

# Janus Head

Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in  
Literature, Continental Philosophy,  
Phenomenological Psychology, and the Arts.

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8010  
Pittsburgh, PA 15216

ISSN: 1524-2269

0 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 0

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## *The Castle of Debris*: Tatsuya Tatsuta's Formative Abstract Representation of Lacanian Desire

George Saitoh

“There are only two tragedies in life: not getting what one desires, and getting it.” – Oscar Wilde



*The Castle of Debris* is situated first from the entrance to the large exhibition hall in Tokyo's National Art Centre. Piled on the floor are the 'monad' pieces of heat-transformed polystyrene, burned and melted from identical and flat machine-turned replicas into figurations of seemingly infinite textural and topographical complexity, but all to some degree concave, hollowed-out carapaces.

Tatsuta tells me that this latest work represents desire (or the Lacanian structure of desire as defined by lack (欠如) of an ideal

object, drawing the individual towards images of that object that are—and must be for desire to persist—false or unobtainable.

Among the pile are islands of heavily burnt pieces with varying degrees of spacial condensation and discoloration from white through brown, and at the center of each is one or more glittering decorative orbs sparkling with superficial beauty. Beyond these islands, the remoter monads can appear as benign as white prawn crackers until the devastating truth of their potential is realized in the browning, glazing effects encircling the positive object with its solid reflective surface, dark and round like the swiveling eye of a burlesque octopus camouflaged beneath a rocky shelf.



Unlike his previous *Re-Monad 1-4* exhibit (NAU exhibition, NACT Feb 2016), where the composite monad pieces were fixed to the supporting medium's surface, permanently embedded in it, here there is a sense of ease, of possibility for change, palpable potential for re-arrangement, escaping the confines of the present, a sense of optimism. In the center of the mass, where the pile is deepest, the pieces are whitest—pure, creamy, airy, and, at first glance, as playfully attractive as puffed rice, popcorn, curls of hair, beer froth, bath foam.

This effect is emphasized, as well as made possible, by the horizontal layout that feels alive, intimate, and improvisational, less conspicuously an art exhibit than a real, unfinished creative act in progress inviting the viewer to share an imaginary hand in the rehabilitation process underway. The viewer becomes easily involved—the delimiting boundary of a frame or canvas edge is absent and the contents of the *The Castle of Debris* bleeds right up to your feet.

Unusual for a Japanese artist, the effect of an art seemingly with neither traceable form, formal representational structure, nor formal material constituents is that it leaves the viewer helplessly exposed—cut off from any pre-conceived notion of how art is (or should be) constructed and represented.

It is worth repeating that the units of the work—and we must remember that they are merely touching one another in this latest exhibition, like grains of sand on a beach—are not irreversibly interconnected. If each unit is conceived as a plastic representation of a Leibnitz monad, then the mass of units is a multiplication of this monadism, a congregation of diverse cybernetic systems, each alike in kind, but each unique in topographical detail.



In *Re-Monad 1-4* (NAU exhibition, NACT Feb 2016), these pieces were irreversibly cross-linked by heat within a matrix—monads overridden and fused by some destructive, omnipotent force. While traces of the monad were clearly visible, each one—as a unit of free-flowing self-containment—was forcibly linked to others that were in turn broken in the same process.

*Re-Monad 1-4* as a series of pieces was, in effect, a manifestation of the most primitive recall and awareness of all-eclipsing trauma in the seconds (though they could be eons) before blackout, before awareness as well as time itself ends, and death—and infinitude—begins. It is no less than the interface of birth or of clinical death, or of the soul's abdication from the *muselmann*.

In Lacanian terms, *Re-Monad 1-4* may also be viewed as a representation of the *sinthome*. The minimum condition for life, the threshold upon which we may thereafter either permanently cease to be, or begin to re-emerge, re-habilitate, re-identify, 're-monadize', live.

The eventual encounter with the reality of one's prior experience(s)—a reality where nothing can be recalled, or one of



intolerable recall whose denial has been possible to sustain up to now, but for no longer—coming about as a result of the inevitable running down of imaginative/projective energy that comes with time and the progressive inability to infuse present reality and objects with fantastical (deluded) meaning leads to confrontation with one's *sinthome*.

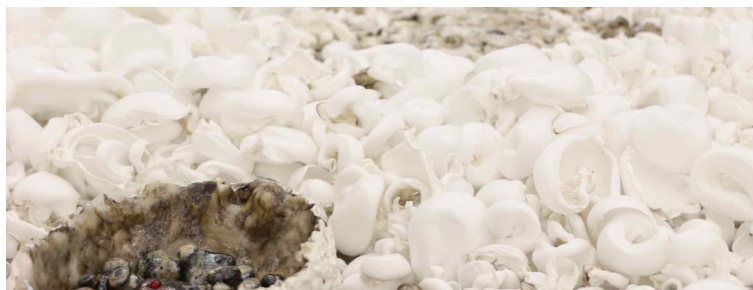
It is an encounter from whose crisis old fantasies can no longer be supported, but are nevertheless remembered 'to have been' with shame, like husks piled up. This interpretation of 'rock bottom,' where either death or new (different) life is the only way forward is the crisis point from which one emerges to live more consciously than before, or not all.

In *The Castle of Debris*, the improvement is underway. We are no longer in the nightmare or *pavor nocturnus*, locked in the desireless desert of the trauma, but in the dream, the frustrating, desiring dream where objects are as varied and as abundant as they are infused with false promise and pretense. But this fact cannot keep up with our sense of pleasure, and that is what matters most for the possibility of living.

Each unit, each monad, is a unit of desire, a representation of the unique lack inside the individual. Each piece, hollow at its core, has a different shape from its neighbor, with which it nevertheless shares the mark of a cavity.

But if we can see each piece as an individual's desire *per se*, among the mass of diversity shaped within each individual out of a uniquely lived experience, we can also take this pile of monads to represent the multiple forms of desire in one individual. For unlike Freud's drive, orbiting some fixed focal point, Lacanian desire is multivalent, finds countless possibilities for its fulfillment.

Complexity (複雜性) is key. The pieces, upon closer inspection, reveal a plethora of lost, bleached or formalin-fixed possibilities: outer ears (pinnae), inner ears (cochleae), hearts, pancreata, snake heads, deep-sea jaws, scooped-out fruit-halves, Venus flytraps, noses, boxing gloves, embryonic sacs, coffee beans, fetuses, lobster claws, placentae.



For each transformation of one replica polystyrene food tray, each convulsive reaction to the propane torch's 2000 degrees C of heat, the duration and distance from the object is never precisely repeated though the materials are gripped in the artist's sensitive hands. However much control the artist brings to bear the outcome cannot be pre-ordained. The object gets away from him, takes on a direction (a 'will') of its own. Thereafter, the most he may do is modify its form according to what he *discovers* to emerge under the blast of heat. But he cannot consciously *create* any of these objects, these 'monads' in their precise detail.

Each is a product of entropy that he has nevertheless instigated, is responsible for. This, perhaps, is the source of the work's harnessed energy, it's wildness. The artist has to live with the results, accept what they retro-actively reveal to him about his own artistic desire.

And here we have yet another aspect of this complex, multi-layered artwork that demands our consideration: the notion that desire

itself only becomes fully recognizable, takes on clarity of form and substance, *after* it has been (unsuccessfully) satisfied. This sense is also somehow rendered and captured within *The Castle of Debris*.

This remarkable and unavoidable Lacanian characteristic ensures present desire will outpace knowledge of its object, and therefore will always require a ‘leap of faith’ if it is to be actualized, if we are to experience its pleasurable effects – the pleasures of hope and optimism for a future better than the present.

How does this fit with our (and the artist’s) striving for control? If control deadens, it is because it kills desire. Desire for control is an oxymoron. It is the fascist imperative inside each of us against which art rails, subversively, to redeem us.

But without a container of control, desire (欲望) cannot manifest itself. Lack is no longer a lack (欠如) in an infinite void (無).

Every great modernist has sought this balance between control and emancipation. Indeed every great artist who has understood, on some level, this structure of desire and that perfect balance (unattainable, because it *must* be to sustain itself) is the object of their own desire, has had to treat complexity in either of two (ideal) ways—use complexity to render a simpler object or use simplicity to render a complex object—in the full knowledge that they will fail, and thus have the desire to go on failing again and again in the name of desire.

James Joyce set out to show that all the desirable ingredients of the world that he could name didn’t satisfy desire. His literary son, Samuel Beckett, chose to fail at rendering desire by assuming that he didn’t have any, and setting out, from that hypothetical position, toward a sub-worm existence, which he could never quite reach. The nagging urge to go on, the only thing left when he stripped away every possible image of the desirable, was desire itself,

or its insistence on Waiting for (its) Godot. But both artists adumbrated desire's locus in their own extreme way.

In a distinctly Beckettian turn, Leonard Cohen sees himself described in his *Book of Longing* as 'the creator of the black photograph...the guy who takes a lot of trouble setting up a picture and then holds his hand over the lens as he snaps it... I have been, I am and I will remain the Ch---t of Matter and the Redeemer of the Inert. Nico perceived me immediately...my work...is a monument to Nico's eyes...that the Black Photograph sang to other irises, and yes corneas, retinas, optic nerves, all the way down the foul leather bag to Nico's restless heart, another human heart.'

I prefer the 'cheat of matter' who (knowingly) restores the lack at the instant it is to be (falsely) occupied by the actualization of an imperfect image. Either way, Christ of matter or cheat of matter is an important reference to the presumption of controllability: the geometrically identical polystyrene dishes, the hand-held propene lamp (or hand-focused Fresnel Lens). The two interfaces between control/loss of control and loss of control/control, which, although the artist cannot dictate what happens where heat meets material, he can at least approach control over the duration of this span of time—when the first interface occurs, and again when the second occurs. Here Tatsuta may play God, presiding over a world in which individuals, between the traumatic poke of birth and the curtain call of death, are nevertheless guided by free will.



That world is characterized by the unfathomable complexity of human desire. It can never be other than disordered, evolving, and failing.

*Coda:*

*THIS VERSUS THAT*

by

George Saitoh

*There had to have been  
really something  
for this to be  
like this and not like that,  
or even that.*

*Later, this will really have been,  
proving it will not  
have been that,  
or even that*

*but what had to have really been this.*

# Vampires, Viruses, and Verbalisation: Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as a genealogical window into fin-de-siècle science

Hub Zwart

*Euthanasia is an excellent and comforting word! I am grateful to whoever invented it.*

– John Seward <sup>1</sup>

*They don't realize we're bringing them the plague.*

– Sigmund Freud

## *Abstract*

This paper considers Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*, published in 1897, as a window into techno-scientific and sociocultural developments of the fin-de-siècle era, ranging from blood transfusion and virology up to communication technology and brain research, but focusing on the birth of psychoanalysis in 1897, the year of publication. Stoker's literary classic heralds a new style of scientific thinking, foreshadowing important aspects of post-1900 culture. *Dracula* reflects a number of scientific events which surfaced

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<sup>1</sup> Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (1897/1993, p. 298).

in the 1890s but evolved into major research areas that are still relevant today. Rather than seeing science and literature as separate realms, moreover, Stoker's masterpiece encourages us to address the ways in which techno-scientific and psycho-cultural developments mutually challenge and mirror one another, so that we may use his novel to deepen our understanding of emerging research practices and vice versa (Zwart 2008, 2010). Psychoanalysis plays a double role in this. It is the research field whose genealogical constellation is being studied, but at the same time (Lacanian) psychoanalysis guides my reading strategy.

Dracula, the infectious, undead Vampire has become an archetypal cinematic icon and has attracted the attention of numerous scholars (Browning & Picart 2009). The vampire complex built on various folkloristic and literary sources and culminated in two famous nineteenth-century literary publications: the story *The Vampyre* by John Polidori (published in 1819)<sup>2</sup> and Stoker's version. Most of the more than 200 vampire movies released since *Nosferatu* (1922) are based on the latter (Skal 1990; Browning & Picart 2009; Melton 2010; Silver & Ursini 2010). Yet, rather than on the archetypal cinematic image of the Vampire, I will focus on the various scientific ideas and instruments employed by Dracula's antagonists to overcome the threat to civilisation he represents. Although the basic storyline is well-known, I will begin with a plot summary.

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<sup>2</sup> John Polidori acted as Lord Byron's personal physician during his European travels and based his vampire story on an unfinished fragment by Byron, conceived at the same time and place as Mary Wollstonecraft's *Frankenstein*, in Villa Diodati, near Lake Geneva, in the rainy summer of 1816. Polidori's thesis, composed in Latin, was a medical treatise on *Oneirodynia*, i.e. somnambulism (Stiles et al 2010).

*Summary*

Jonathan Harker, a solicitor from London, travels to Transylvania, – a polyglot, multi-ethnic region “full of geological and chemical strangeness” (Stoker 1897/1993, p. 284) and beset by superstition –, to meet Count Dracula, who had expressed his intention to migrate to London, the teeming metropolitan centre of the modern Western world. In a dreary, unfamiliar landscape Jonathan is picked up by a mysterious driver who takes him to a dilapidated medieval castle in the Carpathians, on the edge of a precipice, heaving him in and out of his carriage with “prodigious strength” (p. 17, p. 20). When he meets the Count, Jonathan feels uneasy and intimidated by Dracula’s presence, by his cold hands, his sharp teeth, his pale, statuesque body and his nauseating (“malodourous”, “stagnant”, “foul”) breath. Soon, he realises that he is in fact the Count’s prisoner (p. 31). The castle’s doors are locked and seem too large and heavy for him to open, and he feels completely helpless (p. 31). During a nocturnal exploration he is physically harassed by Dracula’s “voluptuous” brides yearning for his blood. Utterly defenceless, he faints. In letters to his wife Mina, he confesses his traumatic and embarrassing experiences, identifying himself with medieval ladies once imprisoned there.<sup>3</sup> Soon it dawns on him that he is kept alive only because Dracula needs him for his envisioned real estate transaction, a first step towards unleashing an exponentially proliferating network of vampirism pervading the Western world.<sup>4</sup> Jonathan manages to escape to England, but has

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<sup>3</sup> “Here I am, sitting at a little oak table where in old times possibly some fair lady sat to pen, with much thought and many blushes, her ill-spelt love-letter, and writing in my diary in shorthand all that has happened... the old centuries have powers of their own which mere modernity cannot kill” (p. 39).

<sup>4</sup> “This was the being I was helping to transfer to London, where, perhaps for the centuries to come, he might, among its teeming millions, satiate his lust for blood,



contracted a strange and debilitating brain disease in Dracula's castle. His collection of notes and diary entries, however, in stenographic shorthand (the new, bureaucratic style of writing which Count Dracula is unable to decode) will become a key component in the Dracula file.

Meanwhile, Mina's friend Lucy Westenra became engaged to a wealthy aristocrat named Arthur Holmwood, after turning down two other suitors: Dr. John Seward (a psychiatrist who studied with Prof. Abraham van Helsing in Amsterdam and now directs a private mental asylum near London) and an American adventurer named Quincey Morris. Seward is writing a scientific report about his "pet patient", a dangerous psychopath named Renfield who suffers from "homicidal and religious mania" (p. 94) and who eats spiders and flies, so that Seward labels him as "zoophagous". When Renfield telepathically registers the arrival of his "Lord and Master" and Lucy begins to display unsettling symptoms (restlessness, anaemia, sleepwalking, blood loss), Seward suggests to contact his former mentor Van Helsing, an expert in obscure diseases, who eagerly accepts the invitation.

Upon his arrival, Van Helsing is struck by strange marks on Lucy's neck and tries to save her life with blood transfusions, using blood procured from four gentlemen (Seward, Morris, Holmwood and Van Helsing himself) who volunteer to save the ailing female recipient with their revitalising bodily fluids. Because of the intimacy of the intervention, her fiancé Holmwood is the first gentleman to act as donor, but when his blood resource becomes exhausted, Morris, Seward and Van Helsing (overruling Holmwood's moral objections) feel obliged to contribute as well (although this, as Van Helsing phrases it, makes Lucy *de facto* a "polyandrist"). They must overstep such considerations to protect

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and create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-demons... a terrible desire came upon me to rid the world of this monster" (p. 52).

the life and purity of the vulnerable women who are Dracula's primal target (Lau 2016). But the damage has been done, and after her burial, Lucy's proves *undead* rather than dead, foraying the night with "voluptuous" and "insatiable" wantonness (p. 189). She becomes a nightmare version of herself, a human-shaped bat in search of fresh blood, with children as her victims. Van Helsing recommends "euthanasia" (i.e. brutally killing the dangerous undead woman in her sleep) and indeed, after a series of intense ethical deliberations, the four gentlemen open her tomb, and Arthur Holmwood is granted the privilege of driving a stake through her heart, literally impaling her, like an unfaltering "figure of Thor", driving the stake "deeper and deeper" into her undead body (p. 194).

Meanwhile, worried because of her husband's chronic brain fever, Mina decides to share his notes and letters (which she has copied on her typewriter) with Seward and Van Helsing. Because of this additional information, the connection with vampirism can finally be made. The physicians conclude that London has become the potential target of a vampire pandemic, and that Dracula must be hunted down at all costs. Mina herself, armed with a portable American "traveller's typewriter" (QWERTY type, a gift from Morris, p. 310) joins the team. Her text processing device, together with similar contrivances such as the phonograph used by Seward for making clinical records, proves extremely helpful in putting together a professional vampire file. Van Helsing explains that the undead Count, who had been an alchemist while alive, is actually "experimenting" (p. 269) and increasing his knowledge by using victims like Lucy and Renfield as research subjects (and wolves, bats and rats as research animals). The Western world is a laboratory for Dracula and at a certain point even Mina falls victim to the Count. He hypnotises her and forces her to suck his blood. She is saved, but remains "unclean", and an uncanny, telepathic rapport between her and Dracula develops, so that Seward and Van Helsing keep her under close surveillance, realising that, should she seriously

develop vampire symptoms, this would oblige them to commit “euthanasia” again.<sup>5</sup> And even Mina herself, being aware that her blood is contaminated by vampirism, proactively requests euthanasia, should the vampire infection transform her into an undead: “You must promise me ... that you will kill me” (p. 293).

Dracula is a distant voice, calling and manipulating his followers from afar, but because of the rapport, Mina herself can also function as a medium, a telepathic navigator. Van Helsing, who is an expert in hypnosis as well, and explicitly refers to the work of Charcot (p. 172), manages to establish a telepathic link with Dracula. Via this wireless Mina-Dracula connection and Mina’s hypnotic reports, they are able follow the undead Count back to Transylvania, where they slit his throat and plunge a Bowie knife into his heart, so that his undead body can finally perish into entropic dust.

As indicated, *Dracula* will now be read as a genealogical window into the fin-de-siècle era, exploring various connections between Stoker’s novel and contemporaneous scientific events occurring in the year of publication 1897: an epistemological turning-point, the birth year of psychoanalysis, and a remarkable year for science. The methodological starting point for this procedure is the principle of synchronicity (Zwart 2002; 2008; 2015), i.e. the hypothesis that synchronic events (occurring in various realms of science, society and culture more or less at the same time) share a common profile, a family likeness if you will. They reflect a common zeitgeist and may therefore mutually elucidate one another, so that the significance of one particular event (in this case: the publication of a novel) may help us to assess the significance of a various

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<sup>5</sup> “Euthanasia is an excellent and comforting word! I am grateful to whoever invented it” (Stoker 1897/1993, p. 298). Although these sentences are actually written down by Seward, they reflect deliberations with Van Helsing, and he appears to be citing or paraphrasing him.

simultaneous events (such as scientific, technical or medical breakthroughs) and vice versa.

### *The year 1897*

1897 was an important year for science, a prelude to the twentieth century. The most noteworthy scientific event perhaps was J.J. Thomson's discovery of the electron as a subatomic particle, a first step towards elementary particle physics as a key research area of the century to come. After the electron ( $e^-$ ), a whole series of atomic particles were discovered: the photon ( $\gamma$ , 1900), the proton ( $p^+$ , 1911), the neutron ( $n^0$ , 1932), the neutrino (1959) and so forth, up to the current hunt for the Higgs boson ( $H^0$ ) at CERN.

In the same year 1897, Thomas Edison filed a patent for a device known as the Kinetoscope: a prototype model for viewing motion pictures, an important step towards twentieth century cinema (the cultural ecosystem where vampirism would thrive). But Edison's device was part of a long list of inventions coming from his lab in Menlo Park, including the phonograph, developed for recording and reproducing the human voice, invented in 1877, but perfected for mass production during the 1880s (Wicke 1992; Page 2011). In *Dracula*, this device is used by Dr. Seward, who keeps phonographic patient files, entering clinical observations as a daily routine (p. 197), but also by Lucy Westenra for her diary. The phonograph is explicitly presented as a leap forward in communication technology compared to old-fashioned handwriting. When Seward is unable to use it, he exclaims: "How I miss my phonograph! To write diary with a pen is irksome to me" (p. 298).<sup>6</sup> In combination with Mina's portable typewriter (which

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. a similar quote by Mina: "I feel so grateful to the man who invented the 'Traveller's' typewriter... I should have felt quite astray doing the work if I had to write with a pen..." (p. 310). It is almost as if Stoker is advertising these (American) innovations (cf. Page 2011).

transforms the content of Seward's phonographic cylinders into hard-copy text), such contrivances prove powerful weapons in the anti-vampire campaign.

Also in 1897, the term "computer" was used for the first time for a mechanical calculation device (McCoy, 2010, p. 1). As pointed out by Wicke (1992), Kittler (1993), Picker (2003), Page (2011) and others, "bourgeois" bureaucratic devices such as the phonograph, the telegraph (p. 196) and the typewriter (equipped with a function called *manifold* that allows Mina to produce multiple copies) play a prominent role in *Dracula* and herald the coming age of electronic contrivances. These devices, I will argue, enable a symbolisation of the real.

In the same year, the German pharmaceutical company Bayer registered a trademark for aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid), a modification of salicylic acid or *salicin*, which actually was a folk remedy derived from the bark of the willow tree (*Salix* in Latin). Aspirin was the first mass product of modern industrial pharmacy, destined to develop into a large-scale research arena in the twentieth century and symbolising the shift from traditional low-tech (home-made) remedies to science-based pharmaceuticals. In *Dracula*, this shift is reflected in Van Helsing's eclectic combination of traditional remedies against vampirism (such as garlic, wafers and crucifixes) with more modern techniques to avert the looming vampire pandemic. But it is also visible for instance in Dr. Seward's use of a modern biochemical tranquiliser (chloral hydrate), for which even the chemical formula is provided:  $C_2HCl_3O + H_2O$  (p. 95).

Last but not least, 1897 is generally regarded as the birth year of psychoanalysis (Ellenberger 1970), another important twentieth-

century discourse.<sup>7</sup> In 1897, Sigmund Freud (a Viennese neurologist who attended Charcot's lectures on hypnosis and hysteria in Paris) began his opus magnum *Die Traumdeutung*, using his own (daily recorded) dreams as source material.<sup>8</sup> The birth of psychoanalysis is meticulously recorded in Freud's letters to Wilhelm Fliess, a maieutic diary or self-analysis published posthumously in 1950 as *Aus den Anfängen der Psychoanalyse*. Wilhelm Fliess was a nose and throat specialist from Berlin who speculated about a physiological link between the nose and female genitalia. He claimed to have discovered genial sports in the interior of the nose and believed hysteric symptoms to be of nasal-genital origin (Sulloway 1979/1992, p. 140). In 1897, Fliess published his monograph *Die Beziehungen zwischen Nase und weiblichen Geschlechtsorganen* [The Relations between the Nose and the Female Sexual Organs], which also contained a theory on infantile sexuality. In 1897, in his letters to Fliess, Freud reports the onset of his systematic self-analysis.<sup>9</sup> One of these letters contains the famous sentence "Ich glaube an meine Neurotica nicht mehr" ("I no longer believe in my neurosis theory", Letter 69 to Wilhelm Fliess, September 21, 1897). The discarded theory was based on confessions made by patients concerning incestuous seduction events which allegedly had occurred during early childhood. Freud's famous sentence is regarded as a pivotal turning point in the genesis of psychoanalysis, reflecting his renunciation of the seduction theory, more precisely: his acknowledgement of the decisive role of phantasms in the genesis of psychic syndromes. It is also the beginning of a life-long self-analysis (continued in *The*

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<sup>7</sup> Ellenberger points out that 1897 is the year of Freud self-analysis, resulting in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The term "psychoanalysis" was first used by him in print in 1896.

<sup>8</sup> "Während dem Doktor Freud eben das Geheimnis der *Traumdeutung* aufgeht, erscheint Bram Stokers *Dracula*" (Kittler 1993, p. 19)

<sup>9</sup> "Der Hauptpatient, der mich beschäftigt, bin ich selbst" (Letter 67 to Wilhelm Fliess, August 14, 1897); "Meine Selbstanalyse ist in der Tat das Wesentlichste, was ich jetzt habe" (Letter 71 to Fliess, October 15, 1897).

*Interpretation of Dreams, Psychopathology of everyday life* and many other publications), although the label self-analysis is misleading for strictly speaking, self-analysis is impossible, as Freud himself indicates (Letter 75 to Fliess, November 14 1897). As Lacan emphasises, these documents rather constitute an analytic *dialogue* with Fliess (with Freud in the role of the analysand): the commencement and foundation (*Anfang*) of a whole oeuvre (Lacan 1954-1955/1978, p. 150).

Like Freud, Van Helsing and Seward are scientifically trained neurologists who must overstep their positivistic “prejudices” (p. 172) to master new techniques which allow them to address incomprehensible therapeutic challenges (vampirism in the case of Van Helsing, hysteria in the case of Freud). In Lacanian terms (Lacan 1969-1970/1991), they must switch from “university discourse” (i.e. the discourse of the expert, the one who *knows*, based on formal academic training) to the “discourse of the analyst” (which implies a willingness to suspend one’s expert knowledge in order to give the floor to the affected subjects themselves, listening carefully, with evenly poised attention, to whatever they report, however trivial, strange or indiscrete their free associations may initially seem; Zwart 2016). To come to terms with obscure afflictions, therapists like Freud and Van Helsing must overcome their professional, nineteenth-century scepticism and follow “the mind of the great Charcot” who, as Van Helsing puts it, used new techniques (notably hypnosis) to enter into “the very soul of the patient” (p. 172). Or, as Mina phrases it during her conversations with Van Helsing: “hypnotise me, so that I will be able to speak freely” (p. 277); or even: “hypnotise me and so learn *that which even I myself do not know*” (p. 290, my italics), a phrase which is reminiscent of Freud’s famous remark that, in psychoanalysis, analysands not only confess everything they know, but “more”: more than they know themselves (1926/1948, p. 215). Van Helsing also points to other psycho-experimental developments, taking us beyond Freudian psychoanalysis and into the area of the

occult, such telepathy and “electrical science”; - but all these connections will be explored in more detail below.

Two other events that are part of the novel’s techno-scientific ambiance deserve to be mentioned here as well, although occurring shortly after 1897, namely the discovery of the virus by Martinus Beijerinck in 1898 and the discovery of blood types by Karl Landsteiner in 1900. In Stoker’s novel, vampirism is described as an infectious condition, a self-replicating viral disease, transmittable via contaminated blood. It is by consciously infecting their victims that vampires produce copies of themselves so that vampirism can proliferate. In the next sections, I will analyse these various correspondences between *Dracula* and concurrent techno-scientific, biomedical and psycho-cultural developments more in depth, focussing respectively on (a) blood transfusion, (b) virology, (c) psychoanalysis, (d) brain research and (e) communication technology (with psychoanalysis occupying the central position in the series).

### *Dracula and blood transfusion*

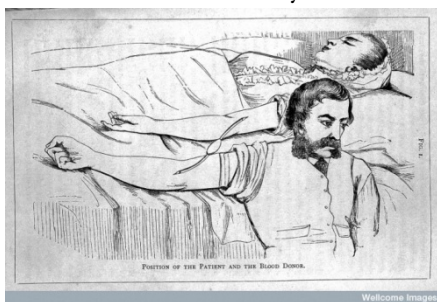
When Van Helsing enters Lucy Westenra’s bedroom, armed with the “instruments” and “paraphernalia” of his profession, he immediately recognises that she has lost a significant amount of blood, so that “there must be transfusion of blood at once” (p. 111). This requires a male volunteer as donor, and her fiancé Arthur Holmwood arrives on the scene right in time (p. 112) so that Van Helsing can conduct the operation, transfusing Arthur’s pure (“undefibrinated”) blood into Lucy’s ailing body.

For centuries, blood-letting (‘negative’ transfusion) had been in use as a panacea, but in the nineteenth-century ‘positive’ transfusion was being tried as an alternative. It proved a hazardous and potentially toxic procedure, however, often with questionable



results, and sometimes giving rise to disastrous haemolytic effects, causing the death of the patient (Masson 1993; Learoyd 2012). In *Dracula*, blood transfusion is applied on four occasions, and consistently as a gendered practice, involving the transfusion of blood directly from male donors (two of whom are physicians) to a female recipient.<sup>10</sup> Lucy (a young patient whose physical afflictions draw the attention of physicians-lovers) is both a therapeutic and an erotic target, and in *Dracula*, blood (donated by eager male volunteers who compete with one another to become the next donor) functions as a substitute (a displacement, psychoanalytically speaking) for semen: a bodily fluid of symbolic value, transferable from male to female bodies, but possibly contaminated by (or at least associated with) infectious disease (such as syphilis for instance).

But the procedure fails to achieve the intended results and the novel describes how Lucy's condition changes from passivity and



lethargy (due to anaemia) into vampirism (with a behavioural spectrum ranging from “savage voluptuousness” up to feverish and wild “contortions”). The latter may actually suggest blood poisoning, misattributed to

vampirism, although rabies (transmitted by bats, as will be discussed below) may provide an alternative explanation (Gómez-Alonso 1998). Stoker's novel stages a team of physicians who, confronted with an unknown threat, revert to risky interventions. And when their transfusion experiment falters, they decide to euthanize their patient.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. the illustration below (Aveling 1873, p. 303). Reproduced in: Wellcome Library, London (Lau 2016).

Due to Karl Landsteiner's discovery of blood types in 1900 (A, B, and O, to which AB was later added), blood transfusion became more manageable and safe. Therefore, in the course of the twentieth century, the focus of concern shifted from incompatibility of blood types to the transmission of (viral) infections via contaminated blood products (such as viral hepatitis and HIV).<sup>11</sup> In retrospect, we may reinterpret some of Lucy's uncanny symptoms as resulting from iatrogenic blood poisoning, due to incompatibility of blood types, so that the treatment dramatically aggravated her condition. Landsteiner's discovery made blood transfusion safe; thereby transferred vampirism from the realm of biomedical concerns into the world of psycho-erotic deviance (Ramsland 2002) and cinematic fiction. On the other hand, precisely *because* Landsteiner's discovery made blood transfusion practically feasible, a new kind of vampirism emerged: an insatiable thirst for blood at work within the biomedical system itself, exemplified by the modern blood bank, frantically trying to meet the growing global demand for blood products and urging healthy citizens to become donors (Waldby & Mitchell 2006).<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the focus shift from the hazards of blood transfusion as such to the prospects of future pandemics proliferating through contaminated ("impure") blood. Indeed, transfusion is only part of the story and that Lucy's symptoms are overdetermined. Her anaemia is also associated with the mysterious scars visible on her

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<sup>11</sup> Also, symbolic pollution would become a bio-ethical concern, notably when dealing with recipients from religious minorities, such as described in a novel by Ian McEwan "The idea of having a stranger's blood inside me makes me sick, like drinking someone's saliva, or worse. I can't get rid of the idea that transfusion is wrong" (2014, p. 142).

<sup>12</sup> This is reflected in the novel *The Red Star* by the Russian communist Alexander Bogdanov (1908/1984), about Martians routinely performing blood transfusions to increase productivity and life expectancy of the human workforce. The author himself died in 1928, after a foundering transfusion experiment (Groys & Hagemester, 2005).

throat: two little red punctures with white edges, reminding Quincey Morris of the wounds inflicted by “big vampire bats” living on the Pampas (p. 138), animals that not only drink the blood of their victims, but also infect them with mysterious and often fatal diseases, a phenomenon known today as “zoonosis” (Quammen 2012). And indeed, a big nocturnal bat is spotted near Lucy’s bedroom window on multiple occasions.

### *The vampire virus*

A basic concern enacted in Stoker’s novel is the potential toxicity of bodily fluids that are exchanged, between males and females, but also between bats and humans. From a biomedical viewpoint, there is more to vampirism than the incompatibility of blood types. The vicissitudes of vampire victims such as Lucy point to a stratagem of self-replication via transmission of infections.

The word virus literally means slimy, liquid poison or venom. In *Dracula*, it is clear that vampirism is transmitted via blood: either via the Vampire’s kiss, leaving two red marks on the victim’s throat, or via the Vampire’s “baptism”, which represents a kind of role reversal, with the victim being forced to drink Vampire blood (p. 286). Via exposure to contaminated blood, the “gift” (the poisonous donation) of vampirism enters the body, and victims are initiated into the vampire network, becoming carriers themselves, actively contributing to the proliferation of the disease, so that vampirism continues to replicate itself. In other words, vampirism emerges as a viral infection, a potential viral pandemic, albeit *avant la lettre*, for the term virus had not been invented yet.

Two years after Stoker published his novel, Martinus Beijerinck at Delft University (the Netherlands) confirmed the existence of a mysterious infectious agent, undetectable through microscopes. Notably since the 1980s, viruses have become the target of global concern. They have emphatically entered the global societal stage in

the form of newly emerging, zoonotic viral threats, from HIV up to Ebola and Zika: public health challenges that are closely associated with global societal developments such as increased mobility, disruption of ecosystems and the rise of mega-metropolises (Zwart 2014). Indeed, as David Quammen phrases it, “zoonosis is a word of the future, destined for heavy use in the twenty-first century” (2012, p. 21). Stoker’s literary intuition uses both the transmission route of viral infections (via blood) and the association with bats (as zoonotic carriers). Not only Quincey Morris, also Van Helsing himself associates vampirism with bats that live “in the Pampas” and “come at night to open the veins of cattle and horses and suck dry their veins” (p. 173), while inflicting mysterious diseases upon their victims. Indeed, the vampire is a kind of bat and Lucy “was bitten by such a bat ... here in London in the nineteenth century” (p. 173). The bite by the bat-like vampire (with its large canines taking fight at dusk) is what causes her disease. After Dracula’s escape back to Transylvania, the Van Helsing team members meticulously “sterilise” his hiding place, his “unclean lairs” (p. 260). Indeed, in contemporary virology “vampire bats” are allotted a crucial role in viral zoonosis, notably in South America, and especially in transmitting rabies (Poel et al 2006; Schneider et al 2009).

In other words, two years before the actual discovery of the virus, Stoker’s novel in an anticipatory manner stages vampirism as a viral infection, a potential viral pandemic, threatening London, the teeming metropolis. This menace to public health is caused by increased mobility: the ability to travel relatively fast and easy to remote places and back (from London to Transylvania and back) with the help of steamers and railroads, exposing the Western world to unknown infectious agents, which until then had been contained in isolated eco-cultural niches. Thus *Dracula* can be read as an anticipatory document, exploring emerging viral threats as part of the human condition of the emerging present.

But still, vampirism is overdetermined: it can neither be reduced to blood poisoning nor to viral infections, – if only because Professor Abraham van Helsing, expert in “obscure diseases”, and “one of the most advances scientists of his day” (p. 104), is not a virologist at all. Rather, his viewpoints and techniques are of a neurological and psychotherapeutic nature. Various connections between Dracula and Freud, between vampirism and psychoanalysis can be drawn. The latter has been regarded as an (intellectual) pandemic itself. In 1909, accompanied by Carl Gustav Jung and Sándor Ferenczi, Freud visited the United States. According to Jacques Lacan, who had the story from Jung, upon entering New York harbour Freud allegedly spoke the famous words “They don’t realize we’re bringing them the plague” (Lacan 1966, p. 403). In other words, now that infectious diseases such as typhus, typhoid fever, bubonic plague, etc. were increasingly contained (via policies of quarantine, vaccination, etc.), they were replaced by psychoanalysis as a mental infection, coming from Continental Europe.

### *Psychoanalysis: Van Helsing and Freud*

Freud and Van Helsing represent a research field *in statu nascendi*. Van Helsing is a neurologist determined to come to terms with inexplicable phenomena that pose a challenge to the “scientific, sceptical, matter-of-fact nineteenth century” (p. 213). He employs hypnosis, explicitly building on Charcot (the proverbial giant on whose shoulders he stands) and develops a rapport with patients. Freud had been using hypnosis as well, but reformed his methods in the 1890s, replacing the hypnotic rapport by free association (automatic speaking). Still, he considered himself an enlightened physician who aimed to bring obscure afflictions such as hysteria within the realm of scientific understanding.

*Dracula* has drawn the attention of psychoanalytic readers not only because of the decidedly erotophobic (and therefore emphatically

erotic) content of the novel, but also because of its intellectual ambiance: the various congruencies that can be discerned between the ideas, practices and conversations of Van Helsing and his disciples and Freud's psychoanalytic style of thinking. Also where psychoanalysis is concerned, Stoker's novel reads like an imaginative anticipation of what was to come. For although Van Helsing used hypnosis while Freud opted for free association, some striking correspondences can nonetheless be pointed out. And this first of all concerns the psychoanalytic rule which says that, in order to probe neurotic symptoms, *everything*, however trivial or personal, is relevant. Or, as Freud himself phrased it: "We instruct the patient to ... report to us whatever internal observations he is able to make [taking care not to] exclude any of them, whether on the ground that it is too *disagreeable* or too *indiscreet* to say, or that it is too *unimportant* or *irrelevant*" (1917/1940, p. 297; cf. 1926/1948, p. 214). Seemingly trivial details (the bagatelle) may prove to be highly significant. Unconscious motives are revealed by failures and embarrassments, rather than by achievements.

This principle of non-selectivity can be encountered in *Dracula* on several occasions. Take for instance the following quote from Jonathan Harker's diary where it says: "I must keep writing... All, big and little, must go down; perhaps at the end the little things may teach us most" (p. 257). Earlier, Van Helsing had already urged Seward to be careful about his psychiatric notes: "Take good note of it. Nothing is too small. I counsel you, put down in record even your thoughts and surmises. Hereafter it may be of interest to you... We learn from failure, not success!" (p. 111). And later, when the hunt for Dracula has started, Van Helsing tells his team members: "We want no more concealments. Our hope is now in knowing all. Tell freely! ... It is need that we know all" (p. 254/255).

At the certain point Mina Harper (transcribing documents on her typewriter so as to add them to the files) asks the following

question to Van Helsing: "Dr. Van Helsing, will you read this, and tell me if it must go in. It is my record of to-day. I too have seen the need of putting down at present everything, however trivial; but there is little in this except what is personal. Must it go in?" The Professor reads it over and then hands it back to her saying: "I pray that it may" (p. 211). Van Helsing subsequently explains (in his idiosyncratic English) that the records must contain "everything", especially the "little things", because "we have seen how good light all the little things have made. We have told our secrets, and yet no one who has told is the worse for it" (p. 211). Thus, Mina's typewriting, conducted with evenly poised attention as it were, transforms a heterogeneous pile of textual materials into a case study record: data which can be submitted to a symptomatic reading, waiting for revelatory cues.

From a classical psychoanalytical perspective, the vampire emerges as the incubus-like object of repressed libidinal desire (Jones 1951) and as the embodiment of the oral, biting / sucking drive<sup>13</sup>, which surfaces at night, when the super-ego's censorship is temporarily suspended, draining the patient's energy. If we subject *Dracula* to a close reading, however, several more detailed connections can be added.

First of all, Stoker's Lucy reminds us of one of Freud's first patients, known as Irma, the main protagonist in his most famous dream, recorded in *Die Traumdeutung* (Freud 1900/1942) as *Irma's Injection* and dreamt on the night of July 23, 1895: the first dream meticulously interpreted by him. In this paradigm dream, Freud meets a former patient (Irma) who suffers from unexplainable symptoms. He asks her to open her mouth and peers curiously into her throat, where he notices a strange white spot. Three colleagues join the examination and after some deliberations they conclude

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<sup>13</sup> According to Lacan, the young child is a little vampire (Lacan 1962-1963/2004, p. 2727), while vampirism itself exemplifies the oral drive ("La pulsion orale, c'est le *se faire sucer*, c'est le vampire", Lacan 1964/1973 p. 219).

that the suffering is caused by an iatrogenic infection, resulting from a (rather carelessly administered) injection with a “solution” named *Trimethylamine*, whose formula appears before the dreamer’s eyes, printed in bold type. Freud’s detailed interpretations reveal that the dream addresses experiences of professional failure. Several details point to medical mistakes Freud had made and apparently, via this dream, he was trying to exculpate himself (at the expense of colleagues).

Several correspondences between Lucy and Irma can be pointed out. In both cases, there is the element of iatrogenic suffering (in Stoker’s novel associated with futile or even toxic blood transfusions) and in both cases a team consisting of four males (all of whom are physicians in the case of Freud, two of whom are physicians in the case of Stoker) prove unable to help their patient, but engage in questionable interventions and become entangled in intricate biomedical and bioethical deliberations. Like in the case of *Trimethylamine*, the structural formula of *chloral hydrate*, used by Seward, is provided in the text. In both cases, moreover, this chemical compound (this “solution” in the chemical sense) cannot really be regarded a “solution” in the biomedical sense, because the real problem is of a much more psychic nature. The white spot in Irma’s throat, raising suspicion (as the most visible mark of her affliction) is reminiscent of the two suspicious red-white dots on Lucy’s throat. They function as the Lacanian object *a* (Copjec 1994): an unsettling scar, an inexorable something, a tantalising non-object (the “negative” as it were of Dracula’s canines), in other words: an object of desire; a desire which Dracula and the Van Helsing’s male collaborators actually share, an obsession with the victim’s throat, serving as an erogenous zone. But whereas in the case of the Count this desire is acted-out, in the case of Van Helsing and his followers it is sublimated into biomedical interventions (including donorship). Similar to Irma, Lucy (a young female patient whose physical afflictions immediately draw the attention of physicians-lovers) is both a therapeutic and an



erotic target, and in *Dracula* blood functions as a substitute or displacement for semen, as we have seen: a bodily fluid of symbolic value, transferable from male to female bodies, but possibly contaminated by (or at least associated with) infectious disease (as in the case of syphilis for instance). As Copjec (1994) argues, Freud's dream-image of Irma's throat is reminiscent of female genitals, reluctantly offered for visual inspection. And whereas Seward feels hampered by considerations of discretion,<sup>14</sup> Van Helsing proves much less inhibited, going for a complete and detailed examination, arguing that all chambers (including a Victorian lady's bedroom) are alike to a doctor (p. 251).

Thus, intriguing resemblances can be pointed out between Abraham van Helsing from Amsterdam and Sigmund Freud from Vienna. Both were influenced by the work of Charcot in Paris and both feel forced to move beyond mainstream neurological research in order to enter the terra incognita of (poorly understood) psychic afflictions, employing methods and viewpoints that were frowned upon by the medical establishment. Both are willing to divert from the mainstream professional paths so as to access the human psyche via its undercurrents.<sup>15</sup> Van Helsing, who introduces himself to Mina Harker as someone who has studied men and women all his life, takes Jonathan Harker's (apparently unexplainable) neurotic brooding (due to the unspeakable traumatic encounter with Dracula and his brides) quite seriously, because his suffering "falls within the range of my study and experience" (p. 167). Yet, unlike Freud, Van Helsing continues to combine his study of obscure diseases with hard-core, brain-centred, medical, even surgical

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<sup>14</sup> "I did not have full opportunity of examination such as I should wish; our friendship makes a little difficulty which not even medical science or custom can bridge over" (p. 103).

<sup>15</sup> *Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo* ("If I cannot bend the Higher Powers, I will move the netherworld"), the phrase that Freud had chosen as motto for his *Traumdeutung* (1900/1942).

activities, including a neurosurgical operation, performed by him on patient Renfield.

### *Fin-de-siècle brain research*

Unlike Freud, who left the neurophysiology field to become a psychotherapist, Van Helsing continues to combine both vocations. Both he and Seward are trained neurologists: a profession about which Bram Stoker (coming from a family of physicians) was well-informed, notably via his brother Sir William Thornley Stoker, a brain surgery pioneer (Stiles 2013). And indeed, the human brain is an important focus of attention throughout the novel. We are told that Van Helsing “made the brain and everything that belongs to it his specialty” (p. 166) and that he made a name for himself because of his discovery of “the continuous evolution of brain matter” (Stoker 1897/1993, p. 213). Both he and Seward are quite familiar with brain research as it evolved during the 1890s, notably when it comes to cerebral localization (Stiles 2013).

Also in the portrayal of the novel’s central couple, Jonathan and Mina Harker, much attention is given to the condition of their brains. This first of all applies to Jonathan, who suffers from a “violent brain fever”, so that he has to be nursed by his wife (p. 93). He is troubled by neurological symptoms (including amnesia) resulting from his traumatic experiences and at various occasions we see him relapsing into a stupor or a freeze, or a sudden state of forgetfulness, due to the “injury to the brain” (p. 157). Where Mina herself is concerned, however, the trend is consistently in the obverse direction, notably due to her role as the professional, well-equipped and well-trained secretary of the team. Van Helsing claims at a certain point that her brain has evolved into a “man’s brain – a brain that a man should have were he much gifted” (210) and that “her brain is trained like a man’s brain” (p. 302). In other words, while her husband effeminates, she adopts the masculine

role. Contrivances such as typewriters apparently have an impact on the brain's plasticity, furthering social mobility and emancipation, or even gender swaps.

Besides the Count, whose peculiar brain will be discussed below, the most important neurological target in the novel is Seward's "pet lunatic" (p. 209): patient Renfield, whom Seward considers a fascinating case, a "wonderfully interesting" study (p. 108), a living window into the workings of the human brain. Renfield is, psychoanalytically speaking, not master in his own house ("I am not my own master", p. 220). He has been recruited by the Count to act as a faithful servant to "his Lord and Master", addressing Dracula in the form of prayers ("I am here to do your bidding, Master, I am Your slave. I have worshiped You long and afar off. Now that You are near, I await Your commands", p. 97). For Renfield, vampirism equals religion, building on "life" and "blood" as basic signifiers, and he finds himself in the position which Enoch once occupied, because he likewise walked with God. In fact, Renfield serves as a sort of "index" for the coming and goings of the Count ("He seems so mixed up with the count in an indexy kind of way", p. 222). Strange and sudden changes in Renfield's mood and behaviour indicate that "the Master is at hand", that Dracula is near. Under the sway of the Count's proximity, his religious mania intensifies and his notebook fills up with columns and small figures.

Seward uses his pet patient as a research subject and even considers subjecting him to "vivisection". Indeed, his desire as a researcher is to literally cast a glimpse into this mind that has become enslaved by a "malign influence". If he only could peer into the secrets of this intelligent lunatic's living brain, it would allow him to significantly advance his branch of science, thereby completely outdating established discourse (such as David Ferrier's brain map, explicitly mentioned in the novel and dating from the 1870s, but relying on vivisection performed on animals). Such an experiment,

moreover, would tell him something about his own “congenitally exceptional brain” (p. 69).<sup>16</sup> As Lombroso (1876/2006) argued: the brain of psychopaths (such as Renfield) and geniuses (such as Seward himself) are basically similar. Both forms of psychic deviance mirror one another. But alas, moral obstacles and societal resistance (against vivisection) prevent him from subjecting Renfield’s brain to such an intervention, which, as he sadly acknowledges, would be even more problematic than vivisection on animals. In fact, 1897 was also an important year for the anti-vivisection movement. In response to growing public opposition to research involving animals, the *Victoria Street Society* changed its name into “National Anti-Vivisection Society” in 1897.

At a certain point, Seward allows Van Helsing to join him on a visit to his favourite patient, and Van Helsing agrees that Renfield provides fascinating case material for studying mental delusions. But shortly after that, Dracula steals into Renfield’s cell and kills his faithful apostle. Seward and Van Helsing find him in a pool of blood: his back is broken, his skull severely damaged and he is paralysed. Van Helsing decides to operate, just above the ear, in order to reduce the pressure on the brain, where the whole motor area seems affected. As Stiles (2013) has demonstrated, the surgical details of the operation were provided by Bram Stoker’s surgeon brother.

Van Helsing’s neurological “philosophy of crime” explicitly builds on the viewpoints of Lombroso. A true criminal, Van Helsing explains, always works at one crime, and almost seems predestined to commit it (p. 303). This peculiarity in criminals is so constant, he maintains, that it is even known to the police. A better

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<sup>16</sup> Seward feels strangely at home in his asylum, and has a clear awareness of his morbid inclinations. Lucy notices him playing with a scalpel, and at nightfall, while listening to the yelling of his patients, he admires “the wonderful smoky beauty of sunset over London with its lurid lights and inky shadows and foul clouds” (p. 125).

understanding of the criminal brain would offer scientists an Archimedean starting-point for studying the human brain as such (p. 303). Van Helsing is convinced that the Count is likewise “a criminal and of criminal type. Nordau and Lombroso would so classify him, and qua criminal he is of imperfectly formed mind” (p. 303). He is selfish, remorseless, single-minded and fully committed to his predestined purpose.<sup>17</sup> Dracula is an atavism, equipped with a mind that was once well-adapted to brutal, pre-historic circumstances, but now poses a threat to the modern bourgeois world.

But in order to really enter Dracula’s mindscape, Van Helsing realises that he has to change perspective from a neurological to a psychoanalytical approach. He really begins to understand how Dracula’s mind works when he studies Mina’s transcripts. After reading through her typewritten diaries, Van Helsing exclaims: “Oh Madame Mina, this paper opens the gate to me” (p. 198). It offers him a Royal Road, so to speak, into Dracula’s drives and tactics. In Lacanian terms, Van Helsing switches from “university discourse (the discourse of the neurology expert) to the discourse of the analyst (reading carefully, with evenly-poised attention, waiting for the apparently trivial cues, the symptomatic bagatelle).

Thus, Van Helsing’s paradigm-shift (from nineteenth-century neuroscience to fin-de-siècle psychotherapy) concurs with a similar transition taking place (simultaneously as it were) in the professional biography of Sigmund Freud. But whereas Van Helsing functions as a literary counterpart of Freud, the professional activities of his disciple Seward rather constitute a

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<sup>17</sup> Stephen Jay Gould points out how Jonathan Harker’s description of Dracula matches Lombroso’s physiognomy of the born criminal (aquiline nose, eyebrows meeting over it, pointed ears: Gould 1981/1996, p. 152). Dracula’s employment of the Szgany (gypsies) accords with Lombroso’s view of their inborn atavistic criminality (p. 155).

literary anticipation of the vicissitudes of Freud's most famous follower (and official successor): the psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung.

*Seward and Jung: psychiatry and the intrusion of the occult*

Comparable similarities as between Van Helsing and Freud can also be discerned between their most prominent disciples: between Van Helsing's favourite student John Seward and Freud's deflected follower Carl Gustav Jung. Both Seward and Jung began their careers as professional psychiatrists working with (often dangerous) psychotic patients in closed psychiatric institutes. At the time when Jung met Freud, he was employed at Burghölzli mental hospital near Zürich, where patients like Renfield were treated and where Jung, at a relatively young age, was entrusted with considerable responsibilities (second in rank only to the Institute's Director, Eugen Bleuler). Jung was much respected, both by colleagues and patients, and much like Seward he used patients as research subjects in experiments, such as the famous word association experiments developed to explore unconscious "complexes" (Jung 1905/1979). In fact, in Stoker's novel, Renfield is subjected to a kind of word association test when, during a question-and-answer session, he suddenly stops speaking at the word *drink* in combination with *spiders*: "[Renfield] stopped suddenly, as though reminded of a forbidden topic. So, so! I [Seward] thought to myself. This is the second time he has suddenly stopped at the word 'drink': what does it mean? Renfield seemed himself aware of having made a lapse, for he hurried on, as though to distract my attention from it" (p. 242). This may indeed be regarded as a highly typical, early-Jungian scene.

Renfield is depicted as a "homicidal" and "religious" maniac who consumes living insects as a sacred meal, a private religious ritual. Also in this respect, he is a typical Jungian patient whose symptoms resonate with and re-enact ancient religious rites. And Dracula (as

the archetypal medicine-man) supports these rituals by providing Renfield with Death's-head moths of a special type: *Acherontia Atropos of the Sphinges* (a label which not only refers to the netherworld, but also resembles the famous motto of Freud's *Traumdeutung*: "Acheronta movebo..."; If I cannot deflect the superior powers, then I shall move the currents of the netherworld). Renfield jots down "masses of numbers" in pocketbooks to keep account of his sacred meals (p. 67).

Meanwhile, in Seward's own mind, a scientific hypothesis, an "unconscious cerebration" is slowly taking shape concerning his patient's madness (p. 67), and he hopes that quite soon it will become a "conscious" idea. Seward uses Renfield (the "homicidal maniac", p. 68) as a research subject in a series of experiments and even coins a new "classification" for him, calling him a zoophagous (i.e. life-eating) maniac (p. 69). While Seward uses a phonograph, Jung was likewise eager to employ new devices for studying his patients, notably in the context of his word association experiments, such as a galvanometer, but also a *Fünftelsekundenuhr* (a one-fifth second time watch) to measure reaction times as accurately as possible (Jung 1905/1979).<sup>18</sup>

A Jungian reading of *Dracula* focusses on the vampire as an archetypal *Gestalt*, as a sorcerer or shadow. The confrontation with Dracula reveals an inner split in the protagonists' personalities. In the case of Jonathan, for instance, an ambitious Victorian gentleman suddenly experiences himself as weak, impotent and helpless. In a castle with enormous doors, he seems like shrunken

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<sup>18</sup> Jung's experimental technique and up-to-date equipment is quite convincingly depicted in the movie *A Dangerous Method*, directed by David Cronenberg and casting Michael Fassbender as Jung (released in 2011). The movie convincingly stages the relationship between Freud and Jung and contains a scene where Freud (Van Helsing) joins Jung (Seward) during a visit to a psychiatric patient. Also the differences of opinion between Freud and Jung concerning the admissibility of studying telepathic phenomena as objects for research are addressed.

and emasculated, identifying himself with ladies who once were kept in Dracula's harem. While being molested by Dracula's women, he faints, so that the Count undresses him and carries him to his bed. In the case of Lucy, however, a stereotypically passive Victorian lady is suddenly transformed into a wanton male-huntress. Likewise, Dracula himself, a congenial and courtly personality during the day, changes into an uncanny creature (with bat-like or even reptilian characteristics) during the night. In other words, their personalities suffer a Gestalt-switch, from "personality no. 1" to "personality no. 2" (Jung 1962).

*Dracula* stages a series of collisions between respectable science and occult practices, in vogue during the fin-de-siècle era. The biomedical control over knowledge is challenged by intrusions of other forms of knowledges, of an occult and esoteric nature (Wynne 2000, p. 44). Van Helsing practices hypnosis, as we have seen, but, as Wynne phrases it, Stoker's novel features "a battle for the control of mesmerism, wresting it back from its occultist associations and retrieving it for science" (p. 47).<sup>19</sup> Whereas Sigmund Freud remained sceptical, discarding occultism as a "threat" to psychoanalysis, which should side with scientific materialism,<sup>20</sup> C.G. Jung (1902/1979) was much more open to telepathy and other techniques associated with obscurantism and playing a prominent role in *Dracula*. Yet, in Stoker's novel, the distribution of roles is reversed. While Van Helsing (the senior colleague) tries to convince Seward of the dangers of a self-imposed exclusion of occult phenomena from science (and for him this even

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Stoker's comments on Frederic-Antoine Mesmer, whom he includes in his book *Famous Imposters* because, although his "astonishing discovery" (hypnosis) is now tested and employed as a therapy and accepted as a contribution to science, he himself used it "in the manner or surrounded with the atmosphere of imposture" (Stoker 1910, p. 44).

<sup>20</sup> "Die Analytiker können ihre Abkunft von der exakten Wissenschaftlichkeit und ihre Zugehörigkeit zu deren Vertretern nicht verleugnen... Die Analytiker sind im Grunde unverbesserliche Mechanisten und Materialisten" (Freud 1921/1941, p. 29).



includes the use of Catholic ritualistic paraphernalia such as crucifixes and communion wafers), it is the disciple who stubbornly clings to the role of the scientific sceptic, resisting Van Helsing's "superstitions" for quite some time. Indeed, he even doubts his father-figure's soundness of mind and seriously considers the possibility that Van Helsing has gone "mad", regarding him as if he were patient ("I shall watch him carefully", p. 183).<sup>21</sup>

### *Electronic power and the cordon sanitaire*

According to Van Helsing, the Count is equipped with an atavistic brain: primitive and underdeveloped, but also very powerful, "mighty" and effective. Dracula is a highly educated person, a polyglot and *homo universalis* with an encyclopaedic historical knowledge, but also well informed about contemporary England. As a learned and civilised aristocrat, his brain is not deficient, but rather dramatically *different* in the sense of adapted to a very different cultural environment. For bourgeois visitors from the West, such as Jonathan, he is as intimidating as the physiognomy of the landscape he inhabits, giving it a face as it were. With its "great masses of greyness", Transylvania represents a lost world, a heart of darkness, a historical time capsule where conditions continue to exist which elsewhere belong to a vanished past (Arata 1990; Lucendo 2009).<sup>22</sup> And Dracula is an aristocratic tyrant who terrorises and exploits an (illiterate, superstitious) rural

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<sup>21</sup> ("Van Helsing's monstrous ideas ... start out before me as outrages on common sense... I wonder if his mind can have become in any way unhinged... I shall watch him carefully", p. 183).

<sup>22</sup> Stoker, who never visited Transylvania himself, based his descriptions on Emily Gerard's *The Land beyond the Forest* (Gerard 1888). Count Dracula is often associated with Vlad III, Prince of Wallachia (1431–1476/77), also known Vlad Dracula or Vlad the Impaler: an alchemy adept, but notorious for his cruelty. In Stoker's novel, however, the connection with historical models remains vague ("a soldier, statesman, and alchemist ... there was no branch of knowledge of his time that he did not essay", p. 269; cf. McNally and Florescu 1994; Clasen 2012).

population.<sup>23</sup> The place where he dwelled for centuries is “full of strangeness” and replete with weird magnetic, with electric and occult forces (p. 284). To this environment, his tough yet subtle brain seems perfectly attuned. But such a brain could do a lot of harm in a great city like London, where he would “flourish in the midst of a disease that would kill off whole peoples”, and where “the greater world of thought” would be open to him (p. 285).

Dracula embodies the return of the repressed, in the political sense of the term: of the ancient regime and the *Herrenmoral* (in Lacanian terms: the discourse of the Master). He is the dominant Father of the primeval “horde” (Freud 1912/1940), predating on and accumulating women, scheming to add Lucy and Mina to his harem (via rituals such as the vampire baptism and the vampire kiss), but by so doing he runs into conflict with the “brotherhood” (Van Helsing and his disciples). But he is also the Master in Hegelian dialectical terms: an intimidating Gestalt who managed to secure his authority to rule over others long ago, by risking his life and facing deadly adversaries in battle, but now experiences that former servants (bourgeois professionals) become increasingly powerful, representing a new type of power, relying on modern technology and challenging his absolutism (“Transylvanie, c’est moi”). During his first meeting with Jonathan, he tells about the wars and battles he has fought (as the “brains” of his people) since time immemorial: against Wallachians, Saxons, Turks, Austrians, Hungarians, and so on. And he surrounds himself with servants, such as the Szgany and Slovaks: ethnic groups who instinctively and unquestioningly seem to acknowledge him as Master. Indeed, as Dracula himself phrases it: “I am boyar, I am master”, as he has been for a very long time (p. 26).

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<sup>23</sup> Marx defined capital as dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour (“Das Kapital ist verstorbene Arbeit, die sich nur vampyrmäßig belebt durch Einsaugung lebendiger Arbeit und umso mehr lebt, so mehr sie davon einsaugt. (1867/1979, p. 247).

In contrast to Dracula, Jonathan-the-solicitor is a completely different kind of person: a Hegelian Servant, so to speak, who relies on professional knowledge and who, by displaying reliability in service, advances stepwise from clerk to partner. But Dracula realises that he is quite dependent on the professional knowledge of this servant when it comes to finding his way successfully into the modern bureaucratic world.

In modern metropolises, phenomena of vampirism tend to be domesticated and contained by transferring them to a different stage in the sense of *Bühne*: the phantasmagorical realm of artistic experience. Lord Byron, for instance, was not only the *author* of a Vampire story (entitled: *Fragment of a Novel*), but also served as model for the vampire Lord Ruthven in the story written by his personal physician John Polidori. Another example of a poet susceptible to the vampire complex was Charles Baudelaire (1857/1972) who, in his poems, confesses to be a vampire at heart (“Je suis de mon cœur le vampire”, LII). One of his greatest poems, entitled *A celle qui est trop gaie* (XXXIX), introduces a lover who desires to sneak into his lover’s room at night in order to bite her, creating a gaping wound in her “astonished flank”, kissing her new lips (her second mouth), so as to infuse a deadly, toxic venom into her unbearably beautiful body. Interestingly, in Stoker’s novel, it is Van Helsing himself who (as soon as he has reached Dracula’s castle) sneaks into the resting places of sleeping beauties. After a brief flash of inhibition, paralysed by the fascinating and radiant voluptuousness of these female vamps, he quickly proceeds to butcher them in their sleep, knowing very well that he would not stand a chance should he allow them to awake. And indeed, women are likewise described by Baudelaire as predators, equipped with dangerous claws and venomous teeth, so that it is advisable to approach them only when they sleep. Bourgeois culture responded to Baudelaire’s vampire poetry with censorship, a form of moral hygiene, forcing him to remove his obscene “litter” from his (now classic) volume.

But moral hygiene is an important force at work in *Dracula* as well, also with respect to the bio-political dimension. Steamers and trains allow for new forms of mobility, as we have seen, opening up remote and unfamiliar regions, including Dracula's surreal homeland. Strange practices and ideas, coming from isolated niches, start to circulate and find their way from the continent into cities such as metropolitan London: a perfect target for an erotic-religious gothic plague. Or, to use the terminology of Oswald Spengler (1918): vampirism seems about to expand from a regional subculture into a phenomenon on a global civilisation scale (and may even realise the dystopian possibility of a replacement of humans as the reigning species by post-human vampires: Stiles 2006). This threat calls for geopolitical hygiene (Kittler 1993). *Dracula* describes how a cordon sanitaire is created by a team of volunteers, working in secret (p. 285), a kind of secret service. *The* narrative ends in the triumph of a superior, "stainless" English constitution over that of an infectious, Eastern European "other" (Lau 2016). With the help of phonographs and portable typewriters, a data file is established that can be systematically analysed. Thus, the (initially quite erratic and enigmatic) behaviour of the invading vampire becomes as decipherable as ENIGMA during World War II.

Rather than on intimidation, Van Helsing's team relies on technological contrivances that compensate and complement their initial experience of deficiency or lack. Dr. Seward, for instance, initially feels "cicatrised" by the rejection of his marriage proposal to Lucy (p. 171), but armed with a phonograph, he shifts his focus of attention to his vocation as a researcher, displacing his intentionality from Lucy to Renfield and, eventually, to the invading Count. And while Lucy Westenra dies as a romantic femme fatale, Nina Harker's typewriter allows her to constitute herself as a new type of subject. These contrivances open up a new type of career, a new female profession: as secretary (Kittler 1993).

Mina becomes a pioneer, a role model, the embodiment of a “new woman”, as the novel phrases it; and her profession is bound to enrol millions of women during the century to come. Relying on her portable typewriter, she succeeds where weakened husband Jonathan (as well as the enchanting amorous idol Lucy) failed. Indeed, it is “Mina’s prowess with the typewriter that brings down Dracula” in the end (Wicke 1992, p. 467). As Kittler (1993) phrases it, Dracula is overpowered by communication technologies associated with the new professional bureaucracy.

To paraphrase Hegel, the novel stages a clash between Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) and superstition (*Aberglauben*), and Dracula’s Master’s discourse (or master morality) is eventually defeated by a squadron of modern professionals. Although Dracula and Van Helsing use similar methods, such as hypnosis, in the case of Van Helsing hypnosis is not an instrument of repression and manipulation, but rather an instrument of *information*, exemplifying a new power regime, based on data, on “intelligence”. After the elimination of Renfield, Mina takes over the latter’s role as “index”. It is as if (via Mina) an electrode is inserted into Dracula’s *Id*, as if a wireless connection is established from *Id* to *Id*, so that the Count’s movements can be telepathically traced and recorded. By hearing the click of the typewriter and by putting the phonograph’s forked metal to their ears to listen, the protagonists familiarise themselves with a new wave of electronic gadgets, representing a new, electronic enframing or *Gestell*, which is to become more infectious and pervasive than vampirism (Zwart 2017). And its elementary component is, not coincidentally, the very electron discovered in 1897.

### *The Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real: a Lacanian assessment*

*Dracula* provides a window into fin-de-siècle research practices and collates various disciplines (haematology, virology, psychotherapy,

neurology) into a genealogic *Gesamtbild*, thereby elucidating the techno-scientific and socio-cultural constellation into which psychoanalysis was born. Its maieutic backdrop involves an epistemic spectrum ranging from blood transfusion via virology and psychotherapy up to emerging communication technologies. In various manners, as we have seen, these areas of research and practice reflect a common zeitgeist or family likeness. The question now is: how to summarize this common epistemic profile, the common denominator of these various developments? The basic, comprehensive formula, I will argue, is that both psychoanalysis and *Dracula* reflect a triumph of the *symbolic* over the *imaginary* as a techno-scientific strategy for coming to terms with the threatening *real*.

First of all, from a Lacanian perspective, Freudian and Jungian interpretations may be regarded as complementary to some extent, focussing on the symbolic and the imaginary dimensions respectively. A Jungian analysis foregrounds the imaginary: the vampire as a fascinating and intimating *Gestalt*. And indeed, initially the narrative unfolds in a cultural landscape under the sway of the imaginary. The Vampire functions as a threatening-but-seductive incubus, displaying reptilian behavioural repertoires and relying on intimidation and reflexes, but insensitive to the “symbolic order”: to morality and political legitimacy. In the course of the novel, however, the imaginary is increasingly eclipsed by processes of symbolisation, with the help of various contrivances (typewriters, phonographs, stenography, etc.), exemplified by Edison-like machines, reframing the socio-cultural ambiance in terms of “typographical” phenomena (Lacan 1957-1958/1998, p. 147).

The most professional representative of what Lacan refers to as “university discourse” is John Seward, whose writing practices not only reflect the importance of innovative text-processing devices, but also the growing importance of scientific symbolisation in areas

such as pharmacy and biochemistry. Whereas Van Helsing continues to rely on traditional remedies (garlic, wafers, etc.), Seward goes for evidence-based “solutions”. To fight his own symptoms (insomnia), he uses *chloral hydrate*, for which chemical formula is provided ( $C_2HCL_3O$ ), comparable to Bayer’s *aspirin* ( $C_9H_8O_4$ ) and Freud’s *trimethylamine* ( $C_3H_9N$ ). The biomedical symbolism of these chemical compounds reflects the advance of the symbolic as an immunisation strategy against the threatening real. With the help of symbolic elements (C, H, O, N, etc.) the scientific subject tries to control and domesticate the elusive object *a* (Dracula’s white, infectious and suddenly protruding teeth, and the marks they leave on a woman’s neck). And when John Seward, speaking into his phonograph, announces that he has decided to invent a new “classification” for his homicidal patient, calling him a *zoophagous* (life-eating) maniac, this neologism likewise functions as a signifier meant to contain and control this intrusion of the unclassifiable (this intrusion of the real).

Landsteiner’s discovery of blood types, resulting in the introduction of a small alphabet representing the presence or absence of antigens on red blood cells (A, B, AB and 0), likewise provides an optimal example of the symbolisation process. Via letter-like symbols, the archetypal image of the vampire is subverted (obliterated). As technology advances, Vampirism is reduced to its scientific, biomedical, noumenal essence (in this case: blood type, determined by antigens and manageable with the help of letters, i.e. labels on blood samples). Compatibility of blood samples can now be established with a simple test, resulting in a letter code, allowing physicians to determine health hazards for recipients in terms of *present* or *absent*, *Yes* or *No* (so that symbolisation eventually amounts to digitalisation: 1 or 0).

Present-day virology works in a similar fashion. With the help of DNA sequencing machines a symbolic code is produced, so that the infectious agent can be identified. Lacan refers to such processes

as the symbolisation of the real (at the expense of imaginary and mythological responses). This process will never be completed, however, and vampirism (the haunting archetypal image, preferably dwelling in cinematic environments) will never be eliminated once and for all. Increasingly, however, it is transferred from the realm of pre-modern, superstitious, “imaginary” beliefs (building on traumatic experiences such as blood poisoning) into the arena of cinematic fascination.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, the symbolic is produced and sustained by processes of symbolisation, verbalisation and textualisation, relying on mechanical and electronic devices and scientific nomenclature, giving rise to a professional, knowledgeable discourse, functioning as an immunisation device designed to keep Dracula’s intimidating gestalt (and the “Master’s discourse” connected with it) at bay. In the course of the novel, we witness the unfolding of this process, slowly at first, but increasingly effective. While being imprisoned by the Count, for instance, Jonathan Harker already quotes Hamlet (p. 39) who used a portable notebook (his “tables”) for recording observations: a writing practice which was meant to erase and replace previous (“imaginary”) records that had been “copied” into his memory system.<sup>25</sup> Count Dracula intuitively senses the power of the symbolic, for when he intercepts some of Jonathan’s

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<sup>24</sup> In popular culture of today, Lacan argues, the once uncanny Gestalt of the vampire has become trivialised into a comic book figure (Lacan 1961-1962, p. 41).

<sup>25</sup> “Yea, from the table of my memory / I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records ... / And thy commandment all alone shall live / Within the book and volume of my brain / My tables – meet it is I set it down” (Hamlet Act I scene V). In his notebook, Hamlet systematically replaces his imaginary picture of a harmonious parental marriage by a close monitoring of the doings and saying of the Queen, whom he now suspects of adultery. From a psychoanalytical perspective, the Count plays a similar role as Hamlet’s father: a horrifying, disruptive, authoritative voice coming from another world, deterring recipients from their normal course. Stoker was quite familiar Shakespeare’s play. He decided to become the manager of actor Henry Irving after seeing the latter performing Hamlet (Farson 1975).



stenographic shorthand letters, with their “strange symbols” quite incomprehensible to him (p. 44), he immediately destroys “every scrap of paper”, thus trying to erase all Jonathan’s “notes and memoranda” (p. 45). But the advance of the symbolic cannot be stopped.

Although Jonathan manages to return to England, he initially seems to have lost his physical and mental strength completely. And although he is formally promoted from clerk to partner in the company (thus progressing in the symbolic order of social and professional mobility), Mina finds her husband terribly weakened and excessively nervous: “the very essence of his strength is gone” (p. 170; in Lacanian algebra:  $-\Phi$ ). But this deficiency or lack can be technologically compensated, and Jonathan begins to recover as soon as he starts to follow Mina’s example by contributing to the team’s database, producing records and writings (Jonathan’s modern version of Hamlet’s “tables”). Again, the advance of the symbolic cannot be prevented. At a certain point, Van Helsing, presiding over a meeting of the anti-Dracula team, concludes: “We have here much data; and now we must proceed to lay out our campaign” (p. 215). Vampirism is overcome with the help of accumulated symbolic components (letters, texts, notes, dates, clippings, etc.) collated into the Dracula file, and resulting in the successful “symbolisation” of undead life. After Dracula’s demise, all that remains is an enormous “mass of typewriting of which the record is composed” (335), an enormous amount of textual litter.

Dracula and Van Helsing struggle to achieve control over Lucy Westenra and other female “research subjects”, initially via blood (taken by Dracula and replenished by Van Helsing), but subsequently also via hypnosis, allowing both Dracula and Van Helsing to turn human beings into unconscious informants. Van Helsing is as lethal as Dracula (provided the undead are included among his victims) and what is said about Dracula (“He had a mighty brain, a learning beyond compare... There was no branch

of knowledge of his time that he did not essay", p. 269) applies to Van Helsing as well, who is described not only as a doctor, a scientist, a philosopher and a metaphysician, but also as someone who is knowledgeable in the history of ancient medicine; a single-minded scholar who has no time to spare for socialising or friendship. Dracula is Van Helsing's "object *a*": an alluring, enigmatic, spectral something to which everything else is sacrificed, but whose ontological status remains highly precarious and paradoxical: an *undead* object that cannot be reflected by mirrors and immediately returns to entropic dust as soon as the university expert finally captures it. For vampirism is an instance of "negative entropy": a death drive bent on destruction, but surviving the subject's own death, relying on the undead body as a carrier, so that "euthanasia" is indicated as a "second death".

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## Psychological Perceptiveness in Pushkin's Poetry and Prose

Steven C. Hertler

### *Abstract*

This is the first of five papers celebrating the psychological complexity of nineteenth century Russian novels authored by Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin, Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol, Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky, and Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev. Using biography, letters, narratives, and literary criticism, the life and writings of each author will be reviewed as they contribute to the understanding of the human mind and the apperception of the human condition. More subtly than the case study, more fully than the clinical anecdote, more profoundly than the apt example, these novels animate sterile, empirical findings and add dimension to the flatness all too prevalent among psychological description. Herein, Pushkin's tempestuous upbringing, cavalier belligerence, and eccentric oddities show that the Russian author, as much as his work, sustains and rewards close psychological study.

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## *Introduction and Background*

Philosophy bifurcated into the sciences and humanities. The sciences and humanities then branched into mature disciplines such as biology, physics, and archaeology. These then further divided into sub-disciplines such as molecular biology, astrophysics, and paleoarchaeology. Division and subdivision were symptomatic of reductionism, the process of breaking down complex phenomena into comprehensible component parts.<sup>26</sup> With divided labor came astonishing success. Reductionism is the stuff of experimentation, of taking messy realities and controlling them, one by one, in an artificial environment where the contributions of each variable can be systematically studied.<sup>27</sup> Through reductive experimental science, extraneous variables and confounds, benighted superstition and illusion, mistaken assumption and error, all alike were exposed to light, and the truth prevailed. Yet, there was a price for such success.<sup>28</sup> The best minds were sequestered within their respective specialties, learning more and more about less and less.<sup>29</sup> This became apparent as a profound problem by the time Snow<sup>30</sup> wrote his essay on *The*

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<sup>26</sup> T. Brown and L. Smith, *Reductionism and the Development of Knowledge*. (New York: Psychology Press, 2003); F. Dumont, *A history of personality psychology: Theory, science, and research from Hellenism to the twenty-first century*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> E. Agazzi, *The Problem of Reductionism in Science: (Colloquium of the Swiss Society of Logic and Philosophy of Science, Zürich, May 18–19, 1990) (Vol. 18)*. (Springer Science & Business Media.)

<sup>28</sup> T. Lee, *Questioning nineteenth-century assumptions about knowledge, I: Determinism* (Vol. 3). (SUNY Press, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> M. Garland, *Cambridge before Darwin: the ideal of a liberal education, 1800–1860*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980); T. S. Kuhn, *The structure of scientific revolutions*. (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Snow, C. P. *The two cultures* (Cambridge University Press, 1959/2012).

*Two Cultures*, which marked the first and most fundamental of breaks between the sciences and humanities. There are then professors of science that have read little more than a bit of Dickens, and professors of humanities who don't know the second law of thermodynamics.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps more than any other discipline, psychology falls on the fault line of this rift with a foot tenuously planted on each side of the divide. With this awkward straddle being an unsustainable position, psychology, given its status as a social science, is naturally progressing away from indulgence in such ideographic topics as psychobiography and case studies. Instead, psychology is actualizing nomothetic trends exemplified early on by dustbowl empiricism and behaviorism. Much more than in the recent past, peer reviewed journal articles are now likely to be written by five, six, and seven or more authors. They are, furthermore, likely to include vast samples, found conclusions on complex statistics, and introduce technical terms and specialized knowledge that come from interfacing with cognitive neuroscience, genetics and behavioral genetics, evolutionary biology, behavioral ecology, behavioral economics, and comparative zoology. Unarguably, this is all for the best. Reductionism is the natural and necessary means by which psychology differentiated itself from philosophy, and the means by which it continues to mature. Absent these trends, we would have no improvement in explanatory power. So one should not counsel against reducing complex realities into parts that can be controlled and studied. Likewise, one should not discourage the student to avoid narrowly

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<sup>31</sup> C. Snow, *The two cultures* (Cambridge University Press, 1959/2012).



specializing or developing a recondite research program. Also, above all else, one should in no way lament the empirical rigor that psychology continues to assume.

Nevertheless, one should recognize costs of reductionism. The cost of the above-described specialization is sterility; specifically, sterility in the depiction of ideation, relational dynamics, and social psychological phenomena. There are some stopgaps routinely used to counter the sterility of reductionism. For example, there is the case study and the clinical anecdote, which serve as mainstays against the two-dimensionality of the psychological construct and the characterological profile. Companion volumes to the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*,<sup>32</sup> such as a recently edited collection of cases by Barnhill,<sup>33</sup> are illustrative of this important effort. Perhaps even more effectually, narrative psychologists integrate psychological concepts and constructs within the context of the larger life story as they, for example, study redemptive themes,<sup>34</sup> temporal perspective,<sup>35</sup> and therapeutic progress.<sup>36</sup> Finally, there are the theoretically promising, but unfortunately moribund, sub-disciplines of *psychobiography* and *psychohistory*, variously practiced and

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<sup>32</sup> J. Barnhill, *DSM-5 Clinical Cases*. (American Psychiatric Publishers, 2013).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> D. McAdams, *The redemptive self: Stories Americans live by* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> J. Adler and D. McAdams, "Time, culture, and stories of the self." *Psychological Inquiry* (2007), 97-99.

<sup>36</sup> J. Adler, L. Skalina and D. McAdams, "The narrative reconstruction of psychotherapy and psychological health." *Psychotherapy Research* (2008), 719-734.

championed by Freud,<sup>37</sup> Erikson,<sup>38</sup> Schultz,<sup>39</sup> Runyan,<sup>40</sup> Zucker,<sup>41</sup> and Brody,<sup>42</sup> who only partially succeeded in their efforts to holistically study persons and lives.

Notwithstanding such contributions, character types often lie prostrate, breathless and lifeless while psychological internality remains remote, inchoate, and ineffable.

### *Method: Purpose of the Present Study*

It is the contention of the present work that the psychological complexity of Russian literature can and should be used to assuage the empirical sterility and two-dimensional unreality of social science data. When science is soft, art is instructive. What cannot be controlled empirically or reduced sufficiently might still be apprehended artistically and depicted instructively. Animation, breath, and life, to some measure, can be found in the novel; most particularly the novel of Russian extraction. Just as Freud<sup>43</sup> looked to Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* to illustrate fraternal rivalry and

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<sup>37</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a memory of his childhood* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1964).

<sup>38</sup> Erik Erikson, *Young man Luther: A study in psychoanalysis and history* (WW Norton & Company, 1993).

<sup>39</sup> W. Schultz, *Handbook of psychobiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>40</sup> W. Runyan, *Life histories and psychobiography: Explorations in theory and method* (Oxford University Press, 1982).

<sup>41</sup> R. Zucker, Henry Murray's legacy: An epilogue. *Studying Persons and Lives* (1990), 335-340.

<sup>42</sup> E. Brody, Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 174 (1986), 127-128.

<sup>43</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Dostoevsky and parricide* (The Brothers Karamazov and the Critics, 1928), 41-55.

fratricidal impulse, modern students of the mind can look to the Russian canon at large to teach the otherwise inexpressible, and understand what is unquantifiable. And so, the objective of the present study is to convince readers of the utility of Russian literature; of its ability to serve as one useful counterweight to the necessary evils of reductionism. Its audience is the psychology student who would not think to add classic Russian novels to his reading list, and the experienced academic whose understanding and powers of illustration in the lecture hall might benefit from familiarity with the canonical Russian author.

So with the objective stated and the audience identified, it only remains to specify method: First, it is necessary to explain why, above all other times and nations, the literature of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia is an extremely heavy counterweight against reductionism. Second, because the Russian novelist is as uniquely instructive as his novel, the life of Pushkin will be reviewed. Among other lessons, Pushkin's life is instructive of ambivalence and conflict in terms of heritage and station. His biography also demonstrates the tension generated by mismatch between 19<sup>th</sup> century high Russian culture and Pushkin's poor hygiene, incontinence, indecorousness, and unconventionality. Third, selections from *The Queen of Spades*, *Dubrovskii*, and *The Blizzard* are used as examples of how psychological phenomena, such as obsessionality, overweening pride, and the fight-flight response, are expertly depicted by Pushkin.

Every so often in Western European history comes an efflorescent explosion, a saccadic leap forward by which time can be marked. As these punctuated disequilibria are separated in time, so they are in space, such that they are associated with, though not confined to, a particular region. Thus there is the Renaissance in Italy, the Protestant Reformation in Germany, the Scientific Revolution in England, and the Political Revolution in America. Nineteenth century Russia, in its eruption of literary talent, is one of those times and places. Vladimir Nabokov<sup>44</sup> deems this abrupt nineteenth century eruption of literary masterpieces a miraculous flow of esthetic values:

I calculated once that the acknowledged best in the way of Russian fiction and poetry which had been produced since the beginning of the last century runs to about 23,000 pages of ordinary print. It is evident that neither French nor English literature can be so compactly handled. They sprawl over many more centuries; the number of masterpieces is formidable. This brings me to my first point. If we exclude one medieval masterpiece, the beautifully commodious thing about Russian prose is that it is all contained in the amphora of one round century—with an additional little cream jug provided for whatever surplus may have accumulated since. One century, the nineteenth, had been sufficient for a country with practically no literary tradition of its own to create a literature which in artistic worth, in wide-spread influence, in everything except bulk, equals the glorious

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<sup>44</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, *Timeless discussions of Chekhov, Dostoevski, Tolstoy, Turgenyev, Gorki, and Gogol* (New York: Harcourt, 1981), 1-2.

output of England or France, although their production of permanent masterpieces had begun so much earlier.

One can look for the source of the fount in Elizabethan era plays, the eighteenth century English Novel, or specifically in the works of Scott, Goethe, Chateaubriand, Byron, or in Russia's own Petrine era and its westernization. While more or less inspired by these and other influences, nineteenth century Russian literature, taken as a whole, is an irreducible, almost emergent phenomenon. The triumph is recognized by the West, and specifically by other Western European authors:

Henry James referred to Turgenev as "*le premier romancier de son temps*;" George Moore, who admired Tolstoy's "solidity of specification," referred to Anna Karenina as the world's greatest novel; Robert Louis Stevenson interpreted Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment as a room, "a house of life," into which a reader could enter, and be "tortured and purified"; Galsworthy sought "spiritual truth" in the writings of Turgenev and Tolstoy; and Arnold Bennett compiled a list of the twelve greatest novels in the world, a list on which every item came from the pen of a Russian author.<sup>45</sup>

Above all else, the psychological complexity of Russian writings is the foundational element of its distinctive greatness. There was something about the time, balanced as it was between serfdom and emancipation, medievalism and

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<sup>45</sup> M. Jones and R. Miller, *The Cambridge companion to the classic Russian novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xi.

modernism, religion and science, that called forth greatness and provided a most meaningful context in which to explore themes such as nature and nurture, order and anarchy, faith and nihilism. At the urgent behest of Peter the Great, Russia spent the transitional time between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries inculcating modernization and westernization from the top down, while in the nineteenth century it began to alternatively assimilate and reject this modernization and westernization from the bottom up.<sup>46</sup> Catherine the Great embodies this ambivalence as when she invited Diderot's attentions only to reject the institution of his ideas,<sup>47</sup> denied Russian mercenaries the opportunity to aid England in suppressing the American rebels and then became reactionary in the aftermath of the French Revolution,<sup>48</sup> and called a senate into being only to deny it power.<sup>49</sup> "Russia, and its literature, has always been conscious of being torn between East and West, where 'East' has ranged from Constantinople to the Tatar hordes, and 'West' has incorporated the whole of Europe and its cultural Progeny."<sup>50</sup> Progress was pitted against identity. The question was how to change, grow, and compete without becoming something different altogether. From all these sources came unprecedented literary dynamism.

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<sup>46</sup> R. Massie, *Peter the Great: his life and world* (Random House, 2012).

<sup>47</sup> P. Blom, *A Wicked Company: The Forgotten Radicalism of the European Enlightenment* (Basic Books, 2013).

<sup>48</sup> R. Massie, *Catherine the Great: Portrait of a woman* (Random House, 2011).

<sup>49</sup> J. Alexander, *Catherine the Great: life and legend* (Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>50</sup> M. Jones and R. Miller, *The Cambridge companion to the classic Russian novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xii.

John Bayley, in his introduction to Pushkin's collected prose, celebrates Pushkin and relates him to four authors who follow him: Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Turgenev and Tolstoy. Of course, there were Great Russian writers that came before, such as Nikolay Mikhailovich Karamzin, Mikhail Lermontov, and Nikolai Karamzin, and great Russian writers that came after, such as Anton Chekhov, Maxim Gorky and Nabokov Solzhenitsyn, but these five authors collected by Bayley represent a sort of epicenter of the Russian literary efflorescence, and each of these five authors warrants separate treatment, as their life and work foster the appreciation of mind and mankind. By way of chronology, Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin, born June 6, 1799 into an aristocratic Moscow household, and so on the precipice of the nineteenth century, is rightly the first subject.

### *The Person of Pushkin*

The Great Russian writers, certainly true of the five herein mentioned, were invariably eccentric extremes with Gogol "shrieking back to the house" after touching a caterpillar,<sup>51</sup> Tolstoy renouncing his ties to family, class, and estate,<sup>52</sup> and Dostoyevsky indulging in fanatical excesses of religious enthusiasm.<sup>53</sup> While one might strain to see Turgenev as an exception to this rule by ignoring his living in a ménage,<sup>54</sup> no

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<sup>51</sup> V. Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol* (New York: New Directions, 1959), 7.

<sup>52</sup> I. Medzhibovskaya, *Tolstoy and the religious culture of his time: A biography of a long conversion, 1845-1885* (Lexington Books, 2009).

<sup>53</sup> P. Jones and M. Jones, *Dostoevsky and the dynamics of religious experience* (Anthem Press, 2005).

<sup>54</sup> V. S. Pritchett, *The gentle barbarian: the life and work of Turgenev* (A&C Black, 2011).

degree of bias can cause Pushkin to be perceived as an exception.

As fictionalized in *The Blackamoor of Peter the Great*, Pushkin's maternal great-grandfather, purportedly of royal lineage, was, when just a boy,<sup>55</sup> purchased from slavery, and presented to Tsar Peter the Great by whose beneficence and patronage he rose to become General Abram Petrovich Gannibal, "a cavalier of the orders of St. Anne and Alexander Nevsky."<sup>56</sup> Though it can be risky to relate "a writer's creative psychology and biography," it is less so with Pushkin because he himself explicitly makes such connections, especially with reference to his African descent.<sup>57</sup> In reaction to being called, as he was by some few coarse contemporaries, a swarthy, ape-like poet, one senses occasional inferiority, but that inferiority is most often overwhelmed by defiant pride. The resulting ambivalence caused him to lash out at impertinent persons who made disparaging remarks, only to then refer to himself as an "ugly descendant of negroes." This ambivalence is best captured in his reaction to the similitude that his child bore to him: "...imagine, my wife has been maladroit enough to give birth to a little lithograph of me. I am in despair at it, in spite of all my self-conceit."<sup>58</sup>

Pushkin was not only different because of his "exotic mother," a granddaughter of Abram Gannibal known as "the

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<sup>55</sup> C. Emerson, *The Cambridge introduction to Russian literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>56</sup> T. J. Binyon, "Prose Fiction." In *Pushkin: A biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 4.

<sup>57</sup> I. Reyfman, "Prose Fiction" In A. Kahn (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Pushkin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 93.

<sup>58</sup> T. J. Binyon, *Pushkin: A biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 379.



beautiful Creole,” but by virtue of his paternal lineage, which though of ancient nobility, had been “impoverished and marginalized.”<sup>59</sup>

The Pushkin clan stayed close to power up to the end of the sixteenth century, falling from grace under the Romanovs, whose dynasty dates from the early seventeenth century. Several ancestors were conspirators and mutineers and offered in particular under Peter the Great. By 1799, the year of the poet’s birth, the Pushkin family had lost all their influence and most of their fortune.<sup>60</sup>

Growing older, encountering prejudice, and experiencing setbacks, Pushkin began to identify with his fallen ancestors: “They were persecuted. And I am persecuted.”<sup>61</sup> So both Pushkin’s maternal and paternal lineage justified a sense of pride and dignity, but these emotions were alloyed by the supposed taint of African ancestry on one side, and the loss of power and place on the other. Pushkin’s pedigree, and the hypersensitive pride and internal confusion that it imposed, recalls Erik Erikson and Eriksonian identity theory.<sup>62</sup> Specifically, Pushkin’s angry ambivalence is recapitulated in Erikson’s reaction to being at once a German and a Dane and

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<sup>59</sup> C. Emerson, *The Cambridge introduction to Russian literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 102.

<sup>60</sup> D. Bethea and S. Davydov, *The Cambridge companion to Pushkin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 11.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> E. H. Erikson, *Identity youth and crisis* (New York: Norton and Company, Inc., 1968).

a Jew and a Gentile.<sup>63</sup> It then seems that Pushkin and Erikson shared a basic insecurity concerning their origins, and likewise shared the capacity to turn that insecurity to productive account.

More directly, his ancestry, by way of his parents, was also marked by extremity. Capricious and frivolous, Pushkin's mother was absorbed in appearances, but what is more, she was a despot whose maternal affection was drowned in arbitrary tyranny, as evidenced by, for example, not speaking to her son for weeks or months when angry. Irresolute and henpecked, Pushkin's father expressed disturbing mood lability, vacillating from impassioned rages to "lachrymose emotional outbursts."<sup>64</sup> As his father had done before him, Pushkin paid scant attention to the education, rearing, and well-being of his children. Indeed, recapitulating both forms of parental caprice, Pushkin was described thus by his academic and moral supervisor, Martyn Piletsky: "Pride and vanity, which can make him shy, a sensibility of heart, ardent outbursts of temper, frivolity and an especial volubility combined with wit are his chief qualities."<sup>65</sup> The thin-skinned pride, paired with the ungovernable temper that he inherited, genetically and environmentally, from his parents, induced him to hostilities so frequent that a friend's wife supposed he duelled every day. He approached these duels with a spirit of nonchalance too reckless to be thought manufactured bravado or extreme élan. One only has to consider his arrival at an affair of honor with a hat full of

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<sup>63</sup> L. J. Friedman, *Identity's architect: A biography of Erik H. Erikson* (New York: Scribner, 1999).

<sup>64</sup> T. J. Binyon, *Pushkin: A biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 11.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

cherries instead of a second, only to be fired upon and then to throw away his own shot. Few defy statistical odds, and so it was with Pushkin. At the age of thirty-seven, still having a young supple mind, just having attained a vast store of generative historical knowledge, and perhaps having only recently entered his literary prime, fell in a “fatal duel with a wretched adventurer from royalist France.”<sup>66</sup>

In his life, as in his death, he displayed mercurial impulsivity, being blown like a dandelion seed aloft on the winds of external occurrences and internal passions. Indeed, he possessed what some have deemed animalistic passions, in addition to expressing militant atheism and displaying crude, low, ungoverned behaviors that contrasted markedly with the orthodox piety of the aged Tolstoy and the paroled Dostoyevsky. He was said to snort like a stallion when touching a female hand. His animalism extended to his physical appearance, most marked by his “extraordinarily long, claw-like fingernails,” which, like his person, were often unabashedly dirty. Though of the nobility by rank and wealth, he expressed little of the polish characteristic of that class. Pushkin was wont to use indecent language and hiss at actresses in the theatre, gamble compulsively, and behave promiscuously. From this last vice, Pushkin reaped gonorrhea and syphilis. One will find this outcome more or less inevitable after reading Pushkin’s infamous Don Juan List, noting names of women, often married, whom he lusted after, obsessed over, consummated relationships with, or even

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<sup>66</sup> V. Nabokov, *Timeless discussions of Chekhov, Dostoevski, Tolstoy, Turgenyev, Gorki, and Gogol* (New York: Harcourt, 1981).

begot children by.<sup>67</sup> Admitting it to be a caricature, his able biographer<sup>68</sup> nonetheless provides the following informative summation of this vein of Pushkin's character:

“Beginning while still at the Lycee, he later, in society, abandoned himself to every kind of debauchery and spent days and nights in an uninterrupted succession of bacchanals and orgies, with the most noted and inveterate rakes of the time. It is astonishing how his health and his very talent could withstand such a way of life, with which were naturally associated frequent venereal sicknesses, bringing him at times to the brink of the grave [. . . ] Eternally without a copeck, eternally in debt, sometimes even without a decent frock-coat, with endless scandals, frequent duels, closely acquainted with every tavern-keeper, whore and trollop, Pushkin represented a type of the filthiest depravity.”

One gets a sense of his true eccentricity from reading the writings of anyone with whom he cohabitated, for however long. One such complaint records his practicing marksmanship by shooting wax bullets at the wall of his bedroom, while sitting nude in his bed. The writer goes on to note that,

“This was extremely inconvenient, for I had come on business, had work to do, got up and went to bed early; but some nights he did not sleep at all, wrote, moved about noisily, declaimed, and recited his verse in a loud

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<sup>67</sup> D. Bethea and S. Davydov, *The Cambridge companion to Pushkin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>68</sup> T. J. Binyon, *Pushkin: A biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 68.

voice. In summer he would disrobe completely and perform in the room all his nocturnal evolutions in the full nudity of his natural form.”<sup>69</sup>

Nor did he confine his nakedness to his quarters. Most starkly, his utter disregard for decorum is illustrated by his wearing transparent muslin pants without undergarments to a formal dinner. The scandalized young ladies had to be precipitously ushered out, while the rest of the company attempted to act as normal while ignoring the unimaginably idiosyncratic Pushkin and his salient *faux pas*.

Some wondered how Pushkin’s genius could survive his lifestyle. Confounding them, it did. In fact, so meteorically did he rise and so young did he die, that his debauchery hardly had a chance to impede his productivity. “Scarcely out of his teens, Pushkin was already celebrated as Russia’s supreme poet.”<sup>70</sup> Through all the “duels of honor and games of chance”<sup>71</sup> survived a deep and philosophically rich thinker after his own fashion. Pushkin grappled with “individual isolation” and “existential doubt” that appears to be specifically an outgrowth of his reading of Pascal’s *Pensées*, and generally an outgrowth of his atheistic materialism. All such preoccupations which leached into his poetry, as evidenced by the following passage from *The Wanderer*:<sup>72</sup>

Who with inimical power

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<sup>69</sup> T. J. Binyon, *Pushkin: A biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 120.

<sup>70</sup> C. Emerson, *The Cambridge introduction to Russian literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 102.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 104

<sup>72</sup> A. Kahn, Pushkin’s lyric identities, in A. Kahn (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Pushkin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 36.

Summoned me from nothingness  
 Filled my soul with passion,  
 Disturbed my mind with doubt?

He could not find solace in religion<sup>73</sup> and could not even seem to shed sufficient skepticism to accept *Pascal's Wager*.<sup>74</sup>

But in vain do I surrender to a seductive fancy;  
 My mind resists, despises the hope ...  
 Nothingness awaits me beyond the grave...  
 What, nothing! No thought, not a first love!  
 I am terrified!...Once again I look at life sadly,  
 And wish to live a long time so that a dear image  
 Might long melt and flare up in my sad soul.

### *The Writings of Pushkin*

Pushkin's philosophical depth, like his past and person, is insinuated into his characters.<sup>75</sup> In *The Queen of Spades*, Pushkin, recalling his own domineering mother and henpecked father, writes, "My late grandfather, as far as I remember, played the part of butler to my grandmother. He feared her like fire..." Pushkin is writing of a woman known as *la Vénus muscovite* creating a sensation in Paris in her youth; and in doing so he accurately captures the power of beauty to impress, but also to oppress. In her prime, the

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<sup>73</sup> A. Kahn, *The Cambridge Companion to Pushkin*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>74</sup> A. Kahn, Pushkin's lyric identities, in A. Kahn (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Pushkin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 39.

<sup>75</sup> A. S. Pushkin, *The collected stories* (Everyman's Library, 1999).

abject subordination that this woman is able to impose makes salient the reproductive imperative, and beauty as a signal of reproductive ability. More importantly, reminiscent of *Miss Havisham*, the Dickensian creation of *Great Expectations*, Pushkin's Venus illustrates the developmentally inappropriate investment in appearances well past the first flush of youth. One recognizes the egocentric narcissism of Cluster B personality disorders when reading that, after the passage of sixty years, this all too real fictive woman no longer had "the slightest pretensions to beauty." Nonetheless, she "adhered to all the habits of her youth...spending just as much time on, and paying just as much attention to, her toilette." A holdover from beauty long gone, this woman expects all to come before her and bow. There is no graceful transition from youth to matron, from matron to grandmother. Beauty granted power, and both, now gone, are bitterly lamented. In her aged condition, with all charms faded, *la Vénus muscovite* exercises arbitrary autocratic power over the person of her serving maid, who becomes known as the "martyr of the household." Where her beauty once gave her power over all men in her sphere, her remaining money gives her power over a select few in her pay. It is thus that she continues to affront with immature whims and contradictory orders while exuding a baseline of abject disregard and meanness:

She poured the tea and was scolded for using too much sugar; read novels aloud and was blamed for all the faults of the authors; accompanied the Countess on her rides and was held responsible for both the weather and the condition of the pavement.

Pushkin's Venus recalls the feminine expression of the erratic, emotional, and impulsive personality type. It reminds the psychologist of the Histrionic and the Borderline personalities.

Within the same novella, Pushkin is perhaps among the first to plumb the depths of obsession, including "the irrational, the violent, and the extreme," through his main character, Hermann, a Germanic officer within the Imperial Russian Army.<sup>76</sup> As noted by Rosenshield,<sup>77</sup> *The Queen of Spades* provides an intimate descent into obsession:

Three, seven, ace began to eclipse in Hermann's imagination the image of the dead old woman. Three, seven, ace didn't leave him for a moment and played continually on his lips. If he saw a young girl, he would say: 'How slender she is! A real three of hearts.' If anyone asked him the time, he would answer: "Five minutes to the seven." Every pot-bellied man he saw reminded him of the ace. Three, seven, ace haunted him in his sleep, assuming all possible forms: The three blossomed before him in a form of a magnificent flower, the seven appeared as a Gothic portal, and the ace an enormous spider. All his thoughts fused into one: to make use of the secret that had cost him so dearly.

Consequently, this novel, written in 1833 by a man who would rather die than not gamble,<sup>78</sup> prefigures Dostoyevsky's

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<sup>76</sup> G. Rosenshield, *Pushkin and the genres of madness* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), viii.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> T. J. Binyon, *Pushkin: A biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).



inclination to obsessively gamble and to incorporate his gambling obsession into his writings. Still further, before Dostoyevsky begot *Crime and Punishment's* Roskonakov, Pushkin's Hermann, in petty imitation of Napoleon, commits the "ethical equivalent of political despotism"<sup>79</sup> by divesting an old woman of her wealth in the form of her secret, taking her life in the bargain.

*Dubrovskii* is another story in which Pushkin shows himself expert at capturing characterological hauteur, while wonderfully documenting its relational implications. The hubristic pride of Kirila Petrovich Troekurov, who was accustomed to treat others with caprice and reap deference in return, spoke of himself in the third person: "I'll show him...I'll make him cry himself blind; I'll teach him what it's like to affront Troekurov!" In the narrow confines of this short story, Pushkin shows how supercilious pride, compounded by miscommunication, can result in the misuse of power and influence and catalyze cycles of revenge that recall the blood feuds of the pre-modern state. *Dubrovskii*, a man of high moral worth accustomed to plain dealing, gets the bad end of a quarrel with his quondam friend, the Machiavellian Troekurov. In pursuing the quarrel, Troekurov resists an instant and obvious strike for a deferred and oblique attack that is much more fatal: "...a man like *Dubrovskii*, a proud man of the land and of the sword, could only parry the first kind of attack, the second renders him an idiot child." The legal maneuverings and corrupt machinations of the insidiously influential Troekurov come

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<sup>79</sup> J. Børtnes, Religion. In M. V. Jones & R. F. Miller (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to the classic Russian novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 106.

to deprive Dubrovskii of his estate, and thereafter of his reason. As contemporary psychoneuroimmunological studies do attest, a sudden stressful descent down the pecking order, such as Dubrovskii's transition from proud independent estate holder to humble dependent debtor, can wreak havoc on mind and body alike. As the corrupted court officials seize the Dubrovskii estate, the elder Dubrovskii, purple-faced with anger, dies of apoplexy. His son Vladimir, disgusted with the failure of state justice, torches his natal house, consigning the portrait of his mother and the bodies of the officials, all alike, to the flames.

Aptly and simply named *The Blizzard*, Pushkin's tale shines forth in his depiction of the best laid plans being scuttled by the most basic elements. "The rigors of a winter journey by sleigh during a blizzard," as vividly detailed by Pushkin, recall the incongruous hairlessness of man so ill-suited for "the eternal Russian struggle with cold."<sup>80</sup> It happens that Vladimir Nikolaevich, the ardent lover of Maria Gavrilovna, after arranging a clandestine matrimonial ceremony by entreating priests and collecting witnesses and coordinating with his lover, is in the end thwarted by nature. The troika and driver being reserved for his betrothed, Vladimir sets out with an unfortunate horse and a simple sleigh. The twenty-minute ride along the well-known route, in consequence of the rising wind and an obscured road, disorients Vladimir. Ebullience and bliss give way to exhaustion and despair by way of a gradual process that, in its psychological astuteness, elicits empathy while it teaches humility:

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<sup>80</sup> M. V. Jones and R. F. Miller, *The Cambridge companion to the classic Russian novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 48.

Vladimir found himself in the middle of a field, and his attempts to get back on the road were all in vain. The horse trod at random, now clambering up a pile of snow, now tumbling into a ditch; the sleigh kept turning over; all Vladimir could do was to try not to lose the right direction. It seemed to him, however, that more than half an hour had passed, yet he had still not reached the Zhadrino woods. Another ten minutes or so went by, but the woods still did not come within his view. He rode across a field intersected by deep gullies. The blizzard would not let up; the sky would not clear. The horse began to get tired, and Vladimir perspired profusely, even though he kept sinking into the snow up to his waist.

With each assessment of the hour, he is ever more seized by panic. He is now acting as an unthinking creature in the grip of panic. Like the routed soldier and the injured animal, he feels instead of thinks, and acts instead of planning. After being so limbically dominated, there is, too, the attempt to reassert cortical control, the attempt to overpower emotions with rational response:

At last Vladimir realized he was going in the wrong direction. He stopped, began to think, to recollect, to consider, and became convinced that he should have turned to the right.

After this ineffectual effort, Vladimir mounts one last spasm of emotion, one more epinephrine-induced exertion to do by sheer will what only can be done by strategic thinking:

He rode on and on, however, yet there was no sign of Zhadrino; nor was there an end to the woods. He realized with horror that he had driven into an unfamiliar forest. Despair took possession of him. He whipped the horse; the poor animal tried to break into a trot but soon gave in to fatigue, and within a quarter of an hour slowed down to a snail's pace despite every effort on the part of the unfortunate Vladimir.

He reaches a house and has a resurgence of panic, hurrying toward a guide and offering him to pay him anything asked. Though, on learning that it is near dawn, "Vladimir no longer says anything." All is now over; adrenal exhaustion sets in. As can be seen, the will of horse and horseman is spent. In the heights of his unthinking exertions, in his profuse perspiration, in his inability to master his emotions, one sees the flight/fight response in lasting and vivid detail: Anxiety gave way to fear, fear to panic, and panic to enervation. The cock crowed and the sun rose as he came to the church, finding locked doors instead of his affianced love. Pushkin ingeniously recapitulates the emotions of man in the storm. Vladimir and the storm raged together, but as the storm subsided so did Vladimir's will:

Gradually the trees thinned out, and Vladimir emerged from the forest, but there was still no sign of Zhadrino. It must have been around midnight. Tears gushed from his eyes; he drove forward haphazardly. The weather had by now grown calm, the clouds were breaking up, and a broad, flat field, covered with a white undulating carpet, stretched out before Vladimir.

## Conclusions

To *The Queen of Spades*, *Dubrovskii*, and *The Blizzard*, are added *The History of Pugachev*, *Egyptian Nights*, *The Shot*, *The Captain's Daughter*, *The Stationmaster*, and other psychologically astute novellas, and this is not to mention Pushkin's verse novel *Eugene Onegin*, his many narrative poems, his dramas and his fairytales...all this in a raucous thirty-seven years. Still further, this corpus of Pushkin is merely the beginning of the nineteenth-century Russian canon, which encompasses several authors, longer lived and more prolific, that the scholar, intellectual, student, and professor can mine for psychological revelation.

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## Rousseau's Languages: Music, Diplomacy, and Botany

Maria T.C. Quintos & Fernando Calderon Quindós

### *Abstract*

Little attention has been paid to some aspects of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's intellectual activity compared with others. His affairs as a diplomat, his contribution to music, and his affection for botany are only three of them. This article shows their connections with forms of expression in which words are replaced by other kinds of graphic representation, such as ideographic signs for their evocation and numbers for their efficiency and simplicity. These contributions were collected in his first and last intellectual projects: *Project for Musical Notation* (1742), a young man's idealistic challenge presented before Paris Académie des Sciences—and rejected by them; and *Characters of Botany* (1776-1778), a private senescence enterprise.

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## Introduction

As it is well known, Rousseau's last years were devoted to botany<sup>81</sup>. Many ignore, however, that he reached a high knowledge of this science and that botany established among the leading likes of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a result of his support. His *Letters on the Elements of Botany*—posthumously published in 1781—had an extraordinarily immediate acceptance, and soon, the first translations, reworkings, and imitations of the original work came out<sup>82</sup>. Rousseau wrote those letters only at the request of his friend Madame Delessert and took on work with no purpose of submitting these writings to print. No ambition encouraged him but sheer duty towards friendship. Like his other scripts on botany, his *Letters* were enclosed within the scope of privacy, as well as his *Fragments for a Dictionary of Botanical Terms* (from now on referred to as

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<sup>81</sup> In the last years, some important monographies on this philosopher's botanic writings have come to light. On Rousseau's three hundredth birthday anniversary, Alexandra Cook, associate professor at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Hong Kong, published *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Botany* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2012). In *Œuvres Complètes*. Raymond Trousson and Frédéric S. Eigeldinger, eds., (Paris/Genève: Slatkine/Champion, 2012) appeared Volume 11, *Écrits sur la botanique*, prepared by Takuya Kobayashi, from the University of Waseda (Tokyo). Only some years before Guy Ducourthial, professor at Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle de Paris, published *La botanique selon Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris: Belin, 2009).

<sup>82</sup> *Botanik für frauenzimmer in Briefen an die Frau von L\** comes to light in Mannheim (1781); *Letters on the elements of botany* in London (1785); *Botanik for Frueutininimer i Breve til Fru de L* in Copenhagen (1789); *Cartas os elementos de botanica...* in Lisbon (1801). The first Spanish edition – prepared by Diego Guerrero – dates back to 2005, followed by F. Calderón Quindós's translation (*Cartas sobre botánica*, Oviedo: KRK, 2007). As regards reworkings and imitations, see Calderón Quindós's works "Les lettres sur la botanique et ses refontes au tournant des Lumières en Angleterre, Suisse et France (1785-1809)" in Eric Francalanza, ed., *Rousseau en toutes lettres* (Rennes: PUR, 2014), pp. 375-389; "La réception scientifique des *Lettres élémentaires* et le phénomène de la botanique à l'usage des femmes" in Claire Jaquier and Timothée Lécho, eds., *Rousseau botaniste: Je vais devenir plante moi-même* (Fleurier/Pontarlier: Éditions du Belvédère, 2012), pp. 85-95.

*Dictionary of Botany*) and his *Characters of Botany*, which he wrote only for himself<sup>83</sup>, and to which he did not—or did not want to—put the final touches.

His *Dictionary of Botany* consisted of a list of names and definitions—at least a fifth of which had been borrowed from other authors. His work of compilation started about 1765, after his first botanic raids. Gathering plants and making herbaria was for him as important as collecting names and creating a dictionary of use. He needed to provide himself with vocabulary that would help him and his addressees understand each other. The task was not easy, as names in the scope of botany were constantly under refinement, and their thesaurus relentlessly growing. Besides this, terminological repertoires, while increasingly necessary, were scarce and hardly comprehensive. Many authors had lent their genius to this immense task, and Rousseau made good profit of their progress in order to make his own.

Rousseau's *Dictionary of Botany* was in fact very far from the targets and method of his *Dictionary of Music*. His *Dictionary of Music* served as a basic framework for Diderot's encyclopedic project, before the *Dictionary* became a separate work 15 years later, in 1764. In the middle of the century, Diderot—the *Encyclopédie's* main editor—was well informed about his friend's theoretical knowledge and first music compositions, so he could entrust the task to Rousseau. Rousseau agreed to accept the job, and after three months of formidable work, he gathered approximately four hundred entries. Accepting his friend's request meant participating in a unique enterprise in the publishing world, a project which implied getting at a good number of subscribers all over Europe.

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<sup>83</sup> That does not mean, however, that Rousseau would not project his *Dictionary* publication once it had been started. The same can be said about his *Letters*, for which he seems to project a printed ending. As regards *Characters of Botany*, no sign gives evidence that Rousseau meant to take it to print.

Rousseau wrote for others, and to enlighten others was the goal of his work.

*Characters of Botany* is a singularly short work. There is no alphabetic writing in this script, and the “characters” are not letters, but freely built signs probably created between 1776 and 1778. Before delving into them, we should first pay attention to some other parts of Rousseau’s work.



Image 1: From Anacleto Ferrer and Manuel Hamerlinck, eds., *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Escritos sobre música* (Valencia, Universitat de València, 2007)

Writing without words: from music notation to spy games  
*Characters of Botany* was not the result of Rousseau’s writing without words for the first time, not even the product of the first time he invented signs and arranged them according to his own principles. Through musical notation, he had become familiar with non-alphabetic signs from his early age, and had been in contact with sheet music for nearly five decades. In fact, Rousseau had been copying scores for his clients since 1731, and that job could have inspired in him his first ideas about the imperfections of musical notation. He believed that current notation suffered important lacks and suggested eliminating traditional signs and replacing them with algebraic elements. In his view, half notes, crotchets, or

quavers could indicate sounds on the staff, but none of them did establish “aucun vrai rapport à la chose représentée”<sup>84</sup>. Numbers—universal and simple—could express mathematical relations between one sound and the other and its simplicity could facilitate music learning better than ordinary musical notation. As a consequence, not only did Rousseau dispose of old musical signs, but he also replaced the five-line staff with a single horizontal line and explained how numbers—one for each musical note of the scale—should be placed on the paper with respect to that single line according to the number of octaves. Only with some additional simple signs, Rousseau would finally eliminate the rubbles of musical language, which he described as a “système fort embrouillé et fort mal assorti”<sup>85</sup>. The first version of Rousseau’s *Project for Musical Notation* was ready in 1742. That very year, he presented it in Paris Académie des Sciences. The commissioners were so kind as to read it but they questioned its novelty. With little argument, the court noticed too many coincidences between Rousseau’s coded notation and father Souhaitty’s, the author of a numeric notation system in 1677. Unhappy with the verdict, Rousseau sent his *Dissertation on Modern Music* to print in 1743. If the novelty of his reform had been questioned, he should defend it. That resulted in new developments of the project and a new approach. However, he did not receive the praise he thought he deserved. From the moment he stood before the Academy commissioners he knew he should give up the idea of promoting his reform on a large scale. The scholars made him notice that replacing traditional notation with new ones would mean reprinting all the former music sheets; therefore, he decided to lower his expectations. Rousseau’s preface to his *Dissertation* explained that his notation was meant only with sheer propaedeutic character, as a way of facilitating the access to a kind of notation that—not being better than his own—was entirely integrated in the musical routines of the century. As Descartes

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<sup>84</sup> Dictionnaire de Musique. In Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, eds., *Œuvres Complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, vol. V, 1995), p. 936.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 935.

himself did in his *Discourse on the Method*, Rousseau soon realized that the empire of customs was invincible<sup>86</sup>.

Once his dispute with the scholars had finished, Rousseau settled in Venice as the secretary of the French embassy, in 1743. He had no training in diplomacy or experience in the international field, but he was proficient in Italian and had done pen pusher work on some occasion. He kept the position for hardly a year, as he fell out with the ambassador on whom his income depended. Throughout that period, he wrote by his own hand the communiqués weekly sent to the Court. The writing of those communiqués often demanded taking precautions. In order that spies could be evaded and confidentiality guaranteed, each country's central authorities prepared code books for its local offices abroad. The secretaries were the persons responsible for both the writing down and cyphering of the letters dictated by ambassadors and the deciphering of the secret mail received. That was an annoying job, and patience and careful attention were required for its correct performance; however, Rousseau found it simple and easy from the first day.

When confined in England many years later, Rousseau feared for his life and decided to get back to his old habit of cyphered writing. Having no code book to use, he prepared his own code book scrupulously, and wrote down the instructions that should be followed in order to decode his letters. This work doubtlessly expresses Rousseau's anxiety during his stay in England in the years 1766 and 1767. Yet, at the same time, it is excellent proof of his cryptographic skills and his general dexterity. Rousseau used the

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<sup>86</sup> Naturalist Tournefort (1656-1708) was of the same opinion. At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century he had also conceived an integral reform project for botanic nomenclature. He was drawn to the idea of naming vegetal species after meaningful suffixes. However, in order that his reform could have followers and become universal, no name ought to have been used.

substitution technique, the same he had exercised during his diplomatic mission in Venice.

Du Peyrou, his confidant and friend from Neuchâtel, should replace numbers by letters according to the agreed-upon code. It was not just to assign one or several digits to each alphabet letter; in order to alleviate his friend's job and hinder spies, Rousseau had laid out twelve deciphering sections in his code book. If Du Peyrou referred to Hume, he just needed to use the expression *Noms propres* plus 790, its numeric counterpart; if the issue was Geneva, the section was *Villes et Pays* plus 6. Rousseau also used null signs, signs which invalidated the previous or next sign, and a good amount of duplications. Everything was meant to keep his correspondence secret. He felt he was being watched, and Du Peyrou confirmed his suspicion in his reply on 16 March 1767. It seemed that some alien hand had opened the envelope, which made Rousseau elaborate a second code book<sup>87</sup>. Here he kept his original twelve sections, but, instead of digits, he used two-letter bigrams. For better instruction of the addressee, each book included a *pratique*. See the transcription of the first one as well as its deciphering:

Ciphered text:

“eo.89.up.993.ti.59.600.983.75.41.512.911.406.69.798.861.69.797.ab”<sup>88</sup>.

Clear text: “this number [code book] sets off on 28 February 1777.”

From Rousseau's cryptographic activity, the section *mots fréquents* stands out. He felt he was the victim of a conspiracy. This idea became his obsession and the section was full of terms that denounced this drama: *Cache...é, chagrin, coup, cruel, danger, mort,*

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<sup>87</sup> Both code books can be found in *Œuvres Complètes* (vol. V, pp. 553-584) under the title *Chiffres à chiffrer et à déchiffrer*.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, p. 555.

etc. As a secret index of his worries, his code book thus anticipated both his mood and the main issue of his mailing with Du Peyrou. However, not everything under the section obeyed his obsession, and from the hundred and fifty terms composing his first version, some of them were meant to draw a friendlier setting. *Beau*, *bonheur*, *botanique*, *campagne*, *espèce*, *herbe*, were words that told about a hobby both friends shared, and to which they owed their friendship bonds<sup>89</sup>. Set in England, Rousseau did not neglect his communication with Du Peyrou or abandoned his devotion for botany. On the contrary, he still was highly keen to it and, thanks to his friend, managed to recover his botany library, which he had left behind in his beloved shelter: Ile de Saint –Pierre.

*Complexity into words, or sensations into signs*

Music and botany were Rousseau's two passions, and both were affected by his genius's singularity. It is possible to notice common features in the way he approached each of them. One of these features, perhaps the most meaningful one, was related with language. In his *Dictionary of Music* the entry "notes" reads: "Si le premier avantage des signes d'institution est d'être clairs, le second est d'être concis, quel jugement doit-on porter d'un ordre de signes à qui l'un et l'autre manquent?"<sup>90</sup> Botany seemed to be in the same situation, and Rousseau frequently expressed his disappointment at the high amount of terms that were about to bury a science whose objects of study simply laid before our eyes and under our feet. It was the disgust produced in him by this terminological eagerness that determined his preference for Linnaeus. Not only had Linnaeus introduced the principle of parsimony in botanic *denominatio*, but also in the art of writing. Linnaeus's *Species*

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<sup>89</sup> From the same section, with the exception of the word "campagne," these terms are excluded from his second code book. This absence pictures a more gloomy drama.

<sup>90</sup> *Dictionnaire de Musique*. In *Œuvres Complètes* (vol. V, 1995), p. 935.

*plantarum* gathered the virtues of both clearness and concision, and Rousseau celebrated those rarities in a science beaten by the chaos and disconcert originated by terminological excess. Linnaeus, he said, “établit enfin une nomenclature éclairée” and managed to produce descriptions consisting only of that which was essential, “s’y bornant à un petit nombre de mots techniques bien choisis et bien adaptés”.<sup>91</sup> Rousseau appreciated Linnaeus’s reform. He firmly believed that observance of the rules introduced by this Swede naturalist meant saying goodbye to nomenclatural habit and recovering the study of plants.

This fondness of sign, instead of meaning, also governed -according to Rousseau- the destiny of music. He affirmed that, in fact, music was no more “the science of sounds” to musicians: “c’est celle des noires, des blanches, des croches, etc. Dès que ces figures cesseroient de frapper leurs yeux, ils ne croiroient plus voir de la Musique”<sup>92</sup>. With more interest in the means than in the aim, those musicians would not understand that signs different from the ordinary ones could be useful to write music and dictate sounds with equal or more efficiency than traditional quavers, crotchets, or half notes. There was no clearness and economy. Unclearness lay in the lack of relation between the sign and what meant to be represented; and the arrangement of signs on the staff provoked an exaggerated volume spreading of characters. That criticism could also be transferred to botanic literature; even to Linnaeus’s *Species plantarum* (1753). Rousseau firmly believed that words could be contracted. Moreover, he firmly believed that they could be replaced by symbols and ideograms, hieroglyphics of the highest simplicity; not by abbreviated forms sanctioned by use, but newly invented elements able to offer an idea of vegetal realities. Thus, Rousseau became, if not the designer of a new way of concision, at least the man who gave this new fashion the widest development

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<sup>91</sup> *Fragments pour un dictionnaire des termes d’usage en botanique*. In *Œuvres Complètes* (vol. IV, 1969), p. 1206.

<sup>92</sup> *Dictionnaire de musique*. In *Œuvres Complètes* (vol. V, 1995), p. 935.



throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He invented approximately one thousand characters displayed in several lists, which are nowadays preserved in the Public Library of Neuchâtel<sup>93</sup>.

Rousseau's unusual task had some precedents<sup>94</sup>. Symbols, in fact, were a means of scientific language before he invented his. And chemistry, a science he was familiar with, had inherited from ancient alchemists a good number of well-known symbols. Linnaeus's *Species plantarum* gathered some of them. Alchemy had used the ♀ ♂ symbols to refer to iron and copper; Linnaeus incorporated them to his work, forgot their alchemic meanings, and decided to use them to signal sexes: ♀ for feminine and ♂ for masculine. He used already existing material, but gave it biological meaning. The initiative of this Swedish botanist, which very probably came from an urge to abbreviate descriptions, must have inspired Rousseau, as perhaps did Michel Adanson's *Familles des plantes* (1763), which informed about the advantages botany could get from the adoption of ideographic language.

Kobayashi (2012) classified them into four types: *arbitraires* – with no direct relation between what is represented and how it is represented; *phonétiques* – when the sign is an abbreviation; *indicatifs* – when they indicate place or location; and *figuratifs* – when they convey outlines or sketches of the parts meant<sup>95</sup>. Numbers and mathematical signs could be added as a fifth type to

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<sup>93</sup> There are three lists. A fourth one, kept for some time in Botanisches Museum Berlin, got lost during the Second World War. Its title *Caractères de botanique* originates from manuscript Neuchâtel 's MsR 21. In Takuya Kobayashi (*op. cit.*, p. 264, note 1).

<sup>94</sup> On this issue, see William T. Stearn, *Botanical Latin* (London: David & Charlie, 1966), particularly chapter XXIV "Symbols and abbreviations."

<sup>95</sup> Ducourthial en *op. cit.*, presents a similar classification and deals with "abréviations", "chiffres", "signes imitatifs," and "signes arbitraires". Kobayashi excludes numbers, perhaps because they mostly adopt an auxiliary role. For example, class *Triandria* holds a super-indexed 3 beneath with a shaft supporting an equilateral triangle.

this classification, as Rousseau uses the dash sign (-) in terms such as *duplo* or *duplum*, and the equal sign (=) in *aequalis* or *inaequalis*. From these five sign types, the figurative one is the largest and perhaps that which offers a more exact picture of Rousseau’s inventive geniality, as can be shown in the examples below referring to different terms:







<i>Corona</i> (MsR 80)			
<i>Cuculatus</i> (MsR 80)			
<i>Flos</i> (MsR 80)			
<i>Macula</i> (MsR 80)			
<i>Semen</i> (MsR 80)			
<i>Umbella</i> (MsR 80)			

Image 2: From Guy Ducourthial, *La botanique selon Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris: Belin, 2009)


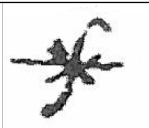





- The term *corona* is represented as a basket consisting of three lobes supported by an arc (a simple horizontal line underneath) and a cross on top of the central lobe,

- *Cucullatus* –adjective which means to express hoodish shape – is represented by an upright shaft holding a ring from a sort of hood oriented to the northwest comes up.
- *Flos* is a three-petal flower.
- *Macula* is a simple ink stain.
- *Semen* is an homunculus with a dot in the middle.
- *Umbella*, is an inverted triangle divided in three equal inverted triangles, etc.

Some of these symbols, with adjustments and extra features, are used to introduce specific information. Thus, the *f* abbreviation corresponding to *folium* occurs a dozen of times; if the leaf is radical – *folium radicale* – Rousseau draws an x-shape across its lower part; if it is *florale*, the x-shape is drawn across its upper part; if it is *inferius*, an inverted eyebrow shaped curved line occurs beneath the *f*. In this way, the word *folium* means leaf, but the abbreviation *f* turns up to be the stylish image of a plant open to the broadest descriptions. Exceptionally, Rousseau also states some usage standards: “The colon [:],” he points out, “turns the

noun into adjective”; therefore, while *petalum* is *p*, *petalinum* is *p*∴.

Rousseau wrote no introduction to his *Characters of Botany*, which prevented us from knowing the exact reasons that made him undertake such an enterprise, in what circumstances he performed it, and how much time he devoted to it. We have been provided, however, with some of his friends’ beautiful records, particularly François de Chambrier’s, Pierre Prévost’s, and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s<sup>96</sup>. The three of them visited Rousseau in his old age, and

	Folium caulinum (MsR 80)		Folium inferius (MsR 80)	
Folium (MsR 80)	Folium florale (MsR 80)		Foliosus radicale (MsR 80)	
	Folium incisum (MsR 80)		Follium superius (MsR 80)	

the three of them were equally drawn to the project their friend was shaping throughout his last two or three years of life. The news

<sup>96</sup> Ducourthial in *op. cit.* (ch. VIII: “Deux outils pédagogiques”, pp. 301 y 302), quotes the three men’s report.

they provide are of high interest, but one in particular deserves to be mentioned: Rousseau's enterprise was one conceived only for himself, one that, once concluded, may have served as some kind of Linnaeus's *Species Plantarum* portable substitute. Linnaeus's work was in fact too large, and that characteristic meant a serious inconvenience for those who could not do without them. Rousseau used it in his herborizations, and herborizing required freedom of movement, lightness, and easiness. None of that was offered by his *Linnaeus*. His solution to the problem was to make up an *écriture abrégée*. Linnaeus's description, containing only that which was essential, could not be trimmed, but they could still concentrate in symbolic formulas of "8 to 10 characters". That was Rousseau's objective: to create a symbol factory through which descriptions could be concentrated, to get rid of Linnaeus's work, and taking some benefit from it at the same time.

## A Review of the Theoretical Bases of the Beats' Repudiation of Capitalism

Ehsan Emami Neyshaburi

### *Abstract*

The Beats perceived the ideals of corporate capitalism to be corrupting and destructive annihilating their individuality and freedom of choice. According to them, capitalism was as much of a dictatorship as communism. The Beats strived to introduce spirituality as an alternative to the materialism propagated by capitalism. They also believed that this system was so irrational that it led to wars and the invention and use of the nuclear bomb. They were discontented with American capitalism because it tried to socio-politically control the citizens. They claimed to have rejected or at least escaped capitalism which is debatable and the paper shows that in some cases they did not manage to do that.

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### *Introduction*

Capitalism, also called the Market Economy and Free Enterprise Economy, came to the fore after the collapse of

feudalism and since then many thinkers have, on account of its negative effects, excoriated it severely and some others believe that it is still the best economic system in which a country's businesses and industry are controlled and run for profit. Some critics assert that capitalism auctions off nature and idealism (Burns 21) and some aver that it focuses only on profit and is not "sentimental over human life" (qtd. in Yannella, 15) and considers consumers as helpless sheep and still some others contend that in capitalism a group ethos is impossible to shape up; greed and corruption culminate; self-reliance and conscience will be at risk of loss and eventually "the game is fixed, the deck stacked against the weaker players" (McDonald 97). The Beats, in turn, were of course amongst those who criticized capitalism for its oppression, repression, alienation, and irrationality. Unanimously, they held capitalism responsible for the dire situation in which they lived. Ginsberg in *Howl*, for example, takes capitalism responsible for the destruction of the best minds of his generation: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, /dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix" (Schumacher 21). Capitalism, as a matter of fact, makes those who cannot conform or adjust themselves to the system consider themselves mad and different from the rest and deserving of bitter denunciation. In *Howl*, Moloch, a god in some ancient religions for whom children were sacrificed, is the capitalist system:

Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and  
unobtainable dollars! Children screaming under the  
stairways! Boys sobbing in armies! /Old men weeping  
in the parks! /Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of

Moloch! Moloch the loveless! Mental Moloch!  
Moloch the heavy judger of men! /Moloch the  
incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone  
soulless jailhouse and Congress of sorrows! Moloch  
whose buildings are judgment! Moloch the vast stone  
of war! Moloch the stunned governments! /Moloch  
whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood  
is running money! Moloch whose fingers are ten  
armies! Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo!  
Moloch whose ear is a smoking tomb (Schumacher  
23)!

So, Moloch, as Ginsberg mentions, is “the vision of the mechanical feelingless inhuman world” in which we live and accept (Schumacher 240). In other words, he had discovered that Moloch was keen on “burying alive the curative power of the visionary imagination” (Roszak 128). Ginsberg also says that the key line in this section is “Moloch whom I abandon! Wake up in Moloch” (Schumacher 23)! Moloch is the god of Ginsberg’s parental generation that he claims to have abandoned or rejected. Here, Ginsberg purports that he has managed to extricate himself from the tangles of the capitalist society which is a highly debatable point and we will deal with it in this article as a claim made almost by all the Beats.

### *Old Capitalism VS. New Capitalism*

Fromm makes a distinction between the nineteenth and twentieth-century capitalism. Capitalism in the former period was “truly private” (88) and the capitalist had a personal interest in possession and property. Oppression, discipline,



and obedience were the most important characteristics of the relation between the capitalist and his workforce. Briefly then, we can say that “the social character of the nineteenth century was essentially competitive, hoarding, exploitative, authoritarian, aggressive, individualistic” (96). Fromm continues that in the twentieth-century instead of competitiveness, we find a tendency toward teamwork; instead of ever increasing profit, a penchant for secure and steady income; and instead of exploitation, a wish to spread and share wealth. Far more important, overt authority in the nineteenth century, Fromm submits, changes into anonymous authority in the twentieth century; that is, the authority of public opinion and the market (96). But in the twentieth century, although industrial relations have become less exploitative, social relations less authoritative, and material conditions much better, and although oppression, in comparison with the nineteenth century, has been removed, man is not still free because as Fromm quotes Adlai Stevenson “we are not in danger of becoming slaves any more, but of becoming robots” (99). Fromm reiterates that

There is no overt authority which intimidates us, but we are governed by the fear of the anonymous authority of conformity. We do not submit to anyone personally; we do not go through conflicts with authority, but we have also no convictions of our own, almost no individuality, almost no sense of self (99-100).

In fact, autonomy has not replaced the nineteenth-century’s authoritarianism in the twentieth century but irrational subservience to the laws of the market has replaced it and “the

laws of the market, like God's will, are beyond the reach of your will and influence" (134) and from here loss of individuality exudes. The Beats, accordingly, felt a deep sense of revulsion against conformity and absence of individuality that capitalism firmly demanded.

According to Marcuse, the capitalist system promises to bring about an increasingly comfortable life for the people who "cannot imagine a ... different universe of discourse and action" (*Dimensional* 26) because this society basically tends to contain and manipulate subversive imagination and this is exactly what happened to the Beats. In other words, as C. Wright Mills emphasizes, those who hold power in this democratic state "are moving from authority to manipulation" (110). Edward Sanders in his book about Ginsberg's life has printed a secret document sent out by the CIA which declares that Ginsberg is "potentially dangerous" (53) and therefore should be manipulated. Or Ginsberg himself had once seen an FBI document indicating that the Bureau had kept him under surveillance for some time and "described how once I left the house & entered an automobile" (119). Holton, Skerl reports, believes that capitalism even manipulates wars. At the time of World War II for example, all the intellectual and industrial resources were mobilized for the war effort. Being inattentive to the critical intellectual, capitalism drew everybody into supporting the struggle against fascism; social criticism was disappeared or was transformed into organs of the war effort (*Reconstructing* 13-14). Like Fromm, Marcuse also believes that people become subservient to the system but he argues, too, that society, in the process of production, fulfills the need for liberation by satisfying the needs which make subservience

palatable and even unnoticeable (26). The twentieth-century capitalism, Marcuse mentions, is a world to which the individual must adapt himself. This world is not essentially hostile and does not necessarily deny his innermost needs but instead, preconditions him to spontaneously accept what the system offers to him (*Dimensional* 77). Riesman takes manipulation as positive. Saying that no one prefers to return to the nineteenth century brutalization of early industrial revolution, he concludes that manipulative persuasion, which characterizes the twentieth-century capitalism, is to be preferred to force (159-60). However, the Beats were dead set against such a persuasion because they regarded American society as intelligent but not reasonable. Accordingly, reason implies understanding and intelligence does manipulation and control and they really preferred the former.

### *Alienation*

Alienation perhaps is the most deleterious effect of capitalism and according to Fromm touches “upon the deepest level of the modern personality” (107). Edgar defines alienation as “the estrangement of humanity from its society, and its essential or potential nature” and identifies four consequences of it: powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self-estrangement (9-10). Gold submits that when you believe your actions are not altogether willed, you are, in fact, alienated (152). Capitalism, according to Marxists, alienates labourers from themselves and from each other by considering them in terms of production, as objects rather than human beings. As a matter of fact, the ownership by one class of the objectified labour of another, leads to alienation;

there is a conflict of interest between capitalist and worker because both the means of production and the product produced by labourers are controlled by the capitalist system. Labourers become powerless, as Edgar says, because they feel that they cannot influence the production process and they experience meaninglessness because they feel that they are unable to identify their contribution to the product. So, Marxism refers to alienation mostly as an economic consequence of capitalism but conversely, in case of the Beats who were alienated from American society, alienation, as Skerl quotes Holton, was “a cultural position, a consequence of the homogeneity of modernity” (*Reconstructing* 13). To bring about homogeneity or sameness, American society demanded conformity and in this process stifled visionary imagination and any difference or heterogeneity. The Beats, as a result, did not feel comfortable in their own country, hence their itchy feet and many trips to other countries. Or having recourse to Jazz, Eyerman contends, they expressed their alienation from the mainstream American culture (135). It is not accidental, too, that Sal in *On the Road* instead of the modern consumer culture, identifies himself with its garbage (Kerouac, 142) or in general the Beats, fascinated themselves with the ‘social dregs’ of American society such as Herbert Huncke. The primary aim of political activity “must therefore be to eliminate alienation, to achieve a society in which there is no conflict between private and public interest, a society in which men will be really free” (Harrison-Barbet 265) and this was what the Beats actually wanted.

The Beats objected to American society’s materialism; most of them did not have steady jobs and ran a hand-to-mouth life via writing (Burroughs might be an exception). They had

realized that, as Roszak reiterates, wherever non-human entities assume more importance than human beings, alienation comes into existence and paves the way for self-righteous misuse of others as sole objects (58). By the same token, Marcuse and Brown emphasize that alienation is mainly psychic not sociological and is a disease rooted inside all people and if a revolution is supposed to free mankind from alienation, it must be therapeutic in character and not solely institutional (Roszak 95-7). It is not accidental then that Fromm speaks of an affinity between alienation and insanity: 'aliênê' and 'alienado' are respectively French and Spanish older words for the psychotic and 'alienist' in English is still used for the doctor who deals with the insane (117). The word 'mad' that Kerouac uses in *On the Road* multiple times implies the concept of alienation. Because of its materialist essence, capitalism "*puts man in second place ... he is alienated from his nature and his true needs*" (Fromm xxxi). In his discussion of alienation, Fromm speaks of *quantification* and *abstractification*. Each man is referred to as an abstract phenomenon and a figure; people have only different quantities but not different qualities; the concrete reality of an individual and their uniqueness are lost; we should say 'something' instead of 'someone' (108-11). Marcuse suggests that individuals in a capitalist society identify themselves with the existence which is imposed upon them. This identification is not illusion but reality, or absorption of ideology into reality. Marcuse, then, concludes that this reality constitutes a more progressive stage of alienation (*Dimensional* 13) which in turn, as Skerl quotes Holton, is conducive to "a loss of the ability to imagine alternatives" (*Reconstructing* 15). The Beats purported to have known this old trick of capitalism and tried to "Wake up in

Moloch” (Schumacher 23), constitute their own alternatives of reality, subjectivity, or consciousness in order to abandon or flee from Moloch.

### *Extrication from or Entanglement in Capitalism*

As mentioned above, the Beats claimed to have abandoned capitalism or have extricated themselves from it. This is highly debatable and many thinkers and critics have dealt with it and posed this basic question: is it possible to entirely transcend the umbrella of capitalist authority? Without question, cultural diversity or pluralism is a central feature of modern American society that is still encouraging it and as time goes by more cultural groups stake a claim to win respect and understanding from others. But we should not forget that all this diversity and pluralism take place within the scope of an overriding and dominant culture: capitalism with its strong discourses. Ratner submits that capitalism may allow individuals to repudiate particular instances of cultural concepts and behaviours but the overall patterns will remain intact (49). However, Jacoby questions this claim for diversity and enunciates that it is not real diversity but its opposite. In actuality, staking such a claim shows that capitalism is going to homogenize and standardize society and by the same token, cultural groups tend to resist: “as people feel threatened by standardization, they search out and cultivate differences” (159). Philip Slater also points out that when there is a prevailing view in a society, at opposite end of the spectrum there will be a human attitude or penchant that tends to refute, contort, or depart from it (Saleebey 177). And perhaps, as Lukacs argues, this is the same “process by which

life moulds men into members of a class" (*Studies* 209) and the result is class conflict because psychologically speaking, social dominance orientation (SDO), as a prejudicial attitude, causes one to desire "that one's in-group dominate or be superior to out-groups" (Bordens 116). This homogeneity or standardization that American society strived to impose was the main reason of the Beats' resistance or revolution. Many native voices and experiences have been stymied by this prevailing view and it is a great pity that social science knowledge and organizations instead of liberating people from the dominant institutional discourses, often support or at best, do not challenge them. Even psychotherapy is no exception. Doctor Benway's organization in *Naked Lunch* is a good example. Saari criticizes psychotherapy claiming that it has only helped the poor and the oppressed to adjust to a sick society and thereby cooperate with the institution in oppressing them (49). Social constructionism, in general, Ratner asserts, supports and justifies the status quo of capitalism (228).

In a capitalist society, as Marcuse mentions, freedom from want which is the concrete substance of all freedom becomes a real possibility and accordingly, in a society which seems capable of satisfying the needs of individuals, autonomy, independence of thought, and the right to opposition lose their critical function. Such a society has the faculty of, on the one hand, demanding acceptance of its principles and institutions and on the other, reducing the opposition to the promotion of alternative policies but only *within* the status quo. Additionally, Marcuse concludes, when living standards rise, non-conformity with the system becomes socially useless, and "the more so when it entails tangible economic and

political disadvantages and threatens the smooth operation of the whole" (*Dimensional* 4). The same thing happened to the Beats although we cannot say that their non-conformity was completely useless. Many people in American society of that time accused the Beats of laziness and therefore being disadvantageous to society. Kerouac and Burroughs consecutively changed their jobs and could not join the army to serve their country at the time of war. Dean, too, in *On the Road*, repeatedly changes jobs and chooses "freedom over work ... a hobo, a wanderer, taking a job only when necessary" (Foster 40). "We're really all of us bottomry broke. I haven't had time to work in weeks" Dean says (Kerouac 29). Simpson reports that Ginsberg, once working in a company, pointed out how much they could save by having an IBM machine to replace him and as a result, he was fired (70). But this is not the full story, of course. Fromm complains that the relationship between work and pleasure in modern societies is mechanical; work is not a mode of self-realization and satisfaction but a means to make money (xxxiv) and this is the true reason of the Beats' problem with work and jobs. Being examined by psychiatrists in the navy after he suddenly dropped his rifle and went to the library, Kerouac explained: "It's not that I *will* not accept discipline, it's that I *cannot*. I'm not a warrior, I'm a scholar" (Nicosia 104).

Marcuse reiterates that in this modern society mass production and mass distribution claim the *entire* individual and the corollary is not adjustment but *mimesis*, that is, an immediate identification of the individual with his society which leads to complete loss of individuality. This is a mental process during which, Marcuse points out, the inner dimension of the mind in which opposition to the status quo



can take shape is reduced (*Dimensional* 12-13) and at last thought is conquered by society (108). Such a society accords great importance to group activity and group decision-making. Organizations are therefore formed to prioritize the needs of groups and this “would stifle the individual” (Whyte 48). So, the organization man comes into existence and this existence, as Whyte understands, is based on a central fallacy called false collectivism (49); this is a type of man for whom

the search for better group techniques is something of a crusade—a crusade against authoritarianism, a crusade for more freedom, for more recognition of the man in the middle. The key word is “democratic”; with some justification the organization man argues that the old-style individualist was often far more of a bar to individualism in other people ... (Whyte 48).

In spite of all this, American culture has a “nominalist psychologistic” bias, Weigert believes, which tends to take atomistic individuals responsible for their happiness, success, failure, and in general, for their fate (57) and, as a result, conceal or ignore the role of society.

Greenblatt in his article “Towards Poetics of Culture”, expounds on the disagreement between Jameson and Lyotard over the function of capitalism. Jameson distinguishes between ‘individuals’ and ‘individual subjects’. Before capitalism arose, Jameson submits, we were integrated, whole, and agile because we were in fact, individual subjects and not individuals. Then, capitalism emerged and shattered this luminous and benign totality. So, he celebrates the materialist integration of all discourses but unfortunately, Jameson

complains, capitalism destroyed this integration and instead, brought about privatization and differentiation. According to Jameson, therefore, integration, unification, totalization, wholeness, and individual subjects are positive terms. Lyotard, as Greenblatt says, conversely, argues that capitalism wants a single language and a single network and destroys proper names. In other words, he celebrates the differentiation of all discourses but unfortunately, Lyotard complains, capitalism tends to destroy such a differentiation and instead, brings about totalization and integration. So, according to Lyotard, therefore, individuals, privatization, and differentiation are positive terms. Simultaneously and contradictorily, Greenblatt explains, capitalism is blamed for being both the agent of privacy and differentiation by Jameson and the destroyer of privacy and differentiation by Lyotard. Greenblatt, without fear of contradiction, refers to the distinct power of capitalism and enunciates that capitalism instead of the securing of a particular fixed position, has the ability to oscillate restlessly between these two modes: unification and differentiation. Other economic and social systems may ossify one of these two modes but capitalism, as Greenblatt uses Derrida's term, *circulates* inexhaustibly between the two (Veese 3-8). As a matter of fact, by circulation or oscillation Greenblatt means that capitalism is so extremely flexible that can adapt itself to every situation. Then, it is not accidental that many critics point out to the impossibility of extrication from capitalism and some go beyond this and conclude that the Beats who firmly claimed to have abandoned or escaped from capitalism and wanted to bring about difference in American society had in fact been digested in the system and were not cognizant of the peculiarities of capitalism. However, the Beats supported

Liotard's idea and like Bakhtin who preferred heteroglossia or multiplicity of dialogic art over the homogeneity and uniformity of monologic expression in the modern novel (60, 264, and 270), they preferred the same for America and by the same token, reflected a variety of different voices in their novels.

The goods and services that capitalism puts forward and its productive apparatus, Marcuse believes, 'sell' or impose the social system as a whole. Everything in the system including the means of mass transportation and mass communication, the commodities of lodging, clothing, food, and the entertainment and information industry propagate prescribed attitudes, habits, certain emotional, and intellectual reactions and all these bind the consumers to the producers and via the latter to the whole system. Marcuse continues that this system permeates "a pattern of *one-dimensional thought and behavior* in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe. They are redefined by the rationality of the given system and of its quantitative extension" (*Dimensional* 14). Not to mention of course that the Beats had already discovered one-dimensionality of American society and also its incapability of being rational. Marcuse emphasizes that the system's 'higher culture' has always been accommodating not through the rejection or denial of other cultural values but via their wholesale incorporation into its established order (*Dimensional* 60) and this is the confirmation of the flexibility to which Greenblatt points out. To exploit new markets and sell new lifestyles, capitalism appropriated the rebellion of all sixties movements (Echols 48) and the Beat movement was

no exception according to Marcuse. He reiterates that the reign of such a one-dimensional reality does not mean that other modes do not find the opportunity to emerge but due to capitalism's high flexibility and its capability of adaptation, these modes of protest and transcendence, including the Beat, are not contradictory to the status quo any longer; they are not negative or harmful and therefore are gradually digested by the system (*Dimensional* 16). Accordingly, the Beats "are no longer images of another way of life but rather freaks or types of the same life, serving as an affirmation rather than negation of the established order" (62).

The highest civilization that mankind enjoys at the time of capitalism, Marcuse argues, by no means guarantees freedom. The intellectual and material achievements of mankind seem to create a truly free world for him but, in fact, the more intensified progress he makes the more he seems to be bound up with intensified unfreedom so that the most effective subjugation and destruction of him, Marcuse purports, comes about at the height of civilization. He counts mass extermination, atom bombs, world wars, and concentration camps not as relapse into barbarism but as the inevitable result of man's technological development and domination (Roszak 102). Lukacs also stresses this unfreedom in capitalism: "... in imagination, individuals seem more free under the dominance of the *bourgeoisie* than before, because their conditions of life seem accidental, in reality, of course, they are less free ..." (*Studies* 208). According to Freud, as Fromm explains, man in society is torn between two alternatives. He can find happiness via unrestricted satisfaction of his instincts or enjoy cultural achievements and security based on instinctual frustration. Freud concludes that

civilization is actually the result of man's instinctual frustration. His basic concept is that of a 'homo sexualis'. There is a similar concept, too: that of a 'homo economicus'. Fromm reports that economists like Ricardo and the Manchester school translated Darwin's theory of 'struggle for survival' into the sphere of economy. Accordingly, both the economic and sexual man have the same characteristics in common: asocial, competitive, greedy, and isolated. This kind of alleged temperament makes capitalism seem a system that perfectly corresponds to human nature and as a result, places it beyond the reach of criticism (74). Fromm concludes that in the East Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* and in the West Huxley's *Brave New World* describe the direction of civilization. In both worlds man is like robots and lives in a robotic system in which he simply dies. According to Fromm, man has only two alternatives: total destruction or a rediscovery of his humanity (351). Famously, the Beats firmly repudiated instinctual frustration and conversely, believed in the free play of the unconscious; Dean in *On the Road* beautifully exemplifies a character who prioritizes his libidinal activities: "to him sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life, although he had to sweat and curse to make a living and so on" (Kerouac 4). In addition, many critics almost unanimously say that the Beats were in quest of a humanity apart from the one that the twentieth-century civilization had put forward but whether they were successful is another matter.

Although the Beats purported to have abandoned or escaped from capitalism, Marcuse, considering capitalism's flexibility and the capabilities of its apparatus, decides that it blocks all escape and as mentioned above, it "takes place on a material

ground of increased satisfaction" (*Dimensional* 75). In accordance with Marcuse, Sterritt believes that although the Beats are regarded as a source of ornery and flamboyant criticism of American dream, they fell prey to the temptation to reinforce and reproduce the hegemonic assumptions (3). Althusser, too, enunciates that authorities and establishments reproduce themselves:

self-empowered authorities, establishments, and systems have consolidated the power to reproduce themselves and their effects by seizing the attention of individuals ... through what he calls Ideological State Apparatuses, social institutions that seduce the inherently fragmented self with the illusion of monadic coherence, upon which further illusions may be built for the benefit of the entrenched power system (Sterritt 80).

Of course, it is true that the Beats sometimes fell prey to capitalism but it should be elaborated that they at least destroyed the established hierarchy of America's values and mixed high and low cultures in negation of capitalism. They also brought about "new meaning, a new place for human corporeality" (Bakhtin, 170). Accordingly, Eyerman complains that "responsibility for change is usually attributed either to anonymous, universal forces, such as modernization, capitalism, or imperialism, or to charismatic leaders and powerful individuals" and strives to give pride of place to social movements, like the Beat, which act as "central catalyst of broader changes in values, ideas, and ways of life" and in this way, gives social movements "the recognition they deserve as key agents of cultural transformation" (7).

Roszak reiterates that those who dissent must be resourceful enough to avoid being digested in this society. He exemplifies Bob Dylan, Vanessa Redgrave, and even Herbert Marcuse who, as dissenters, fell prey to capitalism. He quotes Marcuse who had accepted this: "I'm very much worried about this ... At the same time it is a beautiful verification of my philosophy, which is that in this society everything can be co-opted, everything can be digested" (70-1). As mentioned above, Marcuse had the same idea about the Beats and rejected them completely and claimed that instead of presenting a different way of life, they only produced freaks whose corollary was affirmation of the status quo rather than its negation. Van den Haag and Brustein state that the Beats, in actuality, were conformists and only masqueraded as rebels (Belgrad 239). Max Weber, too, sees the bureaucratic capitalism as an 'iron cage' within which man is caught and to which he can only resign himself with stoicism (Riesman xxxv). According to Eagleton's one definition of ideology as "the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power-structure and power-relations of the society we live in" (*Theory* 13), Sal Paradise in *On the Road* is suffering from ideology, a false consciousness imposed upon him by society and "feeling that everything was dead" (Kerouac 4), but the difference is that Sal, as opposed to many others, has waked up in Moloch and therefore, is cognizant of this situation and goes the extra mile to extricate himself from it and the result is nothing but fatigue and despair and eventually his return to the sedentary life of his aunt. Enunciating the same idea, Barthes, instead of ideology, uses the word 'myths':

For the very end of myths is to immobilize the world: they must suggest and mimic a universal order which has fixated once and for all the hierarchy of possessions. Thus, every day and everywhere, man is stopped by myths, referred by them to this motionless prototype which lives in his place, stifles him in the manner of a huge internal parasite and assigns to his activity the narrow limits within which he is allowed to suffer without upsetting the world (156).

D'Angelo, Elkholy reports, points out to Ginsberg's idea that the state should be rejected. The state, in fact, is not real because it is not a person. Only persons are real and exist through their private consciousness. So, Ginsberg continues, the Beats came to the conclusion that they were in the midst of a vast American hallucination brought about by American media and paid for by the CIA. When we compete and struggle for wealth, when we do not have any natural feeling of tenderness for each other and are separated, the state seems to be necessary. Perhaps the only way to overcome the state, Ginsberg thought, was through a revolution in consciousness (237-38) and it is not accidental that the Beat movement has often been called a revolutionary movement.

Having recourse to social psychology, Reich observes that the oppressed and exploited often identify with oppressive and repressive forces. Out of insecurity or a desire to get themselves rid of the burden of independent thought, these groups and individuals accept external domination (King 71). Perhaps this can be held true for Sal in *On the Road* but not for Dean. Sal finds no security outside American institution and at last gives up and again adopts a sedentary life and



marries a girl, both of which are approved by society; Larson calls this a “reassertion of traditional normative relationships and stable social structures” (Holladay 54). Goodman complains about the capitalist system, too. The system, he says, “muffles the voices of dissent” and purports that itself is the only possible society and nothing else is thinkable. When there are no alternatives people put up with a system (x-xi). Goodman also states something that perhaps justifies the Beats’ behaviour:

If an organized society perfects itself, there is less “open” environment ... if society becomes too tightly integrated and pre-empts all the available space, materials, and methods, then it is failing to provide ... real risk, novelty, spontaneity, that makes growth possible. This ... drives young people out of the organized system altogether and makes creative adults loath to co-operate with it. When time, clothes, opinions, and goals become so regulated that people feel that they cannot be “themselves” or create something new, they bolt and look for fringes and margins, loopholes, holes in the wall, or they just run (129).

According to Martinez, this marginalization is, of course, a defensive self-marginalization against attacks of society targeting individualist mobilities (111). In some cases, if the Beats felt that they could not change capitalism’s cultural homogeneity, at least they could evade it and accordingly, as Holton points out, “provided the site for a centrifugal cultural space in the midst of a centripetal cultural moment” (Holladay 61); hence their many trips to other countries such

as Mexico. As Goodman stresses, American society puts forward an either/or choice; either the individual accepts the system or dissents totally from it and stands as a lonely human being (134). Dean, as opposed to Sal, does not give up and at the end of the novel, loneliness is his fate.

Adorno asserts that those who criticize society are part of it and cannot escape from it; the implication is that the Beats' escape from capitalism is only a boast on their part: "The cultural critic is not happy with civilization, to which alone he owes his discontent. He speaks as if he represented either unadulterated nature or a higher historical stage. Yet he is necessarily of the same essence as that to which he fancies himself superior" (19). The Beats knew power relations but according to Foucault, knowing does not lead to a total escape from power relations (Gutting 51). In fact, they knew that what society imposed upon them were not universal truths but "contingencies masked as necessities" (Gutting 60) or as Eagleton avers "socially necessary illusion" (*ideology* 2). It is axiomatic that Sal's escape from capitalism is not permanent. His life seems stuck in limbo; he cannot go forward and he cannot go back at least for some time. Swartz mentions the idea of liminality derived from the anthropologist Victor Turner. According to Turner, young people in tribal communities, to become full-fledged members, should pass through three stages of 'preliminary', 'liminal', and 'post liminal'. In the liminal stage, young people go beyond their pubescent and community consciousness and step into an 'other' world which breaks from their culture but at last, they get back to their community and assume a more structured role in society. Sal in *On the Road* is stuck in the second stage; he neither joins

Dean's world nor the world of the *fellahin* (Terry's world in *On the Road* for example). In other words, Sal neither belongs to the old or rejected reality nor to the new consciousness that he is striving to receive from Dean. So, Sal is in a liminal stage and loses his identity. However, this marginality does not last for a long time and the result is Sal's reaggregation or his tender embrace of the normative capitalist system. The visionary world that Sal and Dean experience in the liminal stage is completely at odds with the social reality (95-8). In the following excerpt from *On the Road*, Sal refers to this disparity when Dean shows him a photo of a recent adventure:

Dean took out other pictures. I realized these were all the snapshots which our children would look at someday with wonder, thinking their parents had lived smooth, well-ordered, stabilized-within-the-photo lives and got up in the morning to walk proudly on the sidewalks of life, never dreaming the raggedy madness and riot of our actual lives, our actual night, the hell of it, the senseless nightmare road. All of it inside endless and beginningless emptiness. Pitiful forms of ignorance (147).

Of course, Swartz confesses that Dean's position is different from Sal's (95). As opposed to Sal, Dean remains in the 'other' world to his dying day and doing this he, in fact, defeats capitalism. Swartz reiterates too, that through the use of drugs and alcohol, Sal and Dean or respectively in their real life, Kerouac and Cassady insisted on remaining in their liminal states (97). Dean emphasizes this: "Now dammit, look here, all of you, we all must admit that everything is fine

and there's no need in the world to worry, and in fact we should realize what it would mean to us to UNDERSTAND that we're not REALLY worried about ANYTHING. Am I right?" (80).

### *Defeat of Capitalism?*

Using other methods, too, Dean Moriarty manages to defeat capitalism. For Dean, Carden enunciates, "the free exercise of masculinity means consumption without cost" and opposing the system in which financial relations are very highly regarded, Dean consumes cars and women as "the ultimate icons of a capitalist economy based in male dominance" without paying any money (Holladay 83). In *On the Road*, Dean professionally steals cars: "Man, that's a detective's car and every precinct in town knows my fingerprints from the year that I stole five hundred cars. You see what I do with them, I just want a ride, man! I gotta go" (130) or "he set a Denver record for stealing cars and went to the reformatory" (25). And "when I was working for the New Era Laundry ... hiking by day and stealing cars by night to make time (25). Or "Dean rushed out the next moment and stole a car right from the driveway and took a dash to downtown Denver and came back with a newer, better one" (128). Women, Carden continues, are representatives of the bourgeois household and the centre of capitalist consumption. If this is so, conquering women, as a matter of fact, Dean Moriarty overcomes the society that has punished and humiliated him (Holladay 83). In *On the Road* there are many instances that illuminate Dean's relations with women. "His specialty was stealing cars, gunning for girls coming out of high school in the afternoon,

driving them out to the mountains, making them, and coming back to sleep in any available hotel bathtub in town” (25). Dean simultaneously conquers two or three women and have relations with them; to do this he is working to a tight schedule:

Dean is balling Marylou at the hotel ... At one sharp he rushes from Marylou to Camille--of course neither one of them knows what's going on--and bangs her once ... Then at six he goes back to Marylou--and he's going to spend all day tomorrow running around to get the necessary papers for their divorce. Marylou's all for it, but she insists on banging in the interim. She says she loves him--so does Camille (28).

He is not ready to pay the cost even when his wife, Camille, gives birth to a baby:

I learned that Dean had lived happily with Camille in San Francisco ever since that fall of 1947; he got a job on the railroad and made a lot of money. He became the father of a cute little girl, Amy Moriarty. Then suddenly he blew his top while walking down the street one day. He saw a '49 Hudson for sale and rushed to the bank for his entire roll. He bought the car on the spot. Ed Dunkel was with him. Now they were broke. Dean calmed Camille's fears and told her he'd be back in a month (65).

Or when Inez gives birth to an illegitimate child of Dean: “Camille gave birth to Dean's second baby ... and Inez had a baby. With one illegitimate child ... Dean then had four little

ones and not a cent, and was all troubles and ecstasy and speed as ever" (143). In another excerpt, Dean and his friend Ed meet a girl who is living on her savings in San Francisco. To pay the cost of the journey they decide to bring her along. She says she will not go unless Ed marries her. For the sake of the money Ed marries her but as soon as the money is run out they leave her in a motel and give her the slip with no qualms. Or Dean wants Sal to have sex with Marylou because as Sal conjectures he wants to see what she was like with another man.

Marriage, formal education, work, traditional religion, and the military, as the cornerstones of American society and culture, are rejected in *On the Road*. In the first lines of the novel the narrator, Sal Paradise, speaks of failure in marriage, illness, weariness, and death: "I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up. I had just gotten over a serious illness that I won't bother to talk about, except that it had something to do with the miserably weary split-up and my feeling that everything was dead" (4). Introducing Dean, Sal repudiates the old life and promises a new beginning, a new life: "With the coming of Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road" (4). In actuality, Sal is fed up with the old system of life and is going to bring about a new one. Swartz, as Bloom reports, states that Kerouac, to oppose the old system, broke all loyalties to parents, country, and God. These loyalties, as a matter of fact, placed discourses on young people forcing them to think and feel in certain ways (*Road* 171). The 1950s were the time of Cold War and American society suspected anything that was different. The United States government feared communism and started mass witch hunts accusing many Americans of

protecting the American political Left; the Beats were considered as dangerous communists and derogatively were called Beatniks, a name derived from Sputnik, the Russian spacecraft. The government constantly reminded people that the American way of life was at risk and about to end; it was threatened by many things but the most important menace was plurality propagated especially by the Beats. So, to maintain the status quo, the government had to control and manipulate people. Despite being threatened by the status quo, the Beats called for plurality; they were not communists or socialists of course; they insisted on the satisfaction of corporeal desires and having novel experiences. Without question, what the Beats' works suggested were completely different from what the young people received from their parents, schools, churches, and the government. The Beats inculcated that it was not communism that was the enemy of American society; the real threat was the institution that imposed social limitations and pressures on people.

The Beats were also at odds with their capitalist society concerning the idea of utopianism. They saw utopianism in individuality and American society saw it in collectivism. "The former ... celebrates pluralism, diversity, individual ... the latter ... desires uniformity, harmony, conformity and stasis" (qtd in Elkholy 37). Burroughs in *Naked Lunch* lampoons capitalism or "Naked Mr. America" who shouts: "My asshole confounds the Louvre! I fart ambrosia and shit pure gold turds! My cock spurts soft diamonds in the morning sunlight" (41). Swartz describes the capitalist society of that time in this way: "The dominant culture of commercialism and suburbia was reified and grounded in myths and rationalizations that served two purposes: they

limited thought by making it seem as if the world as *presented* was the world as it *has to be*, and they helped to obscure the terrible price paid for corporate and commercial America among the disenfranchised" (29-30). It, in fact, justified the status quo. In general, capitalism "always represents above all a reign of 'reification', of fragmentation of humanity ..." (Slaughter 141). American society, Swartz continues, defined safety and security in accordance with the notion that what was necessarily good for America was what was good for corporations (30). In the 1950s and especially '60s those who had been long-ignored in American society formed liberation movements and severely called into question many norms, ideas, and expectations that had been considered as highly important. 'Big houses', 'new cars', 'trips to warmer areas in the winter', and 'life insurances' (Wilson 10) were values that all contributed to the capitalist system and these movements, of course, criticized them as corporate values. The Beats were no exception; they "questioned the mythology of the American Holy Trinity—Progress, Money, Science" (Swartz 30). Harris believes that *Junkie* is an ironic critic of capitalist relations. The book's preface, as Harris says, emphasizes that Lee's descent into addiction is determined by the *anomie* of his economic freedom. During the war Lee becomes an addict which is a turning point in his life and Harris quotes the following lines from the novel that clearly depict the relation between Lee and money: "It was at this time and under these circumstances that I came in contact with junk, became an addict, and thereby gained the motivation, the real need for money I had never had before" (*Fascination* 62). Harris maintains that addiction becomes a positive gain because it teaches Lee the real value and necessity of money. It is to be accepted that the only meaningful economy is the one in



which the need for money is real and of value; money is the only source of satisfaction and motivation. Although junk contests social norms through deviance, “the addict simply sees no legal or moral difference in the life cycle of capital” (62). In fact, junk represents another business economy “where spiritual needs are translated into material forms that can be satisfied by the consumption of commodities” (62) and as Lukacs contends “it becomes the way of life, the decisive determinant of thoughts and emotions (*Studies* 163) and causes human beings to be “transformed into parts of an inhuman machine” (*Studies* 163). Lukacs even goes beyond this and reiterates that such conditions that capitalism brings about turn man into a beast (*Meaning* 35).

According to Burroughs, junk is very akin to capitalism and “Like capitalism, it is the ultimate control system and the one on which, for Burroughs at least, all others are modelled. Ruthlessly exposing the workings of consumer culture, junk reveals the lie behind the commodity’s promise of bliss” (Savran 100). In *Naked Lunch* Burroughs describes junk in capitalistic terms:

Junk is the ideal product ... the ultimate merchandise. No sales talk necessary. The client will crawl through a sewer and beg to buy ... The junk merchant does not sell his product to the consumer, he sells the consumer to his product. He does not improve and simplify his merchandise. He degrades and simplifies the client ... Junk yields a basic formula of evil virus: *The Algebra of Need*. The face of evil is always the face of total need ... You would lie, cheat, inform on your friends, steal, do *anything* to satisfy total need (3-40).

In this excerpt Burroughs truly realizes that the power of both junk and commodity is “addictive” (Savran 99). Junk, just like capitalism produces a ‘need’ in the consumer that can never be satiated and the consumer is always in total need. Even the authorities, Burroughs symbolically theorizes, cannot extricate themselves from capitalism and become its victims: “The President is a junky but can’t take it direct because of his position. So he gets fixed through me” (36). However, the Beats, like Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*, were aiming for “a whole life of noninterference with the wishes of others, including politicians and the rich, and nobody bothers you and you cut along and make it your own way” (Kerouac 146). In other words, they wished to go beyond the scope of capitalism and claimed to have escaped from it but this claim is still in question. Mentioning the idea of masculinity in Burroughs’ works, Russell, for example, argues that Burroughs was unable to free himself from the restrictions of American society (15). Burroughs’ model of homosexuality in which the two sides must be masculine gives no place to women or even effeminate gay men and masculinity has always had pride of place in American culture. Accordingly “Burroughs’ post-Stonewall gay characters are always prepared to defend their sexuality and prove their status as men through violence” (Russell 91). Frank asserts that the counterculture of the 1950s and ‘60s enhanced capitalism’s efficiency:

rebel youth culture remains the cultural mode of the corporate moment, used to promote not only specific products but the general idea of life in the cyber-revolution. Commercial fantasies of rebellion,

liberation, and outright "revolution" against the stultifying demands of mass society are commonplace almost to the point of invisibility in advertising, movies, and television programming. For some, Ken Kesey's parti-colored bus may be a hideous reminder of national unraveling, but for Coca-Cola it seemed a perfect promotional instrument for its "Fruitopia" line, and the company has proceeded to send replicas of the bus around the country to generate interest in the counterculturally themed beverage. Nike shoes are sold to the accompaniment of words delivered by William S. Burroughs ... (4).

So, it could be said that, "business dogged the counterculture with a fake counterculture, a commercial replica that seemed to ape its every move for the titillation of the TV-watching millions and the nation's corporate sponsors" (Frank 7).

### *Conclusion*

Some critics point out that in their relation to the underprivileged and marginalized groups the Beats fell prey to capitalism. Although they resisted the official thought and main discourses of American society, "these putative nonconformists hardly escaped the monologizing tendencies of the sociocultural ethos surrounding them" (Sterritt 15). Nicosia refers to Kerouac's anti-Semitism and his memories of being humiliated by some rich Jews (415). Dittman, too, refers to Kerouac's appalling anti-Semitism (90). Once Kerouac's mother opined that "Hitler should have finished the job [on the Jews]" (qtd. in Dittman 103) and he

concurred with her. In 1961, he complained of “the Jew Talk of critics” who criticized his works and sometimes insulted him and their “Jewish conspiracy against him” (qtd. in Dittman 103). It is reputed that Kerouac insulted the Jews in front of Ginsberg, himself a Jew. Also in Burroughs’ works there are some streaks of anti-Semitism: “He look like Jewish owl with black glasses” (69) or “all a Jew wants to do is doodle a Christian girl” (87). Once Brion Gysin, his friend and collaborator, objected to such sentences in some of his novels and Burroughs’ interesting answer was that these ideas were not expressed by him but by his characters. Additionally, Kerouac supported Hitler. Charters reports that he eagerly corroborated Ann Morrow Lindbergh’s book *The Wave of the Future: A Confession of Faith* (1940) in which she had enunciated that Nazism would be one of the forces of the future and not one of the forces of evil. Kerouac justified that Hitlerism had promised economic freedom; that all shall eat (28). Although African Americans almost have a better situation in the Beats’ works and the Beats mixed with and befriended them and used their accent and jazz music, some people believe that the Beats were insensitive to the black’s struggle against oppression and accordingly, did not take action at all to change their dire situation and in this case, they again contributed to a society that put the white on a pedestal and oppressed the black. However, within or without capitalism, the Beats foregrounded the economic inequalities and political domination in America and above all, criticized their society in order to make it a better place to live in. It is not of course easy to say that the Beats completely fell prey to capitalism because in this case, some questions should be raised: why did the capitalist system strive to efface the counterculture and its resistance to society? Why were the

Beats, just because they resisted the system, treated as enemies by it?

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## “Moral Enigma” in Shakespeare’s *Othello*? An Exercise in Philosophical Hermeneutics

Norman Swazo

*“polla ta deina kouden anthropou deinoteron telei”*

[“Many are the wonders, but nothing walks stranger than man.”]

--Sophocles, *Antigone* (332)

*“When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,*

*Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,*

*Nor set down aught in malice.”*

--Shakespeare, *Othello* (5.2.340-341)

### *Abstract*

Literary criticism of Shakespeare’s *Othello* since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century leaves us with various complaints that Shakespeare fails to achieve poetic justice therein, or that this work leaves us, in the end, with a moral enigma—despite what seems to be Shakespeare’s intent to represent a plot and characters having moral probity and, thereby, to foster our moral edification through the tragedy that unfolds. Here a number of interpretive views concerning the morality proper to *Othello* are reviewed. Thereafter, it is proposed that Heidegger’s thought about the relation of appearance, semblance, and reality enables a novel interpretation of the moral significance of this tragedy, thereby to resolve the question of moral enigma.



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Writing recently in a review of a volume engaging the theme of moral agency in Shakespeare's dramatic works, Colin McGinn lamented, "I am often visited with the thought that ignorance of philosophy is the curse of the modern age."<sup>97</sup> Thus, "Misconceptions of philosophy abound, conceptual confusion is rampant, and a whole continent of vital human thought is left in the shadows." And, when it comes to drama as a mode of literary expression in particular, McGinn writes,

In drama, we are confronted by agents performing actions for reasons...Fictional agents are no different from real agents in this respect: they are beings with human psychology, and designed by their makers that way. Just as we understand our friends and enemies by reference to their psychological states, so we must understand the agents of fictional narratives by reference to their states of mind. This is particularly true of the moral dimension of human action: all the varieties of culpability and responsibility that apply to actual people also apply to fictional people.<sup>98</sup>

Accordingly, McGinn advises us, "To understand human action we must take the measure of all this complexity—and for that we need philosophy."

But, if we agree with McGinn that we need philosophy, then it follows we may ask: What parts of this august discipline are to

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<sup>97</sup> Colin McGinn, "Book Review: Michael D. Bristol, ed., *Shakespeare and Moral Agency*. New York. Continuum Press. 2009." *Shakespeare Studies*, Vol. 40, 2012, 222-226, *Academic OneFile*, Accessed 11 January 2017.

<sup>98</sup> McGinn, "Book Review," 222.

speak to us in our engagement of a work of art such as that of Shakespeare's *Othello*? Is it merely *formal aesthetics*, such that we are enabled to form a proper aesthetic judgment, discern the beautiful and the ugly, the artful and the obscene? If it is to aesthetics that we appeal, then perhaps we will speak as does Stanley Cavell, when he considers that, "Othello's ugliness was to have gone the limit in murdering his love and his hope, the hero in his soul. But his beauty was to have had such a love and such high hopes."<sup>99</sup>

Or, are we to look to *philosophical anthropology*, that informs us of human nature, of "human vulnerabilities" as well as the "invulnerable pretenses" that are present in our human "all-too-human" action, including what troubled Montaigne, "appalled" as he was "by the human capacity for horror at the human"?<sup>100</sup> Moral agency in works of literature in that case present us with the task of discerning humanity's predispositions to good or wickedness.

Perhaps we should turn to *epistemology*, as it speaks to us of the possibilities and limits of what we can know, and of moral knowledge, including that knowledge of self (*gnōthi sauton*) such as Socrates and Plato would have us achieve if we are to have a life of excellence (*arête*), thus to avoid vice and, worse, what Aristotle understood as "simply evil," that wickedness that is "beyond the limits" of vice?

Or, because of the insistence that a poet deliver his or her "poetic justice" in the structure and presentation of the play, we are directed to find our counsel in *ethics*, concerned as it is with human character (Aristotle); or with human rights and duties that respect the dignity of all persons (Kant); or with the consequences of moral

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<sup>99</sup> Stanley Cavell, "Epistemology and Tragedy: A Reading of *Othello* (*Together with a cover letter*)," *Daedalus*, Vol. 108, No. 3: Hypocrisy, Illusion, and Evasion, Summer 1979, 27-43, p. 31.

<sup>100</sup> Cavell, "Epistemology..." 28 and 31.

decision that depend on calculations of utility and disutility (Mill); or with what is universal moral truth in contrast to what is morally and culturally relative; or with what is merely historically contingent, but which nonetheless contributes to multifarious opportunities for coexistence and convergence that work in favor of human solidarity (Rorty)?

In all of the foregoing it is clear, as Martha Nussbaum argues, literature one way or another projects a morality, such that an artist thereby manifests a “social function,” in which case, following Henry James, Nussbaum reminds that “the aesthetic is ethical and political.”<sup>101</sup> Hence, it is reasonable, in encountering a work of literature such as Shakespeare’s *Othello*, that one discerns this linkage of the aesthetic, ethical, and political. Such is the opportunity and task of ethical criticism.<sup>102</sup> Accordingly, one can concur with Nussbaum in her argument that, (1) “moral philosophy needs certain carefully selected works of narrative literature in order to pursue its own tasks in a complete way,” and that, (2) “literature of a carefully specified sort can offer valuable assistance to [the conduct of public deliberations in democracy] by both cultivating and reinforcing valuable moral abilities.”<sup>103</sup>

In short, we may hold that a work of art such as Shakespeare’s *Othello*, through its narrative discourse, is also a work of moral probity and moral edification.<sup>104</sup> However, this claim presupposes a question long subject to contestation within the field of literary

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<sup>101</sup> Martha Nussbaum, “Exactly and Responsibly: A Defense of Ethical Criticism,” *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1998, 343-365.

<sup>102</sup> By contrast to Nussbaum, see Richard Posner, “Against Ethical Criticism,” *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol. 21, 1997, 1-27, and Richard Posner, *Law and Literature: The Relationship Rethought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>103</sup> Nussbaum, “Exactly...,” 346.

<sup>104</sup> See here Michael D. Bristol, “Is Shakespeare a Moral Philosopher?” in M.D. Bristol, ed., *Shakespeare and Moral Agency* (New York: Continuum Publishers, 2009).

criticism and the philosophy of literature. Consider, e.g., that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Alexander W. Crawford<sup>105</sup> published a number of essays contributing to the interpretation of Shakespeare's dramas, among them *Othello*. Given the range of interpretive approaches to *Othello*, Crawford opined, "The very intensity of the passion [represented in the plot] has doubtless confused our notions and clear thinking."<sup>106</sup> Crawford observed, accordingly, that "Admiration for the 'noble Moor,' compassion for the 'divine Desdemona,' and scorn for the intriguing Iago, have misguided our judgments, have obscured the story of the play and the very words that should reveal the true character and actual deeds of the persons." Pressing his complaint, Crawford premised, "In some cases both artistic sensibility and moral judgment have been paralyzed, until Othello has become a perfect hero, Desdemona a spotless saint, and poor Iago a fiend incarnate." Concluding his argument here, Crawford accused, "Instead of appreciating the play as it is written, and perceiving the informing thought of the dramatist, this emotional criticism has made the injurer noble, his chief victim a saint, the injured a devil, and Shakespeare foolish."

It seems Crawford took issue primarily with moral judgments elicited by the play, such that one should reconsider one's response to the presentation of the main characters, thus not to find Othello a perfect hero, Desdemona a spotless saint, and Iago a fiend incarnate. Presumably, if one *were* to perceive Shakespeare's "informing thought" in the play, then one *would* arrive at moral judgments that are consistent with *Shakespeare's intent* and, thereby, moral judgments that are consistent with the mode of writing that is tragedy. But, apparently, for Crawford most critics of *Othello*—

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<sup>105</sup> At the time, Crawford was Professor of English at the University of Manitoba.

<sup>106</sup> Alexander Crawford, *Hamlet, an ideal prince, and other essays in Shakespearean interpretation: Hamlet, Merchant of Venice; Othello, King Lear* (Boston: R.G. Badger/Toronto: The Copp Clark Co., Limited, 1916); <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/othelloessay1.html>

up to his time of writing—*did not* perceive Shakespeare's informing thought and, therefore, they *did not* deliver correct moral judgments proper to this tragedy. Given this sort of proposition (logically, a subjunctively structured conditional), Crawford reminded of a statement in the *Edinburgh Review* published in 1850, which expressed "only the truth when it said that 'all critics of name have been perplexed by the moral enigma which lies under this tragic tale.'" In short, for those writing in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Shakespeare's *Othello* presented its audience with a *moral enigma*: "The solution of a play that is a 'moral enigma,' Crawford wrote, "must come if it comes at all from a solution of the moral aspects of the play, which can be reached only by a due consideration of all the moral relations of the various persons of the drama."

Crawford here was concerned with what later literary criticism understands as the principle of "poetic justice," i.e., in this case what is to be accounted Shakespeare's structuring and representation of "the moral aspects of the drama." The problem for Crawford was that, for some interpreters, it may be argued that Shakespeare "ignored this principle altogether." Thus, Crawford provided us with the historical note, "In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when criticism was almost entirely didactic, it was all but unanimously agreed that Shakespeare paid no attention to moral subjects or to ethical forces."

In the intervening period since Crawford wrote, however, there has been ongoing effort among literary critics to interpret Shakespeare tragedies in general, and also to engage this issue of morality that bears upon this seeming problem of moral enigma.<sup>107</sup> One such as

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<sup>107</sup> Robert Ornstein, "Historical Criticism and the Interpretation of Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Winter 1959, pp. 3-9. Here Ornstein speaks of Shakespeare scholarship having advanced "far beyond the Romantic criticism which confused literature and life," but he allows that "it is possible that future generations will in their turn smile at the naïveté of some...particularly

Eugene Hnatko (writing in 1971), shifted the focus from Shakespeare himself to a more general failure in the writing of tragedy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century relative to audience demands of the time, hence to the demise of tragedy: “tragedy died,” Hnatko argued, “because, of all types of literature, it seems so admirably suited to what the age saw as the purpose of all writing—moral instruction—and the fulfilling of that purpose was inimical to the very nature of the genre in that it led to a simple poetic justice which allowed no room for tragic questioning or cosmic resolution.”<sup>108</sup> Yet, this interpretive view is reasonably to be juxtaposed to that of Marvin Rosenberg, who writes that *Othello* as presented on stage in 1604 was in the context of “a London theater invaded by skepticism and sensuality,” a time “ripe for the play, with its pervasive sexual atmosphere and byplay, its erotic and despairing language, its bold, anguished image of man and woman contending in love and jealousy.”<sup>109</sup>

Notwithstanding, writing some five years after Hnatko, Jane Adamson remarked that, “the growing mass of commentary about *Othello* in recent decades seems to have become stuck in old ruts, old debates and circularities.”<sup>110</sup> Adamson therefore argued for a return to the play itself, thereby to engage several seemingly unresolved questions among the critics—“*why* has it proved hard for critics to reach even a rough general agreement about its basic

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those concerned with the ethics of the plays.” See here also, Lawrence W. Hyman, “Literature and Morality in Contemporary Criticism,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Autumn 1971, 83-86.

<sup>108</sup> Eugene Hnatko, “The Failure of Eighteenth-Century Tragedy,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Restoration and Eighteenth Century (Summer, 1971), 459-468.

<sup>109</sup> Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Othello: The Search for the Identity of Othello, Iago, and Desdemona by Three Centuries of Actors and Critics* (Cranbury NJ: Associated University Presses, 1961), 1.

<sup>110</sup> Jane Adamson, *Othello as Tragedy: Some Problems of Judgment and Feeling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 1

tenor, about what we make of its hero, and about the kind, depth and scope of the demands it makes on us?"<sup>111</sup>

Similarly, as part of a new set of critical essays on the play published in 2002, John Gronbeck-Tedesco took note of Edward Pechter's "masterful" *Othello and Interpretive Traditions*<sup>112</sup> and commented on "the 'impossible demands of responding at once to Othello's and Iago's voices'"—again, what seems to be a problem of poetic justice in the presentation of the two persona.<sup>113</sup> But, if so, it would seem the demands here concern the religious sentiments of the play's audience in their sociopolitical and historical context. And, in that case, as Daniel J. Vitkus argued, "The tragedy of Othello is a drama of conversion, in particular a conversion to certain forms of faithlessness deeply feared by Shakespeare's audience. The collective anxiety about religious conversion felt in post-Reformation England focused primarily on Roman Catholic enemies who threatened to convert Protestant England by sword, but the English also had reason to feel trepidation about the imperial power of the Ottoman Turks, who were conquering and colonizing Christian territories in Europe and the Mediterranean."<sup>114</sup>

On Vitkus's reading, Shakespeare thereby delivers to his audience a problematic play that brings to the fore the Elizabethan era's *problem of identity*. Othello the man is discerned as a "demonized"

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<sup>111</sup> Adamson, *Othello as Tragedy*, 2

<sup>112</sup> Edward Pechter, *Othello and Interpretive Traditions* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999)

<sup>113</sup> John Gronbeck-Tedesco, "Morality, Ethics and the Failure of Love in Shakespeare's *Othello*," in Philip Kolin, ed., *Othello: Critical Essays*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 255-270, at 255.

<sup>114</sup> Daniel J. Vitkus, "Turning Turk in Othello: The Conversion and Damnation of the Moor," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 2, Summer 1997, pp. 145-176, at 145. See here also, "Moors in Early Modern England," 1-5, <http://2015.playingshakespeare.org/download/file/fid/93>, accessed 12 January 2017.

representation of the foreign Other from “Muslim culture,”<sup>115</sup> and a figure calling to mind “the power of Islamic imperialism to convert Christians...” As Pechter put it, Othello as protagonist “is an alien to white Christian Europe, what we would now call an immigrant, whose visible racial difference seems to be the defining aspect of his identity, the source of his charismatic power to excite interest and to generate horror.”<sup>116</sup> The setting of Venice is thereby perceived to represent multiple alienations, Othello himself suffering from “identity crisis,” culturally other such that he “neither can understand Venetian culture nor can adjust to it and so the tragedy happens.”<sup>117</sup> This speaks, then, to Shakespeare’s intent: “In Othello, Shakespeare does not simply present a portrait of intercultural relations as conceived by an English Renaissance artist, and therefore his portrait is subjected both to the ideological field of the author and to the exigencies of his art.”<sup>118</sup> This, as Mohssine Nachit argues, highlights the “challenge of multiculturalism” that is present in this play and which resonates with contemporary challenges in which religious overtones and

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<sup>115</sup> Granted, it is arguable that Othello is a Muslim. The Shakespeare Company’s production of *Othello* in March 2016 represented Othello as an “assimilated” Arab Moor, a “Muslim immigrant” to Venice. See here, Antoun Issa, “Othello—a Timely Reminder on Racism and Islamophobia,” Middle East Institute, 28 March 2016; <http://www.mei.edu/content/othello—timely-reminder-racism-and-islamophobia>, accessed on 15 January 2017. Also see, Kate Havard, “Othello’s Wicked Magic,” *The Washington Free Beacon*, 12 March 2016, <http://freebeacon.com/culture/othellos-wicked-magic/>. Yet, the text of the play itself seems to allow for Othello’s conversion from Islam to Christianity—Iago (Act 2, Scene 3, 342-44) referring to Othello’s baptism (“And then for her, To win the Moor, weren’t to renounce his baptism, All seals and symbols of redeemed sin...”).

<sup>116</sup> Pechter, *Othello and Interpretive Traditions*, 2.

<sup>117</sup> Sandeep Kumar Dubey, “‘Identity’ and ‘Culture’ as Postcolonial Issues in Shakespeare’s Othello,” *Ars Artium*, Vol. 3, January 2015, 92-98.

<sup>118</sup> Ferial J. Ghazoul, “The Arabization of *Othello*,” *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 50, No. 1, Winter 1998, 1-31, at 2.



undertones contribute causally to interpersonal and intercultural relations.<sup>119</sup>

Thus, Paul N. Siegel wrote of “the Christian overtones” present in *Othello*, Othello’s “noble soul” related to a “diabolically cunning” Iago, each having a “symbolic force” that contraposes “Christian values” to “anti-Christian values”—e.g., the ecstatic love of Desdemona versus the Satanic malice of Iago.<sup>120</sup> Hence, it is not surprising that Coleridge would opine, “It would be something monstrous to conceive this beautiful Venetian girl falling in love with a veritable negro”—a problematic disposition from the point of view of Karen Newman, who engages “the problem of female subjectivity in the drama of early modern England.”<sup>121</sup> Newman clarifies that for one such as Coleridge, a veritable negro counts as “a figure of ridicule unworthy of tragedy who would evidently appear ‘sub-human’ to European eyes,” precisely monstrous in the context of a possible “miscegenation” that is “against all sense and nature.”

Such Christianized interpretation one finds likewise in S. L. Bethell’s focus on the “diabolic images” of the play.<sup>122</sup> Bethell’s

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<sup>119</sup> Mohssine Nachit, “Shakespeare’s *Othello* and the Challenges of Multiculturalism,” *Arab World English Journal*, Special Issue on Literature, No. 4, October 2016, pp. 97-107, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2872975](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2872975), accessed 11 January 2017.

<sup>120</sup> Paul N. Siegel, “The Damnation of *Othello*,” *PMLA*, Vol. 68, No. 5, December 1953, pp. 1068-1078, at 1068.

<sup>121</sup> Karen Newman, “‘And wash the Ethiop white’: Femininity and the Monstrous in *Othello*,” in Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O’Connor, eds., *Shakespeare Reproduced: The History and Ideology* (Abingdon: Routledge/Psychology Press, 2005), 143-162, at 143.

<sup>122</sup> S.L. Bethell, “Shakespeare’s Imagery: The Diabolic Images in *Othello*,” *Shakespeare Survey Online* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), <http://web3.apiu.edu/researchfile/Research%20Materials/Macbeth-Teaching%20Values%20Through%20Imagery/Shakespearean%20Imagery/Shakespeare's%20imagery-the%20diabolic%20images%20in%20Othello.pdf>

approach is one that shies away from treating the play as representing “purely...a domestic tragedy” and instead attends “to its profoundly theological structure.” For Bethell, Shakespeare “prefers to show belief in action and express philosophy in its poetic equivalent.”<sup>123</sup> Thus, e.g., Bethell points to beliefs ascribed to Iago and asserts that these “are made with sufficient point for him to be recognized by an Elizabethan audience as an ‘atheist.’” But, if Iago is to be found an atheist, Bethell writes, “We might find credible the character of an evil man who, though an unbeliever, likes to dwell on that aspect of religion which fills others with dread and to model himself upon a Devil in whom he does not objectively believe. Alternatively, we could accept Iago as a ‘practical atheist’, one who lives by an atheistic code without making any deliberate intellectual rejection of religion.” Thus, for Bethell one makes sense of *Othello* only in sorting out the diabolical imagery of the play.

But, setting aside the diabolical imagery, by contrast, one such as Jean Porter retains the Christianized interpretive view and speaks instead of “moral mistakes” in relation to virtue and sin.<sup>124</sup> Porter refers to Aristotle in sorting through a reasonably correct assessment of Othello the man as the “eponymous hero” who “acts out of a combination of factual and moral errors which are intertwined with his character.” In this respect, Porter accounts for Aristotle’s position (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book III, 1110a1 to 111b5) that “someone who acts out of a mistaken belief about a relevant matter of fact may not be morally culpable for what would otherwise be a bad action.” Thus, here one who reads Shakespeare’s *Othello* with a view to sorting out its adherence or failure to deliver on critical expectations of poetic justice would have to consider the relation between Aristotle’s ethics and Aristotle’s understanding of the purpose and function of tragedy, as articulated in his *Poetics*; but

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<sup>123</sup> Bethell, “Shakespeare’s Imagery,” 70

<sup>124</sup> Jean Porter, “Moral Mistakes, Virtue and Sin: The Case of Othello,” *Studies in Christian Ethics*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2005, 23-44.

consider also whether the same Aristotelian moral and aesthetic interpretative strategy applies reasonably to (a) the Elizabethan context, (b) a judicious reading of Shakespearean tragedy in general and (c) of *Othello* in particular.

In contrast to Crawford's insistence on moral enigma in *Othello*, there are all too many readers who find moral lessons consistent with any number of positions in practical rationality, be they philosophical or religious.<sup>125</sup> But, even so, one must be clear here whether Shakespeare is to be construed as an artist wittingly didactic in the composition of a play such as *Othello*. As Sneh Lata Sharma put it, "when moral lessons are derived from Shakespeare's tragedies, it does not mean that Shakespeare intended to impress upon his audience or readers some principles to guide them in their life. He is the least didactic of all writers."<sup>126</sup> Yet, Sharma would have us focus on the elements of mismatch structured into the drama, Othello and Desdemona mismatched such that the man's "rash and impetuous temperament" is related to the woman's "blind love" that "cannot see the faults and foibles" of the man she loves, Othello thus shown under the circumstances to be "a credulous fool," jealousy, the "venom of suspicion," at the heart of the tragic loss of life in murder and suicide.<sup>127</sup> Quite simply, "*excess of anything is bad*," and so it is with excess of passion that intrudes upon Othello's thought in the form of the monstrous he intuited first in his nemesis.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> For a recent publication, see for example, Michael D. Bristol, ed., *Shakespeare and Moral Agency* (New York: Continuum Press, 2009).

<sup>126</sup> Sneh Lata Sharma, "Moral Lessons in Shakespearean Tragedies," *International Journal of English Language, Literature, and Humanities*, Vol. II, Issue V, September 2014, 410-420, <http://ijellh.com/papers/2014/September/40-410-420-sept-2014.pdf>, accessed 11 January 2017.

<sup>127</sup> Sharma, "Moral Lessons," 416

<sup>128</sup> Ambreen Shahriar, "Othello, a Jealous Barbarian or a Noble Fool," *Al'adab wa Llughat* (Arts and Languages), Vol. 6, 2013, 189-198, [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ambreen\\_Shahriar/publication/295539503\\_OTHELLO\\_A\\_JEALOUS\\_BARBARIAN\\_OR\\_A\\_NOBLE\\_FOOL/links/56caf8](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ambreen_Shahriar/publication/295539503_OTHELLO_A_JEALOUS_BARBARIAN_OR_A_NOBLE_FOOL/links/56caf8)

It is precisely the derivation of this kind of supposedly moral injunction that is problematic, however, from the view of philosophical criticism. Charles Altieri raises an important caution in the face of a mode of criticism he finds “imperious” for being philosophical, e.g., in his review of Tzachi Zamir’s *Double Vision: Moral Philosophy and Shakespearean Drama*.<sup>129</sup> Altieri “resists” Zamir’s “assumption that the richest readings” of the plays “bring out the audience’s capacities for making moral judgements about dense situations for which analytic philosophy has limited resources.” For example, Altieri is concerned that “Zamir will not honour Shakespeare’s interest in creating particular agents who challenge morality rather than being subsumable under general ideals of rationality.” Thus, Altieri would have us avoid any imperious reductive reading such as philosophical criticism might advance: “Perhaps to reduce these imagined lives to the terms of moral education or moral dilemma is to deny them precisely what matters in them—the vision of possible lives that we can identify with only in imagination.”

But, is it really so that Shakespeare presents Othello, Iago, and Desdemona as characters with whom we may identify only in our imagination and not in terms of our daily realities of interpersonal relations? Pechter is more likely to be correct when he points to the play’s elicitation of questions concerning “the nature of belief, the fraught and problematic process by which convictions are settled in

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2d08ae5488f0dad2ac.pdf. My reference here is to the passage of text (3.3.109-110) in which Othello and Iago converse about Cassio, Othello intuiting, “By heaven, thou echo’st me, As if there were some monster in thy thought Too hideous to be shown.”

<sup>129</sup> Charles Altieri, Book Review: *Double Vision: Moral Philosophy and Shakespearean Drama*. By Tzachi Zamir. Princeton University Press, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 48, No. 1, 101-103,

<http://m.bjaesthetics.oxfordjournals.org/content/48/1/101.full.pdf>. See in relation to this perspective, Paul A. Kottman, ed., *Philosophers on Shakespeare* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

the mind,” indeed how belief can be oppressive to the point of doing harm to oneself even as others are wronged.<sup>130</sup> And here, both moral philosophy and moral psychology link to the task of epistemological clarification whereby reason finds itself overpowered by a monstrous passion. Thus, Pechter opines, “Whatever our intuitions or advantages in knowledge, we wind up like [Iago’s] victims inside the play, trapped inside the reproduction of his contaminated and contaminating malice. There seems to be no effective critical purchase on Iago, no judicious higher knowledge by means of which we can eliminate his prejudiced opinions. As Iago himself puts it in his final speech, ‘What you know, you know’ (5.2.300).”<sup>131</sup>

However, if we take the foregoing concern with the nature of belief as a central feature of Shakespeare’s construction, then we are given yet another conditional proposition: “It is as if Shakespeare knew that our inability to fully justify a protagonist’s actions was in fact crucial to the drama’s ethical claims upon us and as if the dramatic stakes and ethical claims were raised in more or less direct proportion to the extent to which someone’s actions appear morally defensible.”<sup>132</sup> It is moral psychology, then, that contributes to the moral assessment, Richard Raatzsch accordingly pointing to “Iago’s wickedness as a ‘pathological case of the human.’” But if, as Raatzsch would have it, Iago is a “paradigmatic embodiment of evil,” such that “A model of evil itself cannot be evaluated and therefore cannot be justified,” then, on an Aristotelian assessment Iago is an instance of a wicked man, his actions manifesting his character, his wickedness thereby beyond the limits of *vice per se*. Paul Kottman understands Raatzsch to mean “not simply that Iago acts in a manner that is wicked in the extreme, but that by virtue of its pathological character, his wickedness eludes any evaluative

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<sup>130</sup> Pechter, *Othello and Interpretive Traditions*, 4

<sup>131</sup> Pechter, *Othello and Interpretive Traditions*, 5-6

<sup>132</sup> Paul A. Kottman, “The Apologetics of Evil: The Case of Iago (review),” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 1, Spring 2012, 130-132.

judgment”—“Trying to ‘understand’ Iago does not entail doubting morality or abandoning moral standards of judgment altogether; rather, understanding Iago in his pathological essence, as one who can be neither simply justified nor condemned, ‘draws our attention to the limits of the moral.’ ‘Iago,’” Raatzsch concludes, “teaches us our moral limits by transcending them.”<sup>133</sup> But, on this interpretive view, it seems we are returned to Crawford’s complaint of moral enigma and the lack of poetic justice in *Othello*; for as Kottman put it recently, “ethicality appears in a ‘negative’ form, as it were, through the experience of its resounding lack or defeat.”<sup>134</sup>

This moves us then to Cavell’s engagement of *Othello*, i.e., tragedy understood as an epistemological problem.<sup>135</sup> Othello’s conflicted thoughts are explicitly those of paradox in his engagement of Iago’s deception: “I think,” he says, “my wife be honest, and think she is not. I think that thou art just, and think thou art not. I’ll have some proof.” (3.3.394-396) Othello’s counsel to Iago is to be honest; whereas Iago’s retort is that honesty is a fool, that it is better to be wise. But here we have yet another deception, since ‘wise’ in Iago’s sense is the equivalent of Machiavellian *virtù*, a calculating cleverness; and this calculative thinking is never the equivalent of Aristotle’s concept of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*). Yet, perhaps the paradox in Othello’s mind is merely apparent: “...however far he believes Iago’s tidings,” Cavell asserts, “he cannot just believe them; somewhere he *knows* them to be false.” But, what does Cavell mean by this? He answers: “I am claiming...that we must understand Othello to be wanting to believe Iago, to be trying, against his knowledge, to believe him.”<sup>136</sup> Cavell’s judgment here seems counter-intuitive; but there is reason

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<sup>133</sup> Kottman, “The Apologetics...”, 132

<sup>134</sup> Paul A. Kottman, *Tragic Conditions in Shakespeare: Disinheriting the Globe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 7

<sup>135</sup> Cavell, “*Epistemology and Tragedy*,” 33

<sup>136</sup> Cavell, “*Epistemology and Tragedy*,” 38

to agree that such is the “torture of logic in [Othello’s] mind”—a “crazed logic” that moves “Othello’s rage for proof.” In the end, if Cavell is correct, we are to say that, “What this man lacked was not certainty. He knew everything, but he could not yield to what he knew, be commanded by it. He found out too much for his mind, not too little.”<sup>137</sup> Thus, Othello in the end admits to being “perplexed in the extreme” (5.2.345).

Yet, are we to account this perplexity as Othello’s singular fault and thus the key impediment to his self-understanding, such that we declare Othello thoroughly morally blameworthy for his manifest deed? One who engages the text in terms of Orientalist discourse reminds us: “Othello’s mode of action dose [*sic*: does] not arise from his character, it was imposed and practiced upon him by Iago”<sup>138</sup>—Iago whose “Spanish name...recalls Sant’ Iago Matamoros (Saint James, the Moor Slayer),” as Michael Neil observed.<sup>139</sup> Thus, Charles Campbell interprets the suicide scene: “the Muslim he kills becomes, by the metonymy of his mirroring action, himself”—and so, one might say, by implication, that the *Christian* “Othello” performs his last soldierly deed, as he kills the *Muslim* “Utayl,”<sup>140</sup> who dared to love too much, the excess to be

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<sup>137</sup> Cavell, “*Epistemology and Tragedy*,” 43. For further engagement of Cavell’s interpretive approach, see his *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

<sup>138</sup> Jamil Y. Al-Asmar, “Othello and the Discourse of Orientalism,” [https://www.alaqsa.edu.ps/site\\_resources/aqsa\\_magazine/files/60.pdf](https://www.alaqsa.edu.ps/site_resources/aqsa_magazine/files/60.pdf). See here also, Charles Campbell, “Iago’s Orientalism: Imperial Discourse in Othello,” *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, Vol. 12, 2011, 9-24. [http://www.ijaes.net/images/ijaes/IJAES2011/Full\\_Text\\_PDF/2.%20Campbell.pdf](http://www.ijaes.net/images/ijaes/IJAES2011/Full_Text_PDF/2.%20Campbell.pdf), accessed on 15 January 2017.

<sup>139</sup> As cited by Charles Campbell, 10

<sup>140</sup> See here, Fariel J. Ghazoul, “The Arabization of Othello,” *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 50, No. 1 Winter 1998, 1-31; <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1771217.pdf>, accessed 15 January 2016. Ghazoul refers here to Khalil Mutran’s translation/*Arabization of Othello* in his *Utayl (Othello)* (Cairo, Dar al-ma‘arif, 1976).

located not merely with reference to his own passion (*pathos*), but as contrary to the cultural conventions of Christian Venice.

Campbell's choice of word here—metonymy—refers us to the Greek *metonymia* from which it originates, which is twofold in meaning: “to call by a new name” or “to take a new name.”<sup>141</sup> The word functions, we can argue reasonably, as an element of Shakespeare's structure, insofar as Othello the converted Muslim tacitly calls himself by the name of the “malignant and turbaned Turk,” through this act surrendering his Christian name ‘Othello’ for the unspoken Muslim name that, in Arabization, is ‘Utayl.’ The religious subtext thus is expressed in this death scene. But it still leaves us with the question whether we are to account Othello blameworthy, even as one finds Iago's calculative cleverness a manifest expression of his wickedness. And, on this question we can refer to Aristotle.

In his *Poetics* (Ch. 6),<sup>142</sup> Aristotle characterizes tragedy as a form of imitation of life, presented through the actions of the characters, appealing to one's pity and fear, thereby to bring about the purgation of these emotions. In Chapter 11, Aristotle clarifies that “our pity is awakened by undeserved misfortune, and our fear by that of someone just like ourselves—pity for the undeserving sufferer and fear for the man like ourselves.” It is important to note here Aristotle's focus on *action* first and foremost, and only secondarily on the characters as agents of action. Thus, Aristotle opines, “tragedy is a representation not of men, but of action and life, of happiness and unhappiness.” Accordingly, he adds, “it is their characters, indeed, that make men what they are, but it is by reason of their actions that they are happy or the reverse.”

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<sup>141</sup> *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <http://www.etymonline.com>; accessed on 15 January 2017.

<sup>142</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. T.S. Dorsch (no publication data)



To the extent one examines the actions of men and women, in this case the actions of characters in a tragedy, one must also bear in mind, as Aristotle informs us in Chapter 9 of the *Poetics*, one should discern the universal truths to be found therein—i.e., “the kinds of things a certain type of person will probably or necessarily say or do in a given situation.” But, even then, what is to be discerned is a universal not merely in terms of what is possible; it must be an agency that is both possible and credible, and credibility depends on an action that accords with “the laws of possibility and probability.” A tragedy such as the *Othello* is both possible and credible, Aristotle (*Poetics*, Chapter 11) would hold, in the representation of calamity (“an action of a destructive or painful nature, such as death openly represented, excessive suffering...”). *Othello* is to be understood through his actions as well as his character. However, *Othello*’s actions seemingly elicit both pity and fear, unless we understand, as does Aristotle (*Poetics*, Chapter 13) that, “There remains a mean between these extremes. This is the sort of man who is not conspicuous for virtue and justice, and whose fall into misery is not due to vice and depravity, but rather to some error...”

One must consider that *Othello* is not “in possession of the facts” that are necessary to a correct judgment. His trust in Iago is misplaced, *Othello*’s word manifesting the error of his thought when he speaks of “honest” Iago (1.3.292)—Iago who swears by the god Janus (1.2.33) and shows himself duplicitous in his actions—even as we know *Othello* struggles in the paradox of his thought, thinking Iago *seemingly just* and also *possibly unjust*, but perhaps *not credibly* unjust though Iago is indeed *incredibly* wicked. *Othello* falls into misery, granted; but, despite the attributed valor that is “conspicuously” present in his “great skill and prudence” in war, in his “noble rank and well-tried faith,”<sup>143</sup> etc., there is reason

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<sup>143</sup> The reference here is to Cinthio’s “The Moor of Venice,” which is, of course, recognized as a source-text for Shakespeare’s *Othello*. See here Giraldi Cinthio,

to suppose Othello nonetheless the type of man *not conspicuous for virtue and justice*—which explains his fall into error. For, as he himself judges, “...little of this great world” can he speak. (1.3.86)

And, it is in this way that one may point to a resolution of the moral enigma that so troubled Crawford. Iago is as much the equivalent of the “Ensign” in Cinthio’s “The Moor of Venice”—one of “the most depraved [in] nature” yet “in great favour with the Moor,” “who had not the slightest idea of his wickedness.” How could this be so? Cinthio explains by way of the Ensign’s calculating cleverness: “for despite the malice lurking in his heart, he cloaked with proud and valorous speech, and with a *specious presence*, the villainy of his soul, with such art, that he was *to all outward show* another Hector or Achilles.”<sup>144</sup> It is this specious presence, the overwhelming power of *semblance* in Iago, that overcomes Othello: The General, for all his prowess and valor in war, is bested by the lesser ranked Iago, whose cleverness, armed with its formidable *pathos*, clandestinely works its defeat upon the Moor.

On this point, it is not Aristotle but the 20<sup>th</sup> century existential phenomenologist Heidegger who assists us in our discernment. Heidegger reminds us of “the fundamental precariousness” of the human as a political being, whose existence requires him, i.e., necessarily, to *discriminate* (to *decide*) among being, appearance, and non-being:

...the man who holds to being as it opens round him and whose attitude toward the essent [the particular being] is determined by his adherence to being, must take three paths. If he is to take over being-there [i.e., his place, *topos*, in the *polis*] in the radiance of being, he must bring

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“The Moor of Venice,” in Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. Edward Pechter, Norton Critical Edition, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 151-161.

<sup>144</sup> Cinthio, op. cit., p. 153; italics added.

being to stand, he must endure it in appearance and against appearance, and he must wrest both appearance and being from the abyss of nonbeing.

Man must distinguish these three ways and accordingly he must decide for them and against them...<sup>145</sup>

Othello, as with all men, is faced with the terrible task of discerning reality, of disclosing the real (*nooúmenon*) and enduring the real in the face of appearance (*phainómenon*) and against appearance, especially when the latter presents itself as semblance (*eidôlon*). In this Othello did not succeed, hence the error of his judgment. But, Othello is not, therefore, a wicked man, in the way in which Iago is. Othello's actions and his thoughts disclose his character, to be sure; but, what his actions and thought first and foremost disclose are (1) his ignorance of—his failure to apprehend—reality and (2) his entrapment by semblance. This is an *involuntary* action, even as eventually his passion gets the better of him. His, as Aristotle would say, is an unjust *act*; but he is not, therefore, an unjust *man*, though he is to be accounted responsible for his unjust deed. Hence, it would be an incorrect moral judgment to assert, as many a critic has, that "Othello ought to have been able to avoid or overcome the particular circumstances that led to his destruction," that "his suffering must be more pathetic than terrible."<sup>146</sup> Like all men, in any given moment, one may find oneself overwhelmed by a torturous logic, and *that*, as Aristotle might say, tinged with the fire of madness. Othello's is a madness driven by the power of semblance, overwhelming reason's apprehension of being, of reality as it is and not as it seems to be.

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<sup>145</sup> Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. R. Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 110

<sup>146</sup> Derek Gottlieb, "The Art of World-Collapse: Othello, Heidegger and the Veils of Illusion," *International Journal of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 3. No. 4, 2009, 34-51, at 36 and 38.

The question with which we began was that of Crawford in his concern for the moral enigma of *Othello*. However, whatever literary critics may have to say about Shakespeare's intent and our ability to discern it, the text will speak to us in our day only on the basis of what Hans-Georg Gadamer means when he speaks of a "fusion" of horizons of understanding—that of the text as it speaks to us from its time and that of our own self-understanding in our historical present. All readings of Shakespeare's *Othello* will be productive in the interpretation and never merely reproductive of authorial intent. And, therefore, it is only in such productive interpretation that the moral enigma of the play is reduced; but our perplexity, like Othello's, is never indefeasibly eradicated. Hence, it would be more correct to say of Othello that, to our own "ocular proof," he is more "terrible" than he is "pathetic," that the *terror* of discrimination of the threefold path of being, appearance, and nonbeing is much more decisive than is the *pathos* that motivates one's action.

Perhaps, then, one should pose the question differently from that troubling Crawford. At base, the question *Othello* elicits is not that of moral enigma but of *the enigma of the human being in his being*, in his "essence," as Heidegger might say. But, this means here, an essence to be comprehended otherwise than in terms of (1) essence (*essentia*) contraposed to existence (*existentia*), or (2) possibility (*potentia*) contraposed to actuality (*actualitas*), or (3) the "*humanitas*" ("civility") of the "*homo humanus*" (e.g., such as identifies the Englishmen or the Venetians *qua* "nobility") contraposed to the "*homo barbarus*" (such as identifies the Ottoman Turks or the Moors *qua* "barbarians"); or (4) the *humanitas* of *homo humanus* that, for the Christian, distinguishes the human from God (*Deitas*), i.e., from what is divine.<sup>147</sup> Heidegger

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<sup>147</sup> Martin Heidegger. "Letter on Humanism" (1949), trans. Frank A. Cappuzi, online version at [http://www.pacificinstitute.org/pdf/letter\\_on\\_%20Humanism.pdf](http://www.pacificinstitute.org/pdf/letter_on_%20Humanism.pdf); accessed on 22 January 2017.

understands the significance, and the need, of poetic insight when he opines: “The tragedies of Sophocles—provided a comparison is at all permissible—preserve the *ἦθος* [*ethos*] in their sayings more primordially than Aristotle’s lectures on ‘ethics’.”<sup>148</sup> One may argue, so do the tragedies of Shakespeare, in present case the *Othello*, which, through Othello’s being discloses the *ontological liability* of the *homo humanus* that is inescapable, for better or for worse.

Given current events that indeed highlight “the challenges of multiculturalism” (as noted earlier)—i.e., the entire *problematique* of “coexistence” or “coalescence” of what is proper to Islamic identity and what is proper to European identity—there is reason to appreciate the instruction in productions of the play that account for this contemporary disquiet. Thus, as Antoun Issa put it recently in his commentary on The Shakespeare Theatre Company’s production of *Othello* in Washington D.C. in March–April 2016 (as directed by Ron Daniels), “The glaring concern that sprung out of the stage—as if a shocking realization to one’s senses—was the direct application of this 16<sup>th</sup>-century view of Western-Islamic relations on today’s discourse. Have we progressed so little in all this time that we are still engaged in the same debates, the same fears, the same prejudices so eloquently portrayed, and rebuked, by Shakespeare centuries ago?...The somber view of Othello is the resignation that the Western and Islamic worlds are irreconcilable, and animosity and mutual fear will remain the norms that characterize the relationship.”<sup>149</sup>

Yet, beyond that, Issa concludes, “Othello...serves as a timely reminder that behind the key markers of humanity, such as race, religion and nationality, lies a universality of human characteristics

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<sup>148</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 269

<sup>149</sup> Antoun Issa, “Othello—a Timely Reminder on Racism and Islamophobia,” Middle East Institute, 28 March 2016; <http://www.mei.edu/content/othello—timely-reminder-racism-and-islamophobia>, accessed on 15 January 2017.

shared by all.” And it is because of our continuing need to discern the universal in the particular—as the Greeks of antiquity understood, even as contemporary philosophers recognize the same in our time—that we have need of literature such as Shakespeare’s *Othello*, of the humanities, that speak to us of what is universal in the human condition.<sup>150</sup> But, more important, what Shakespeare’s *Othello* discloses for all to witness, as Heidegger would say, is our being-there (*Dasein*) wherein we, severally and jointly, might, but also might not, disclose the being that is most our own, discriminating on the threefold path of being, appearance/semblance, and nonbeing; for, of reality we are to say, as does Shakespeare, “Tis a pageant, to keep us in false gaze” (1.3.18-19). That is the inescapable manner of our being in the world.

With this insight, Heidegger refers us to Sophocles’s *Antigone* (332), wherein we are told, “Many are the wonders but nothing walks stranger than man” (*polla ta deina kouden anthropou deinoteron telei*). Shakespeare and Sophocles both understand, I submit, that “Nothing surpasses the human being in strangeness;” in which case, as Heidegger intuitively, “Man, in *one* word, is *deinotaton*, the strangest.” Indeed, “Such being is disclosed only in poetic insight.”<sup>151</sup> It is thus, therefore, that we must say of Othello, as he exhorts us in the end, “Speak of me as I am” (5.2.340-341), nothing to extenuate by circumstance or to explain away by malicious cause. Othello “is,” in *his* being, as *we* “are”—not “pathetic,” but the most “terrible” (*deinotaton*) indeed. It is for the human, in the very condition of his and her existence, to have an ontological liability ever at the ground of an all-too-human *angst*, and hence as the ground of all possibility of moral responsibility.

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<sup>150</sup> See here, William Casement, “On Defending the Humanities: Setting the Record Straight,” *The Journal of General Education*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 1984, 87-104.

<sup>151</sup> Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 149

In the end, therefore, there is but one judgment that is to be passed for all to hear, to be heard as the unceasing “judgment” of this tragedy. It is spoken aptly by none other than the Duke (1.3.200-207), though this “sentence” installs a *proverb* “equivocal,” in the disquietude of our minds:

When remedies are past, the griefs are ended  
 By seeing the worst, which late on hopes depended.  
 To mourn a mischief that is past and gone  
 Is the next way to draw new mischief on.  
 What cannot be preserved, when fortune takes,  
 Patience her injury a mockery makes.  
 The robbed that smiles steals something from the thief;  
 He robs himself that spends a bootless grief.

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## Into The Void: Nietzsche's Confrontation With Cosmic Nihilism

Clay Lewis

### *Abstract*

This paper looks at authoritarianism as an expression of nihilism. In spite of his rigorous critique of Platonism, I suggest that Nietzsche shares with Plato an authoritarian vision that is rooted in the cyclical experience of time. The temporality of the eternal return unveils a vista of cosmic nihilism that cannot possibly be endured. In the absence of metaphysical foundations, the vital will to power is assigned an impossible task – to create meaning from nothing. I suggest that when confronted with the horror of the ungrounded void, the self-overcoming of nihilism reverts to self-annihilation. The declaration that God is dead becomes the belief that death is God. I trace Nietzsche's cosmic nihilism back to Plato's myths and the poetic vision of Sophocles and Aeschylus. I argue that Nietzsche's overcoming of nihilism is itself nihilistic. However, this does not mean that Nietzsche's project is as a complete failure. On the contrary, I suggest that Nietzsche's deepest insight is that the good life does not consist of the pursuit of truth, but the alleviation of suffering.

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*The Genealogical Method*

This paper looks at Nietzsche's confrontation with the innate nihilism of Western metaphysics. I suggest that nihilism is not just an existential issue, but deeply political as well. It is typically assumed that authoritarianism is an expression of foundationalism. Conversely, democracy is taken to be an outgrowth of the dissolution of metaphysical foundations. Against this standard assumption, I argue that authoritarianism is in fact symptomatic of nihilism. David Ohana makes a similar argument in his book *The Dawn Of Political Nihilism*. Ohana suggests that nihilism and authoritarianism are not two opposed world-views, but rather two sides of the same coin. Ohana: "Until now, nihilism and totalitarianism were considered opposites: one an orderless state of affairs, the other a strict regimented order. On closer scrutiny, however, a surprising affinity can be found between these two concepts."<sup>152</sup> Totalitarianism is not contrary to, but rather an expression of nihilism – the will to establish Order in the midst of Chaos. In what follows, I attempt to expand on Ohana's insight by looking at nihilism as a development of ancient Greek metaphysics – from Plato's myth of the cave to the Promethean destiny of eternal return.

Nietzsche's genealogical method refutes the divine origin of authority, tradition, and law. The problem, however, is that value loses its affective force once morality is perceived to be nothing more than a historical construct. In the absence of divine origins, morality amounts to nothing more than subjective preference resulting from the radical de-centering of meaning, value, and truth. In response to the dissolution of metaphysical foundations, the only perceived refuge becomes either the passive nihilism of radical pessimism or the active nihilism of religious fundamentalism. The dissolution of foundationalism provokes a metaphysical need for

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<sup>152</sup> David Ohana, *The Dawn Of Political Nihilism*, (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2012), 1

moral absolutes. The challenge, therefore, is to face the ungrounded void without succumbing to nostalgia for the Absolute.

The death of God is the discovery that Truth lacks any metaphysical grounding in the Absolute. I take issue with postmodern thinkers who view Nietzsche's declaration that "God is dead" as an emancipatory event.<sup>153</sup> For instance, Jacques Derrida associates nihilism with democratic pluralism and authoritarianism with foundationalism. For Derrida, the deconstruction of a transcendental signifier opens up a plurality of diverse interpretations in place of a fixed origin. For this reason, nihilism is akin to liberation – *freedom from* moral absolutes and *freedom to* decide for oneself what is meaningful. According to this logic, postmodernism gives rise to the democratic self-legislation of value. But what *is* meaningful? Indeed, what is good? More often, the discovery that our highest values are ontologically ungrounded provokes a sense of *angst*, anxiety, or horror before the abyss. Postmodernism in naïve to the extent that the very real danger of nihilism stemming from the radical contingency of value, meaning, and truth is evaded, suppressed, and concealed. We ignore the metaphysical need at our own peril. To paraphrase Nietzsche, it is necessary to know why we exist.

According to Martin Heidegger's influential interpretation, Nietzsche's will to power occupies the threshold between the culmination of nihilism and its supersession towards a genuine affirmation of life. In my view, Nietzsche ultimately fails to overcome the tragic destiny of the West. Contrary to his original intent, Nietzsche's attempt to overcome of nihilism is itself nihilistic. Heidegger: "Thought in terms of the essence of nihilism, Nietzsche's

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<sup>153</sup> See Gianni Vattimo, *Nihilism And Emancipation*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004)

overcoming is merely the fulfillment of nihilism.”<sup>154</sup> Nietzsche’s declaration that God is dead means that in the late-modern age, our highest values devalue themselves. For this reason, the death of God requires that thinking occur without recourse to metaphysical foundations. I argue that Nietzsche’s aesthetic response to the horror of ontological groundlessness proves insufficient. In response to the radical contingency of value, meaning, and truth, Nietzsche attempts to legislate a new table of values beyond good and evil. I will nevertheless argue that the revaluation of value does not signify the overcoming of nihilism, but rather its full expression. The vital will to power is assigned an impossible task – to create meaning *ex nihilo*. When confronted with the cosmic nihilism of the eternal return, the self-overcoming of nihilism reverts to self-annihilation.

I tend to interpret Nietzsche’s legacy in light of Heidegger’s appropriation of the crisis of nihilism. For Heidegger and Nietzsche both, European history is nihilistic to the extent that it is characterized by the innate violence of Platonic metaphysics. Heidegger: “European history reveals its fundamental feature as nihilism.”<sup>155</sup> Platonic metaphysics is characterized by the unconditional grounding of meaning, value, and truth in a fixed origin, foundation, or cause. Heidegger: “Metaphysics is an inquiry beyond or over beings, which aims to recover them as such and as a whole for our grasp.”<sup>156</sup> In other words, metaphysics seeks to comprehend the ground of being in order to grasp the totality of being. Metaphysics is an expression of nihilism for the following reason: The ill-fated attempt to grasp the ultimate foundation, origin, or ground of being leads to the startling discovery that being is in fact ungrounded. This discovery can be unsettling to say the least. In Heidegger’s words, “an attempt to delimit beings in what

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<sup>154</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche vs. III-IV*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York, NY: Harper One, 1987), 219

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 188

<sup>156</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?* trans. Glenn Gray (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2004), 106

they are, in their Being, leads us to the brink of nothingness, and to the abyss.”<sup>157</sup> Heidegger: “We must not shrink back here and must rather consider this: If we want to grasp beings (the Greeks say delimit, place within limits), then we must, indeed necessarily, proceed to the limit of beings, and that is nothingness.”<sup>158</sup> Thinking is the endurance of this abyss, chasm, or void at the heart of existence. It would seem that for Heidegger, thinking is a dangerous exercise.

The philosophy of Immanuel Kant exemplifies the kind of metaphysical grounding of morality that Nietzsche’s genealogy renders untenable. Unlike Nietzsche, Kant evades the nihilistic implications of attempting to ground morality upon mere reason. According to Nietzsche’s analysis, Kant “wanted to supply a *rational foundation* for morality . . . morality itself, however, was accepted as given.”<sup>159</sup> In attempting to establish a metaphysical foundation of morality, Kant simply takes it for granted that such an exercise is both possible and desirable. Nietzsche exposes the insufficiencies of Kant’s philosophy by posing a radically different kind of question, one that is genealogical rather than metaphysical. While Kant poses “the question of where our good and evil really originated”, and therefore seeks a metaphysical grounding of morality in the transcendental categories of subjective reason, Nietzsche instead asks: “Under what conditions did man make these value judgments good and evil?”<sup>160</sup> More simply, while Kant passes moral judgment upon existence, Nietzsche inverts this relationship, judging morality from the perspective of life itself. Nietzsche’s genealogy of morality therefore indicates a radical inversion of Platonic orthodoxy.

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<sup>157</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Beginning Of Western Philosophy: Interpretation of Anaximander & Parmenides*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz, (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), 13

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 7

<sup>159</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good And Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York, NY: Vintage, 1966), 97

<sup>160</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy Of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York, NY: Vintage, 1967), 16



Nietzsche: "What, seen in the perspective of *life*, is the significance of morality?"<sup>161</sup> Oblivious to this line of questioning, Kant's transcendental idealism attempts to ground universal moral law upon the *a priori* categories of practical reason.

For Kant, the moral law is characterized by its universality. Moreover, the unconditional moral law can be distinguished with certainty from the relativity of social maxims, customs, and norms on the basis of practical reason. Nevertheless, the attempt to metaphysically ground morality in the sovereignty of reason is both unfounded and untenable. While Kant suggests that practical reason is the ultimate foundation of moral law, Nietzsche argues that reason is not at all transcendental. Instead, reason remains historically mediated by the same social conditions from which it claims independence. Consequently, there is no rational basis by which to distinguish between the absolute moral law and the relativity of value. Additionally, Kant's universal moral law bears within itself a self-contradiction. On the one hand, 'the moral law within' is unconditional, absolute, and therefore every bit as objective as the laws of physics governing the movement of 'the starry skies above'. On the other hand, the moral law is not so much discovered as it is legislated by the autonomous will. Only one of these claims can be true. Either the law is absolute and determines the will, or the will is primary and constitutes the law. In my opinion, the notion of the autonomous will marks the true originality of Kant's thinking. For Kant, the autonomous will only submits to law that it has legislated. The Kantian legacy of secular modernity is that all value is perceived as historically contingent. Put simply, there is no moral law at work in the cosmos apart from the law that is willed into existence *ex nihilo*, out of nothingness.

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<sup>161</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth Of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York, NY: Vintage, 1967), 22

The Kantian legacy of secular modernity becomes readily apparent in light of John Stuart Mill's appropriation and development of Kant's thought. Mill's notion of individual freedom is widely considered to be the foundation of political liberalism, a tradition to which Nietzsche is vehemently opposed. In my view, Kant's notion of moral autonomy is the basis of Mill's idea of political freedom. Like Kant's notion of moral autonomy, Mill's idea of political freedom is both formal and abstract. The problem is that liberal freedom does not provide a compelling vision of 'the good life'. Mill argues that we are free to determine the good in our own way, so long as our own freedom does not inhibit the freedom of others. Nevertheless, Mill fails to pose the fundamental question, mainly – What is the good life? The implication of the liberal notion of freedom developed by Kant and Mill is that 'X' is not willed because it is good. Instead, 'X' is good because it is willed. The relativity of value resulting from moral self-legislation eradicates any notion of intrinsic meaning in the world. The will is completely ungrounded. Or, to phrase the matter differently, the will is grounded in nothing other than the will itself – the will to will. This leads to a significant problem: that while everything is permitted, nothing is compelling. Nietzsche: "One would rather will nothing than not will."<sup>162</sup> In the words of the poet Yeats: "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity."<sup>163</sup> In this sense, nihilism is not opposed to, but rather symptomatic of political liberalism.

Nietzsche's most provocative claim is that the highest values of the modern age originate from a slave revolt in morality. Nietzsche distinguishes between two different kinds of morality: 1) noble, or master morality, and 2) slave morality. According to Nietzsche, the virtues of the ancient Greeks exemplify noble morality, while the values of the ancient Hebrews is akin to a slave revolt in morality. While noble morality affirms the ancient virtues of courage, strength,

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<sup>162</sup> Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy Of Morals*, 16

<sup>163</sup> Yeats <<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/second-coming>> 2017

and honour, the slave revolt inverts this table of values. With the slave revolt, the ancient virtues of strength, courage, and honour are replaced with the Christian values of humility, love, and compassion. Nietzsche's evaluation of these two different kinds of morality is extremely nuanced. On the one hand, Nietzsche respects the vitality of noble morality. But on the other hand, Nietzsche admires the strength of will required to undermine and supplant these noble values. In fact, the slave revolt in morality accomplishes that which Nietzsche himself initiates but never accomplishes – a revaluation of value.

Nevertheless, Nietzsche's tentative admiration for this slave revolt is tempered by his dislike of the spirit of resentment from which it originates. Nietzsche claims that the slave revolt in morality originates from a seething sense of psychological resentment towards the ruling nobility. The revaluation of value is not motivated by a desire for justice. Instead, the slave revolt is rooted in a twisted and cruel desire for vengeance and retribution. In this sense, the intention of the slave revolt is not the abolition of hierarchical structures of power, but instead, to seize power for oneself, and to rule as one was once ruled. For this reason, Nietzsche judges slave morality to be reactionary rather than life affirming and genuinely creative. The slave revolt is nothing more than a reactionary rejection of the noble sense of what is good. According to Nietzsche, the slave first conceives of "the evil enemy and the Evil One, and this in fact is his basic concept, from which he then evolves, as an afterthought, a good one – himself!"<sup>164</sup> In this sense, "slave morality . . . is fundamentally reaction."<sup>165</sup> All that noble morality calls good slave morality calls bad. While noble morality is a spontaneous affirmation of the good, "the slave revolt in morality begins when resentment itself becomes creative and gives birth to values."<sup>166</sup> Slave morality is

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<sup>164</sup> Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy Of Morals*, 41

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 37

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 36

driven by a hatred of evil, which the slave identifies as everything the noble considers good. If slave morality is founded upon hatred and resentment, noble morality is inspired by love of the good. Nietzsche argues that the noble “conceives the basic concept ‘good’ in advance and spontaneously out of himself and only then creates for himself an idea of ‘bad’! This ‘bad’ of noble origin and that ‘evil’ out of the cauldron of unsatisfied hatred.”<sup>167</sup> In other words, while slave morality distinguishes between good and evil, noble morality distinguishes between good and bad. Nietzsche admires the slave revolt in morality for accomplishing a revaluation of value. Nevertheless, Nietzsche ultimately remains faithful to the spontaneity and vitality of noble morality.

For Nietzsche, slave morality violates the laws of nature itself; it violates the basic law that the strong should devour the weak. Nietzsche expresses this controversial argument by means of analogy. The struggle between master and slave is equivalent to the relationship between the bird of prey and the lamb. The bird of prey hunts the lamb because it is strong, just as the lamb is prey to the bird because it is weak. While noble morality celebrates this strength, slave morality condemns it. Instead, slave morality makes a virtue of weakness and a sin of strength. In this sense, slave morality is amounts to a mutilation of the will; the will is repressed and turned against itself through the psychological internalization of conscience and guilt perpetuated by organized religion. Nietzsche levels some of his sharpest criticism at the moral indoctrination of ascetic priests. The ascetic priests are evocative of the Catholic clergy as well as the Hindu Brahmin caste. Nietzsche: “The ascetic priest alters the direction of resentment. By instilling such notions as sin and guilt, the will is folded back upon itself for the purpose of self-discipline and self-overcoming.”<sup>168</sup> In other words, religious asceticism trains the will to repress the affirmative life-instincts for the sake of

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 41

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 41

disciplinary self-mastery. Such discipline of the will is presumably achieved through the religious practice of poverty, humility, and chastity as well as spiritual training in fasting, yoga, and meditation. According to Nietzsche, ascetic priests exemplify the bitter resentment of slave morality. Nietzsche: "Here rules a resentment without equal, that of an insatiable instinct and power-will that wants to become master not over something in life but over life itself . . ." <sup>169</sup> Mastery over life is characterized by belief in the ascetic ideal. The ascetic ideal is the ancient metaphysical faith in the goodness of truth; "the faith in a metaphysical value, the absolute value of truth . . ." <sup>170</sup> Nietzsche: "It is the profound, suspicious fear of an incurable pessimism that forces whole millennia to cling to a religious interpretation of existence . . . Piety, the 'life in God', seen in this way, would appear as fear of truth." <sup>171</sup> It is interesting that in spite of his criticism of the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche readily admits that he too relies upon faith in the value of truth.

It is perhaps unexpected that Nietzsche himself confesses a metaphysical need for the ascetic belief in the absolute value of truth. Nietzsche's own revaluation of value can only be undertaken on the basis of an unconditional belief in the ascetic ideal. This is unfortunate, seeing as the revaluation of value disenchant the very faith upon which it depends. The will to truth deconstructs its own foundation – the ascetic faith that "god is truth, that truth is divine." <sup>172</sup> Consequently, Nietzsche's genealogy of morality is caught in a performative contradiction. On the one hand, the revaluation of value presupposes an absolute value of truth beyond any revaluation and upon which the task of revaluation is nevertheless grounded. But on the other hand, the revaluation of value is precisely the deconstruction of all such absolutes. The task

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 117

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 151

<sup>171</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good And Evil*, 71

<sup>172</sup> Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy Of Morals*. 152

of revaluation therefore undermines and destroys its own conditions of existence. Nietzsche: “*That the ascetic ideal has meant so many things to man, however, is an expression of the basic fact of the human will, its horror of a vacuum: it needs a goal – and it would rather will nothingness than not will.*”<sup>173</sup> In other words, faith in the ‘ascetic ideal’ is symptomatic of the basic fact that “man has to believe, to know, from time to time why he exists.”<sup>174</sup> Nietzsche: “Apart from the ascetic ideal, man, the human animal, has no meaning . . .”<sup>175</sup>

In Nietzsche’s final analysis, “this ascetic priest, this apparent enemy of life, this denier – precisely he is amongst the greatest conserving and greatest yes-creating forces of life.”<sup>176</sup> Nietzsche explains that “from the moment faith in the god of the ascetic ideal is denied, a new problem arises – that of the value of truth . . . The value of truth must for once be experimentally called into question.”<sup>177</sup> Nietzsche therefore poses a deeply unsettling question: “What if this belief is becoming more and more unbelievable, if nothing turns out to be divine any longer unless it be an error, blindness, lies – if god himself turns out to be our longest lie?”<sup>178</sup> It would seem as if “some ancient and profound trust has been turned into doubt . . . and how much must collapse now that this faith has been undermined . . .”<sup>179</sup> Nietzsche recoils but does not retreat from the horror of such a collapse. Indeed, the will to truth “forbids itself the lie involved in the faith in god.”<sup>180</sup> Not only does Nietzsche’s genealogy of morality expose the groundlessness of our highest values, but in an even more

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 97

<sup>174</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York, NY: Vintage, 1974), 75

<sup>175</sup> Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy Of Morals*, 162

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 121

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 153

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 152

<sup>179</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 279

<sup>180</sup> Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy Of Morals*, 160

radical gesture, questions the value of truth as such! Nietzsche therefore poses a remarkably new kind of question: "Might not morality be a will to negate life, a secret instinct of annihilation?"<sup>181</sup> What is the value of value? What is the value of morality for life? Does morality benefit or inhibit the flourishing of life? Prior to Nietzsche's provocation, Western philosophy was established upon Socrates' assurance that the virtuous life is the happy life. However, Nietzsche suggests that the benefit of morality to life has heretofore been merely presumed as fact. The social utility of morality has never been subjected to serious doubt, which is precisely Nietzsche's intent.

### *The Death Of God*

The prophetic declaration that God is dead does not necessarily announce the emancipation from religious dogma, as Nietzsche's post-modern enthusiasts presume. Nor does it announce a catastrophic loss of faith, as is the interpretation of Nietzsche's neo-reactionary readers. The matter at hand is neither simple nor clear. The meaning of the death of God has yet to be decided for the reason that we are still living out the implications of what it means to exist in a godless age. Nietzsche's famous declaration that God is dead is uttered in aphoristic form in the parable of the madman. As Eugene Thacker indicates in *12 Fragments On Nihilism*, "we do him a disservice if we credit Nietzsche for the death of God. He just happened to be at the scene of the crime."<sup>182</sup> That a madman should witness this event is appropriate, given that insight into the ungrounded horror of being is akin to a madness that can scarcely be endured. Upon stumbling upon this dangerous discovery, the madman descends from the monastic solitude of the mountain into

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<sup>181</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth Of Tragedy*, 23

<sup>182</sup> Eugene Thacker <<http://www.fourbythreemagazine.com/issue/nihilism/12-fragments-on-nihilism>> 2017

the bustle of the market. Predictably, the public does not readily receive the madman's message. Ironically, it is the madman, bearing the message of God's absence, who is the authentic seeker of God. It is the unbelieving villagers, weak of faith, who ultimately reject the death of Go. Moreover, the madman not only discovers that God is dead, but that we have killed him: "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him".<sup>183</sup> At first, it seems that "there has never been a greater deed"; that humanity has reached spiritual maturity and is no longer in need of such dogmatic certainties as belief in God.<sup>184</sup> It turns out that this initial estimation is far too optimistic. The madman ultimately concludes that he has arrived too early; that "this tremendous event is still on its way."<sup>185</sup> Although God is dead, this truth remains too horrific to bear. The madman says that "*We have killed him* – you and I".<sup>186</sup> What does it mean to bear responsibly for the death of God? Both the solitary individual and the unreflective herd share responsibility for this crime. It is clear that the herd bears responsibility for unreflectively receiving established dogma as truth. But in what sense is the madman responsible for the death of God? The only crime of the madman is to seek truth unconditionally, no matter how unsettling that truth may be. For Nietzsche, it is precisely such fidelity to truth that kills God, so to speak. The will to truth disenchant the necessary fiction that God is truth and truth is divine. Put simply, truth, for Nietzsche, is akin to madness. For this reason, truth is the greatest danger. As such, truth ought to remain hidden, a privilege of the noble few.

Nietzsche's announcement that God is dead is an allegory for at least three related phenomena: 1) the discovery that the divine realm of ideas is a myth, 2) the ensuing disenchantment of the temporal world of appearance, and 3) the culmination of metaphysics in the nihilistic

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<sup>183</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 181

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 181

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 182

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, 181



destiny of the West. According to Heidegger's interpretation, Nietzsche's use of the term God refers to super-sensory realm of ideas. Since Plato, Western metaphysics has been characterized by the position that the ideal realm of forms is "the true and genuinely real world".<sup>187</sup> The ascetic ideal is not limited to religion; it is prevalent in philosophy as well. For Nietzsche, the beginning of Western metaphysics in ancient Greece is the origin of asceticism. For this reason, Nietzsche suggests that Plato is the first ascetic priest. Nietzsche: "The idea at issue here is the valuation the ascetic priest places on our life: he juxtaposes it [becoming] with a quite different mode of existence [being] . . ." <sup>188</sup> The problem with Plato's metaphysical dualism between being and becoming is that this world is viewed as illusory and empty of true substance. The phenomenal world of becoming is devalued by the metaphysical valuation of an ideal world of true being. In contrast to the true super-sensory world, the phenomenal world of appearance is false. Nietzsche: "Philosophical men have a presentiment that the world in which we live and have our being is mere appearance, and that another, quite different reality lies beneath it."<sup>189</sup> In light of this metaphysical dualism, the imperative of reason amounts to "the annihilation of the veil of *maya* . . ." <sup>190</sup> In this sense, Platonic metaphysics devalues life as mere appearance, illusion, or *maya*. The aim of philosophical reason is to 'annihilate' this false world of appearance in order to intuit the divine world of forms.

The divided line between the sensible and super-sensible realms is symbolized by Plato's famous allegory of the cave in *The Republic*. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates invites his interlocutors to imagine the human condition as one of bondage in an underground cave-like dwelling. Upon the walls of this underground dwelling are images of

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<sup>187</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology & Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1977), 61

<sup>188</sup> Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy Of Morals*, 117

<sup>189</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth Of Tragedy*, 34

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, 40

shadows cast by fire. Since the prisoners lack any knowledge of existence outside of the cave, the shadows of artificial things are mistaken for the things themselves. There is nevertheless a world beyond the bondage of the cave – a world of radiant sunlight in which the things themselves shine forth. The Sun represents the form of the Good, the source of true knowledge, of which the perception of shadows is a mere semblance. Socrates then asks us to image that the prisoner was compelled to emerge from this false world of darkness. For Plato, the world of shadows cast by fire represents the illusory world of appearance, while the world of overwhelming beauty represents the true realm of forms. The prisoners' forced ascent from the cave would amount to the destruction of the illusions to which one clings as certain and true. One would be compelled towards the unknown. Upon emerging from the underground prison, one is compelled by some unknown force to turn and gaze upon the Sun itself. The Sun represents the Supreme Source, the form of the Good that moves all without itself being moved. Upon first perceiving the radiant illumination of the Sun, one would be blinded, and therefore subjected to a state of ignorance even more extensive than one's condition of bondage in the cave. However, once one's eyes adapt to the sunlight, one would perceive a world of overwhelming beauty in which the forms are intuited as they truly are. For Socrates, such true vision amounts to wisdom. Socrates then asks us to imagine that following his ascent into the radiance of being, the prisoner was compelled to descend into the darkness of the cave once more. While the prisoner was once bound in a state of ignorance, now the prisoner is bound in a state of knowledge. Plato's allegory indicates that knowledge does not bring freedom. The prisoner remains bound in spite of the wisdom gained. Nevertheless, inspired by such visions of overwhelming beauty, the prisoner feels compelled to bear witness to the truth for the benefit of others. The prisoner therefore attempts to teach what he has learned: that we are ignorant of our own bondage. This world is a mere semblance of truth. Furthermore, there is another world beyond our own, a world of overwhelming beauty and truth. Tragically, the prisoner is not

believed. Moreover, he is hated and despised by those he wishes to teach. Lacking knowledge of the Good, those bound within the depths of the cave prefer ignorance to truth. Such is the human condition according to the Platonic legacy of Western metaphysics.

In my opinion, the meaning of Plato's allegory is identical to that of Nietzsche's allegory of the madman. For Plato, this illusory world of appearance is symbolized by a world of shadows cast by fire, while the true world of the forms is represented by a world of 'overwhelming beauty' illuminated by the Sun. In light of Plato's allegory, the death of God therefore indicates that "the suprasensory world is without effective power."<sup>191</sup> Heidegger: "That the highest values hitherto are devalued means that these ideals lose their capacity to shape history."<sup>192</sup> In other words, the implication of what Nietzsche calls the death of God, or what Heidegger names the end of metaphysics, is that the unconditional grounding of reality has itself become unreal. However, the discovery that the real world of forms is a myth does not simply render the false world of appearance true. Heidegger: "If God, as the suprasensory ground and goal of all reality is dead, if the suprasensory world of the Ideas has suffered the loss of its obligatory and above all its vitalizing and upbuilding power, then nothing more remains to which man can cling and by which he can orient himself."<sup>193</sup> The death of God provokes a condition of existential disorientation in light of the radical contingency of all meaning, value, and truth. In Nietzsche's words, the death of God is akin to "plunging continually . . . through an infinite nothing."<sup>194</sup> The temptation, in light of this state of existential groundlessness and psychological disorientation, is to attempt to reorient oneself by clinging to the illusion of a transcendent power. Heidegger: "The cause of nihilism is morality,

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<sup>191</sup> Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 99

<sup>192</sup> Heidegger, *Nietzsche vl. III-IV*, 203

<sup>193</sup> Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 61

<sup>194</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 181

in the sense of positing the supernatural ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty that are valid in themselves.”<sup>195</sup> The nihilist believes: 1) that this world, the world that is, should not be, and 2) that the other world, the world that should be, is not.<sup>196</sup> This is precisely the meaning of Plato’s allegory of the cave, in which illusion is preferred to truth.

The belief of the nihilist is identical to that of the metaphysician. For instance, Plato argues that this world only retains value in light of a true world beyond our own. The divine world of forms grounds the material world of appearance in true being. Consequently, “whatever has value in our world now does not have value in itself.”<sup>197</sup> In order to affirm value, meaning and truth in this world, one “must affirm another world than the world of life, nature, and history.”<sup>198</sup> Nevertheless, Nietzsche asks: “Insofar as they affirm this ‘other world’ . . . must they not by the same token negate its counterpart, this world, our world?”<sup>199</sup> Heidegger cites Socrates, who perceives “the world down here as a veil of tears in contrast to the mountain of everlasting bliss in the beyond.”<sup>200</sup> The truth of this world is a mere reflection of a higher world. But the existence of another world would at the same time negate the intrinsic value of this world. Consequently, while metaphysics is already inherently nihilistic, so too is the destruction of metaphysics via the revaluation of value. Again, although metaphysical dualism is thoroughly nihilistic, the collapse of metaphysical dualism risks bringing nihilism to its full expression. While formerly this world lacked meaning in itself, now the world lacks any meaning whatsoever; nature has become

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<sup>195</sup> Heidegger, *Nietzsche vl. III-IV*, 206

<sup>196</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York, NY: Vintage, 1967), 318

<sup>197</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 242

<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 282

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 282

<sup>200</sup> Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 61

“indifferent beyond measure.”<sup>201</sup> As a result of the disenchantment of the supersensory realm, our own “de-deified world has become stupid, blind, mad, and questionable.”<sup>202</sup> Just as the true world has become a myth, the apparent world too has become ungrounded. In Nietzsche’s words, an “ancient and profound trust has been turned into doubt . . . and how much must now collapse, now that this faith has been undermined.”<sup>203</sup> It would seem that both the traditional faith in unconditional value and the modern critical revaluation of value inevitably leads to nihilism. Platonic metaphysics is nihilistic because meaning lies beyond the world. The end of metaphysics is nihilistic because there is no longer a beyond, and therefore no meaning either.

Nihilism is “the radical repudiation of value, meaning, and desirability.”<sup>204</sup> As the metaphysical grounding of value is subjected to revaluation, “the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is lacking; ‘why?’ finds no answer.”<sup>205</sup> In this sense, the revaluation of value leads directly and unavoidably to a devaluation of value. However, it is Nietzsche’s hope that the devaluation of value is only a transitional stage in the history of the West. The transition from passive nihilism to active nihilism would signify a new epoch of world-history. In the fragmentary *Will To Power*, Nietzsche distinguishes between 1) the catastrophe of passive nihilism on the one hand, and 2) the possible redemption of active nihilism on the other. For Nietzsche, it remains to be decided whether the death of Go signifies catastrophe or redemption. The implication of passive nihilism is that “every kind of dogmatism that is left standing dispirited and discouraged.”<sup>206</sup> Active nihilism, however, is “a violent

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<sup>201</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good And Evil*, 15

<sup>202</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 309

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 279

<sup>204</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, 7

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, 9

<sup>206</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good And Evil*, 1

force of destruction.”<sup>207</sup> Active nihilism is the conviction that “what is falling, we should still push”<sup>208</sup> in order that “the weights of all things can be determined anew.”<sup>209</sup> In this sense, active nihilism is “not only the belief that everything deserves to perish; but one actually puts one’s shoulder to the plough; one destroys.”<sup>210</sup> Nevertheless, it seems that redemption can neither be achieved through the old faith in the ascetic ideal, nor through the new principle of valuation – the will to power. For Heidegger and Nietzsche both, “nihilism does not strive for mere nullity. Its proper essence lies in the affirmative nature of a liberation.”<sup>211</sup> Heidegger: “Nihilism then proclaims the following: *Nothing* of the prior valuations shall have validity any longer; all beings must be differently posited as a whole . . .”<sup>212</sup> Consequently, “the will to power becomes the principle of a new valuation . . .”<sup>213</sup> Contrary to Kant’s moral law, “the will is now pure self-legislation of itself; a command to achieve its essence, which is commanding as such, the pure powering of power.”<sup>214</sup> The ungrounded will to power has no purpose apart from the preservation and enhancement of power; it is the will to nothing.

It is at this point that the thinking of Heidegger and Nietzsche diverge. Heidegger suggests that Nietzsche’s error is to presume that “the basic characteristic of beings is will to power, and all interpretations of the world, to the extent that they are kinds of valuations, derive from the will to power.”<sup>215</sup> In my view, Nietzsche’s will to power more closely resembles the vitalism of

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<sup>207</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, 18

<sup>208</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 219

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid*, 219

<sup>210</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, 18

<sup>211</sup> Heidegger, *Nietzsche vl. III-IV*, 204

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid*, 205

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid*, 202

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid*, 224

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*, 188

Spinoza's *Conatus* than the individualism of Descartes' *Cogito*. For Nietzsche, the will to power operates unconsciously at the instinctual level; it is a transpersonal force that runs deeper than the individual ego. For Heidegger, the will to power does not indicate the overcoming of nihilism, but rather its logical extension. While Nietzsche distinguishes between passive and active forms of nihilism, Heidegger makes a similar distinction between incomplete and complete nihilism. While Nietzsche's thinking exemplifies incomplete nihilism, Heidegger's thinking presumably characterizes complete nihilism. Heidegger suggests that "incomplete nihilism does indeed replace the former values with others, but it still posits the latter always in the old position of authority that is gratuitously maintained as the ideal realm of the suprasensory."<sup>216</sup> While God has disappeared from his "authoritative position in the suprasensory world, his authoritative place is still always preserved . . . as that which has become empty."<sup>217</sup> Heidegger suggests that "the empty place demands to be occupied anew and to have the God now vanished from it replaced by something else."<sup>218</sup> According to this demand, new ideals are set up as highest values in the realm formerly occupied by being itself. As a result, being is transformed into value, and, as such, into an arbitrary determination of the ungrounded will.

The transformation of being into value effectively devalues being into a product of the will. To the extent that being is "accorded worth as a value, it is already degraded to a condition posited by the will to power itself."<sup>219</sup> For Nietzsche, value has no metaphysical grounding apart from the ungrounded will to power; the world is will to power and nothing else.<sup>220</sup> For this reason, Heidegger judges Nietzsche's genealogy of morality to be nihilistic. Heidegger: "Nietzsche's metaphysics is nihilistic insofar as it is value thinking,

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<sup>216</sup> Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 69

<sup>217</sup> Ibid, 69

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, 69

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 103

<sup>220</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good And Evil*, 48

and insofar as the latter is grounded in will to power as the principle of all valuation. Nietzsche's metaphysics consequently becomes the fulfillment of nihilism proper, because it is the metaphysics of the will to power."<sup>221</sup> The implication is that there is nothing of value apart from that which is attributed value by the generative will. Contrary to Nietzsche's incomplete nihilism, Heidegger suggests that "completed nihilism must, in addition, do away with even the place of value itself, with the suprasensory as a realm, and accordingly must posit and revalue values differently."<sup>222</sup> The challenge of completed nihilism is to leave the open place formerly occupied by God empty, open, and unoccupied by any transcendental signifier. Heidegger suggests that "instead of [the place of God], another [place] can loom on the horizon – a place that is identical neither with the essential realm belonging to god nor with that of man, but with which man comes once more into a distinctive relationship [with being]."<sup>223</sup>

For Nietzsche, humanity in its present form is not up to the task of assuming self-mastery and dominion over the Earth. A new type of man must therefore be created – the Overman.<sup>224</sup> The strength of will required for undertaking a revaluation of value is rare, as is anything noble. Nietzsche: "Independence is for the very few, it is a privilege of the strong."<sup>225</sup> Contrary to Heidegger, Nietzsche's insight into the groundlessness of being does not inspire awe and wonder, but horror in the face of the abyss. Nietzsche warns that the vast majority of people lack the courage to exercise the generative will to power in the face of a meaningless and indifferent universe. Only an elite aristocratic caste has the courage to face the groundlessness of being and summon the strength of will necessary to create

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<sup>221</sup> Heidegger, *Nietzsche vl. III-IV*, 204

<sup>222</sup> Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 69

<sup>223</sup> Ibid, 100

<sup>224</sup> See Stanley Rosen, *The Mask Of Enlightenment*, (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2004)

<sup>225</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good And Evil*, 41



meaning from *nothingness*, from nothing prior to the will itself. Nietzsche advocates for the creation of “a new aristocracy, based on the severest self-legislation.”<sup>226</sup> Only the caste of the ‘overman’ is capable of becoming who they are: “self-legislators, self-creators, creators of new values and tables of what is good.”<sup>227</sup> Put simply, the highest need is “to teach man the future of man as his *will* . . .”<sup>228</sup> Such strength of will is fashioned through a strict adherence to ascetic regimes of self-discipline “with the intention of training a ruling caste – the future maters of the Earth.”<sup>229</sup> Heidegger: “Justice looks beyond to that sort of mankind which is to be forged and bred into a type, a type that possesses essential aptitude for establishing absolute dominion over the Earth.”<sup>230</sup> It would be a mistake to interpret the Overman as equivalent to the modern Enlightenment project of moral self-legislation, whereby each is subject only to the law that they themselves will. On the contrary, the highest man is “he who determines values and directs the will of millennia by giving directions to the highest natures.”<sup>231</sup> It is therefore no less true for Nietzsche than for Aristotle that “the wise man must not be ordered but must order, and he must not obey another, but the less wise must obey him.”<sup>232</sup>

Nietzsche distinguishes between the ruling caste of the Overman from under-caste of the last man. The last man lacks sufficient courage to endure the spiritual transfiguration undergone by the Overman. Instead, the last man succumbs to the need for a metaphysical grounding of truth. The metaphysical need refers to the psychological inability to cope with the radical contingency of

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<sup>226</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, 504

<sup>227</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 266

<sup>228</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good And Evil*, 117

<sup>229</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, 502

<sup>230</sup> Heidegger, *Nietzsche vl. III-IV*, 245

<sup>231</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, 519

<sup>232</sup> Aristotle, *The Basic Works Of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York, NY: Random House Inc, 1941), 691

truth. In response to the anxiety, uncertainty, and disorientation of metaphysical groundlessness, the last man clings to the myth of divine origins. Just as the allegory of the cave teaches that there is an ideal realm that grounds this world, the myth of the metals teaches of the divine origins of justice. According to Nietzsche, the purpose of Plato's myth is to instill the false belief "that the order of castes, the highest, the dominating law, is merely the ratification of the order of nature, of a natural law of the first rank."<sup>233</sup> The teaching of the myth of the metals is that the ruling philosopher-kings belong to a superior caste, just as the lower castes are inherently inferior. It therefore follows that the last man is incapable of self-mastery and so must be ruled by the Overman. The function of the noble lie is to maintain order by justifying hierarchical social relations as an expression of the great chain of being. This hierarchy is justified by the belief that the social order is a reflection of the natural order, and that the rule of the few is at the same time the rule of the best.

We have seen that Nietzsche is opposed to the perceived dualism and foundationalism of Platonic metaphysics. However, Nietzsche shares with Plato an authoritarian political vision that is rooted in the cyclical experience of time. For Nietzsche and Plato both, the temporality of the eternal return unveils a vista of cosmic nihilism that cannot possibly be endured. Ohana states the problem well: "Man created an illusion of wholeness, order, and unity in order to organize the chaos by giving it a meaningful structure, but the reflective consciousness exposes the illusion."<sup>234</sup> Man cannot bear to be the origin of his own meaning. The insight into the Promethean destiny of cyclical time reverts to a psychological need for political order grounded in foundational myth (the myth of foundations). By outlining the nihilistic destiny of Western metaphysics, Nietzsche brings us face-to-face with the disenchantment of all value, meaning,

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<sup>233</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, trans. H.L. Mencken (Tuscan, AZ: See Sharp Press, 1999), 82

<sup>234</sup> Ohana, *The Dawn Of Political Nihilism*, 42

and truth. Tragically, Nietzsche brings us to the precipice of the abyss, while nevertheless failing to accomplish a leap beyond.

### *The Promethean Destiny Of The West*

Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* poses the following question: "What is the significance of the *tragic* myth amongst the Greeks?"<sup>235</sup> For Nietzsche, tragic myth offers a glimpse into the nihilistic fate of the West. Nietzsche's visionary insight is that attic tragedy is an aesthetic response to the horror of confronting the ungrounded emptiness of being. The innate nihilism of Western metaphysics is evident in the startling conclusion of Plato's *Republic*, the myth of Er. The myth of Er offers a shocking vision of cosmic nihilism. The myth tells of the warrior Er, who upon dying in battle, returns to life bearing an unsettling account of the afterlife. Er describes the transmigration of his soul through divine realms. Upon departing from his body at the moment of death, Er's soul first arrives at a landscape of heavenly and demonic realms. At this boundary between worlds, the soul encounters a judge who measures out punishment and reward. The judge directs the soul towards higher or lower realms based upon the goodness of one's life. The wicked are imprisoned in the depths of Tartarus, each sin punished ten times over, while the virtuous ascend to heavenly realms of bliss. After receiving their just measure, all souls, wicked and virtuous alike, journey towards a panoramic vista. Upon entrance into this visionary realm, the soul glimpses the horrific Spindle of Necessity, a cosmic vortex turned by the arbitrary decree of the hideous Moirai (Fates), daughters of Ananke (Necessity). At this point of the journey, the soul must decide on its next reincarnation based upon the lessons learned from previous lives. The soul's decision as to what constitutes a good life will determine the fate of its reincarnation. If the soul decides wisely, it

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<sup>235</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth Of Tragedy*, 18

will ascend to a higher form of life. It is for this reason that philosophical wisdom is of cosmic significance for Socrates.

It is nevertheless strange that the myth of Er ultimately undermines Socrates' assurance that the good life is also the happy life. Instead, the myth indicates that ultimately, wisdom is futile. Life is blind suffering, regardless of virtue or vice. The nullity of wisdom becomes increasingly evident in light of the startling culmination of the soul's transmigration. After deciding on the form of its next life, the soul must journey to Lethe, the river of forgetfulness. Upon reaching the banks of Lethe, the soul is compelled to drink from the river, and subsequently forgets its previous incarnations along with the lessons learned. The soul is then carried away by the solar winds of a cosmic storm, randomly descending as a shooting star into its next incarnation. Plato's cosmological vision is horrifically bleak. In the end, the soul's reincarnation is not determined by just measure, but instead by blind Fate. If I may draw from Hindu cosmology, the "wheel of samsara" is not turned by Justice. There is no karma in Plato's horrific vision, only arbitrary Fate. The myth of Er contradicts Socrates' fundamental teachings that "virtue is knowledge; man sins only from ignorance; he who is virtuous is happy."<sup>236</sup> In order to establish that the good life is in fact the best form of life, Socrates must presuppose a cosmological notion of justice operative within the universe. However, the arbitrary turning of the Spindle of Necessity indicates that there is in fact no such measure. Instead, "all that exists is just and unjust and equally justified in both."<sup>237</sup> Plato refutes the optimism of the Hindu sages; reincarnation is not governed by karma. Instead the transmigration of the soul is determined by the turning of blind Fate.

The nihilistic destiny of Western metaphysics is readily apparent in Sophocles' *Theban Trilogy*, especially *Oedipus The King*. Sophocles

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid, 91

<sup>237</sup> Ibid, 72

tragic drama presents striking answers to Nietzsche's question of whether or not truth is beneficial to life. The answer is a resounding no! On the contrary, Sophocles' attic tragedy offers a shockingly bleak vision of the world in which the search for truth is fated to culminate in utter devastation. Even Oedipus, the heroic king of Thebes, lacks the strength to endure the truth of cosmic nihilism. For Oedipus, truth is ultimately a revelation of horror. According to a prophecy of the Delphic oracle, Oedipus is destined to kill his father and sleep with his mother. Horrified by the oracle's prophecy, Oedipus exiles himself in a desperate attempt to avoid his fated ruin. But Oedipus's determination to evade his future only hastens the prophecy to fruition. Oedipus is ignorant of the fact that the King and Queen of Corinth, who raised Oedipus, and whom Oedipus takes to be his biological parents, are in reality Oedipus' adopted parents. It is because of this ignorance that in self-imposed exile from Corinth, Oedipus fails to recognize his true father when they meet in a chance encounter upon the road. Ignorant of his true identity, Oedipus engages in a heated dispute with the elderly stranger. In a state of rage, Oedipus unintentionally kills the stranger, Oedipus' true father, Laius, King of Thebes.

Upon reaching the city of Thebes, Oedipus discovers its citizens at the mercy of the monstrous Sphinx. The only hope for salvation is to solve the riddle of the Sphinx. The Sphinx's riddle represents the secrets of nature of which only Oedipus is wise enough to perceive. Oedipus heroically solves the riddle and defeats the Sphinx. In a demonstration of gratitude, the Thebans crown Oedipus their king. As a result, Oedipus unknowingly marries his own mother Jocasta, the Queen of Thebes. To all appearance, Oedipus rules over a period of prosperity. However, the truth is that Oedipus' heinous crimes are festering deep within the body-politic. The gods strike Thebes with a horrible plague as punishment for the unspeakable crimes of their king. Oedipus, desperate to relieve the suffering of his people, pleads to "learn what act or covenant of mine could still redeem the

state?”<sup>238</sup> At that moment, Creon, brother of Jocasta, returns from the oracle bearing news that “our wounds will issue into blessings.”<sup>239</sup> The gods bring reassurance, promising that “seek and you shall find. Only that escapes which never was pursued.”<sup>240</sup> Encouraged by the oracle’s prophecy, Oedipus is determined to discover the identity of Laius’ killer, and thereby “drag that shadowed past to light.”<sup>241</sup> Nevertheless, Oedipus’ resolve to discover the truth at any cost leads to the devastating recognition of the ungrounded emptiness of being.

According to Aristotle’s authoritative interpretation of the play, Oedipus’ torment at the hands of gods is just. This is because Oedipus is afflicted with that which Aristotle calls the tragic flaw of pride. According to Nietzsche, however, Sophocles’ play bears witness to far darker truth – that ignorance is preferable to knowledge. Nietzsche: “Sophocles understood the most sorrowful figure of the Greek stage, the unfortunate Oedipus, as the noble human being who, in spite of his wisdom, is destined to error and misery . . .”<sup>242</sup> Far from displaying a tragic flaw, Oedipus’ only crime is his devotion to truth. In the pursuit of truth, Oedipus summons the prophet Tiresias, who warns Oedipus that truth is too difficult for the soul to bear. Oedipus nevertheless persists, and Tiresias declares that “the murderer of the man whose murder you pursue is you . . . I say that you and your dearly beloved are wrapped together in hideous sin, blind to the horror of it.”<sup>243</sup> Oedipus is reduced to a state of shock and despair. Desperate to avoid such a horrific prophecy, Jocasta offers false comfort, dismissing the command of the Delphic oracle to “know thyself.” Jocasta: “There is no art of prophecy known to man . . . If the god insists of tracking down the

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<sup>238</sup> Sophocles, *The Oedipus Plays Of Sophocles*, trans. Paul Roche, (New York, NY: Meridian, 1966), 7

<sup>239</sup> Sophocles, *The Oedipus Plays*, 8

<sup>240</sup> Ibid, 9

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, 11

<sup>242</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth Of Tragedy*, 67

<sup>243</sup> Sophocles, *The Oedipus Plays*, 21

truth, why then, let the god himself get on track.”<sup>244</sup> Ever faithful to the gods, Oedipus is beyond such false consolation and resolves to face the truth at any cost. Jocasta nevertheless continues to plead with Oedipus to “forget it all. It’s not worth knowing . . . God help you, Oedipus! Hide it from you who you are.”<sup>245</sup> Oedipus is nevertheless compelled to continue seeking the truth until the mystery is revealed: “Forget it all? I can’t stop now.”<sup>246</sup> According to Nietzsche, Oedipus should have followed the council of Tiresias and Jocasta; the truth is indeed too painful to endure. Upon discovery of the truth, Oedipus cries out: “Lost! Ah lost! At last it’s blazing clear. Light of my days, go dark. I want to gaze no more.”<sup>247</sup> According to the chorus, Oedipus’ fate reveals “man’s pattern of unblessedness.”<sup>248</sup> What, then, is the truth of Oedipus’ fate? What discovery could be so horrific that Oedipus is compelled to gauge out his own eyes in the shock of recognition?

The horrific truth of Sophocles’ attic drama is as follows: “The edge of wisdom turns against the wise: wisdom is a crime against nature.”<sup>249</sup> For Sophocles, we are abandoned by the gods, destined to suffer a world of pain, whose only respite is death. Nietzsche suggests that, “conscious of the truth he has once seen, man now sees everywhere only the horror or absurdity of existence . . .”<sup>250</sup> In recognition of his fate, Oedipus’ act of self-blinding suggests that it is better to live a life condemned to eternal darkness than to glimpse the horror of being. According to Nietzsche’s interpretation, “it was to be able to live that the Greeks had to create these gods from a most profound need.”<sup>251</sup> Nietzsche: “The Greek knew and felt the terrors

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid, 40

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, 58

<sup>246</sup> Ibid, 60

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, 67

<sup>248</sup> Ibid, 68

<sup>249</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth Of Tragedy*, 69

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 60

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, 42

and horrors of existence. That he might endure this terror at all, he had to interpose between himself and life the radiant dream-birth of the Olympians.”<sup>252</sup> The veil was torn for Oedipus, thereby revealing a glimpse of the horror. In spite of his nobility, strength, and courage, Oedipus’ fate is too terrible to bear. Creon nevertheless attributes blame to Oedipus, advising him to “stop this striving to be master of all. The mastery you had in life has been your fall.”<sup>253</sup> Nevertheless, it is not pride, but rather devotion to truth that drives Oedipus. The teaching of the play is completely nihilistic, and can be summarized as follows: “So being mortal, look on that last day and count no man blessed in this life until he’s crossed life’s bounds unstuck by ruin.”<sup>254</sup> Oedipus’ tragic fate indicates that it is better *not to be* than *to be*. Oedipus: “Oh wretched, ephemeral race, children of chance and misery, why do you compel me to tell you what it would be most expedient for you not to hear? What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second best for you is – to die soon.”<sup>255</sup>

The tragic world-view of *Oedipus King* is reinforced in an important passage of Plato’s *Apology*. At the moment of his death, Socrates says that he owes Asclepius a rooster. Asclepius is the god of healing, to whom Socrates owes a sacrifice. Presumably this debt is owed because Socrates thinks that death heals the wound of life. For Socrates, life is a disease whose only cure is death. Like Oedipus, Socrates “suffers life like a sickness,” and only death can heal the illness of living.<sup>256</sup> It is therefore better to not have been. Ultimately, both Socrates and Oedipus attain peace by resolutely enduring the cruelty of their fate. For this reason, Oedipus is considered a hero within the ancient Greek world. According to the conventions of attic tragedy, a hero is characterized by the quest for truth, such as

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid, 42

<sup>253</sup> Sophocles, *The Oedipus Plays*, 80

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, 81

<sup>255</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth Of Tragedy*, 42

<sup>256</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good And Evil*, 74



Odysseus' epic journey in Homer's *Odyssey*. For the ancient Greeks, the quest for truth inevitably involves the transgression social norms, roles, and customs. Since the social order is divinely sanctioned, the transgression of social norms therefore invites divine retribution. For the ancient Greeks, a hero clears a new way of being beyond established forms of life. The search for truth therefore requires great courage. By committing incest and patricide, Oedipus transgresses the sacred cultural taboos of Thebes. These taboos repress the instincts in the name of preserving the established social order. The will of the hero is liberated from any such restrictions. Nietzsche calls the Greek hero a "free spirit." For Nietzsche, the will is free to the extent that "the spirit would take leave of all faith and every wish for certainty . . ." <sup>257</sup> However, even the 'free spirit' must submit to the 'tyrannical' rule of the gods.

Take, for instance, Aeschylus' remarkable *Prometheus Bound*, in which the gods themselves are cast as tyrants. In the only surviving fragment of the Prometheus trilogy, the primordial Titanic gods are at war with the new Olympic gods. The ancient Titans are defeated and imprisoned within the abysmal depths of Tartarus. Only Prometheus, who sides with the new gods, against his own kind, is spared punishment. Upon observing the wretched state of humanity, Prometheus raises mankind above bare animal life by bestowing the transformative gift of fire. In so doing, Prometheus transgresses the divine command of Zeus. The tyrant Zeus is enraged by Prometheus' compassion for humanity, imprisoning the Titan for all of eternity upon a mountainside of untrodden desolation in a savage act of divine retribution. As if that were not punishment enough, Prometheus must endure the consumption of his liver by a bird of prey, only to have it continually regenerate in order to be consumed again and again until the end of time. As Prometheus bears the gift of foresight, the question arises as to why the Titan could not foresee his own tragic fate? It is a cruel trick of Fate that Prometheus is gifted

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<sup>257</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 290

with foresight but not with the gift of remembrance. Though gifted with foresight, Prometheus is nevertheless destined to forget. As a result, Prometheus must suffer the eternal return of the infinite cycles of time. Time is an infinite circle; everything that will happen has already happened. Conversely, everything that has happened will happen again and again. Even the ancient Titanic gods must submit to the arbitrary law of the “grey-grim” Fates. To the extent that we moderns look to the future while forgetting our past, Prometheus’s Fate is also our own.

Aeschylus’ bleak cosmic vision can be discerned in Prometheus’ final lamentation: “So must I bear, as lightly as I can, the destiny that fate has given me; for I know well against necessity, against its strength, no one can fight and win.”<sup>258</sup> Perhaps, like Oedipus, Prometheus would have gouged out his own eyes upon learning of his tragic fate, were his arms not already bound by indestructible adamantine chain. The remarkably nihilistic vision of Aeschylus’ attic tragedy is “that it is better to die than suffer torment.”<sup>259</sup> The contention that non-being is preferable to being can readily be discerned when Prometheus reveals the nature of his gift to humanity. Prometheus: “I stopped mortals from foreseeing doom . . . I sowed in them blind hopes.”<sup>260</sup> The response of the chorus to this revelation is not sorrow, but approval; “That was a great help that you gave to men.”<sup>261</sup> It would seem that knowledge does not bring freedom, but rather visions of catastrophic ruin and utter despair. With knowledge, one can only lament “the dreamlike feebleness by which the race of man is held in bondage, a blind prisoner.”<sup>262</sup> For Prometheus, ignorance of our condition is preferable to knowledge. “It is better not to know” that mortals as well as the immortal Gods and Titans are

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<sup>258</sup> *Greek Tragedies vl I*, ed. David Grene & Richmond Lattimore, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 69

<sup>259</sup> *Greek Tragedies*, 93

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid*, 74

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid*, 74

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid*, 85

bound by the blind rule of Fate. In spite of Prometheus' bitter lamentations, Hermes dares to accuse him of pride: "Bring your proud heart to know a true discretion – oh foolish spirit – in the face of ruin."<sup>263</sup> Hermes: "When you are trapped by ruin don't blame fortune."<sup>264</sup> But Prometheus remains steadfast, resolutely bearing the injustice of the gods, conceding no wrongdoing. Prometheus: "Oh Holy mother, oh Sky that circling brings light to all, you see me, how I suffer, how unjustly."<sup>265</sup> Prometheus must resolutely endure his fate, bearing witness to the nihilistic horror of being until the end of time.

For Nietzsche, Prometheus' fate is also that of the West. Like Prometheus, we are destined to endure the eternal return of time that destroys and renews all that we take to be eternal and true. Nietzsche's shocking discovery is that "something might be true while being harmful and dangerous in the highest degree."<sup>266</sup> Truth is not beneficial but harmful to life. For Nietzsche, the challenge is therefore "to recognize untruth as a condition of life . . ."<sup>267</sup> It would seem that self-consciousness is an aberration that ought to be annihilated. The challenge, in light of Aeschylus' tragic vision of cosmic nihilism, is to ascend to a higher perspective from which the horror of blind Fate appears sublime. From the vistas of such heights, "all things, whether good or evil, are deified."<sup>268</sup> For Nietzsche, affirming the beauty of suffering is all that can be hoped for: "for it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence is eternally justified."<sup>269</sup> For Nietzsche, only the aesthetic re-enchantment of experience provides relief from this primal death wish. The only consolation is to learn to see beauty in necessity.

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid, 102

<sup>264</sup> Ibid, 105

<sup>265</sup> Ibid, 106

<sup>266</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good And Evil*, 49

<sup>267</sup> Ibid, 12

<sup>268</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth Of Tragedy*, 41

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, 52

Nietzsche's genealogical project remains unfinished, cut short by the tragic onset of madness. We are left with an *aporia* – an unsurpassable limit that must nevertheless be surpassed. It would seem that the search for truth dissolves its own conditions of existence: the ascetic belief that truth is divine and that knowledge is akin to blessedness. We cannot simply evade Nietzsche's shocking discovery that it is not truth, but fiction that proves beneficial to life. Although I have argued that Nietzsche's attempt to replace ethics with aesthetics is ultimately inadequate, Nietzsche's confrontation with cosmic nihilism should not be judged to be a complete failure. In my view, Nietzsche's deepest insight is that the good life is not the pursuit of truth, but the alleviation of suffering.

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## &lt;Nature&gt;

Carol Roh Spaulding

The chiggers and ticks had taken over as far north as Saskatchewan when people began to wise up: no more going <outside>. This is not to say that a nostalgic parent didn't manage now and then to drag his or her offspring away from their screens and into the sunshine for a game of ball or even a hike to the former <waterways>. A self-defeating prospect, of course—think: aridity, dust, sun rashes, then the wheezing. The re-entry scrub-down, alone, meant you had to take a whole day off work or school. Now, no one even thinks about Exposure. That's why it's not forbidden.

I'd be lying if I said I was going to miss Earth, at least not this version of it. I'll miss nothing except Jakob and Skye, my own kids. They worry about how I'll manage, since it's not like I'm being transported to a fabulous vacation resort on one of the Black Moons. If I'm lucky, I'll get—I applied for, anyway—Primordia. It's the "practice planet" of some former humanoid species, which I personally would take any day over one of the Cloud colonies, no matter how scorched and swampy they say it is.

*Franka Burth?*

Of course, my personal device clatters to the tile when I stand at attention. As if that doesn't elicit frown enough, the guard, a shapely intersexual named TriLLe, eyes my baggy flight suit acidly.

“Present.” I shrug under TriLLe’s gaze. I’ve lost weight in the Canopy.

We used to say, quaintly, *today is the first day of the rest of your life*, which is a lot of pressure to place on a single outcome. But I wouldn’t trade what’s happening now for the best life anyone could imagine. Because in that case I wouldn’t get this chance.

The victim and his family got to have their say.

This is my say.

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After denial. After Big Oil. After irreversible damage when they discovered exposure of layers too close to the Earth’s core, finally, someone said let’s put the out-of-doors *indoors*. It wasn’t the structures, themselves, that were novel. We’d seen decades of more-or-less successful bio-domes. The switch came with huge private investment in realism, starting with screens that blacked out the real outdoors and then imitated the rising and setting of the sun.

Almost instantaneously, people understood. <Outside> was over.

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Time collapses into a kind of heaped blanket. A Recursion, it’s called. Think: the door standing open; the one you already passed through. We know there’s more, that there are others, separate, simultaneous. A Recursion’s something you sense is happening, like collective *deja-vu*, a natural disaster of connected human consciousness. Except it’s not time, exactly, that gets us there or gets us out.

So, the folds in our proverbial blanket: I can start out talking about my husband, Thom Hudson, and we’ll end up back at Michael Michael Michael, my seventeen-year-old accuser, a pierced, pale skinhead, Dome-raised from birth and in every way Thom’s polar

opposite. It happens when memory clings in some cognitive backwater. With too much emotional residue to achieve a complete shift, they overlap. Not their physical selves, just some neurological rut.

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The kids were still in grade school that autumn. Thom had worked very late into the season. At that elevation, the pass had long been closed due to the wildfires. Knowing Thom, he simply re-routed the trail and kept clearing. An elegant solution, were it not for the shock-storm. Before anyone knew what a shock-storm was, Thom got caught in one. First, he collapsed from thirst and hunger. Then his fingers and toes split open like overcooked sausages. Then he curled against the trunk of a <redwood> and got ready to die.

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About my gig, the one that got me into this mess: Circa early 21<sup>st</sup> century, people would have understood it as a kind of direct, intuitive blogging. I'd been working for Corporate and making good money, but I began to notice sloppiness that left them open to and eventually resulted in a totalizing breach. I got out before the finger-pointing started, with a good enough reputation and client base to freelance. My job was to have thoughts for people with content dependence—people who had spent too much time watching people watch people do actual things.

We used language solely as therapy, no visuals, because it'd been found to sharpen and even restore overall cognitive function. In other words, the brain is not a closed circuit. There has to be input, and for that there has to be, well, an opening.

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So, long before I found myself on the loading dock of a C-Class Transport, this kid, Michael had been downloading my stuff. We did not enter into a therapeutic relationship. With freelance, you don't need a diagnosis as long as the client can direct-pay. I worked via gray-net, known only as Blogger #045584, which meant that as long as I stayed economically inconsequential and didn't require



<cash> I could subsist under the radar with nobody paying enough attention to bother with me. I made sure to use angle brackets around a list of “post-diction” that would otherwise trigger surveillance protocols.

Michael and I had established a decent context flow, or baseline, for him to work with, using “forest,” “mountain,” <wilderness>,” “open-sky,” and what have you--all, of course, modified for significance based on age, intelligence, and experience. Some very workable narrative, there. Mount Everest, for example, in all its snow-capped glory, had once been the ultimate destination for people who needed to create their own adversity in life, and not the giant brown stump of its current iteration.

You have to imagine how meaning worked before all the downloads, when most reading still felt like a private experience. Number of re-posts and high flow rates helped you make a name for yourself, but for a certain oddball type of kid, the idea of <original> content seemed fascinating, edenic. Like vinyl to digital sound, or a Smith-Corona to a computer pad.

So, Michael. What I know: he was one of those MQ-9 Reaper kids recruited straight out of 8<sup>th</sup> grade to sit inside an air-conditioned cubicle in an armory somewhere in the cornfields of Iowa, working a joystick, death metal blaring, Pepsi and Doritos on the console as he conducted overseas flight missions to “gather intelligence and imagery about enemies.” Until he snapped. Whether this was from working too hard or from the sudden realization that his job was to regularly eviscerate entire villages on the other side of the globe, I couldn’t say.

Michael resurfaced a year later at a Google warehouse, where he’d held down a job for the better part of a year. He had started actually logging off regularly, taking breaks, paying more attention to bodily functions. Pretty soon he was out of gamer’s diapers.

There was even a material girl he said he liked, whom he met in treatment (where else?). He said he preferred to read in Long Form (Standard) even if he couldn't write it very well because it reminded him of his grandfather, a <Luddite>, whom he credits for teaching him to think in whole sentences and to pronounce vowels the Long Form way.

One day after a little piece I did on my blog about rain showers (people used to stand in them and not burn) this Michael wrote back using the customer feedback form:

*I-wnt = "2" C a rl nt sky.*

My heart knocked around in my chest a bit. Always a kid who had to see for himself if it was really all that forsaken. But knowing you could exit the Domes or Auto-Trans was a far cry from actual Exposure.

How to play this? *You'd be disappointed*, I messaged. Still, a weed of doubt sprouted in my gut: who was I to shut curiosity down? My Thom would have been just like this Michael kid--insistent, inclined to see for himself, had he grown up in this.

Wy =? from Michael.

*The Night Parks are actually more beautiful and convincing than the "real" night sky. Even in the Middling Domes. Trust someone old enough to know the difference.*

*I-kno + [h o n e y b e e s] = / usd-2 R-prduce.*

*So what?*

*I-kno /= wht-a "s u n b u r n" z.*

So? I logged off. I had stuff to do. Jakob had been home on leave from Interspace, I remember. And I'd agreed to watch Skye's pet crabs while she was off on one of her atmospheric retreats.

I didn't tell Michael, but the vibrancy of a real night sky is a thing you can feel in your teeth, your spine, your lungs. World without end, the stars and stars. Two days later, Michael wrote to remind me I was late with his most recent contracted download.

\*\*\*

You almost wanted a less predictable story. That long-foretold asteroid shower, for example. Cataclysm. Apocalypse. Earth become Ocean. That way, it could be over once and for all, instead of again and again.

Floods and drought and sinking coastlines became the norm, environmental degradation *du jour*. The melting of the <permafrost> brought about the exponential momentum that caused the Browning. The too-late. Suddenly it didn't matter what you believed; a lot of ingenious stopgaps and legislation and engineering happened very quickly. Almost as though they'd planned for it.

You wanted those who had brokered away our future to pay somehow for the mess they'd gotten us into, but turns out they were the only ones with the resources to get us out. It's not like you could eat the ashes or drink the sea, until even that became possible, with advanced recycling and filtration systems. Eventually, communities built Domes big enough for things like bike trails through municipal woods, edible gardens with clinical bee colonies, beaches with sand and surf and video sunsets. The projections covered over the apparatus—something like the old IMAX theaters—and almost made you forget you weren't <outside.>

Most convincing of all was the star-studded sky of the Night Parks. There was still environmental management, although not what you

might call <stewardship> of the Earth, which implied taking *care*, a partnership. This was mostly just maintenance of the Arteries (pipelines), transport of goods and the people who had clearance on Auto-Trans, drone deliveries, and Enforcement. There were <Domeless>; no one knew how many. But the average person mainly spent time trying to figure out how to get admission to a bigger and better Dome.

\*\*\*

Not a surprise: when I didn't respond for a week, Michael hacked into my personal account. *I knw yused 2 liv <outside>. Ulasted longr thn mst. Cn Ushow me?*

*No.*

*Wh't's <nature>?*

*Takes too much post-diction to explain. They'll just redact it.*

*Nt wrds. SHO ME.*

*Why do you want out?*

*Bc I thk I rmmbr it, F r a n k a.*

Michael knew me only as #044584.

I put my hands in my lap, straightened my back, and shut my eyes, heart pounding. *Thom? Is that you?*

The door standing open; the one you've already walked through.

\*\*\*

Time collapses into a kind of heaped blanket. Just like everyone else, I had been made to watch the two of us, our limbs coiled, our mouths forming pornographic oh's of someone's version of pleasure on the unnervingly convincing footage during my trial

proceedings. Michael's homemade tattoos of dreary symbols of hate and demise. His girlish limbs and supple fingers.

It's not like it absolutely didn't happen. It might have happened. In some version of my Michael encounters perhaps the two of us somehow ended up that way, one another's temporary solution to skin hunger.

But that wasn't what anyone was witness to. What you're seeing when watching Enhancement is something between entertainment and evidence. The sheer volume of surveillance footage in shops and plazas and public transport eventually became pointless and unmanageable. Instead, whole Hollywood production studios rose up to create these visual depictions of your alleged crime; the more heinous of them even got serialized. That's why there're so many convictions. Plus, the Enhancements are paid for by taxes; you have to pay serious money to produce testimony in which nothing happened.

I remembered how distasteful I'd found the accusation, apart from the injustice of it. If I was going to sneak out and get naked with an underage boy, I like to think I could do a little better than Michael. They provide the footage for your own personal viewing pleasure on the screen that's used for entertainment on commercial flights. There are five of us exiles on this space-dock, the others—laser violence, drug trafficking, human-trafficking, and suicide bomber--rubber-neck in the direction of my screen.

Some over-achieving government official added this bonus to the footage: an updated Enhancement on Michael, bare to the waist, his chest bedecked in menacing, unreadable symbols, his jeans slung low on the white sockets of his hips, hurling himself at an invisible barrier. His eyes are wild, bandaged orbs. Again, then again, and yet again, his cheek squishes against the Plexi-glass like the underbelly of a squid. Even my hardened fellow exiles recoil.

*Did you exhaust all your appeals, Burth?* TriLLe's light musk lingers in a cloud at my temples. S/he messages this question to my device, which transposes the words into sound. S/he'd had hir voicebox neutralized during one of the reactionary <Spasms> as they came to be called, when they punished those caught undergoing the process of gender transition. Not easily reversible, even once rights were restored.

Everyone gapes at me, so I give them the stink eye. "That's family money you're watching," I tell them. "Primo Enhancement footage. He's got retinal implants, now, for God's sake. He's going to be okay."

TriLLe smirks. *Then why do they want you gone?* S/he'd spread sparkly gold iridescent eye shadow thick under each brow.

I look hir straight in the eye. "If you mattered, you'd already know the answer."

The drug trafficker, her hair in long rainbow colored panels, sucks air in through her teeth. "You must miss the Canopy or something cuz that is exactly where that back-talk is gonna get you."

TriLLe lowers hir scanner to the next Offender, pauses, and aims the device at the right hip pocket of my flight suit. *Out with it.*

I reach in and pull out my souvenir-cum-bargaining chip.

S/he takes it from me, eyes shining, fingering the wristwatch with delicate appreciation. *Analogue.* S/he slips the wristwatch into her inspection bag. *What does a Recursionist need with a timepiece?*

"I know where you can get top dollar for that," I say, but TriLLe ignores me. Frustrated, I turn to Rainbow Girl. "They ticked," I

say. "You had to wind them to keep them telling time and put your ear very close to the clock-face—that's what it was called-- to hear it. Like a heartbeat."

Even TriLLe stops and looks at me.

I make a tiny motion with my thumb and index finger. "See the little knob? You had to keep them wound," I say.

\*\*\*

"You're looking for a concept," I'd told Michael. "There's no such place as the <outside> you're imagining." He would see for himself that controlled environments could out-<nature> <nature>. The whole production a fake of the real that was so real it had to be fake. I'd thought that would be the end of it, and he'd go running back for the Domes. But it only made him hungrier for the *real* real, whatever that is. Was.

\*\*\*

Zinnias grew at the front step of a house I no longer remember. I'd pinch the wings of the thumbnail sized moths that frequented that flowerbed. The cruelty of a child's detached curiosity. I'm ashamed to confess that the actual moths, didn't interest me; it was the gold powder on their wings, which I had fancied enchanted fairy dust that could make me fly, or at least get me airborne. I'd figure out the rest from there. I loved the shimmer of it on my fingertips. I had no idea that removing the dust would disturb the creature's aerodynamics, grounding them.

Perhaps that house with zinnias was the last place I had lived with Thom. Recursion is tidal; leaving spume and scuttling creatures in its wake. You're always looking over your own shoulder. You're always part of your own re-do. No need to say goodbye. And I'm thinking mainly: two more seasons and Thom will be home, when, in fact, he was already gone. And also: that's a lot of wobbly moths.

\*\*\*

Generally, you remain inside the Tubes and Auto-trans. A mile-long sealed entry point along the side of the Dome contains a walk-through exit inside yet another sealed chamber, along with a few caution signs and instructions for re-entry if you've undergone Exposure. Michael and I took the walk-through exit and found a wooden corral fence way out in the Hollows--either a vestige from a ranching operation from back in the day, or a vestige from a film set of a ranching operation from back in the day. Real dusk was just ending, leaving the sky a used-up shroud of ochre. The air tasted burnt and faintly chemical from a recent cloud seeding, but the stars shining their immutable best did not disappoint.

I spread my palm in the general direction of the <Sierra-Nevadas>. "Think of a night sky studded with stars. Like in the dome. Except not footage of stars--actual stars."

Michael threw his head back, blinking. When his eyes began to water, I thought it meant he was moved.

I thought it was awe.

"My dad used to take us up there," I swallowed, "several thousands of feet, backpacking, for weeks at a time. We'd lie back, dizzy with stars, their light bathing us, breathing on us."

He drank it in, like his very first fix, the pale moons of his shoulders heaving. That's what should have clued me in.

"If you could see into the source of the starlight," I continued, inspired, "you'd be seeing back through time into the future."

You're the gaze, and you're the star. The light traversing the conduit between them is simultaneously backing into itself and moving forward, becoming itself at the same time that it's dying off. Loves you, and very much wants to let you go. The door



standing open, the one you already walked through.

Imagine lacking the retinal capacity to see *into* a thing—not blindness, per se, or rather depth blindness. Who knew that true apprehension of the chthonic heavens could cause the cones lining the back of your eye to collapse from too much stimulation, from too much hunger to see? Who knew the moon could forsake you, that <nature> could render you blind?

\*\*\*

Zinnias grew at the front step of a house I no longer remember. Grief practice, I see now. In my earliest dreams as a child, wrenching sadness and despair with neither cause nor resolution would wash over me. I was not an unhappy child. I learned to have the grief in doses I could measure during 24 hour cycles that I could more or less control. Other people's grief. So it helped to stand there and focus on something. On, I guess, moths.

Thom and I had dreamed of erecting a cabin set way back on one of the old logging roads, a place with its own aquifer. A place where tree seedlings floated down shafts of quiet sunlight, alighting in your hair, on your cheek. We'd have solar. Battery back-up. And geo-thermal. The forests had become tinder in the summer and fall, but the dead of Winter could blow in overnight.

He wasn't gone when they found him; it was just too late. We brought him home. We stitched up his fingers and toes. We propped him up and took him out and drove him places. We followed his gaze to try to see what he was now seeing.

\*\*\*

TriLLe looks up when Jakob and Skye enter the bay. *Fifteen minutes*, s/he instructs.

My heart is crazy with love for them, but regret, at the moment, is the stronger emotion. I could have chosen differently. I could have used my head.

My kids' faces hover like sympathetic moons. "Stop looking so troubled," I tell them.

Each takes my hand and squeezes.

"Remember when I used to take you to the grounds around Cloud-Tech or Mandate and spread a blanket under the trees on one of those perfect, chemically-treated lawns? The Suits would walk past and look at us funny, but I couldn't believe everyone wasn't out there just to spend time in a green space with the sound of running water.

"The ponds had that inky murky indigo water," says Skye.

"Chemically treated."

"I remember open-sky," Jakob muses. "You could watch the geese disappear into it."

"It was called migrating," she tells him in her big sister voice of very long ago. "In the time of climates."

"Listen to me," I say. "With every chance you're given, take care of one another."

Somewhere, a great churning kicks in under the flight deck, rumbling in the bowels of the ship. Internal combustion, our eternal savior and downfall.

"If my great-great grandmother could board a ship for this country when she was only a girl, knowing she would never see home again, I can do this. I'll be fine. We'll meet at the Space Station for Christmas or something."

That's when TriLLE steps in on us. *Time, Burth.*

“You know, TriLLe, when I tilt my head at you in just the right way, and squint my eyes a bit, I can make out a shred of sympathy in your expression.”

My kids hold me tight. “See you some time,” Jake, his beard moist, says into my neck. He’s not going to weep for an audience.

Skye can’t meet my gaze until I hold her chin. She blinks, her tears brimming.

“It could be literally moments,” I tell her. “You know that.”

“Why does it seem so final, then?”

“Because it is final. Every time.”

She presses a <buffalo nickel> into my palm. “A souvenir for the journey,” she says. She backs away slowly, her face a pinched oval. “We love you, Mom.” Then she touches her index finger to her opposite palm and mouths, *look at the year*. The door slides shut with my children on the other side.

\*\*\*

“Last child in the woods is a Dirty Dinky!” Thom would say, joking, mournful, looking out at the actual skyline when the equipment workers began executing the <Shut Down>. People made bad jokes about Deconstruction theory, but there you had it. The sun had reached the most dangerous level of ozone factor that precipitated the migrations and the first serious investment of resources to the Space Station.

Anyone would have thought that outer space would be the destination of the privileged, leaving behind our scorched earth. Instead, the Cloud colonies are the dumping grounds for the criminal element. Meanwhile, the wealthy build their own domes, or join a Disney dome, and continue with the lifestyle they would

have lived anyway. They take excursions to space resorts. Their kids go space-tripping to new, hip destinations.

The only reason I stand a chance to get to Primordia or some other planet, rather than the Cloud colonies, is because they figure the risk is punishment enough. They let you “conduct research” knowing you’re running on only the chance of coming back. No one is even sure how old you’d be if that happened.

Yes, we knew about the oceans’ rise. The polar bears in Cuba. The iced-over moon. Yes, we saw it coming. What the grand narratives had not prepared us for was the mundane. It wasn’t saving the earth, but it wasn’t leaving it behind, either, both of which held more poetry as options. That’s the problem with grand narratives. All the doomsday stories that preceded the state we find ourselves in failed to prepare us, not because it wasn’t in fact doomsday but because people needed practical solutions for the piece of the <elephant> they could see.

You almost wanted a bigger story. Cataclysm. Apocalypse. Or the earth become ocean. Crisis we who survive can get used to. Enduring, by contrast, is just an everyday experience. It’s not just that everything is so much messier than oblivion. It’s that nothing is complete. No one’s vision runs things. Just temporary barons of one ilk or another, whose law masquerades as vision in the minds of enough desperate people to make a go of it, for now.

Thusly, we lurch forward.

\*\*\*

At his Victim Restitution Session, Michael’s mother spat at me. His sister wept. Stupidly, I had tried to send some audio for Michael’s contracted input, figuring without it he’d be in a bad way. I had imagined his fingertips drinking the keyboard, stroking the screen during the wait of seven long months before they would know if the retinal implants were successful. How hungry he’d be for

content. If I threw in a song for sentimental reasons, that was my husband I was trying to get through to. *Give me all your lovin'. All your hugs and kisses, too.*

My state-appointed attorney hung his defeated head. "ZZ Top? Are you for real?"

Yes, the attempt to send Michael audio content contributed to the evidence against me. His mother sought, and received, a no-contact order stating that I had willfully blinded the poor child through Exposure, and then demonstrated that I couldn't stay away.

Inspired by the Enhancement footage, the victim sported big fat bandages over his eye sockets at the Session. He rocked his head from side to side as if in a vain search for a way out of the dark. It's not like I felt anything but horrible about what I had allowed to happen to a child. That, I grieve. But two things: first, when I saw him, some things seemed familiar-- a searching sweep of his head, the puffy fists of gauze now covering his eyes, the chest caved in suffering, heaving. Second, we all understood that ultimately this particular exchange was transactional; it would produce a bigger settlement for Michael and his family.

But it did something for me, as well. That's when I realized why Thom must've picked Michael. His theatrics reminded me of Thom's end.

\*\*\*

"You ever seen one of these?" I whisper, showing off my nickel to the wide-eyed failed suicide bomber. She looks at me like I'm crazy. I try not to notice her mottled skin, the burn seams. She has no eyebrows or eyelashes.

"It's a five-cent piece. Beautiful, right? On the front, here, is an <indigenous> man, an American Indian. On the back is a <buffalo>--what you may know as bison. They used to roam the

<prairies> of the American West. It was only in circulation a few years before they retired it.”

“Why?” she indulges me, probably taking pity on me due to my age and fate.

“The date stamp,” I say. “Usage kept rubbing it out.”

“What’s that one say?” she asks.

“Right now, the date says 1931,” I tell her. “Next time I look, I bet it’s gone.”

\*\*\*

Yes, we knew about the oceans’ rise. The polar bears in Cuba. The iced over moon. Controlled environments did <nature> way better than <nature> did. No one thought it strange anymore, least of all the children, when people stopped going <outside>.

That autumn, Thom worked very late into the season. By the time they found him, he’d lost consciousness. But his subsequent recovery seemed to be complete. Memory intact. No apparent PTSD. That was why his later attempt to sever his own head from his body—he succeeded in death but not in deed--could be seen as an act of cruelty to those he loved. But perhaps it wasn’t cruelty. Perhaps it was a sign. Michael had inadvertently helped me to believe it was possible to communicate with Thom. But for that I’ll have to wait for the heaped blanket, the bend in the road.

\*\*\*

Before s/he leads us away, TriLLE puts a hand out for my nickel.  
*Out with it.*

“We’ve been through this, right? Trade you for my watch back,” I place the nickel with its profile of the American Indian face up in her palm.

“Last year of circulation,” I say. “1931.”

She balances the coin atop her thumbnail, index finger behind it like a trigger. *If you can't make out the date, you're free to go. If there's 1931 or any year at all, you're mine.*

“As if it were up to you,” I say.

*Call it.*

Think of the lifetimes hanging in the flipping of a coin: Fluttering. Winged. And in TriLLe's face this time, refracted again, and yet again: iridescence, compassion, my face, your face, awe.

\*\*\*

“Last child in the woods is a Dirty Dinky!” Thom would shout, Jake and Skye bounding after him through the Sequoias. Abandonment happens in stages. A timepiece. A seedling. A doorway. A firmament. A coin. Words that, somehow, you were still allowed to think, and write, and say. A re-run might become a re-do.

There's supposed to be a way out, but you have to know you're in it. No self-pity, okay? And for God's sake don't mourn. What really happened—is happening—is always nostalgia's foil. The trick is to just be kinder on the reboot. To imagine better. Different. More.

--End--

## At the Locker

*For Atom & Eva*

Michaela Mullin

*What origin story do you have in there?*

The mythology of small things.

*Oh, I'd love an apple.*

Have you ever thought about how  
when you put your pencil to paper, even if  
you let the pencil fall,  
you've already made a mark?

*Yes, but is it a dot or a line?*

Depends on how sharp the tip  
and how lightly  
you let go.

(I tie a knot of my cherry stem  
and pass it to you,  
teeth to tongue.)

(The trace words here—

*come un----.*)



## Total Eclipse

Michaela Mullin

Because it cost so much.  
Because it caused too much.  
Because the sun hit Cadillac  
before I felt it, before I forgot  
the sun sets so far away,  
out West where I want to be.

Right on the horizon line.  
Into that horizon line.  
Right on.

Falling bulb,  
filament for memory,  
regenerates itself,

creates you, creates us  
as television recreates,  
as veterans and flagpoles hold up  
ambiguity—  
amber America.

Women  
burning fire bright.  
Where's my water,  
my hydrant?

Women burning,

fired, bright.

Up the bill of right.  
Stop redacting,  
drawing hubris,  
peddling goods.

Unratified  
amendments.

45<sup>th</sup> man,  
*im-potis*,  
*emend*,  
and *No*

*Amen* in this corner  
where we stand  
deciding which way  
is go.

This zenith is our nadir.

Bears aren't marching.  
Bears aren't market.

She-bears constellate.  
She-bears ideate.

The Trojan Polar  
gazing in the water  
does not know  
he isn't real.

Take me to the river  
where I'll catch the day

it all costs more  
than we have

and we'll cook it in the fire  
and we'll eat it  
and be full.

Goodnight, Sun.  
Goodnight, Moon.

## Invitation to a Relation

Michaela Mullin

The song my grandmother sang was in a language I felt but could not translate, barricaded as it was inside my child's mouth.

When I kissed her cheek in the coffin, the lips that held in both my first and second tongues became chapped at the future drought of her inflection.

Rolling my *rs* came easy, but always sounded like a loud engine looking for a more proficient and gentle coyote to cross our body borders.

## Notes on Contributors

**Steven C. Hertler** held the post of Adjunct-Assistant Professor of Psychology for the College of New Rochelle, and currently teaches classes at the College of Saint Elizabeth and Caldwell University, both located in New Jersey. Focusing on personality, evolutionary ecology, comparative psychology, and theoretical sociobiology, he has served as the sole or principal author for 16 peer-reviewed journal articles, as well as contributing to several Sage and Springer Encyclopedias. Dr. Hertler is the author of *The Biological Backstory of Coming Apart: The State of White America 1960-2010* and coauthor of the forthcoming *The Rhythm of the West: A Biohistory of the Modern Era, Ad 1600 to Present*.

**Clay Lewis** is a recent PhD in Social & Political Thought at York University. His dissertation looks at the possibility of post-foundational democracy after the 'death of God'. A major claim of his dissertation is that the 'spiritual crisis' of modernity dissolves the metaphysical foundations of Reason, History, and the State upon which the Westphalian political order is built. In light of the global 'deterritorialization' of the state, he argues that local democracy remains a promising site of an emergent counter-hegemonic democratic project. His current research has for the most part left the field of democratic theory. He is currently writing about the ethics of human gene modification in light of the new CRISPR-case9 gene editing technology.

**Michaela Mullin** is a writer and editor living in Des Moines, Iowa. She earned her BA in English from Drake University, her MFA in Creative Writing from University of Nebraska, and her PhD in Philosophy, Art, and Critical Thought from the European Graduate School. She is a Pushcart Prize-nominated poet, and a recipient of the Helen W. Kenefick Poetry Prize from the Academy of American Poets. Her full-

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**George Saitoh** is the penname of Gary Quinn. He was born in Dublin. He graduated from the University of York in 1999 with a PhD in molecular biology. He currently lives in Tokyo where he teaches at Waseda University. His art essays, drama, fiction, and poetry have been published in Kyoto Journal, Aeqai, Clarion, Word Riot, Santa Ana River Review and Orbis. His plays have been staged in Tokyo and Dublin.

Prof. Dr. Hub Zwart (1960) studied Philosophy and Psychology at Radboud University Nijmegen (The Netherlands). In 2000 he was

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**Carol Roh Spaulding's** award-winning stories and essays include a Pushcart Prize, best story of the year in *Ploughshares*, the Glimmer Train Fiction Open, and the Katherine Anne Porter Prize for Fiction. Her recent novel, *Helen Button*, tells the story of avant-garde writer Gertrude Stein and her life in Central France during World War II. Spaulding is founder and director of the Drake Community Press, a community-engaged publishing laboratory based in Des Moines. She teaches writing and American literature at Drake University.

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