poured some of the cocoa into his own and then handed it back.

I have to watch you all the time, the boy said.

I know.

If you break little promises you’ll break big ones. That’s what you said.

I know. But I wont. (29)

In one of the most dramatic moments in the novel, when they catch the man who stole the cart in which they stored all their miserably scant yet life-sustaining supplies and leave him outstripped of his own clothes and shoes – a “nude and slatlike creature standing there in the road shivering and hugging himself” (217), the boy’s trust in their goodness and in the credibility of their mission is severely undermined. The father offers to tell him a consoling story, but the son openly rejects this kind of false comfort.

Those stories are not true.

They dont have to be true. They’re stories.

Yes. But in the stories we’re always helping people and we dont help people. (225)

The boy, conversely, does not have “any stories to tell” – at least not “happy” ones. His own stories are “more like real life” (226) – closer to the harsh and bitter truth. He also does not have good dreams – “They’re always about something bad happening” – about his father dying or about a horrifying toy penguin that “came around the corner” waddling and flapping its flippers although “nobody had wound it up” (31) – an image which probably signifies the feeling of an alarming loss of control and an unsettling lack of influence on the surrounding reality. Near the ending of the novel he explicitly tells

his father that there is no use in hiding the truth from him, that he is by now mature enough to face it on his own.

When you wake up coughing you walk out along the road or somewhere but I can still hear you coughing.  
I'm sorry.  
One time I heard you crying.  
I know. (227)

Deeply distressed by his father's ruthless handling of the "thief" who took away all their belongings, the boy seems to sense that it is time for himself to take over.

He was just hungry, Papa. He's going to die.  
He's going to die anyway.  
He's so scared, Papa.  
The man squatted and looked at him. I'm scared, he said. Do you understand? I'm scared.  
The boy didn't answer. He just sat there with his head bowed, sobbing.  
You're not the one who has to worry about everything.  
The boy said something but he couldn't understand him. What? he said.  
He looked up, his wet and grimy face. Yes I am, he said. I am the one. (218)

With time, the man becomes increasingly conscious of his son's premature coming-of-age: "Always so deliberate, hardly surprised by the most outlandish adventures. A creation perfectly evolved to meet its own end" (50). He is also aware that his own temporary role is merely to facilitate the genuine carrier of the fire, to assist the only authentic missionary: "My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God" (65).

It therefore seems that what McCarthy has exposed as lost and inconceivable in a more ordinary setting, turns out to be tenable in the most outrageous and unnatural circumstances. The son, in a close and truly loving bond with the father, gradually develops his own sense of purpose, preserving a full awareness of his parent's weaknesses and failures throughout the whole process. He is conscious of his obligations as a son and always, despite his own fears and misgivings, compliantly does what he is told. He nevertheless maintains his own independence and after the father's death (which is an unbearably painful experience he is hardly able to endure), he takes over their mutual mission to "carry the fire" further on by himself. The father stays in his mind and heart as an authentic God-figure: "He tried to talk to God but the best thing was to talk to his father and he did talk to him and he didn't forget" (241). This is in-

deed as akin to the biblical ideal of the bond between father and son as any human relationship can be.

McCarthy's prose is indeed rich in hints and allusions of a strictly biblical as well as a generally religious origin, and the Bible is a major source to be acknowledged in its analysis – one which has been unquestionably neglected and underestimated by his critics. This in itself naturally does not make McCarthy a “Christian” or “religious” writer, but it does invite the reader to, as one of his critics phrases it, “be attentive to, if not preoccupied with, the metaphysical presences in his seemingly anti-metaphysical universe” (Metress 150). Yet McCarthy refrains from constructing or employing any grand narratives or total, closed, and plainly defined systems of thought. The existential and moral inconclusiveness of his characters, the constant obscurity and indefiniteness of the narrative voice, as well as the open-ended and non-progressive character of the plot are not meant to invite us to search for wholeness, clarity, and finality, but rather beg to be valued as worthy qualities in themselves. What truly carries weight is not so much the ultimate destination but the road towards it, not the endmost goal but the quest for it in itself.

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Marzena Sokołowska-Paryż

## The Aesthetic Function of the Document / The Documentary Value of Literature: Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*

In the context of literary accounts of true crime, Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965), a famous book about the Clutter family killings in Holcomb, Kansas, in 1959, stands out as a pioneering work with a powerful effect on readers, which results from the inscription of a factual story into literary conventions, both novelistic (emplotment, characterization, and focalization) and poetic (metaphorisation of discourse). The novel explores the disturbing social phenomena epitomized by the Clutter murder, and at the same time it highlights the mythical meaning of the crime described.

In Truman Capote's own words, his aim was to create a new art form by blending "the persuasiveness of fact" with "the poetic attitude fiction is capable of reaching" (Plimpton 3). His definitions of *In Cold Blood* reflect this ambivalent quality: "non-fiction novel," "creative reportage" are, in fact, oxymoronic concepts. However, such concepts echo the ideas that lay at the foundation of the British novel; as John Hollowell and Jerzy Durczak point out, the entire body of American nonfiction of the 1960s can be seen as a further development of the "combination of periodical journalism and storytelling" (Hollowell 33) that characterized Daniel Defoe's or Charles Dickens's literary techniques (Hollowell 33, Durczak 6). This paper aims to account for the status of Capote's book as an American literary landmark by examining the writer's ways of evoking the literary traditions first established by Defoe (empiricism) and Dickens (realism) and of creating the conjunctions between the real (a true murder case) and the fictive (storytelling). Thus, the paper addresses the question of the compatibility of the conventions of fiction and document. Additionally, it discusses the ways in which Capote inscribes the crime into a wider social context, depicting it as a symbolic case in American social history.

With regard to narrative presentation, *In Cold Blood* unfolds chronologically: the effect of the account's truthfulness derives in part from the presumption of the inherent trustworthiness of chronology. Since Capote's ambition was to prove "that journalism, reportage, could be forced to yield a serious new art form: the non-fiction novel" (Plimpton 1), *In Cold Blood* adheres to the journalistic method of documenting events, yet at the same time relies on plot structure following the realistic mode insofar as it contains

a clear exposition (“The Last to See Them Alive”), development (“Persons Unknown” and “Answer”), and resolution (“The Corner”). Capote chose to tell the story in the voice of the third-person extradiegetic narrator – a literary equivalent of the actual “new journalist” type of the all-knowing reporter, who, according to Tom Wolfe’s prescriptions for “saturation reporting,” should “saturate himself in a particular environment in order to record accurately the scenes and dialogues as they occur. The method frequently requires the reporter to follow his subject around for days or even months and years with a sensitivity to certain people and events and often to a special atmosphere” (Hollowell 32). Capote’s research for *In Cold Blood* lasted for six years, during which time he interviewed the relatives, friends and neighbors of the Clutter family, reconstructed the escape route of Hickock and Smith from the crime scene, but also, which was perhaps his greatest success, gained access to the murderers themselves (Hollowell 70). The variety of documents incorporated into the narrative is indeed impressive and can be divided into three groups. The first comprises legal documents, including witness testimonies and police info on the suspects, collected during the investigation. The second category contains personal documents, mostly letters and entries from diaries. The third group includes what might perhaps be called public documents, that is extracts from newspaper editorials on the crime.

The documents in Capote’s text function primarily as signifiers of the “real,” they are the evidence that the novel is a truthful reconstruction of an actual crime. Hence, Capote frequently abandons narratorial omniscience for the more authoritative personal insight into events and uses the documents as means of figural focalization, as when Mrs. Ashida recalls her last conversation with Herbert Clutter, Bobby Rupp relates his last meeting with Nancy Clutter, Susan Kidwell tells about herself and Bobby in the aftermath of the crime, Nancy Ewalt describes the horror of finding Nancy Clutter’s body, and Perry Smith recounts the details of the murder. In all these instances, Capote achieves the two aims of his new art form: while it is a novel because the documents constitute the novelistic strategy of focalization, this novel is nonfiction because all the cases of focalization are witness testimonies.

Capote introduces a distinction between the witnesses’ statements and the murderers’ testimonies in the novel: the former are integrated with the chronology of the actual events, the latter are retrospectively subordinated to the chronology of the plot. The difference between the two lies, therefore, in their respective temporal frames. Each testimony possesses a dual function: on the one hand, it is a document (spoken or written testimony presented to the investigator); on the other hand, it is a narrative (the witnesses’ version of events). In the case of witness testimony, the time frame of the document (the moment when a piece of information was conveyed the investigators) and the

time frame of the story contained in the document coincide. Capote's interest in the Clutter case was triggered by a newspaper article and "with an impulsiveness not untypical of him, Capote left New York for the Kansas plains with such haste that he reached his destination in time to witness the mass funeral of the murder victims" (Reed 102). Capote was collecting the documentary evidence at the time when the investigation was gaining momentum, hence the testimonies of the friends and neighbors of the Clutter family, as well as of the police investigators, are simultaneously the story of the crime. Yet, in the case of the murderers' testimonies, the temporal frame of these texts as documents is much later than the temporal frame of their narrative: the confessions of the murderers, as well as their diaries and letters would not be available to Capote until the trial. In his finished novel, Capote adopts a strategy of backdating the testimonies. Let us consider the use of quotations in the following fragment from the section "Persons Unknown":

Of course, Perry could have struck out on his own, stayed in Mexico, let Dick go where he damn well wanted. Why not? Hadn't he always been '*a loner*' and without any '*real friends*' (except the gray-haired, gray-eyed, and '*brilliant*' Willie-Jay)? But he was afraid to leave Dick; merely to consider it made him feel '*sort of sick*,' as though he were trying to make up his mind to '*jump of a train going ninety-nine miles an hour*.' The basis of his fear, or so he himself seemed to believe, was a newly grown superstitious certainty that '*whatever had to happen won't happen*' as long as he and Dick '*stick together*.' (124, italics mine)

The information about Perry's inability to leave Dick belongs, chronologically, to the stage of their escape in the immediate aftermath of the murder. In terms of speech representation, Capote uses free indirect discourse to convey Perry's thoughts. Yet, within this free indirect discourse, certain phrases are marked by inverted commas – they are singled out as quotations from Perry's conversations with Capote which belong to a period later than the events of the subplot wherein they are embedded in the book. Basically, we have three chronologies intertwined in the text: the extra-textual chronology of the real events as they happened, the extra-textual chronology of events as imagined by Capote (it should be remembered that he arrived in Holcomb in time for the funeral of the Clutter family and had no knowledge who and why had committed the murders), and finally the intra-textual chronology of events in the novel – the way the author constructs the temporal dimension of the plot. In Capote's fusion of these three chronologies, we see the blending of the "authentic" (journalistic account) and the "fictive" (narrative technique). Capote's technique may be defined as a reconstruction of the

chronology of the real events by way of the incorporation of the chronology of his own experience into the intra-textual plot chronology.

By choosing the realist mode, Capote inscribed an individual act in a social context; in general terms, the subject matter of the novel is the crisis of the American society in the late 1950s and early 60s. The crisis is presented in terms of confrontation of two distinct worlds: one represented by the Clutter family, and the other epitomized by Richard Hickock and Perry Smith. In accordance with the realist conventions, *In Cold Blood* commences with an introduction of the setting and the main protagonists. The setting is the village of Holcomb in Kansas. The description begins with a bird's-eye view of Holcomb, "an aimless congregation of buildings divided in the center by the main-line tracks of the Santa Fe Railroad, a haphazard hamlet bounded on the south by a brown stretch of the Arkansas River, on the north by highway, Route 50, and on the east and west by prairie lands and wheat fields" (3). The view subsequently switches to the main locations of the town: a former dance-hall, a former bank converted into a block of flats, the depot, the post office and the school. Finally, the reader is presented with a close-up of the Clutter house: the River Valley Farm is first described from the outside: "the handsome white house, standing on an ample lawn of groomed Bermuda grass," and then from the inside: "the liver-colored carpet," "the resounding floors," "an immense modernistic living-room couch" (9). This gradual narrowing down of the perspective, beginning with the landscape at large and ending with specific elements of a particular interior, follows the typical realist strategy of using "composite places and object systems" and creating a predetermined trajectory of description from landscape to town to district to home to room to furniture to menu to meal (Hamon 173).

The Clutters' house is primarily the authentic crime scene. Interestingly, when Capote worked with the makers of the film adaptation of his book, he insisted that the house be the location: "much of the Clutter furniture was still in home. Herbert Clutter's Stetson was perched on a hatrack. Nancy Clutter's sheet music remained open at the piano, and her brother Kenyon's glasses rested on a bureau" (Reed 117). Symptomatically, in the novel, the description of this authentic site is embedded in the novelistic conventions, which use spatial features as a means of social characterization. First, the presentation of the house defines the Clutter family as a typical Holcomb family: "This sort of furnishing was what Mr. and Mrs. Clutter liked, as did the majority of their acquaintances, whose homes, by and large, were similarly furnished" (9). Second, it signifies Mr. Clutter's superior social status in Holcomb: "[the house] had been built in 1948 for forty thousand dollars (The resale value was now sixty thousand dollars)" (9). There is an additional "semantic charging of space" (Jahn N6.5) insofar as the descriptions of both the landscape and the Clutter house foreshadow the events to follow. The narrator enu-

merates the “normal nightly Holcomb noises... the keening hysteria of coyotes, the dry scrape of scuttling tumbleweed, the racing, receding wail of locomotive whistles” (5), and all these sounds echo the sounds of the crime – the “hysteria” of the victims, the “scraping” of the murderers’ feet in the house, the “racing, receding wail” of their car as they were escaping. The interiors of the house are likewise marked by significant details: the “liver-colored carpet” (9), a hint that blood that will be shed, is a characteristic example of the way Capote selects seemingly neutral objects and places them in a context which endows them with ominous significance typical of the Gothic novel. Finally, if “representations of space should always be related to the story’s underlying narrative situation” (Jahn N6.6), Capote’s emphasis is on the divergence of place and event: “until one morning in mid-November of 1959, few Americans – in fact, few Kansans – had ever heard of Holcomb... drama, in the shape of exceptional happenings, had never stopped there” (5); “Mr. Clutter seldom encountered trespassers on his property... it was not a place that strangers came upon by chance” (13). In this way, Capote transforms the setting into an ideologically invested stage for the confrontation of social normality and social deviation, developed on the level of characters.

Herbert Clutter’s life story suits the paradigm of the American dream: his forefathers immigrated to America from Germany in 1880, and ultimately changed their name from Klotter to the more American-sounding “Clutter” (6). Herbert, a farmer’s son, started out as a simple assistant to the Finney County agricultural agent in 1934. After “just seven months” he got promoted:

the years during which he held the post – 1935-1939 – encompassed the dustiest, the down-and-outest the region had known since white men settled there, and young Herb, having, as he did, a brain expertly racing with the newest in streamlined agricultural practices, was quite qualified to serve as middleman between the government and the despondent farm ranchers. (11)

One should note the explicit association of Herbert with the American pioneer in this passage, followed by the “rags to riches” story. After resignation from the post, Herbert Clutter “on land leased with borrowed money, created in embryo, River Valley Farm,” the success of which was much doubted by “Finney County conservatives” (11); yet “after a decade Mr. Clutter’s domain consisted of over eight hundred acres owned outright and three thousand more worked on rental basis” (12). In addition to the success story, there is a tale of the (almost) happy family, with daughter Nancy, the “the town darling” (7), who was a perfect housekeeper and a perfect student, and son Kenyon, fascinated with inventions “the newest of which was an electric deep-dish frying pan” (38).

The only serious tension in the apparently model family is caused by Bonnie Clutter, who suffers from depression. By juxtaposing the images of young Bonnie, “the only daughter of a prosperous wheat grower.... The adored sister of three older brothers, she had not been spoiled but spared, led to suppose that life was a sequence of agreeable events” (26) and Bonnie in her later years, marked by the constant “mood of misery... that lingered like a cloud that might rain or might not” (27), Capote transfigures an authentic person into a recognizable literary type, an unbalanced woman reminiscent of Tennessee Williams’s Blanche from *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947). Another interesting parallel can be established through a reference to Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie*. On the one hand, Bonnie Clutter has a lot in common with Amanda Wingfield as an ageing belle, but on the other, in her invalid state, she resembles crippled Laura Wingfield, not to mention her attachment to her “doll-house teacups, anchored to a diminutive tray” (26). This is an emblem of her nostalgia for the past, bringing to mind Laura’s glass figurines, the sign of her remoteness from real life.

The murderers seem to occupy the opposite side of the social spectrum. They emerge as “others” who unthinkingly and ruthlessly destroy a peaceful family life. Their “otherness” is initially suggested by their appearance:

the imperfectly aligned features [of Dick’s face] were the outcome of a car collision in 1950 – an accident that left his long-jawed and narrow face tilted, the left side rather lower than the right, with the results that the lips were slightly aslant, the nose askew, and his eyes not only situated at uneven levels but of uneven size, the left eye being truly serpentine, with venomous, sickly-blue squint that although it was involuntarily acquired, seemed nevertheless to warn of bitter sediment at the bottom of his nature.... Perry, too, had been maimed, and his injuries, received in a motorcycle wreck, were severer than Dick’s; he had spent half a year in a State of Washington hospital and another six months on crutches, and though the accident had occurred in 1952, his chunky, dwarfish legs, broken in five places and pitifully scarred, still pained him so severely that he had become an aspirin addict. (31)

The imperfections in their appearance are the consequences of accidents, thus signifying the authentic, yet the narrator imposes a literary interpretation: Dick’s squint is “venomous,” which reflects the “bitterness” of his nature, while Perry’s dwarfish posture is seen as bespeaking general freakishness. This type of characterization harks back to the realist and naturalist novels which, in order to achieve absolute “transparency of meaning,” would “strive to reduce the imbalance that exists between the being and the appearance of objects and characters” (Hamon 178). Capote’s preliminary conventional opposition

between the “perfect” family and the “evil” murderers centers primarily on Herbert Clutter and Perry Smith. In the course of Mr. Clutter’s characterization, it is mentioned that “he touched neither coffee or tea [for breakfast], he was accustomed to begin the day on a cold stomach” (10). When introducing Perry, the narrator states “like Mr. Clutter, the young man breakfasting in a café called the Little Jewel never drank coffee” (14). This comparison is a primary narrative manipulation – by means of the single word “like,” Capote creates a frame for presenting a multi-faceted confrontation between Clutter and Smith. They constitute two extremes in terms of the development of individual personalities: Herbert Clutter was a loved child and became a loving husband and father, Perry was a misfit and sociopath with a personal history of victimization in the orphanage, school and army. Hence their contrasting psychological profiles: the former is a realist-dreamer who realizes a progressive agricultural project, the latter is a fantasy-dreamer who collects maps of and books about foreign places, longing for the adventure “of drifting downward through strange waters, of plunging toward... a Spanish galleon – a drowned cargo of diamonds and pearls, heaping caskets of gold” (17). They are racial opposites: Herbert is a white Protestant, while Perry has native ancestry, his mother having been “a full-blooded Cherokee” (16), as much as social opposites: the farmer belongs to the comfortably-off middle class, and the criminal is a jobless delinquent. In presenting the facts of the homicide through the prism of the opposition of the two social spheres represented by Herbert Clutter and Perry Smith, Capote accomplishes the didactic aim of the realist novel, as formulated by Guy de Maupassant:

[whereas] life leaves everything on the same level, precipitates things or lets them drag on indefinitely, [Art] by contrast, consists of invoking precautions and preparations, of setting up clever and hidden transitions, of fully illuminating, simply by the skill of composition, the essential events and giving all the others the degree of prominence they deserve according to their importance in order to produce the profound sensation of the special truth one wants to know. (47)

Capote focuses on Perry because he wants to convey a message about the social reality; for the same reason, he disregards Hickock who, unlike Perry, had a stable family background. Hickock’s unthinking ruthlessness contrast with Smith’s guilty conscience after the killing or his repulsion at sexual molestation. Hickock has a “bitter sediment at the bottom of his nature,” thus his off-putting looks reflect an internal flaw of character, whereas Smith’s freakish, childlike appearance is an external defect, a consequence of injuries inflicted on him by the family, army and church. In the light of the family theme,

Smith's life is an illustration of one of the traditional plots of realist fiction where the absence of the father determines the character's criminal proclivity.

Whereas realist writers gave their characters names reflecting certain personal features or social properties, Capote seems to have encountered a case which, with respect to meaningful names, virtually conforms to the realist pattern of narrative presentation. For instance, "Hickock" onomatopoeically resembles "hiccup" which denotes, among others, a slight problem. More significantly, "Clutter" and "Smith" trigger off a chain of subversive connotations. On the one hand, the name "Clutter" is very ominous, as this word may be used to describe bodies lying about in a heap. Furthermore, "clutter" also means "assemblage" and "confusion," this combination of terms suggesting Herbert Clutter's mistaken existential priorities. The Clutter family stand for Protestant values, while Mr. Clutter alone is "all work" and his wife is "all religion." As Diana Trilling points out, Herbert Clutter "was a man without connection with his inner self, living by forced intention, by conscious design, programmatically, rather than by happy disposition of natural impulse" (258-259). Herbert is the product of the course of American history which started as a religious project and subsequently underwent far-reaching secularization. In turn, Bonnie Clutter embodies the other extreme: she lives a spiritual life without hard work, which proves detrimental to her condition. Together, they epitomize America's decay at the very roots of society and culture. Paradoxically, Perry Smith, with his common surname signifying "everyman," stands for a corresponding phenomenon of social disintegration.

The meaningful names illustrate the interlacement of several narrative levels in Capote's novel: journalistic documentation, realist presentation, and mythopoeic structure. This combination is discernible not only in the overall textual macrocosm, but also in the microcosms constituted by smaller descriptive units. For example, from the introductory description of Herbert Clutter one learns about his teeth, "unstained and strong enough to shatter walnuts," his weight "a hundred and fifty-four," his height "just under five foot ten," and his finger "once mangled by a piece of farm machinery" (6). Such details could perhaps be found in a coroner's post mortem, especially the teeth and the finger as distinguishing physical marks. In other words, this description sounds like a literary act of resurrecting the dead; Capote speaks of the protagonist as if the latter were already a corpse. The same strategy is adopted in the presentation of the other family members, who are shown as victims at the points in narrative time when they are still alive: "Tonight, having dried and brushed her hair... she set out the clothes she intended to wear to church the next morning; nylons, black pumps, a red velveteen dress – her prettiest, which she herself had made. It was the dress in which she was to be buried" (56). In this way Capote produces the effect of overlapping temporal planes and images: the past and

the present, Nancy alive and Nancy dead. This admittedly morbid method allows Capote to establish an authentic context – the level of the “real” (the Clutters portrayed as victims). It is upon this level that he imposes the level of the “realistic,” arranging the facts about the family in such a way as to depict them as social types, which echoes the conventions of the realistic novel. Finally, the third level is the mythical, accomplished through metaphorization. On the last day of his life, Herbert Clutter goes out to “examine the morning”:

It was the ideal apple-eating weather; the whitest sunlight descended from the purest sky, and an easterly wind rustled, without ripping loose, the last of the leaves on the Chinese elms. Autumns reward western Kansas for the evils that the remaining seasons impose: winter’s rough Colorado winds and hip-high, sheep-slaughtering snows; the slushes and the strange land fogs of spring; and summer, when even crows seek the puny shade, and the tawny infinitude of wheatstalks bristle, blaze. (10-11)

Mr. Clutter seems to be visiting the temple of nature, with nature being both pure and harsh, innocent and destructive. Nature is described as the meeting ground of life and death: the autumn is the season when the process of decay begins, an omen for Mr. Clutter who virtually stands on the threshold of death. Capote transforms the authentic Kansas landscape into a mythical space delimited by the earthly profanity and the heavenly sacredness.

The recurring image in the first section of the novel is the sky: it is mentioned in the very first paragraph: “the countryside, with its hard blue skies and desert-clear air” (3). When Mr. Clutter walks out in the morning, he sees “the purest sky” with “the whitest sunlight” (10). Elsewhere, Mr. Helm sees Kenyon and Nancy for the last time: “The chill of oncoming dusk shivered through the air, and though the sky was still deep blue, lengthening shadows emanated from the garden’s tall chrysanthemum stalks” (40). Finally, when Mr. Erhart burns the blood-stained clothes and carpets, he wonders “How was it possible that such effort, such plain virtue, could overnight be reduced to this – smoke, thinning as its rose and was received by the big, annihilating sky?” (79). The sky, described through meaningful qualifiers that explore the symbolism of the colors blue and white (see Chevalier 102-103, 1105), becomes an emblem of the duality of existence where life and death are irrevocably intertwined; at the same time, the sky is the “supraterrestrial” realm above the earth, the domain of fate, the “annihilating sky” which strikes blindly at the Clutter family. Interestingly, the question asked by Erhart echoes the ponderings that may be found in some naturalist texts, notably in Stephen Crane’s “The Open Boat,” where the possibility of drowning is seen by the characters as the

injustice of fate (Crane 735). Mr. Clutter's achievements ultimately amount to nothing: to paraphrase the words of Crane's famous poem, the fact that Clutter existed did not create a sense of obligation in the universe. As Hollowell notes, "[Capote's] account invites us to see the fates of the Clutters, like the destinies of Smith and Hickock, as a contemporary tragedy about which we know very little and over which we have so little control" (86).

*In Cold Blood* is so compelling a narrative in part because, to use Aristotle's differentiation, Capote relies on the dramatic "showing," instead of the epic "telling"; in other words, the narrative comprises a succession of dynamically alternating subplots. According to some critics, Capote's method owes a lot to cinematic techniques: "[Capote] uses intercutting of different story strands, intense close ups, flashbacks, traveling shots, background detail, all as if he were fleshing out a scenario" (Hollowell 69). Capote's idea of a neutral description without authorial commentary reflects the principles of camera-eye narration. He strives to achieve the effect of simultaneity through the occasional use of the present-tense: "Dewey is driving the lead car, Perry Smith sits beside him, and Duntz is sitting in the back seat. Smith is handcuffed" (232).

The apparent neutrality of camera-eye narration is perhaps best seen in the parts where the narrator's role is limited to quoting dialogue and narrating events by means of active verbs. In other words, camera-eye narration is essentially conterminous with the external and impersonal focalization. Characteristically, Capote frequently abandons neutrality for the sake of dramatic suspense. The emotional impact of Capote's text derives from what might be called plot disjointment, which in turn creates the conditions for, to use a dramatic term, the superior audience awareness. In the part entitled "The Last To See Them Alive," the subsections about the Clutters are interwoven with smaller narrative units showing Perry Smith and Richard Hickock on their way to Holcomb:

They left the highway, sped through a deserted Holcomb, and crossed the Santa Fe tracks. 'The bank, that must be the bank, now we turn west – see the trees? This is it, this has to be it.' The headlights disclosed a lane of Chinese elms; bundles of wind-blown thistle scurried across it. Dick doused the headlights, slowed down, and stopped until his eyes were adjusted to the moon-illuminated night. Presently, the car crept forward. (57)

Capote uses here a series of active verbs, all of them neutrally conveying the car movement, except for the meaningful last phrase "crept forward," which evokes an unusual association so as to create an eerie atmosphere. The dramatic quality of this phrasal verb resides in the reader's knowledge of the subsequent events. Superior awareness endows seemingly casual statements and innocent facts with a sense of tragic anticipation.

The second part of the novel, entitled “Persons Unknown,” describes the beginning of the investigation simultaneously with the murderers’ escape. Capote plays with the meaning of the phrase “persons unknown”; Dewey meditates “how two individuals could reach the same degree of rage, the kind of psychopathic rage it took to commit such a crime.... It doesn’t add up. It doesn’t make sense. But then, come right down to it, nothing does” (83), while the reader receives a detailed account of Perry’s past. Thus, whereas Perry is a “person unknown” to Dewey, he becomes someone familiar to the reader. Capote’s shifts of perspective from the story of the investigators to that of the murderers places the reader in a morally ambivalent position where the reader acquires the knowledge of facts which remain unknown to the detectives. The reader is the first to hear Smith and Hickock’s confession. The narrator and the reader form an alliance, sharing the kind of omniscience which is unattainable to the characters.

When writing about the details of the murder, Capote often uses witness focalization instead of omniscient narration, primarily because third-person impersonal relation would reduce the crime to its sensational aspect. Varied focalization filters the murder through a complex of highly emotional reactions. For example, Larry Hendricks’s testimony shows how the macabre crime become a part of a personal experience: “That wonderful girl - but you would never have known her. She’d been shot in the back of the head with a shotgun held maybe two inches away. She was lying on her side, facing the wall, and the wall was covered in blood” (62). Due to the form of presentation, this personal statement acquires the quality of documentary authenticity. Interestingly, in the very description of the murder, based on Perry’s confession, Capote uses overlapping focalization and combines Perry’s and Dewey’s points of view:

Dewey’s ears ring with [the noise of the shotguns] – a ringing that almost deafens him to the whispery rush of Perry’s soft voice. But the voice plunges on, ejecting a fusillade of sounds and images.... Kenyon’s head in a circle of light, the murmur of muffled pleadings.... Nancy’s room, Nancy listening to boots on hardwood stairs, Nancy’s eyes, Nancy watching the flashlight’s shine seek the target (‘She said, ‘Oh, no!, Oh, please. No !No! No! Don’t! Oh, please don’t! Please!’...); the dark hall, the assassins hastening toward the final door. Perhaps, having heard all she had, Bonnie welcomed their swift approach.... The crime was a psychological accident, virtually an impersonal act; the victims might as well have been killed by lightening. Except for one thing: they had experienced prolonged terror, they had suffered. And Dewey could not forget their sufferings. (245-246)

Importantly, the strategy of filtering the events through a subjective consciousness in order to induce the readers’ empathy dates back to the origins of the realist novel.

Capote's combination of two epistemological discourses – journalistic and novelistic – raises a plethora of questions, for instance about the construction of an impersonal narrative, which was the writer's declared aim:

My feeling is that for the nonfiction-novel form to be entirely successful, the author should not appear in the work. Ideally. Once the narrator does appear, he has to appear throughout, all the way down to the line, and the I-I-I intrudes when it really shouldn't. I think the single most difficult thing in my book, technically, was to write it without ever appearing myself, and yet, at the same time, create total credibility. (Plimpton 7)

The prerequisite for impersonality is the narrator's covertness, the principle undermined by Capote's use of quotation marks for the inclusion of documentary evidence, which discloses the presence of the interrogator. Furthermore, Capote's narrator leaves his traces all the instances of prolepsis, visibly marked by brackets. Narratorial presence manifests itself in the cases of paralepsis, understood as "an infraction caused by saying too much; a narrator assuming a competence he/she does not properly have" (Jahn N3.3.15). Last but not least, the use of figurative language is a sign of the narrator's discursive presence.

Guy de Maupassant coined the term "illusionism" to define the conventions of the realist novel, which translates the chaos of life into a pattern of causal relations (47). For Capote, there seems to be no conflict between truthfulness and literariness: "You can say that the reportage is incomplete. But then it has to be. It's a question of selection, you wouldn't get anywhere if it wasn't for that... I make my own comment by what I choose to tell and how I choose to tell it" (Plimpton 7). Such a conception allows for manipulating the documentary material, like in instances where accuracy is abandoned for the sake of suspense. The testimonies quoted in the book are not only coherent and well-accomplished pieces of narration, but they also usually have intensely dramatic conclusions.

One might conjecture that Capote's flamboyant personality undermined the allegedly impersonal account. Capote belongs to the generation of American journalists who in the 1960s changed the character of the profession, striving to attract the public attention to their own opinions, experiences, achievements. As Hollowell puts it, Capote's appearances on TV talk-shows or quarrels with other writers helped him to accomplish "an artful cultivation of his public image" (55). Not only did Capote publicly promote *In Cold Blood*, but he also revealed his methods in the famous 1966 interview conducted by George Plimpton, "The Story Behind a Nonfiction Novel." Endlessly hovering over the

boundary between fact and fiction, reality and literature, authorial selflessness and self-concern, the book raises questions about the capacity of existing literary conventions to come to grips with the most challenging aspects of human nature and social reality. Paradoxically enough, in interrogating the journalistic as well as novelistic conventions of representing the reality, *In Cold Blood* attests to the relevance of both types of conventions.

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Matthew Lloyd Adams

## A Few Days in Kiev: The American Relief Administration During the Polish/Soviet War

At the end of World War I, the American Relief Administration (ARA), led by Herbert Hoover, supplied the war-torn Polish people the crucial relief they desperately needed. The ARA staff fed women, children, and refugees; they provided clothing and care for children and supported the intellectual population that could not find work. Another agency led by Hoover called the American Technical Mission (ATM) helped restart Polish industries and supported the rebuilding of commerce. The aid provided by Hoover's organizations played an important role in bringing about stability in newly independent Poland through food aid and technical advice in industry and governmental administration. The ARA's commitment to helping refugees and those affected by war took the organization's staff during the Polish/Soviet War all the way to Kiev on the heels of the Polish Army. The following is an account of several Americans' adventures to Kiev and their daring escape by train through the swarms of Bolshevik cavalry that began to surround the city.

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A major challenge to the American Relief Administration was feeding children near Poland's undefined eastern border. As the Polish Army moved eastward in 1919 and early 1920, there was a specific need for feeding the desperate children in these borderlands. The ARA responded quickly to this need and set up kitchens soon after the Polish occupation of eastern territories. The farther the Poles moved east, the ARA noticed that the greater the need for foodstuffs and clothing became. Yet, as the military situation suddenly changed in favor of the Bolsheviks, fighting in the eastern borderlands quickly proved hazardous for ARA relief workers. The ARA leadership formulated a plan to continue the ARA program of distribution, but at the same time allow for the immediate evacuation of their personnel and supplies if threatened by a Bolshevik advance. As the Red Army invaded sizable amounts of Polish territory in July and August of 1920, the ARA was faced with the possibility of either ending the food relief initiative in Poland all together or continuing under Soviet rule. In an attempt to salvage the mission, the

ARA contacted the Soviet leadership. With no other options available the ARA was drawn into a fluid political situation.

The American Relief Administration's operations were supposed to be in the stage of winding up just as the Soviet offensive got under way. The ARA had followed in the wake of the Polish Army, feeding refugees and the populace in the war-ravaged eastern areas of the newly enlarged Poland. A pamphlet entitled, "A Brief History of the ARA Children's Relief Operation in Poland," written by ARA publicity writers read:

The small Ford trucks furnished by the Joint Distribution Committee were divided into five units of three trucks each and sent to Bialystok, Wilno, Baranowice, Pinsk and Kowel. These little trucks, carrying supplies of hard bread and condensed milk, followed the Polish troops along the Eastern Front as the Polish Army advanced victoriously against the Bolsheviks. The trucks went from village to village distributing hard bread and milk to children in the most inaccessible places which could not be reached by railroad. (10)

The ARA went as far as Kiev with the Poles and had just begun operating kitchens there as the Bolshevik offensive started. But the ARA was well aware of the Bolshevik threat long before the fall of Kiev. It is hard to understand why the ARA leadership, with reliable intelligence about the size of the Bolshevik army, was not more cautious about feeding people in the Polish-occupied territories. One possible explanation that emerges through a reading of the correspondence is that the de-mobilized officers, who made up the core ARA leadership, were extremely brave. The director of operations, William P. Fuller wrote as early as January 20<sup>th</sup> 1920:

We are feeding large numbers of children in the eastern districts and, of course, have to maintain stocks of our foodstuffs to keep the feeding operation going without interruption. We have no idea that you will desire us to stop our work in order not to jeopardize our supplies through the possibility of Bolshevik successes. On the other hand, we felt it necessary to acquaint you with the general feeling that a Bolshevik offensive is forthcoming, and to add that popular opinion is not too optimistic over the chance of the Poles unassisted to resist the offensive without loss of territory. (1)

In early 1920, the ARA leadership believed that if Poland did not get help from the Allies, they most assuredly would lose to the Bolsheviks or would have to ask for peace. But with Allied munitions, the Poles might have a chance to hold off the Bolshevik onslaught, because the Red Army was so badly equipped. If the Poles could get Allied support, then the Bolsheviks could be beaten, and hopefully the Russian people would, in

response to the loss, support a government more conducive to western democracies. The ARA leadership, from Hoover to Fuller, was hostile to the Bolsheviks. They found them a menace in both peace and war. According to Fuller:

It is generally believed that, no matter what he says, Mr. Lenin has but a single object in view in everything he does: the furthering of communism through the world. And this belief is Poland's main reason for not wanting to make peace with the Bolsheviks. Poland does not trust the Russian government. Poland would not dare to withdraw her armies, peace or no peace. And she fears the propaganda that will flood the country on the opening of the frontier. (7)

### **Bolsheviks ask for Peace: Feb. 1920**

In late January 1920, the Soviet Government of Russia proposed peace to the Poles on quite favorable terms. ARA leaders, in constant contact with Polish officials, aside from Piłsudski, contemplated whether to advise the Poles to make peace or to continue fighting the war. ARA Director, WP Fuller kept in constant touch with the ARA offices in London and Washington about the political and military events that were unfolding in Poland.

On February 6<sup>th</sup>, Hoover asked Fuller to recommend to Ignacy Paderewski to make peace at once but then the same day changed his mind and rescinded the request. Still, Hoover feared that if Poland did not make peace with the Bolsheviks, then all the hard work that Wilson, Paderewski and Hoover himself had made in aiding in the rebirth of Poland would be lost. Hoover believed that communism would just bring more misery, and that the starving people were easy targets for the "communist disease" (Hoover 282-283). All who worked for Hoover understood that they were to stay out of politics, although it is obvious that Hoover did not mind opposition to communism. When Hoover withheld food from the communist government of Bela Kun in Hungary, it was clear that he meant to force Bela Kun out by enticing the people of Hungary with food in exchange for a democratic government (293). Hoover once stated: "A weak government possessed of the weapon of food and supplies for starving people can preserve and strengthen itself more effectively than by arms" (301).

As the ARA hesitated in recommending to the Poles what path they should follow, Piłsudski, and even the political party in opposition to him led by Roman Dmowski, knew in what direction they were heading – east. Everything that Poland could scrape together went toward sustaining an army of over half a million, most of which was fighting the Bolsheviks on the Eastern Front. Two or three hundred thousand of the troops

were without overcoats and more than twenty five percent had no shoes, their feet were bound in rags (Paraphrased from: Extract from Polish letter sent to Rickard, 1). Some soldiers did not even have trousers; the soldiers simply wound a blanket around their body and fastened it with ropes. (Paraphrased from: *Codzienny*, Jan. 4, 1920). The lucky ones received British uniforms, French helmets and American blankets (Paraphrased from: *The Literary Digest*, Aug. 21, 1920).

The early part of the winter of 1919 broke all Polish weather records; the temperature was below freezing continually until December, when the winter took a turn for the better. (Fuller to Adams. Warsaw to London. Nov. 20, 1919, Cablegram) The food situation for the soldiers was just as desperate as the food condition for the rest of the population. Fuller reflected this desperation when he wrote:

The food situation is critical in the most pessimistic sense of the word. It has not been possible for the government to supply even the army with decent rations and last Saturday afternoon the Prime Minister himself, with tears in his eyes and also in his voice, appealed to this office for a loan of 680 tons of foodstuffs for army use. This is conclusive evidence of the acuteness of the situation because, for an army of over 500,000 men, 680 tons would be but a drop in a bucket and a very small drop at that. (Fuller to Adams)

Nevertheless, the Polish soldiers, badly clad, without sufficient foods and having a meal only once a day, went into battle with songs on their lips. If they were wounded, they went through an operation, such as the amputation of a hand or foot, without the aid of any anesthetics during the operation (*Codzienny*, Jan. 4, 1920). These men, much as the Polish/American nurses called the Grey Samaritans who came to Poland to help the sick and destitute, were fighting for the dream of a new Poland.

According to the ARA files, the Poles captured Kiev easily on April 30<sup>th</sup>. The Poles attacked the majority Russian city under the guise as liberators and, using the little supported Ukrainian National Army led by Petlyura, under the pretense of self determination. Two days after the fall of Kiev, the ARA sent inspector John P. Gregg to investigate the newly-occupied territory and to initiate relief as far as advisable under the conditions (Fuller to Brown. Warsaw to London May 1, 1920. Confidential Cablegram). According to Gregg:

The worst feature of the whole [Bolshevik] system was the organized persecution and executions by the “Cheris-va-Chaika,” the society for the suppression of counter-revolutionary movements. One woman who had been jailed by them for some months said that the conditions were unbelievable. The women were compelled to live in a large room in the palace taken over by the society, in the basement of which was the

execution room. Those women as well as the men who were in the same building were called out to be questioned or shot and the shots and screams could be heard in the rooms upstairs as well as across the street. She said that fifty or sixty persons were killed in a night and at times as many as a hundred; that one shot for each person was all that was used, and if that was insufficient the victims would be beaten to death with the butts of the guards' rifles. The executioners would sometimes come upstairs with their hands and arms covered with blood and ask for soap, or exhibit jewelry taken from the dead. She told many stories of the horrors that took place, about officers that were skinned alive or tortured, things about which she had a personal knowledge. The execution room was cleaned up when we were there, but there were bullet holes in the wall and blood stains all over the floor and walls. (Gregg to Fuller. Warsaw June 25, 1920. Kiev Report)

Reports like these are astonishing, but what is more confounding is that the ARA leadership, with knowledge of these Bolshevik horrors before the entry of the Poles in Kiev, and with the Bolsheviks gaining momentum and numbers to the east, did not evacuate their personnel from the area as soon as they realized the Allies were not going to help the Polish Army in the fight against the Red Army.

The first reports of conditions in the Ukraine showed that in Zytomir (west of Kiev) and in Kiev, orphanages and hospitals were completely without food. The underprivileged population was suffering intolerably from lack of foodstuffs, and was compelled to eat soup of grass (Paraphrased from: *Dziennik Powszechny*, "Help for Kieff," Warsaw, June 6, 1920). The ARA informed the PAKPD to ship and distribute foodstuffs to the Ukrainian population. By May 19<sup>th</sup>, 6000 rations had been shipped to Zytomir and 10 children's kitchens opened; by June, 12,000 rations had been shipped to Kiev (Paraphrased from: *Dziennik Powszechny*, "P.K.P.D. Action in Ukraine," May 27, 1920). As more stability came to Kiev and the outlying regions, food that was hidden in cellars began to emerge; Kiev actually had more food available than Warsaw. In June, Dr. Dana Durand went to Ukraine to further inspect the territory; CA Gaskill accompanied him; both were part of the American Technical Mission<sup>1</sup> in Poland. Gaskill wrote:

The Doctor<sup>2</sup> was interested in the economic conditions of the country, foodstuffs, etc., while I was to study the transportation and shop conditions of the Russian gauge

<sup>1</sup> The American Technical Mission and the ARA were both led by Herbert Hoover and linked in many ways. In this account Durand and Gaskill arrive in Kiev in an ARA Cadillac and their accommodation is provided by the ARA. The files I reviewed at the Hoover Library on this account were under the label of ARA Europe.

<sup>2</sup> The following pages under the title "The Invasion of Kiev" comprise the history of a two week trip from Warsaw to Kiev and back that was taken through the Ukraine to Kiev by Doctor Durand and C.A. Gaskill. Interwoven is the account of inspector Gregg who was also in the area.

roads after they were used by the Bolsheviks. Each of us had our interpreters, Lieut. Kalinowski of Hallers Army, and M. Grabowski, who had formerly lived in Kieff. The ‘Bolos,’ as all the foreign Missions call the Bolsheviks, evidently had something on him as he was a mighty worried man during the troubles that were to come. We had no intimation that there were any dangers from attacks by the enemy and went on our way as innocent as lambs to the slaughter. I took my old Colt 44, while the Doctor armed himself with a German automatic that blew a hole through the ink bottle on his desk while he was learning its mysteries. I wore my old uniform once more and the Doctor was content with disguising himself in a fuzzy hat that had been left with him by some Austrian who had had first pick down in Belgrade. (C.A Gaskill. An untitled narrative of events in Kiev in June of 1920)

They traveled to Kiev in an old Cadillac touring car (W-71) that had been through “many wrecks” and was “pretty well banged up, but you cannot kill those machines” (Gaskill 1). They were warned that the Kiev *chaussee* (main road) was riddled with roadside thieves and to be on guard against stray bands of Bolshevik troops. The *chaussee* was the only road connecting Kiev with the west. The road was built of stone, very broad and in places very good, but in others full of holes. The road was filled with refugees, gypsies, country people with produce, beggars and other war-torn rabble. There were so many people on the road, Durand and Gaskill considered it unlikely that any bandits would try to rob them, even though they had a car full of money to lose (Paraphrased from Gaskill 2-3).

Not knowing what kind of money to take to Kiev, they brought sixteen thousand Czarist roubles, “a stack a foot high that they stowed in all [their] pockets, musette bags, and had a big roll in the lunch basket” (Gaskill 1). A rouble cost 2.6 Polish marks in Warsaw, but in Kiev they were evenly traded. Kiev, in 1920, had many different currencies representing different governments, such as Duma, Kerenski and to some extent Soviet roubles. German-issued Ukrainian money was the most valuable. There was also the Griven, Petlyura money, Karbovanci and Denikin money issued just before his flight, and therefore called “aeroplanes” which had only a small value. Besides these currencies, there were local issues, thus completely confusing the monetary system and forcing people to use the barter system (Paraphrased from Gaskill 1).

Kiev was in much better shape than the other smaller towns around it, for it was clean and seemed prosperous as much as it could under the conditions. Durand and Gaskill were told “that there was plenty of food... but it was hidden and now that the country was under Polish rule it was beginning to come out” (Gaskill 3). Under Bolshevik rule, the peasants feared taking foodstuffs to the cities because in many cases food was con-

fiscated along with the peasants' horses and wagons. As the people began to believe that the Poles were going to stay, every day more food and clothing came out of peoples' cellars; thus, the market place was full of all sorts of foodstuffs such as flour, milk, and butter, but at prices which were out of sight to the people whose available cash happened to be in one of the previously mentioned monetary notes (Paraphrased from: Gregg to Fuller, June 25, 1920, Cablegram). The people for this reason, as well as the confusion over all the currencies, had to rely on barter, or if they were lucky, cash from rich foreigners who were in the country.

When Durand and Gaskill arrived in Kiev, they went to a large park on the Dnieper that was at an elevation from which they could see over to the Bolshevik lines, where, according to Gaskill, "a Polish captive balloon was taking observations, only about twelve kilometers away where the Polish army had its bridge head" (Gaskill, 4). During their first evening, while at dinner, their chauffeur barged into the room, excited and rambled that "at the Staff garage, where [they] kept [their] machine, they had received orders to put all the cars in order to run and not to take any more of them apart, but to be ready to move on short order as the Bolshevist army was trying to surround the city" (4). The Poles, by June 6<sup>th</sup>, were in a precarious position in Kiev. The city was in danger of being surrounded, trapping all who were inside, including the ARA relief workers.

On the nights of the first and second of June, a Bolshevik force of one brigade of Bashkir cavalry combined with the first, second, seventh and twenty-fifth Infantry Divisions crossed the Dnieper. The troops marched directly down the river, but were stopped temporarily by Colonel Ribbeck, along with a force from Kiev at Dyman. Colonel Ribbeck fortunately was able to capture a copy of a report detailing the Soviet plan, which explains why the Polish third division was able to escape from Kiev when they were seemingly doomed to be surrounded. According to Gaskill:

[The] orders captured showed that the [Bolshevik] objectives were to cut the northern railroad at the three bridges near Malin, Makaljewitschi, and Drushny... Afterward we learned that the southern force consisted of six cavalry divisions, the fourth, fifth, sixth, ninth, eleventh and fourteenth, under the celebrated leader Buddenie. Of course the object was for the two forces to meet and cut the three means of communications, the southern railway, the chausee (main stone road) and the northern railway. Why they didn't succeed no one seems to be able to figure out except that the Poles put up too strong a defense and they lost their nerve. These were the same tactics that drove Denikin out, only he didn't put up any fight leaving all the refugees to be massacred. We had heard lovely tales of people in Kieff going to meet the returning refugee trains and finding the naked, frozen and dismembered bodies of their friends. (5-6)

Early on June 7<sup>th</sup>, the Polish Red Cross evacuated everyone apart from two officers, taking with them a large body of refugees (Gregg to Fuller). The Polish Commander in Kiev General Edward Rydz-Smigly wanted to hold the city, but his orders were to the contrary. At 10:30 the morning of June 9<sup>th</sup>, the first explosions were heard as the Poles blew up the beautiful Kiev bridges over the Dnieper. As the bridges burned, the Bolsheviks fired shells to clear out all the soldiers left in the Polish withdrawal from the Dnieper (Gaskill 6-7). The Bolsheviks gave the Poles no time to breathe and anticipated surrounding the Poles, ending the Polish resistance in Kiev.

Piłsudski fooled himself into thinking that Poland had the resources to re-conquer the Jagiellonian Polish-Lithuanian Empire of the past and failed; however, the General realized his folly in time to pull Polish forces out of Ukraine before the Soviets ended the war in Kiev. The Americans, although brave, understood the circumstances they were in. Their only choice was to use their heads and to save their own necks. Durand and Gaskill would claim to be part of the relief effort in Poland, and thus neutral, if they were captured. On the night of the June 9<sup>th</sup>, Colonel Gaskill slept in the busy Red Cross headquarters, in order to be in touch with the military situation (Paraphrased from: Gregg to Fuller). In Kiev, the electric lights kept going on and off. Gaskill lit candles to eat dinner and then – blink blink – the electric lights would come on. The electric companies were powered by wood because coal was so scarce; thus, if peasants did not bring wood, there would be no power. On the night of the 9<sup>th</sup>, Gaskill did not need candles to eat his dinner, for not only was “the sky illuminated with a magnificent sunset, the light of the burning bridges, but also by a large fire in the city itself” (Gaskill 8). The large fire in the city was at the Ukrainian Headquarters; the Poles, according to Gaskill, “had rounded up a band of suspects and during the interrogation one of them had thrown a bomb and then jumped out of the third story window” (8). Since there was no water to put out the flames, the building burned to the ground.

On the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup>, the general order was given to evacuate. Durand, Gaskill and ARA inspector JP Gregg began making preparations to leave the city. As Gregg and Gaskill were walking upstairs to the ARA apartment to get Gaskill’s luggage, they heard a plane overhead. The Soviet Air Force was no match for the Polish Kosciusko Squadron featuring two American pilots; consequently, Gaskill and Gregg thought that the hum of the propellers was from friendly fighters. Gaskill claimed that he and Gregg “had just assured two old ladies that it was Polski... when WHAM off went two bombs it had dropped. Everybody started to run; they didn’t know why or where, but they wanted movement” (7). The two Americans quickly filled the Cadillac W-71 full of baggage and started for the station. According to Gaskill:

All this time there was the grandest racket going on, the Bolos were shelling the city with three and six-inch shells, one plane was dropping bombs, many fires had started, the Poles were replying with their guns along the river front and from a battery of six inchers near the railway, a very large depot near the freight yard was going up in a cloud of fire and smoke, so when I did arrive at the yard and couldn't find the train the situation was interesting. It was a very big yard full of trains of refugees and all their stuff, troops loading and unloading, much yelling in Polish and the racket from the guns. (9)

The Bolsheviks, or Bolo's as the ARA men and women called them, eventually crossed the Dnieper south of Kiev. The attack force was Budyenny's cavalry, a group composed of 16,000 lances infamous for its brutality, but the Poles were fighting for their lives and checked them. Since their translators had all left ahead of them, thirty minutes passed in bedlam as Gaskill, Durand and Gregg tried to use hand gestures to communicate with the frantic Poles at the rail yard, before locating their train cars and associates. Gaskill's Cadillac was loaned to Polish staff officers and sent out with the auto column which followed very close "on [a] very bad sandy road" on the north side of the train (8). Gaskill and Durand had three excellent large boxcars captured from the Soviet Government, one for the men, and one for the women. The third was set up as a kitchen with a stove and as much food and milk as they could take from the ARA warehouse. From the warehouse stocks, they took coffee, hard bread, cocoa, chocolate, cigarettes, milk, cans of sardines, beans, soups and a large bag of oatmeal. One of their train cars contained the wife of General Rydz-Smigły, but she decided to leave the train and ride on horseback next to the motorcade. The train pulled out at two o'clock with other trains following closely behind and alongside, on the double track, as the Poles in Kiev were under full attack by the Red Army. (9) According to Gaskill:

When we left the town, there were four good fires in progress and the night before the communists had set fire to the Ukrainian Kommenda Miasta. There was little or no water in the town and the flames flew merrily upwards. That night about midnight from thirty kilometers out the whole horizon was lit up by fires. (Gregg to Fuller)

Their progress was very slow because the train had to remain beside the motorcar column and its escort on the road to the south, and to the north they kept pace with a column of cavalry also paralleling the train line (Gaskill 9). According to Gaskill: "The Poles handled this evacuation in a very capable manner, there were eight trains moving together from station to station and at all times protected by armored trains and troops on

all sides” (13). Also the American’s train had a strong engine and a full load of wood. The greatest danger they faced were the scattered bands of Bolshevik cavalry that were behind the Polish lines; but these marauding horsemen the train guards were supposed to take care of. Nevertheless, in the refugee trains that were crowded particularly with women and children, the excitement was horrifying as the trains passed under gunfire. Twice during the night of June 10<sup>th</sup> priests gave the last rites of the Catholic Church to the people packed in boxcars on the trains (*The New York Times*. “Americans in Kiev Get Safely Away,” June 18, 1920).

At eight that evening, the train carrying Gaskill, Durand and Gregg came to a big railroad yard, where they encountered a train that left Kiev a day before. On this train, they found Dr. Durand’s interpreter, who, at that moment, abandoned his family and traveled with the Americans the rest of the trip. They had two Polish soldiers guarding their cars, and while they waited at the train depot, the guards began to pile “the greatest collection of guns, ammunition, hand grenades, a bag of lentils, and a lot of salt herring” into the car (Gaskill 9). The two Americans could not figure out where the supplies were coming from, so they strapped on their weapons and went out. They found a train car with the doors open being looted by villagers and soldiers alike. There was a young boy, not more than twelve dressed as a Poznanian soldier, in one car passing out ammunition and weapons to anyone. One of the soldiers had an armful of German “potato masher” grenades. He dropped one, as he was shuffling away. Seeing this Durand and Gaskill got away as fast as possible. The Polish troops were close to anarchy; whenever the officers turned their backs self-interest was the order of the day.

On the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup>, the Americans found they had traveled only twenty-five miles and “were still in sight of the towers of Kiev that were shining bravely in the early morning sunshine” (9). There was heavy firing in the direction of the city, and a column of smoke rose from the skyline. The place where they stopped was not far enough for them to be out of danger. Even so, the several thousand people in the trains around them stepped out, lit fires and began to make breakfast and tea with their samovars.

It soon looked like a small city, some of the girls even heated curling irons in the fires and fixed up their hair. All kinds of people were on the train, rich and poor, some had food and some hadn’t, but the ones with plenty had no intention of sharing theirs with those who had none, it was a horrible example of selfishness. (10-11)

Toward dusk on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June, firing broke out in front of the train. According to Gregg a battle raged: “After some thousand rounds of ammunition had been shot away in all directions, the battle was ended by a Polish officer who came down the line and an-

nounced that they had been firing on their own troops with a casualty list of four Polish soldiers” (Gregg to Fuller). The Poles had reason to panic, as there were large numbers of Bolshevik troops only 30 kilometers away.

In the early afternoon of the 11<sup>th</sup>, the train steam engine ran out of water. Fortunately, the train had a small force pump, like an old-fashioned fire pump, which was placed in a stream thirty feet below the train. All available soldiers pumped for about an hour, and toward the end, the soldiers forced reluctant volunteers to help pump. At this time, the Red Cross made an inquiry on who was on the train and found that “there were eight small children and two hundred and forty seven people without food, so that they proposed to start to issue rations” (Gaskill 10). The trains’ delay was quickly ended when an airplane flying low and in circles dropped a note; soon afterward, the train began speeding westward. The speed and movement ended as suddenly as it started when shots and an officer waving a flag in a field stopped the train. A group of soldiers had formed a battle line and were moving toward a small village from which shots had been fired at them. The train, with guards deployed on each side, traveled slowly for a half mile until it stopped near the bridge at Malin. At this bridge, the train was caught on the edge of a battle between the Poles and Bolsheviks about twenty-five kilometers ahead. That evening there was intense fighting during which the Poles won out by a narrow margin (Paraphrased from: Gregg to Fuller).

On the night of June 11<sup>th</sup> the train didn’t move; orders were given to stay in the cars with the doors closed and without lights. Around three in the morning, which was close to daybreak, there was “very heavy firing... that continued for some time” (Gaskill 12). The delay was caused by the damage of the big bridge at Malin. It would take until the next afternoon for the bridge to be repaired. As the Americans waited for the repair, Dr. Durand used this delay to figure out the number of calories in the food on the train and how much each person required to sustain life until the train reached safety. Gaskill and five others that night slept in the kitchen car, for the men’s car was crowded. The floor was hard and cold, but the machine gun fire was what kept Gaskill awake the entire night.

On June 12<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 in the afternoon the train began to slowly move. Polish engineers had repaired the damaged bridge, and the armored cars and troops checked the Soviets until the train passed over the bridge. There was a very intense battle at the bridge shortly after the trains’ passage, causing the Poles to abandon their position. Along the track lay the dead, some Polish, some Bolshevik. Every time the train stopped, Polish soldiers buried their fallen brethren; the Soviet troops, which were in large numbers Chinamen and Tartar cavalymen, were piled in mounds and left to be buried by the peasants. The Bolsheviks had very good rifle pits and used fast firing Browning machine

guns from the United States, which the Poles said were very hard to charge against. These guns were captured from Kolchak in the east, judging by the Asiatic troops (Paraphrased from: Gaskill 12).

When the Americans crossed the bridge, they noticed a town burning. According to Gaskill, at the next stop at Drushny:

Kalinowski [Gaskill's interpreter] appeared with the motor car looking for gasoline. He told us that the burning town was called Nowaja Grebla, that the Bolos had crossed the railroad the afternoon before, had set fire to the bridge and stationed themselves in the town with machine guns, promised the natives the loot of the refugee train and had waited for the motor car train and escort to come along. This was the fight we heard that morning and the fringe of which we were in the evening before. The natives told the Poles that there were no Bolos there so they entered the town and had dismounted in the square when the guns opened up on them. There were many killed on both sides, but the Poles finally drove the Bolsheviks back across the railway, and then set fire to the town. This victory was all that saved us as we were waiting easy prey, although the guns of our train guard would have made a good resistance. Why the bridge wasn't dynamited none of us could understand. After we had seen the dead, and the [Asian troops], all idea of non-resistance disappeared from the minds of the Red Cross, especially as the Poles were wearing American uniforms with buttons, canteens, belts and packs stenciled US we figured that claiming to be Americans wouldn't get us very much. (Gaskill 12)

At Drushny, the Americans heated up a big pot of water and made hot milk for the children. Gaskill carried a big bucket, while an assistant ladled the warm milk to the children. The Americans by this account were feeding children even while in the midst of the enemy on the last train out of Kiev. As the train moved west at a high speed, they passed an engine and cars of an earlier departure that probably hit a mine on June 10<sup>th</sup>, which meant that three days ahead of Durand, Gregg and Gaskill's train, the Bolsheviks were behind the Polish lines (Paraphrased from Gaskill 12). The Americans were truly lucky to have made it out of Kiev unharmed.

On the morning of June 13<sup>th</sup>, the train arrived at Korestin, which was fairly out of harm's way. At Korestin, the Americans distributed most of their remaining food and cigarettes, and on June 14<sup>th</sup>, they asked the Red Cross to donate all the bandages, morphine, ether, instruments and food that could be spared to the wounded and poor on the trains. The Americans then left on a special train headed to Kowel, where they arrived on June 15<sup>th</sup>. "Along the way Doc and I got busy, set up the stove again with its stack out

of the lee side of the train and concocted a stew that had in it everything that was left. It was very good and was much appreciated by the women and kids” (Gaskill 13).

Dr. Durand and Gaskill arrived safely in Kowel. They luckily and barely avoided capture by the Bolsheviks who were gaining ground against the Poles at 10-30 miles a day. The two men, with the help of ARA inspector Gregg, fed the starving refugees on the trains and showed the dedication the Americans had to saving the lives of the war victims.

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The ARA officially withdrew from Poland on June 15, 1922, after three years of efficient work during which the group was instrumental in saving the lives of thousands of Polish children and in laying a firm foundation for the continuation of relief through the PAKPD. *The New York Times* wrote, “[t]he ARA at the peak of its operation in Poland was feeding one meal per day to nearly 1,500,000, including children under 17 years of age and nursing mothers, besides making large distributions of clothing” (*The New York Times*, “American Relief Work in Poland Ends: Administration Withdraws After Saving the Lives of Thousands of Children,” July 10, 1922). The ARA also gave food and clothing to the intelligentsia classes and conducted a student-feeding program of considerable scope.

To the Polish people of the postwar era, America was the savior nation, “representing the essence of philanthropy and practical idealism” (Chickering 17). President Wilson’s illness was considered a national calamity. The American minister, Gibson, was “universally esteemed” by the Polish people (Chickering 17). Pictures of Herbert Hoover were in many shop windows, and later a statue in Hoover’s honor was erected in Warsaw by the Polish government. When Hoover arrived in Warsaw in 1919, the Polish people greeted him with incredible affection. Thousands of children in Warsaw formed a special parade for him, passing by the leader of the ARA for hours, waving the napkins with American flags on them they received from the kitchens. The parade would have lasted well into the night if a rabbit had not run by the line of children. Five thousand children ran after this rabbit and eventually caught it. They brought the rabbit to Hoover and presented it as a gift. Hoover, although a man of even temper, could not help that his eyes became glassy with water, not because the children had given him the rabbit, but because the children of Warsaw were playing in the streets once again (Kellogg 4).

Hoover and the ARA helped rejuvenate the Polish nation, a people who were caught in the middle of World War I as Germany, Austria and Russia clashed on Polish soil. By the end of the war, Poland had been destroyed more than any other country, but the peo-

ple saw a chance to once again rule themselves, and they worked hard to accomplish this feat, both socially and militarily. In western Poland, there was guerrilla warfare between the Polish paramilitary forces led by Wojciech Korfanty and the Germans in the area. In the south, the Poles were at odds over control of Teschen with the Czechs; in the north, the free city of Danzig was a sore that would never heal, and near and around Wilno the Poles fought the small army of the reborn state of Lithuania. Worst of all, the Poles tempted disaster by engaging the Soviets in the east. There, Marshal Piłsudski was under the impression that his army was stronger than the Soviets, for the Polish forces constantly pushed the Bolsheviks east, while the leaders in Moscow asked for peace negotiations. He did not take into consideration, at least not enough, that the Soviets were fighting enemies on other fronts. An over-confident Piłsudski invaded Kiev. Lloyd George wrote on Poland's mistakes:

Now there has been a resurrection, and she was starting a new life. But it was a new life without training, without discipline, with tradition lost, with none of her leaders trained either in government or in war. Of course she blundered. It was a blunder of responsibility. (*The Literary Digest*, "The Allied Policy Toward Poland." Aug. 21, 1920)

After defeating Denikin and Kolchak, the Soviets could finally concentrate their forces on the Polish-Russian borderlands. The Poles were defeated time and time again, until their backs were against the gates of their capital, where the Poles rallied and eventually, for the most part, regained the territory they had lost, but the damage had been done. Poland, already torn by the First World War, but on the verge of stabilizing its condition, was once again destroyed, and this time, it was worse than before. The Bolshevik invasion led to requisitions of livestock, equipment and the summer crops; the war pushed refugees to the west and forced the Polish Army to destroy bridges as the Bolsheviks advanced. Cities and towns were razed, and the ARA, although reluctant to leave, was forced to close down its operations and move all equipment and personnel to the west. All of the progress that the ARA had made in the year of its existence was brought to a halt. The children of Poland once again could not be heard playing in the streets of Warsaw.

The war's destruction, however, did not stop the ARA from regrouping and beckoning the American people in the United States to donate to the emergency cause at hand. During and after the Polish-Soviet War, the ARA set up refugee camps and refugee kitchens on trains. As the Polish Army pushed the Bolsheviks eastward, the ARA was close on the army's heels, feeding the cold and hungry children, refugees, students and

intelligentsia. The structure of the ARA organization established by WP Fuller proved strong, and the ARA was able to quickly set up the elaborate system of distribution and inspection they used before the War. With the help of the Grey Samaritans and a reorganized PAKPD, the work went smoothly until the ARA operations ended on June 15<sup>th</sup> 1922.

In the years of ARA operations in Poland, the relief workers acted with the utmost moral and ethical standards. The ARA kept extensive records and hired an outside auditing company to work in its offices to let it be known to the world that the ARA was a charity organization and not a company profiting from the hungry people of Poland. Hoover handpicked the men he had work for him, men who had already proven their loyalty and leadership abilities in the military and in business. In Poland, they acted with the highest discipline. These men were then helped by the Grey Samaritans, who came to Poland for one overriding reason: to help rebuild the country of their birth. They gave an extra touch of care for the children and were instrumental in organizing the rebuilding of orphanages.

The ARA in Poland was not only providing relief, but in many ways, they were establishing the American idea of voluntary charity and self-help in Poland, a land that once had been independent, although for the past 150 years leading up to the war, the Poles lived under the rules of foreign governments. Christine Zduleczna remarked on the subject:

One wondered after all if the peaceful conquest of Europe by food had not done more for the cause of democracy than all the billions of gold and thousands of lives that had been spent to make the world safe for the thing we call democracy. The simple instructions in hygiene, the first principles of accounting, the daily continuance of the ration from America to the children carries with it 'line upon line and precept upon precept' in a [simple language]... the children understand, lessons as new as the principles of democracy in this land of old aristocracy. (Zduleczna 3)

The Americans hoped to thwart the communists in the east and to help the Polish people rule themselves. In some ways, this dream failed; for although Marshal Piłsudski was in the beginning just a figurehead of power, he soon took control of the government in 1926 and held it until his death in 1935, whereupon another military leader, General Rydz-Smigły, took control of the government.

The Polish leaders might not have learned the idea of democracy from the Americans; however, they did learn the value of humanitarian aid and what it meant to hungry people. In 1922, the Polish government transported by rail, without charge, more than

26,000 tons of ARA foodstuffs across Poland to the famine-stricken children of Russia (“American Relief Administration European Children’s Fund Mission to Poland and Polsko-Amerykański Komitet Pomocy Dzieciom 1919-1922, 19). This was a truly amazing gesture by the Poles, considering they had just been at war with the Soviets. The Russians and Germans would not learn the lessons of forgiveness and humanity. It would take another World War, a war that once again left Poland destroyed; there would not be another “Miracle on the Vistula,” in 1944, and Poland would once again be controlled from Moscow. The Soviets destroyed the statue in honor of Herbert Hoover erected by the Poles when they marched into the rubble of Warsaw in 1945, metaphorically ending the spirit of the ARA in Poland.

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## REVIEWS

Zuzanna Ładyga, *Rethinking Postmodern Subjectivity: Emmanuel Levinas and the Ethics of Referentiality In the Work of Donald Barthelme*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009. 192 pages.

**Between the Said-ness, Ipseity of the Same and Amphibology of the Saying's Trace:  
Zuzanna Ładyga's Levinasian Exploration  
of Donald Barthelme's Ethics of Referentiality**

As if everyone forgot that despite or, as Levinas would say, because of the incapacity of language to represent reality, words do have the ethical potential to affect it.

(Zuzanna Ładyga)

I do believe that my every sentence trembles with morality – it's full of morality. But it's the morality of an attempt.

(Donald Barthelme, interview with Jo Brans)

You must be able to tolerate the anxiety.

(Donald Barthelme, *The Dead Father*)

With the benefit of hindsight provided by nearly half a century of cultural wars, critical debates, and changing critical paradigms, in particular the 1990s "ethical turn," *Rethinking Postmodern Subjectivity*, an excellent and engaging book by Zuzanna Ładyga, proposes a new and subtle perception of the ideological and political complexity, philosophical depth, and ethical consequences of the early postmodern and postmodern aesthetics, in particular those at work in the construction of subjectivity in the novels of Donald Barthelme, a writer accorded a prominent place in the postmodern canon.

Ładyga's book's dense argumentation departs from the observation that the tradition of critical readings of Barthelme's works is punctuated by incompatibilities and discrepancies, with the critics of Larry McCaffery's and Jerome Klinkowitz's generation enthusiastically, and with formalist gusto, inquiring into "programmatic postmodern markers [such] as metanarrativization, pastiche, self-referential play with language, and surfictionality" (8), whereas since 1990s the critics of the historicizing persuasion, seeking to reveal the ideological and philosophical positions informing experimental postmodern-

ism seem to have been largely unsuccessful in exploring the problem of referentiality and affect construction in Barthelme's writing. Ladyga points out that both the ongoing debate concerning the status of the subject in postmodernity and lacunae in our understanding of ideological and political significance of postmodern experiments "in the shaping of contemporary American letters" (8) call for a re-investigation of the construction of the postmodern subject in order to transgress the terms of "totalizing humanism and negative theology" (9).

In view of "Barthelme's varied dialogical subject constructs which, unsubsumable under one totalizing critical definition, oscillate between conventional unity and experimental disruptiveness" (9), Ladyga's decision to turn to Emmanuel Levinas's formulation of the concept of the ethical subject in order to re-examine these notoriously systematization-eluding literary subjectivities in Barthelme's work proves most compelling. She stresses a parallel between the philosopher's efforts to identify the ethical dimension of language and the postmodern writer's sensitivity to the connection between the "tangibility of literary subject constructs" (9) and the sense that real-life intersubjective relations are confined within linguistically defined bounds.

It thus comes as no surprise that in an almost Levinasian vein Ladyga challenges the reader to participate along with her in this intellectually adventurous journey – a metaphor that seems pertinent at this point inasmuch as she speaks of the relations between the subject, ethics, and language in terms of a 'map.' The author observes that Levinas's radical revision of the concept of subjectivity "draws a precise map of the relations between ethics, subjectivity and the workings of language, a map that may prove particularly helpful when it comes to a critical analysis of those subject constructs that stubbornly evade the affirmative or negative theoretical models" (9). In the philosopher's non-totalizing perspective the subject emerges as a result of substitution for the Other that occurs as the instance of an "irruption of language by the ethical Saying" (9) that is, a momentary event of the Self being put into question by the Other. The Levinasian transitory, 'uncertain' and questioning subjectivity construct neither seeks ontological and epistemological stability nor proclaims the complete dissolution of the subject. Moreover, in emphasizing the "relation between language and the tangibly real" (9) and the role it assigns to the notion of sensibility, Levinas's concept of subjectivity casts a new light on Barthelme's referentiality and affect construction methods.

As early as in the introduction Ladyga draws the readers' attention to Barthelme's essay "Not-Knowing" (1985), in which he refers to the eponymous 'not-knowing' as a certain ultra-sensibility to the ethical dimension of language, which does not, however – Ladyga advises emphatically – testify to the writer's "moralistic" tendency as some critics would have it. In a delightful paragraph full of attenuated irony on her part when reminding us

of the writer's attitude "utterly ironic about his own authority," she further explains that Barthelme's view is not that of ethics as "a set of extra-linguistic corrective standards" (10). Instead, the writer perceives the ethical relation between literature and real as grounded in a sensibility to both the violent power of language in the act of representation and the world's vulnerability to that power. Levinas and Barthelme thus meet on common ground of understanding that ethics as a language phenomenon "must be differentiated from any fixed system of moral rules" (11).

Whiteheadian subdivision of *Rethinking Postmodern Subjectivity* into chapters and sections provides the flow of sustained and complex argument modeled on the style of the continental philosophy with an orderly and systematic shape, as well as dividing it into discrete portions, enacting, as it were, a dialogical tension between the flow of real life and the violence of language in the act of representing it, a violence intrinsic to Barthelme's conception of referentiality. Such organization of the text makes it both accessible and difficult for the readers, not necessarily questioning our habits of approaching critical texts altogether but nevertheless putting our scholarly certainties into question, and thus leading to a conclusion that in this encounter with the readers Ladyga perhaps offers an ethically charged Levinasian vision of academic endeavor.

Chapter one is devoted to a meticulous and thorough discussion of the philosopher's ethical perspective and its relevance to literary studies, a topic that, as the author remarks, has never been examined in detail. In the philosopher's conception of the encounter with the other in language, the ontological *Said* is juxtaposed with instances of disruption by the performative acts of language, referred to by Levinas as the ethical *Saying* that belongs to the realm of "the otherwise-than-being" (19). It is a "manifestation of the Face's unique expression which signifies beyond the Said, a realization of the proximity to the Other" (19). Levinas's conception of ethics as a re-inspection, or 'deconstruction' of the limits of the language of ontology has an affinity with postmodern strategies of subject construction. It should be noted that "Levinas's rendition of the subject's rapport with otherness as the linguistic interplay of the Saying and the Said [also] illuminates the problematics of text/reader relations" (21).

Ladyga engages Levinas's ideas in the dialogue with the views of Jaques Lacan, Donald Winnicott, and Gilles Deleuze. The problematic aspects of postmodern literary subjectivity construction strategies are thus elucidated, and an amphibological approach – that is, Jean-Francois Lyotard's idea that the only possible way of doing justice to Levinas's ethics is by misreading it (i.e. avoiding fixed meanings) – emerges as an operative concept.

Although Lacan's and Levinas's positions on the origin of the subject converge when it comes to placing it in the traumatic encounter with the Other, in Levinas's account the Saying belongs to a different order than the ontological Said, whereas Lacan's account

ontologizes the moment of the subject's emergence. Ładyga further examines the vexed issue of the role of gender in the process of ethical subject's formation in view of both thinkers "reliance on paternal family metaphor" (42). Levinas's attempt to broaden the definition of ethics by introducing the concept of *the Third* is implicitly based on the assumption of "the feminine as incompleteness and a signifier of the private relation of home that is detached from community" (43). Thus, the feminist claim, that even modified by the addition of *the Third*, Levinasian framework is not conducive to raising the question of feminist politics, must be taken into account when using Levinas "in a discussion of a postmodern writer whose women figures usually do quite well in terms of subverting the system or at least plotting political acts of revolt against its hegemony" (44).

Ładyga also explores the significance of Winnicott's concept of 'transitional space' to literary studies. The psychologist considers it an intermediary territory between the subject and the (m)other, where the differentiation processes of the subject can occur – neither in the subject alone or entirely outside of it – and where in playing the child performs its own becoming. Winnicott's view that art is transitional phenomenon and thus encompasses both the subject and the Other within, as Ładyga elegantly puts it, "the fluid spatio-temporal boundaries of its in-betweenness" (52) is crucial for her readings of Barthelme's postmodernist construction of subjectivities, ranging from those of characters, through that of the writer to those of the readers.

Gilles Deleuze's anti-humanistic approach to affectivity in art provides an explanation of the materiality of the artwork. He emphasizes the dissociation of the artist's actual emotions and sensibility from the form of the work. Deleuze proposes that lived emotions and affections turn to affects and perceptions turn to percepts, which, in turn, make the material expressive of itself. The only resemblance to perceive is that between the sensation 'wrested' from human perceptions and emotions and the artwork's material form which made this 'wresting' possible. The philosopher admits, however that it is difficult to show "where the material ends and the 'wrested' sensation begins" (58), which is very similar to the indeterminacy of sensibility invoked by Levinas.

Having examined and problematized Levinas's ethical perspective in relation to post-structuralist views on the links between subject formation and affectivity in reality and art, Ładyga proposes, in chapters two to four new, elegant, insightful and complex readings of Donald Barthelme's novels, *Snow White* (1967), *The Dead Father* (1975), *Paradise* (1986) and *The King* (published posthumously, 1990) come from different stages of his career as a postmodern writer and showcase different moments in the evolution of writer's interest (whether consciously acknowledged or not) in the ethics of referentiality.

The anticipation of the potentially possible ethical language in *Snow White*, expressed in terms of a tension between the referential trope of fatigue and the performative trope of indolence, which reflects the language of the novel being poised between “aspiration to represent and a recognition of the futility of the wish” (178) and its subjectivity emerging “in the mode of anticipation” (178), gives way in *The Dead Father* to Barthelme’s investigation of the boundaries of literary language. In discussing this novel, Ładyga introduces the concept of ipseity. It refers to the referential capacity of language encountering its limits and folding in on itself by returning to its own tangibility. The trope of ipseity “organizes the book’s thematic focus on transgressions of the corporeal by modulating different levels of mimetism” (178). The rupturing force of the referential confusion marks the moment of the emergence of the book’s ethical subjectivity.

Problematizing “the ethical aspect of the postmodern work’s relation with its reader” (178), *Paradise*, published one year later than the essay “Not-Knowing,” which explicitly declares the writer’s preoccupation with ethicity of writing, explodes its apparently traditional realist form by amplifying the mimetic effect of the Said-ness and thus textualizes the ethical. On the other hand, *The King* “makes the ethics of literary language its central theme” (179) rather than exploring the ethical dimension of language’s potential for disruption. The novel presents a powerful and explicit critique of modernism’s entanglement in politics and its obliviousness to “the harmful potential of words” (179) and their impact in real life. Ładyga concludes her book with the observation that Barthelme’s relinquishing of his efforts to construct non-totalizing subjectivities might perhaps be seen as embracing of a somewhat utopian – but therefore, one might add, potentially evoking the menace of dystopia – belief that certain situations justify the adoption of a corrective ethical stance.

*Rethinking Postmodern Subjectivity* is not only an incisive and interesting inquiry into the vicissitudes of ethical thinking of Donald Barthelme as a postmodern writer, but also transforms our understanding of the postmodern aesthetics. Zuzanna Ładyga’s book constitutes an excellent transitional space in its own right, encouraging a fruitful encounter of the author and the reader, and, in accordance with its temporality of the pastiche, having identified the past vision (the tradition of critical readings of postmodernism and Barthelme), it deconstructs it (debunks a few myths about postmodernism’s aesthetical and ethical positions, goals, and its role in its cultural and historical context) in order to creatively reconstitute it as a new insight beneficial for future scholarly engagements (ethicity in/of literary language, an interplay and tension between the ethical in language and corrective ethics, critical theory as a transitional space).

Zofia Kolbuszewska

Paweł Jędrzejko, *Melville w kontekstach, czyli prolegomena do studiów melvillistycznych. Kierunki badań – biografia – kultura* [Melville in Contexts, or, The Prolegomena to Melville Studies. Research – Biography – Culture]. Sosnowiec, Katowice, Zabrze: bananaart.pl / exmachina / m-studio, 2007. 157 pages.

Paweł Jędrzejko, *Płynność i egzystencja. Doświadczenie lądu i morza a myśl egzystencjalna Hermana Melville'a* [Liquidity and Existence. The Experience of the Land and the Sea and Herman Melville's Thought]. Sosnowiec, Katowice, Zabrze: bananaart.pl / exmachina / m-studio, 2008. 373 pages.

The presence of the great writers of the American Renaissance in the Polish critical discourse is rather unostentatious, to put it diplomatically; the discussions of the works of such men-of-letters as Poe, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, or Whitman, are scattered in journals and collections of essays and, having been written mostly in English and by specialists in English philology, they contribute to the mainstream literary studies in Poland in a very limited degree. In the 1970s, there appeared Polish books on Whitman and Poe, written by Juliusz Żuławski and Franciszek Lyra respectively, but their relevance nowadays is somewhat dubious, as they do not reflect the fundamental changes in the paradigms of American criticism in the closing decades of the twentieth century. In the United States, the discussions of diverse forms of nineteenth-century literary production, taking into account the ideological underpinnings of the process of canon formation, are among the most heated debates in the humanities. The strengthening of such theoretical models as postcolonialism and gender studies is a good incentive for American academics to offer fresh interpretations of classic texts. It is only natural that the debates on the literatures of particular nations take place in specific national contexts – historical, methodological, institutional – one should wish, however, that in the era of global communication such debates would have stronger international resonance. Hopefully, the publication of two books in Polish on Herman Melville, both authored by Paweł Jędrzejko: *Melville w kontekstach* and *Płynność i egzystencja. Doświadczenia lądu i morza a myśl Hermana Melville'a*, will inspire new interest in the American Renaissance among Polish scholars and readers.

While *Melville w kontekstach* is a historical achievement, being the first Polish book devoted exclusively to the author of *Moby Dick*, it is quite a modest contribution to Melville studies. It does not aspire to open any new ground in the field; instead, it combines a historical introduction to the writer and his epoch with a summation of the major tendencies in Melville scholarship. Such a methodological blend is slightly confusing insofar as it makes it difficult to identify the audience of *Melville w kontekstach*; on the one hand, the chapters with a biographical and historical focus seem to be addressed to less

experienced readers, who need to know the rudiments, on the other, the chapters surveying the critical approaches to Melville appeal to more specialized readers. What is evidently missing from Jędrzejko's first book is an overview of Melville's fiction, which would provide a link between the biographical and critical content. The explanation for such an omission is that the later book, *Płynność i egzystencja*, contains a thorough analysis of Melville's entire oeuvre. Unfortunately, this leaves non-academic readers at a loss: those who have been seduced by the relative easiness of *Melville w kontekstach* will probably find *Płynność i egzystencja* to be too much of an intellectual challenge.

*Płynność i egzystencja* is a full-fledged academic book, with an impressive thematic scope, clear aims and consistent methods. The point of departure in Jędrzejko's study is the assumption of the fluidity of boundaries between literature, philosophy and history, which substantiates the thesis that the work of a given writer can provide the frames of and give expression to a complex philosophical doctrine. Jędrzejko situates Melville's writing in the context of existential philosophy, defined in the broadest terms, and points to the common elements of the different historical variants of this philosophical tradition, from romantic philosophy, through French existentialism, to the psychological aspects of hermeneutics and the ethical concerns of deconstruction. Unlike those critics who blindly subjugate literary texts to interpretative models, the author of *Płynność i egzystencja* builds a dialogue between literary discourse and critical meta-discourse, invariably giving primacy to the former. Thus, he pays attention to what he calls micro-poetics; in other words, he demonstrates how symptomatic episodes in Melville's texts, or even very specific objects appearing in selected scenes, offer insights into the writer's existential philosophy. Jędrzejko discusses the significance of objects in the construction of Melville's literary universe and claims that the human sense of being is shaped in relation to the surrounding environment, which consists, precisely, of the configurations of things.

The major part of the book is devoted to Melville's heroes; the analysis of the parallels between the plights of different protagonists provides the key to the fundamental existential situation as imagined by the author of *Pierre*. This situation involves an essentially tragic dualism: on the one hand, it is determined by the fear of senselessness, which manifests itself as the inability to define the purpose of one's actions or as the uncertainty of the nature of external circumstances; on the other, it requires engagement from the character and forces him to overcome the fears and to search for the purpose, in spite of doubts or against the odds. Jędrzejko describes the Melvillean protagonist, epitomizing such a human condition, with an intriguing term "oceanic man." The ocean as the metaphor of existence which is "liquid," that is devoid of unchanging meanings, points to the immensity of effort undertaken by the protagonist in order to achieve self-

reconciliation and a modicum of peace. On the narrative plane, the philosophical conception, grounded in the dichotomy of despair and engagement, takes the form of the opposition between silence and discourse, where silence is the synonym of the inexpressible – and incomprehensible – experience, while discourse aims to establish the permanent vectors of individual life and the world of phenomena through a series of linguistic acts.

In Melville's works, non-discursive experience and discursive perception converge when the characters assert their status as subjects in the narrative gestures of defining the meaning and function of objects. Jędrzejko counts detailed descriptions of objects and catalogues of things among Melville's most characteristic literary strategies. The objects which have been constructed for clearly defined purposes and which have specific names create the illusion of the stability of meanings. Objects have material and technical qualities, but they also inevitably belong to symbolic systems, such as economy, based on the arbitrary calculation of value. Accordingly, things function as signs whose meanings can be modified as a result of contextual changes. In a comprehensive chapter on the formation of selfhood in the environment of objects, Jędrzejko highlights the effect of historicity, constituted by references to the material properties of the external world.

Paweł Jędrzejko treats Melville's writing with respect and enthusiasm, and so he does the work of critics, which precludes any polemical intentions on his part. Nevertheless, *Płynność i egzystencja* departs from the dominating tendencies in Melville scholarship, the tendencies which oscillate between the reading procedures of postcolonialism, new historicism and queer studies, less often psychoanalysis and deconstruction. The examination of Melville's existential themes signifies a return to the very source of his work, a very successful return thanks to the combination of nineteenth- and twentieth-century trends in existentialism into a coherent interpretative perspective.

Marek Paryż

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich and Jerzy Kamionowski, eds. *O wiele więcej Okien* [More numerous of Windows]. Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 2008. 220 pages.

*O wiele więcej Okien* is the third volume in the series of essay collections on American female poets initiated and co-edited by Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich. Preceded by *W Palacu Możliwości* (2003) and *Piękniejszy Dom od Prozy* (2005) it borrows the title, like two earlier volumes, from Emily Dickinson's J657/Fr466 ("I dwell in Possibility") and contains ten meticulously annotated analyses. While some of the discussed poets

(as Elizabeth Bishop, championed by *Literatura na Świecie*) might already be known to wider circles of Polish readers, others (for instance Linda Hogan) are considerably less popular among non-English speaking audiences. Thus, while *O wiele więcej Okien* remains a valuable resource for students and researchers of poetry in English, it is an important addition to the Polish corpus of American Studies. The editors, in fact, also reach out to non-academic readers by including in the volume a chronologically arranged list of (very) short biographic notes on American female poets.

Apart from presenting a spectrum of twentieth-century American poets (from aforementioned Bishop, through Sonia Sanchez and Lucille Clifton to Jorie Graham), *O wiele więcej Okien* is a showcase of varied approaches to writing about, and quite possibly, the reading of poetry. Mikołaj Wiśniewski, in his essay on Elizabeth Bishop's *The Fish*, and Ewa Chruściel, who discusses the significance of brackets and deictic shifts in Graham's poetry, approach their subject matter with a magnifying glass, focusing closely on the minute and tracing barely discernible tensions in the tapestry of examined works. Curiously enough, in both cases it is precisely the fish – and not death of a beautiful woman – that reveals itself as the most poetical topic in the world, perfect medium and metaphor for reading, writing and looking. Commenting on Graham's speaker, who watches "minnows, thousands" that "swirl / themselves, each a miniscule muscle, but also, without / the way to *create* current, making of their unison (turning, re-infolding, / entering and exciting their own unison in unison)" (191), Chruściel observes: "In [Graham's] poems verses twirl like minnows. Glimmering they swirl, particles, corpuscles, flickers, to render [Graham's] perception of the world in *That Greater Nothing*" (193). The never-ending oscillation among the molecules of meaning, concludes Chruściel, results not in answers, but in overlapping strata of questions, and positions the meaning forever "in between."

In his delightful study Mikołaj Wiśniewski pretends to attempt to de-textualize Bishop's object and disentangle it from the layers of language, but his analysis verily emphasizes those qualities of *The Fish* (and the fish) which inevitably hint at its status of a self-reflexive verbal artifact: "Both *The Fish* and *The Monument*... eventually unveil themselves as fabricated objects," he notes pointing to the fact that "fabricated" means "constructed" and "manufactured" as well as "false, imagined" (42). Throughout his analysis Wiśniewski examines *The Fish* as carefully as Bishop's speaker examines the fish, only to let it go in the last sentence of the essay.

Other texts in *O wiele więcej Okien* preserve a more general cultural approach, proving that the notion of "female writing experience" includes a whole range of perspectives on the process of finding one's voice and voicing one's subjectivity through (and often in spite of) the matrix of socio-economic dependencies and expectations. The poetry of

two African-American poets (Sonia Sanchez and Lucille Clifton) as well as the works of Linda Hogan (who identifies herself as Native American, write the editors in the Introduction; 9) are presented against their biographical background and in each case there emerges a story of struggle and attempts at resolution, within the speaking subject and around her. Sonia Sanchez, says Jerzy Kamionowski, through her use of dialect carves out a new discourse capable of expressing experiences of the Other rejected or ignored by the dominant language (124). Linda Hogan, observes Lucyna Aleksandrowicz Pędich, creates spaces to store and restore the disappearing heritage and collective memory, while her own bi-ethnic identity becomes a symbolic battlefield and merger between that which is native and alien, natural and cultural, carnal and spiritual (187). The “ordinary woman” emerging from Ewa Łuczak’s essay on Lucille Clifton consciously chooses to avoid the logic of “either/or,” identified as traditionally non-African, in order to see more, even if only through the key-hole and without participating directly in political and social life (141). Indeed it appears that Clifton’s voice is most resonant when affirming the private and the ordinary, which by no means renders her poetry unpolitical. All of the poets, comment the editors in the Introduction (10), although each in a different way, represent “engaged subjectivity” (to use Małgorzata Poks’ description of Denise Levertov); subjectivity born from interdependencies between the blurred spheres of private and public life.

There is, in *O wiele więcej Okien*, also a place for the comparative approach: Jacek Partyka discusses the metaphysical (and Metaphysical) echoes of George Herbert’s poetry in the works of Elizabeth Bishop and Gosia Gawryś searches for parallels in the treatment of history by Bishop and Wisława Szymborska. Both essays are interesting examples of studies that succeed in mapping out connections between poets separated by a vast temporal, geographical and ideological gap.

Finally, we will find in *O wiele więcej okien* two essays reflecting on feminist sensitivity in the poetry of Anne Sexton and Edna St. Vincent Millay. Even though Sexton never considered herself a feminist, writes Piotr Zazula quoting Adrienne Rich (148), she appears to have anticipated the movement’s rebirth. Several aspects of her persona, including her celebrity status and “sexual exhibitionism”, when not forced into the (narrowly perceived) tradition of confessional poetry, jumpstart a radical revision of the notion of female spirituality. Similarly, in her analysis of selected works by Edna St. Vincent Millay, Paulina Amroży-Lis reveals how despite its traditional form and the employment all too well known stylistic tropes, Millay’s love poetry re-defines cultural conventions and paves the way for a new mode of female experience.

The volume edited by Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich and Jerzy Kamionkowski fulfills the promise foreshadowed by its title: it opens numerous windows of critical analy-

sis and inquiry. One finds oneself hoping that the remaining nine lines of Dickinson's J657/Fr466 will provide inspiration for subsequent anthologies.

Anna Warso

David Mead and Paweł Frelik, eds. *Playing the Universe. Games and Gaming in Science Fiction*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2007. 266 pages.

*Playing the Universe* is a collection of 19 essays devoted to the ideas of game and play that permeate and shape contemporary culture. While the main focus of the volume, as declared in the title, is the field of science fiction, the editors acknowledge the broader significance and veritable inevitability of "the ludic impulse" in western cultural experience. Similarly, the authors, although focused on their respective areas of research, remain aware of the pervasiveness and contextual extent of their subject matter, and a number of diverse theoretical perspectives they adopt seems to be yet another testimony to the potential that the concepts of game and play still hold for cultural studies. As a result the collection offers an astounding variety of examinations, from the discussions of classic science fiction literature and television series, through analyses of computer and role-playing games, to cross-field studies of the phenomena of games and gaming in the intermedia.

Essays included in the section devoted to literature explore the extent to which games and play serve as organizing and structuring patterns of science fiction texts, both on the narrative level and as crucial elements of imagined realities. And so David Mead presents a fascinating analysis of games in Jack Vance's fiction, arguing that they "reflect and characterize the cultures, and sometimes the people that play them" (16), and reinventing their status as formative plot devices, rather than colorful, but insignificant background elements, while Cathlena Martin and Robert O'Connor engage texts in which playing the game (or the Game as it may be) becomes the predominant mode of existence of characters and societies. O'Connor's study of Philip K. Dick's *The Game-Players of Titan* places the human "player" between the conflicting "twin horrors of mechanistic order and entropic chaos" (44), struggling to prevail in a "rigged" game. Cathlena Martin ponders the questions of childhood experience, collaboration and socialization through gaming in Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*, in which the game's global consequences are masked to facilitate more natural "play." Essays by Gavin Miller and Tim Bryant similarly discuss texts where games regulate social relations (Melissa Scott's *Burning Bright*), or become a ritualized mode of expression and basis for criticism of economic relations (make-believe play in Iain Banks's "Culture" utopia).

Approaching the concept of play from another direction, Donald M. Hassler explores the speculative postmodern take on identity and post-human subject in Robert J. Sawyer's fiction, while Thomas J. Morrissey and Oscar De Los Santos discuss the extrapolative (and playful) procedures that characterize discourses of both science and science fiction.

The game of Quidditch and its role in the Harry Potter novels receives treatment in essay by D. Bruno Starrs, who at the same time raises questions about cultural/social determinants of rules in real-life sports. Randy Clark's analysis of team sports in Walter R. Brooks's Freddy the Pig novels on the other hand examines the satirical potential of fantastic sporting events in children's literature.

The second section of *Playing the Universe* focuses on film and the thematic range of material presented in the three essays is equally broad. Rebecca Janicker and Lincoln Geraghty explore the nature of game-playing in two widely acclaimed television series: *Star Trek* and *Red Dwarf*. The authors analyze the differences in treatment of games between the American-made *Star Trek*, with its positive tone and healthy dose of pioneer spirit, and its humorous and yet much less optimistic British counterpart, in order to show how science fiction television presents complex moral themes in a simplified form using the medium of games and simulations.

Fred Mason's essay examines the transformation which sports undergo in science fiction films. The fictional sports of the future are more extreme, frequently life-threatening and more akin to gladiatorial combat than honorable rivalry, reflecting the growing concerns about the present state of affairs. Mason observes: "Excesses in violence in sport, in commercialization, competitiveness and fan identification with teams have all provided the germ of ideas for writers of future sports" (136).

Jonathan Goodwin's analysis of Shane Carruth's *Primer* concludes the film section of the volume. Goodwin sees sport in *Primer* as the "controlling metaphor" (141) of the film, with the two characters reinventing reality with the use of time-manipulating device and turning it into a kind of playing board upon which they compete for control. The plot of the film is extremely involved, resembling, it seems, a game governed by impossibly complex rules.

The third section of the book includes essays which explore the as yet uncharted territories of video games and tabletop games and trace the connections between this relatively new media and the science fiction narrative. Essays by Laurie Johnson and David Boreham both examine those connections, the former focused on the parallels between the emergence of computer games and the development of science fiction writing, the latter concerned with the "techno-poetics" of computer games, which can be understood as non-linear, rhizomorphic texts. Two case studies are also included in this section:

Michael Carlson Kapper's discussion of side games in *Knights of the Old Republic* video games and Michael Nitsche's examination of spatial design in *Zanzarah* adventure game. Both texts present in-depth analyses and offer fascinating insights into the particulars of computer game narratives.

Finally, Mark Gellis's essay proposes a possible reading of tabletop role-playing game supplements as literary texts. Claiming that a game supplement (or "module" as it is also called) "can be treated as a kind of deliberately open-ended and incomplete work of fiction" (167), the author discusses the functions of non-player characters, event sequencing and choices open to players on the basis of *Transhuman Space: Orbital Decay* game module by Patrick Sweeney. In addition, Gellis examines the rhetorical aspects of such texts, their potential for provoking emotional responses and for raising ethical questions.

The final section of the volume is entitled "Intermedia" and comprises two essays which present material drawn from numerous and highly diverse fields. Loren Easton examines the formation of subjectivity in a military context, using computer game experience and contemporary science fiction novel *Broken Angels* by Richard K. Morgan. Easton proposes the concept of "first person plural identity" as model for describing the subject positioned as "interface between commander's information and the material goal" (239) within modern military structure.

Jean Anne Lauer and Shelley Rodrigo's essay is a fascinating study of speculative fiction's proclivity for franchising. The authors analyze the connections between key developments in technology, film industry and corporate culture and their effects upon changes in narrative patterns of speculative fictions. Lauer and Rodrigo observe the synergy between the marketing of science fiction products across a variety of media and point to changes in modes of reception/consumption of narratives, dictated by the policy of media conglomerates.

The editors of *Playing the Universe* have done a remarkable job bringing together scholars interested in how science fiction narrative transforms and is transformed by various media. The concepts of game and play that serve as common denominators for the research presented in this collection can no doubt be found and analyzed in other types of fiction. However, as many essays in this collection show, science fiction genre has so far made the most extensive use of the idea. But then again, isn't being the vanguard what science fiction is all about?

Paweł Pyrka



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