

Lena Petrović

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LITERATURE IN CONTEXT:  
SELECTED ESSAYS  
2000–2015



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# LITERATURE IN CONTEXT:

SELECTED ESSAYS  
2000–2015



Filozofski fakultet u Nišu  
2017.



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# KNJIŽEVNOST U KONTEKSTU:

OGLEDI O KNJIŽEVNOSTI I KULTURI  
2000–2015



Filozofski fakultet u Nišu  
2017.



*Analytical philosophy [is] the philosophical instrument of mature bourgeois society: neutral, uncritical, safe, focused exclusively on the acquisition of pure knowledge. (...) Incomparably more inspiring, but also more uncomfortable for any ruling system, and hence receiving meager material support, is critical philosophy... This orientation has re-endorsed critical thinking, the humanist tradition and the forgotten reflexion on virtues and values. It revived and renewed the ancient idea of "theory" which blends knowledge and morality, science and ethics. It is this school of philosophy that can only help humankind reach the necessary critical self-awareness and discover the way out of current contradictions. (...)*

*It would be fatal for the humankind if philosophy were to be reduced to "scientism". (...) Nowadays the dangers have become obvious of ethically neutral thinking, that which only recognizes the rationality of the means ("instrumental rationality"), and refuses to judge about the "rationality of the ends", because this is allegedly not the business of science or philosophy, but professional politics.*

Mihajlo Markovic





## TABLE OF CONTENTS:

### **FOREWORD**

#### **I THE MYTHIC PERSPECTIVE**

MIT I KNJIŽEVNOST: U ODBRANU ARHETIPESKE KRITIKE .....	15
BEYOND MYTHS OF SEPARATION: GENDER AND DIFFERENCE IN THE POETRY OF ADRIENNE RICH .....	35
WRITER AS ELEGIST: MEMORIES OF LOSS AND ORIGIN IN MCLEOD'S SHORT FICTION .....	61
STRUCTURALISM AS A CRITIQUE OF CULTURE: MYTH IN FRYE, LEVI-STRAUSS, BARTHES .....	80

#### **II TRADITIONS, TRANSFORMATIONS, COMPROMISES: LITERATURE AND THE UNIVERSITY IN THE POST-MODERN ERA**

POSTMODERNISM AS A FAUSTIAN BARGAIN: MARK RAVENHILL'S <i>FAUST (FAUST IS DEAD)</i> .....	99
UMETNOST KOMPROMISA: MAKJUANOVA <i>SUBOTA</i> .....	128
'PLAY UP, PLAY UP, AND PLAY THE GAME': ON GLOBALIZATION, MULTICULTURALISM, AND UNIVERSITY .....	149
DARKNESS WITH A DIFFERENCE: CONRAD'S AND NAIPAUL'S AFRICA .....	172
'ŠTA SE TO DESILO SA MODERNIZMOM?': TRADICIJA MODERNIZMA U ROMANU <i>G DŽONA BERGERA</i> .....	201

THE PERSISTENT TRADITION: HUMANIST HERITAGE IN DARKO SUVIN'S WORK .....	235
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### **III "ROYAL" LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH**

PLATO'S LEGACY, OR THEORY AGAINST DRAMA .....	251
UTOPIJSKI ELEMENTI U DRAMAMA M. DRŽIĆA I M. REJVENHILA .....	278
HAROLD PINTER AND THE POLITICS OF THE ABSURD .....	296
A DEEPENING VISION: STEVE TEŠIĆ'S POST-HOLLYWOOD PLAYS .....	315
'TELL ME LIES ABOUT VIETNAM': HOLOCAUST, HISTORY, IDENTITY IN THE WORKS OF J. M. COETZEE, A. DORFMAN AND P. BROOK .....	340

### **AFTERWORD:**

KNOWLEDGE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY OR, THE LEAVIS/ SNOW CONTROVERSY RE-VISITED .....	385
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<b>INDEX OF NAMES</b> .....	403
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## ***FOREWORD***

The essays collected in this volume were written between 1999 and 2015, a period when, to a particular blend of ethical, archetypal and feminist criticism, which had hitherto defined my theoretical perspective, I added a new, growing interest in the political implications of literature and theory and a new focus on engaged art. These texts are reproduced here with only slight changes. As I re-read them for publication I resisted the natural urge to revise - update or cross out - especially where I detect what now strikes me as a compulsive insistence, from essay to essay, on certain points of my disagreement with the theoretical positions current at the time and still influential, particularly about the manifold way they managed to marginalize “class matters” or ignore the imperative issue of international injustice and violence. I decided however to let the texts stand in their original version: grouped in three thematic sections but arranged (with one exception) in a chronological order within each, they will hopefully testify to a developing continuity of a critical position. The form in which it persists today is summed up in the essay “Knowledge for the 21st Century”, which I placed at the end of this collection, as an apt Afterword.



# I

## THE MYTHIC PERSPECTIVE

Myth is the hidden part of every story.

Italo Calvino

You get a totally different civilization and a totally different way of living according to whether your myth presents nature as fallen or whether nature is in itself a manifestation of divinity, and the spirit is the revelation of the divinity that is inherent in nature.

Joseph Campbell

I therefore claim to show, not how men think in myths, but how myths operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact.

Claude Levi-Strauss



## MIT I KNJIŽEVNOST: U ODBRANU ARHETIPISKE KRITIKE

Za one retke nastavnike Engleske književnosti koji se nerado odriču književne i teorijsko-kritičke tradicije romantizma i modernizma, te još uvek odolevaju podjednako žargonu vodećih postmodernih teorija, kao i njihovim zajedničkim antihumanističkim pretpostavkama, ohrabrujuće je kada na mestima gde bi to najmanje očekivali naiđu na istomišljenika. U predgovoru za svoju studiju *Thinking About Beowulf*, osvrćući se ukratko na postmoderne književnu kritiku i teoriju, Džejmz Erl kaže sledeće:

Postmoderni kritičar je jednostavno izgubio veru u svet i, sa njom, veru u moć jezika i književnosti da ga otkriju i iskupe. Jezik danas izgleda lišen i namere i referencijalnosti: ne otkriva ništa do samoga sebe; pošto je sve tekst, literatura nije ništa posebno; i šta može biti izvan teksta, ako i nas i svet u potpunosti oblikuje jezik? Ako im ne pristupamo sa makar malo vere, pesme su, naravno, samo cinični, preteći gestovi – naročito religiozne i ljubavne pesme... Što se ljubavi tiče, danas je moguće tumačiti Čosera – čak i Troila i Kresidu – a da se reč ljubav i ne pomene. Ovo je književna kritika u eri SIDE: ne veruj nikome; ne dozvoli da te zavedu njihove slatke reči; zaštititi se. I tako, zaštićen nepropustivom profilaktičkom gumicom žargona, kritičar samouvereno odbacuje i „transcendentalnog označitelja” i „transcendentalno označeno” (te, uzgred budi rečeno, čudno razmenljive termine koje koristimo da bismo govorili o svetu i o sebi) i proglašava društveno dobro iz hermetički zatvorenog prostora ideja. Simptomi narcizma sve su uočljiviji u novim kritičkim diskursima...<sup>1</sup>

Ovakav skeptični stav prema postmodernim teorijama književnosti i kulture nije, srećom, sasvim usamljena pojava.<sup>2</sup> Tu spada i predavanje

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<sup>1</sup> James W. Earl, Introduction, *Thinking About Beowulf*, Stanford, 1994, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Najzanimljiviji komentari su, naravno, komentari samih umetnika. U razgovoru sa Arijanom Božović, objavljenom pod naslovom 'Rečitost ćutanja' u časopisu

koje je Salman Ruždi napisao a u njegovom odsustvu Harold Pinter pročitao na proslavi godišnjice Instituta savremene umetnosti u Londonu 1990. Izabrala sam da se ovom prilikom zadržim na Ruždijevo tekstu, i to iz dva razloga. Prvo, zato što, nasuprot danas već ortodoksnom mišljenju da umetnici ne poseduju nikakvu superiornu moć zapažanja, još uvek smatram da više treba verovati onome što umetnici kažu o kritici nego onome što kritika kaže o umetnosti. Drugo, zato što Ruždijevo predavanje, objavljeno pod naslovom 'Zar ništa nije sveto?', može poslužiti kao povod da se još jednom promisli složeni odnos između mita i književnosti i iznova proveri upotrebljivost, po mom mišljenju olako odbačenog i na vodećim svetskim univerzitetima gotovo zaboravljenog, arhetipskog pristupa literaturi.

U Ruždijevo tekstu simptomi narcizma od kojeg, po rečima Džejmza Erla, pati postmoderni kritičar, upadljivo su odsutni: autor je progovorio o sebi, o svetu i o književnosti sa neposrednošću koju nismo navikli da očekujemo od savremenih kritičara i teoretičara i rečnikom za koji nas ti isti kritičari i teoretičari uveravaju da je neprimeren i

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*Mostovi*, Godina XXVIII, april–jul, 97, sv. II, br. 110, južnoafrički romanopisac Dž. M. Kuci izjavio je lakonski da bi mnogo radije podvrgao Žaka Deridu kriterijumima Dostojevskog, nego Dostojevskog kriterijumima Žaka Deride. Još jedan jezgrovit komentar dugujemo dramskom piscu Hajneru Mileru. Na pitanje kako bi se mogli definisati istinski postmoderni drama i pozorište, Miler je odgovorio (na srpski neprevodivom) igrom reči: 'Jedini meni poznati post-modernist je moj prijatelj August Štram, koji je modernista i radi u pošti' (pošta se na engleskom kaže post-office) (Heiner Muller, 'Hamlet Machine and Other Texts for the Stage', *Performing Arts Journal Publication*, New York, 1974, 37). Od kritičkih studija treba pomenuti knjigu Ljiljane Bogoeve Sedlar *Options of the Modern: Emerson, Melville, Stevens, Tibet*, Niš, 1995. U predgovoru ove studije o tradiciji američkog romantizma i modernizma može se naći jedno od najpromišljenijih i najargumentovanijih meni poznatih objašnjenja zašto modernizam ne bi nikada smeo biti prevaziđen, zašto je 'nemoralno postati post-modernista'. Takođe je korisna i knjiga Kolina Falcka (Colin Falck) *Myth, Truth and Literature: Towards a True Post-Modernism*, Cambridge University Press, 1994. U predgovoru autor opisuje postsosirovsku književnu teoriju, kao osvetu nekreativnog senzibiliteta nad kreativnim duhom. To je osveta onih koji gaje netrpeljivost prema književnosti, ili je se plaše, i koji su nekako prokrčili sebi put do položaja gde mogu da proizvode i oblikuju po sistem poželjna tumačenja književnih tekstova. Njihovo nezrelo i filozofski nekoherentno antimetafizičko teoretisanje nastoji da literaturu u potpunosti liši njene uznemirujuće duhovne dimenzije – jednostavnim poricanjem da ta dimenzija uopšte postoji ('Preface' to the Second Edition, XI–XII).



neprimenljiv na postmoderni književni i kulturni fenomen. Ruždi, treba odmah reći, ne ignoriše ključne ideje postmodernizma: on se slaže, na primer, sa Žanom Liotarom da jedinstvena kanonska značenja ili 'velike priče' pripadaju prošlosti. Zaključci koje Ruždi iz ovog otkrića izvodi, razlikuju se, međutim, od onih do kojih dolazi većina postmodernista. Njemu tako ne pada na pamet da književnom jeziku, samo zato što ne polaže prava na konačne istine, ospori sposobnost da govori o svetu izvan sebe – da, iznad svega, prikazuje i, prikazujući ih, podriva one vrste jezika koji pretenduju na takvo pravo i na moć koju im to pravo jemči. Takođe, daleko od toga da proklamuje 'smrt autora', tj. da mu uskrati slobodnu i kreativnu upotrebu jezika i svede ga na pasivni medijum kroz koji progovaraju bezlični diskursi, Ruždi insistira da su 'genijalni romanopisci oni koji poseduju potpuno i nepogrešivo svoj sopstveni glas, oni... koji se potpisuju u svakoj svojoj napisanoj reči'<sup>3</sup>. Konačno, iako prihvata da se 'sve što je čvrsto zaista rasplinulo u vazduh, da stvarnost i moral nisu date, već nesavršene ljudske tvorevine' – Ruždi ne smatra, a to je možda najvažnije od svega, da je ovo specifično postmoderni uvid: izazov za pisce poput Melvila, Džojso, Beketa, i Gogolja bio je da krenu sa te polazne tačke, a ipak nađu načina da zadovolje 'naše neizmenjene duhovne potrebe'. Odsustvo 'transcendentalnog označitelja', drugim rečima, nije nikakvo novo, kobno otkriće, niti nalaže, po Ruždiju, potpuni raskid sa humanističkom tradicijom koja je literaturi pripisivala posebno mesto među svim ostalim procesima označivanja. Naprotiv, upravo je danas (u eri masovne, pop kulture) važnije nego ikada ponovo formulisati ono što je najdragocenije u književnoj umetnosti i odbraniti je – naročito roman – od zbunjujuće žestokih napada, ne kontranapadom, već izjavom ljubavi.

Ruždi je, po sopstvenim rečima, odrastao ljubeći hleb i knjige. Običaj u njihovoj, kao i u većini pobožnih induskih porodica, bio je da se svaka slučajno ispuštena sveta knjiga ili komad hleba ne samo podigne već i poljubi u znak kajanja zbog nezgrapnog svetogrđa. U njegovoj kući, pored svetih knjiga, ljubili su i atlase, rečnike i stripove, a da je kojim slučajem pao telefonski imenik, Ruždi bi verovatno i njega celivao. Ova epizoda iz detinjstva poslužila je autoru kao

<sup>3</sup> Salman Rushdie, 'Is Nothing Sacred?' *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991*, Granta Books, 1992, 426.

uvod u njegovu glavnu temu – odnos sakralnih tekstova ili mitova i književnosti. Dečak koji je ljubio svete i sve druge knjige ubrzo je postao ateist, ali u svom ateizmu, ili postteizmu, Ruždi je zadržao uverenje da su potrebe koje je nekada zadovoljavala religija autentične ljudske potrebe i da ih jezik sekularnog racionalnog materijalizma ne može zadovoljiti. Religija je artikulisala, kaže Ruždi, čovekovo osećanje da je mali i govorila mu takođe šta je to od čega je manji: i isto tako snažno osećanje da je izabran i šta je to što ga je izabralo, i sa kojom svrhom. Religija je bila način da se dokuči poreklo i cilj života i istorija osmisli kao teleološko kretanje ka željenom ishodu. Možda najvažnije od svega, ljubav prema božanstvu zadovoljavala je žudnju da se prolazni, kratkotrajni trenuci transcencije – kada imamo utisak da prevazilazimo granice sopstvenog jastva i sudelujemo u sveukupnom životu izvan nas – zadrže kao trajno stanje. Na pitanje koje je sebi postavljao celog života – Može li religiozni mentalitet da preživi izvan ortodoksne dogme ili hijerarhije, odnosno može li umetnost da bude treće načelo koje posreduje između materijalnog i duhovnog sveta; može li nam književnost, apsorbujući ova dva sveta, pružiti nešto novo, nešto što bi se moglo nazvati svetovnom definicijom transcencije? – Ruždi, poput mnogih drugih humanista, odgovara potvrdno: da može, da mora i da najbolja umetnost to i čini.

Iako im pripisuje isto poreklo, Ruždi – koji, kao što je poznato, ima više nego dovoljno razloga da zazire od verskih svetinja – takođe upozorava na bitnu razliku između religije i književnosti. 'Poštovati sveto', kaže on, 'znači biti njime paralisani: ideja sakralnog je naprosto jedan od najkonzervativnijih pojmova u kulturi, jer teži da svede druge ideje – neizvesnost, promenu, napredak – na zločine'. 'Mitovi su večni odgovori, književnost nam kaže da se do odgovora lakše dolazi i da su odgovori manje pouzdani od pitanja... Ako je religija odgovor, ako je politička ideologija odgovor, literatura je po svom poreklu – u privatnom ličnom iskustvu – predodređena da bude preispitivanje, najveći izazov mitskim apsolutima'.<sup>4</sup> Ruždi citira deo iz Fukoov eseja 'Šta je autor?', gde se kaže da su knjige dobile svoje autore tek kada je njihov diskurs postao odstupanje od utvrđene norme, ili

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 423.

prekršaj, i kada se ukazala potreba da se zbog toga neko okrivi ili kazni. Fenomen autorstva Fuko tumači kao beleg kojim sistem žigoše i izdvaja prekršioce prihvaćenih konvencija i zabrana; autorski tekst oduvek je šizmatično drugo u odnosu na sve svete (i anonimne) spise, pa stoga, zaključuje Ruždi, iako je literatura jedina preostala aktivnost kojom se može ispuniti vakuum što se otvorio sa nestankom boga, ona sama nikada ne sme postati svetinja.

Nije samo Ruždijev beskompromisni humanizam ono što u navedenom tekstu podstiče na razmišljanje, već isto tako, ili možda još više, izvesne nedorečenosti koje bi nepažljivog čitaoca mogle da navedu na pogrešne zaključke. Ukazujući na razliku između mita i književnosti, Ruždi propušta da skrene pažnju, ili bar da dovoljno jasno naglasi, razlike koje nesumnjivo postoje između raznih mitova, ili čak između faza u razvoju jednog mita, koji može, a najčešće se to i dešava, da se od prvobitne priče o ljubavi kao sili koja nas oslobađa od nužnosti, prinude i zakona izvrgne u zakon protiv ljubavi. Stoga bi se mogao steći utisak da su za Ruždija mit ili svetinja, po definiciji, uvek konzervativni, uvek, štaviše, na suprotnom polu od takozvane demitologizirane stvarnosti, na čijoj se strani takođe nalaze neizvesnost, progres i promena. Takav zaključak bio bi u skladu sa težnjom savremenih teoretičara da svaki metod, a prevashodno arhetipski, koji u mitu traži ključ ne samo za razumevanje već i kritiku istorije odbaci kao reakcionarni gest, sračunat da ukine neizvesnost i osujeti promenu i progres<sup>5</sup>. Ovako protumačen, Ruždijev tekst bi takođe

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5 Jedan od njih je Teri Iglton. Pošto je, na osnovu vrlo selektivnog i reduktivnog prikaza arhetipske kritike N. Fraja, zaključio da je Frajevo tumačenje mita, posebno njegov koncept 'mita slobode', samo način da pojam slobode prevede iz domena istorije u domen mitske vanvremenosti i tako mu oduzme smisao revolucionarnog, društveno ostvarivog cilja, Iglton završava retorskim pitanjem – 'Ali ko još čita Fraja?' (*Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Basil Blackwell, 1983, 91–94). Deridino čitanje Levi-Štroša ima takođe za svrhu da diskredituje mitološki, odnosno antropološki pristup izučavanju kulture: međutim, ono što Derida svrstava u nedostatke Štrosovog pristupa – sklonost da u mitovima primitivnih plemena vidi uzor i kriterijum za kritiku savremene zapadne civilizacije, prihvatanje krivice za zločine izvršene nad 'paganskim narodima', nada da se oni u budućnosti mogu izbeći, drugim rečima, nostalgija, humanistička etika, rusooovski romantizam – po mom mišljenju predstavljaju glavne vrline Levi-Štrosove antropologije (vid. J. Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourses of Human Sciences', *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. D. Lodge, Longman, 1988).

mogao da postane argument u prilog tezi koju, pored postmodernih teoretičara, zastupaju i zagovornici političke globalizacije, tezi, naime, da je mitska svest opasni atavizam i da je povratak mitu u stvari povratak fatalizmu, da predstavlja odricanje od lične odgovornosti i identiteta, i, iznad svega, abdikaciju razuma i podavanje iracionalnim strastima; da, ukratko, vodi nasilju i krvoproliću. Pokušaj da se poslednji rat u Jugoslaviji, odnosno otpor Srba novom imperijalizmu 'civilizovanog', 'prosvećenog', 'racionalnog' Zapada, objasni kao posledica tragične zablude jednog naroda koji nije umeo da iskorači iz svoje kolektivne mitske svesti samo je jedan od primera nedovoljno promišljenog ili namerno pogrešnog tumačenja mita.

Ako se, međutim, u razmišljanju o mitu, književnosti i kulturi pođe od pretpostavke od koje polazi Frajeva arhetipska kritika, ili od koje je pošao Jung kada je, da bi razumeo svoje vreme i svoje mesto u njemu, sebi postavio pitanje: 'Po kom mitu ti živiš?' – tj., od pretpostavke da život modernog, istorijskog, baš kao i život tradicionalnog ili arhaičnog čoveka, oblikuje mit, ili tačnije, da istorija sekularnog Zapada ima svoje korene u prikrivenoj mitskoj matrici, postaje jasno da je fraza 'povratak mitu' neumesna i zapravo besmislena: ni moderni čovek ni moderno društvo ne nalaze se pred izborom između povratka mitu i demitologiziranog života, između prošlosti i budućnosti, nostalgije i napretka, tradicije i promene; radi se pre o izboru između različitih koncepcija napretka, promene, budućnosti; a sve one, kao što je Eliot pisao u eseju 'Tradicija i individualni talenat', pretpostavljaju opredeljenje za neke od egzistencijalnih i etičkih vrednosti zabeleženih u različitim mitskim tradicijama koje čine evropsko duhovno nasleđe.

Možda bi se u ovom trenutku trebalo setiti Frajeve definicije mita, dovoljno široke da obuhvati i 'veliku priču' o urbanoj civilizaciji i tehnološkom progresu, da bi se iz njene perspektive jasnije uočili odnosi između mita, istorije i književnosti. Fraj, kao i Ruždi, polazi od pretpostavke da se i mit i književnost rađaju iz jednog istog impulsa: u osnovi čitavih mitskih ciklusa, kao i u osnovi jedne moderne pesme, nalazi se želja za prvobitnim stanjem pripadanja ili jedinstva. Gubitak ovog stanja mit beleži kao izgnanstvo iz raja. Zato svaki mit, u svom prvobitnom i potpunom enciklopedijskom obliku, projektuje potragu za izgubljenim domom; u svom narativnom vidu, mit je pri-

ča o putovanju: od ovoga *ovde* – stanja osujećene želje, lišenosti, nedostatka, egzistencijalnog siromaštva, do onoga *tamo* – mesta gde se objektivna stvarnost i subjektivna želja podudaraju. Cilj potrage – jabukova grana, biljka besmrtnosti, sveti brak, Obećana zemlja, nebeski Jerusalem, Nova Atlantida – bez obzira na varijacije, uvek u suštini otelovljuje nadu da će se izgnanstvo okončati, a podeljeni um naći isceljenje u zagrljaju onog što je, kako Ruždi kaže, veće od njega.<sup>6</sup>

Globalni tehnološki projekat najavljen u Bekonovoj utopiji *Nova Atlantida* može se protumačiti kao poslednja u nizu mitskih faza koje ovo željeno mesto predstavljaju kao grad – grad, naravno, ne samo kao geografski pojam već kao fokus sakralizovanih vrednosti oličenih u patrijarhalnom svetom trojstvu koje čine Država, Zakon i Razum. Prepatrijarhalni čovek doživljavao je svoju transcendenciju u svetim gajevima i podzemnim pećinama, gde se u mističnim obredima prelaska izlivaao iz granica sopstvenog bića i utapao u telo Trojne boginje neba, zemlje i podzemlja, kojoj je pripadao u životu i smrti, kao sin, ljubavnik i dobrovoljna žrtva.<sup>7</sup> Razumljivo je što je baš Atena, rođena bez udela žene, boginja praktičnih veština i zaštitnica grčkog polisa, preusmerila mitsku potragu za domom od bašte ka gradu, kada je dala svoj odlučujući glas Orestu i njegovim zaštitnicima – Apolonu i savetu atenskih mudraca – u njihovom sporu sa Erinijama. Erinije su boginje osvete iz prepatrijarhalnih vremena kada je dete pripadalo majci, čovek zemlji, krvne veze bile svetinja, a materoubistvo – zločin protiv prirode – neoprostiv. Stavši na Orestovu stranu, Atena

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<sup>6</sup> Ova najpristupačnija verzija Frajeve teorije mita i književnosti izložena je u seriji predavanja objavljenim pod naslovom *The Educated Imagination*, The Massey Lectures, Second Series, CBC Publications, Toronto, 1967. Vidi naročito poglavlja ‘The Motive For Metaphor’ i ‘The Singing School.’

<sup>7</sup> Rekonstrukcija mita o Trojnoj boginji nalazi se u svakako najimpresivnijoj studiji prepatrijarhalnih mitova, knjizi Roberta Grejvza, *Bela boginja* (Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*, Faber and Faber, 1961). Grejzvovo mišljenje da je prelazak sa matrijarhalnog na patrijarhalni poredak bio početak katastrofe za zapadnog čoveka dele, između ostalih, Ted Hughes u *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, Faber & Faber, 1993, Erich Fromm u *The Forgotten Language: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales and Myths*, Grove Press, 1951, i Adelle Getty u *Goddess: Mother of Living Nature*, Thames and Hudson, 1990.

je ozakonila ono što smo danas navikli da zovemo falocentričnom vladavinom grada: od toga trenutka pojedinac duguje svoju lojalnost društvenoj zajednici, političke, a ne srodničke veze su prioritete, a ubistvo oca ili kralja – zločin protiv države – neoprostivo. Grčki polis, opasan odbrambenim bedemima, zaštićen od prodora nekada božanske a sada demonske prirode – i takođe amblem zatvorenog, očvrstlog patrijarhalnog ega – evoluirao je u transcendentni večni grad, nebeski Jerusolim, da bi se sa postrenesansnim humanizmom vratio na zemlju kao Bekonova Nova Atlantida ili futuristički megalopolis.

Od sudbonosne Atenine odluke tip transcendencije koji promovira dominantni kulturni mitovi ostao je u suštini isti: umesto periodične dioniske reidentifikacije sa kosmičkom stvarnošću, pojedinac je nalazio zajedništvo isključivo unutar apolonskog prostora kulturne iluzije. U postmodernom diskursu, zapravo, Ničeove su kategorije postale neprimenljive: priroda je, na primer, tabuisana reč, a oni koji je koriste bez ikakvih rezervi ili inhibicija izazivaju podozrenje ili rizikuju epitet romantičnih nostalgijara koji naivno veruju da je moguć nekakav neposredovani doživljaj bića, ili imanentnog prisustva; oni, tvrde savremeni filozofi i teoretičari kulture, ne shvataju da je stvarnost zauvek izvan našeg domašaja, da su iluzija ili simulakrum postali zapravo jedina stvarnost. Nestvarni gradovi iz Eliotove poezije (evocirani sa svom gorčinom onoga koji je iskustvo stvarnu otuđenost iza prividnog zajedništva), lavirinti iz kojih se dvadesetih godina ovog veka možda još uvek mogao naći izlaz, u međuvremenu su se sliili, objedinjeni kompjuterskom tehnologijom, u globalno selo iz kojeg, kako ushićeno tvrdi Mekluan, izlaska nema – niti je poželjan. Jezikom preobraćenika u novu veru, Mekluan opisuje ovu univerzalnu zajednicu kao konačno pronađeni dom, u kome je 'vreme stalo, a prostor iščezao... Globalno selo je simultani događaj... Rekreativno iskonsko osećanje, plemenske emocije od kojih nas je nekoliko vekova pismenosti odvojilo.'<sup>8</sup> Grupni trans, beslovesna opčinjenost, nulti stepen svesti, izazvani poplavom neupotrebljivih fikcija i isfabrikovanih verzija sa TV ekrana, dobijaju u Mekluanovoj euforičnoj viziji smisao kolektivne harmonije ili obrednog pričešća, koje asimiluje čovečanstvo u jednu veliku porodicu. *Participation*

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<sup>8</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium Is the Message*, citirano u Tony Tanner, *The City of Words: American Fiction 1950–1970*, Harper and Row, 1971, 445.

*mystique* u sveopštoj simulaciji ne samo da je svima dostupna već i neizbežna inicijacija. Neprekidni priliv medijske instant informacije sve nas objedinjuje, upijajući pojedinačni um i utapajući ga nepovratno u kolektivnu svest. Nikakav otpor, poručuje Mekluan, nije moguć.

Međutim, za razliku od Mekluana, najistaknutiji antropolozi i arhetipski kritičari, kao što su, pored Nortrop Fraj, Erih From, Robert Grejvz, ili Ted Hjuz, veruju da je velika književnost nastala i dalje nastaje upravo iz otpora prema ovoj svetoj orijentaciji što ju je Atena prva ucrtala na našim duhovnim mapama. Jer ako je funkcija mita, kao i funkcija metafore u modernoj pesmi, da obnovi osećanje jedinstva ili pripadanja, specifično svojstvo književnosti je u tome da nas uvek iznova primora da se zapitamo šta je to sa čime želimo da se poistovetimo, šta je to što je veće od nas i čemu želimo da pripadamo. Još uvek se vodi spor oko toga da li su Eshil i Sofokle u svojim tragedijama pisali religijsku propagandu, tj. slavili patrijarhat kao novostečenu slobodu od tiranije prirode ili ga osudili kao uvod u tiraniju kulture – kao moralnu katastrofu. Ja sama sklona sam da pojavu prvih velikih imena grčke tragedije, njihovo izranjanje iz anonimnosti baš u trenutku sudbonosnog civilizacijskog zaokreta ka zakonu polisa, vidim kao nešto više od puke koincidencije i da je dovedem u vezu sa Fukoovim – i Ruždijevim – idejom da je autorstvo znak, beleg kojim se izdvajaju prekršioci ili kritičari društvenih normi. Ako su, kao što mnogi tvrde, Eshil i Sofokle ne samo prikazali, već prikazujući implicitno osudili novi poredak, onda su ovi grčki tragičari začetnici one značajne tradicije u književnosti i umetnosti koja u neprikosnovenm načelima Velike majke – u simbiotičkoj vezi sa zemljom, jednakosti i ljubavi, krvnim vezama i emocijama, i prihvatanju sopstvene smrti – nalazila kriterijume za vrednovanje i kritiku poretka utemeljenog na vojnoj moći, društvenoj hijerarhiji, političkoj korektnosti i građanskoj poslušnosti, racionalnom mišljenju i tuđoj smrti kao zalogu za zajedništvo.<sup>9</sup> Ta prvobitna tradicija doživljava periodične oseke, ali još nikada nije presahla – uočavamo je u srednjovekovnim romanima, kod Šekspira, u književnosti romantizma i modernizma; ona je takođe inspirisala niz značajnih savremenih dela na engleskom jeziku.

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<sup>9</sup> Jedan od prvih autora koji se založio za ovakvo tumačenje *Orestije* i *Kralja Edipa* bio je Erih From. Vidi Erich Fromm, *The Forgotten Language*, New York, Grove Press, 1951, 195–231.

Tako, na primer, u svojoj knjizi *Zemlje sumraka*, nedavno prevedenoj i na naš jezik, južnoafrički pisac Dž. M. Kuci prikazuje rat u Vijetnamu kao prikriven sukob dveju mitskih tradicija. Protagonista romana, Judžin Don, zaposlen u vojnom institutu Kenedi, radi na projektu za brzo okončanje rata. On vrlo lucidno uočava da svoju hrabrost za pobunu Vijetnamci, kao paganski Anteji, crpu iz svoje veze sa materinskom zemljom. Aktuelnu političku situaciju oni prevode u mitski scenario po kome oduvek žive: u mit o zaveri sinova sa Majkom (tj. vijetnamskom zemljom) i pobuni i zbacivanju Oca (tj. strane imperije: SAD) sa vlasti. Ovaj mit ne predviđa predaju kao opciju: pasti u ruke ocu znači biti živ pojeden, ili sagoreti u vatri, odnosno ne biti sahranjen u zemlji, čime se gubi nada u ponovno rođenje. Predaja tako postaje mnogo strašnja varijanta od smrti, te je američka vojna nadmoć u Vijetnamu bez ikakvog značaja za ishod rata. Judžin Don zato predlaže, kao jedinu efikasnu kontrastrategiju, da se podrivanjem vijetnamskog mita preseče veza između majke i sinova. To se praktično može postići intenzivnom medijskom propagandom – emitovanjem američkog programa, tj. očevog autoritarnog glasa, preko radija – i doslednom upotrebom svih raspoloživih sredstava za pustošenje vijetnamskog tla. Sve veća izolovanost u umirućem pejzažu i strah od smrti bi paganskog Vijetnamca ubrzo pretvorili i dekartovskog intelektualca i naterali ga da poslušno klekne pred očevim vladarskim žezlom. Amerikanci bi morali, kaže Judžin, da potisnu atavističko osećanje krivice zbog napalm udara, jer je intervencija u Vijetnamu njihova dužnost prema istoriji, a ona, istorija, nije ništa drugo do strpljiva borba intelekta protiv anarhije, krvi i emocija, evolucijski uspon od entropijske žudnje za prarodilačkim muljem ka slavi racionalne svesti. Vijetnam je čistilište kroz koje je neophodno proći da bi se iskorenila hrabrost za pobunu – ta arhaična vrlina – i čovečanstvo, smernog srca, kročilo u novi raj.

Zar nije (kaže on) glavni mit istorije potisnuo fikciju o simbiozi neba i zemlje. Mi više ne živimo obrađujući već proždirući zemlju i njene plodove. Odbacili smo je i potpisali to odbacivanje letovima ka novim nebeskim ljubavima. Mi imamo sposobnost da rađamo iz sopstvene glave. Kada se zemlja uroti incestuozno sa svojim sinovima, zar ne treba da pribegnemo oružju boginje *tehne*, čije je poreklo u našem umu? Zar nije vreme da majku zemlju zameni njena verna kći koja je



došla na svet bez udela žene? Ovo je osvit novog doba – doba boginje Atene. Na indokineskoj sceni mi igramo u drami o kraju telurske ere i o venčanju nebeskog boga i njegove partenogene ćerke-kraljice. Ako je predstava bila loša, to je stoga što smo se spotali na sceni u polusnu, nesvesni značenja svojih postupaka. Ja razotkrivam njihov smisao u ovom zaslepljujućem trenutku uspona meta-istorijske svesti u kome počinjemo da oblikujemo svoje sopstvene mitove.<sup>10</sup>

Delirični ton kojim Judžin proklamuje svoju veru u američku kolonijalnu misiju podseća neodoljivo na Mekluhanovu ekstatičnu viziju globalnog sela, unutar kojega će čovečanstvo naći svoj novi dom. Strepnje koje more Judžinovu ženu – da će joj ono što smatra muževljevim ludilom razoriti porodicu – on pripisuje njenoj pogrešnoj predstavi o Americi: 'Ona ne može da shvati da je Amerika dovoljno velika da apsorbuje svaku devijaciju. Ali Amerika je velika, veća od svih nas – Amerika će me progutati, svariti, rastočiti u plimama svoje krvi. Merilin ne treba da strahuje: uvek će imati dom. Niti sam ja taj koji je devijantan, koji istupa iz istinskog američkog mita, već su to oni cinici koji više ne osećaju u svojim kostima i srži autentičnu američku sudbinu.'<sup>11</sup>

Iskorak iz ovog mita i koncepcije istorije koju je on proizveo – Judžin naravno ostaje njen beznadežni zatočenik, fizički zatvoren u ćeliji jedne ludnice u srcu Amerike i mentalno u svom narcisoidnom delirijumu – skopčan je u Kucijevim potonjim romanima i delima mnogih savremenih autora sa izlaskom iz jezika. Bekstvo u tišinu, lingvističko izgnanstvo, nije, međutim, odricanje od govora; kod ovih pisaca ono signalizira potrebu da se, negde izvan granica kulturno dominantnog, i mrtvog, jezika, pronađe i obnovi zaboravljeni, ali još uvek živ jezik – Fraj bi ga nazvao metaforičnim jezikom politeističkih religija.<sup>12</sup> Jedan od primera je pesma 'Na pustom ostrvu, ili glas za Kalibana' savremenog engleskog pesnika Adrijana Mičela. Izabrala sam je, prvo, zato što je zabavna, drugo, zato što nije zabavna na način svojstven postmodernoj književnosti: autor se, naime, ne poigrava idejom da smo nepovratno zatvoreni u sistemu praznih označitelja; da, pošto mreža jezika ne može

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<sup>10</sup> J. M. Coetzee, *Dusklands*, Penguin Books, 1974, 26.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> N. Fraj, *Veliki kod(eks): Biblija i književnost*, Prosveta, 1984, 28.

da zahvati i izruči stvarnost, nikakva vanjezička stvarnost i ne postoji; da, pošto je u središtu svih fantazmičnih struktura koje jezik proizvodi vakuum, u središtu sveta takođe mora biti praznina ili odsustvo. Pjesma se, drugim rečima, ne iscrpljuje parodirajući procese značenja; iznad svega, ne parodira sopstveni jezik. Naprotiv, semantizujući tišinu, a ona je integralni deo Mišelovog jezika: dajući joj smisao osporavanja ili otpora prema onom što je Lakan nazvao 'les maitremots de la cite' – neprikosnovene reči grada – autor ukazuje na gubitak, pa time i na nekadašnje postojanje jezika sposobnog da uspostavi dijalog sa prirodnim okruženjem. Frajeva primedba da je, ispod svih složenosti savremenog života, nemi nedokučivi pogled što ga priroda upire u nas još uvek naš najveći nerešeni problem,<sup>13</sup> ovde je takođe relevantna:

Tihi okean -  
Plava polulopta,  
Ostrva kao znaci interpunkcije.

Interkontinentalni let.  
Putnici otvaraju paketiće putera.  
Diže se uragan  
I sruši avion u more.

Izbačeni na obalu ostrva, petoro njih  
Preživi.  
Tom novinar.  
Suzana botaničarka.  
Džim prvak u skoku u vis.  
Bil tesar.  
Meri ekscentrična udovica.

Tom novinar nanjušio je potok sa pitkom vodom.  
Suzana botaničarka prepoznala je bananino drvo.  
Džim prvak u skoku u vis skakao je gore dole i dao svakom  
po grozd.

Bil tesar istesao je sto na kome su večerali banane.  
Meri ekscentrična udovica je zakopala kore od banana,  
Ali tek pošto su je dva puta zamolili.  
Svi zajedno sakupili su drvca i zapalili vatru.  
Bio je čudesan zalazak sunca.

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<sup>13</sup> *The Educated Imagination*, op. cit., 22.

Sledećeg jutra održali su sastanak odbora.  
Tom, Suzana, Džim i Bil glasali su za konstruktivnu akciju  
Meri, ekscentricna udovica, bila je uzdržana.

Tom novinar je ubio nekoliko tuceta divljih svinja.  
Na uštavljenim kožama štampao je  
Ostrvske Novosti mastilom od hobotnica.

Suzana botaničarka uzgajala je nove vrste banana  
Koje su imale ukus čokolade, bifteka, kikiriki putera,  
Piletine i imalina.

Džim prvak u skoku u vis organizovao je organizovane igre  
U kojima je uvek sa lakoćom pobeđivao.

Bil tesar je napravio drvenu turbinu  
I vodenu energiju pretvorio u struju.  
Koristeći gvozdenu rudu iz brda, napravio je električne svetiljke.

Sve ih je brinula Meri, ekscentrična udovica,  
Njena malodušnost, njena –  
Ali nisu imali vremena da se njome bave.

Vulkan je proradio, ali su oni iskopali jarak  
I skrenuli lavu u more  
Gde je žitka masa očvrsla u živopisni mol.  
Napali su ih gusari ali su ih oni sve pobili  
Ispaljujući iz bazuka od bambusa  
Morske ježeve napunjene domaćim nitroglicerinom.  
Ljudožderima su uzvratili ravnom merom,  
I preživeli zemljotres zahvaljujući svojoj veštini u skakanju.

Bili su snalažljivi, bili su hrabri  
Jednoglasno su odlučili da se uzdržavaju od seksa.

Tom je nekada bio sudski izveštač  
Pa je postao sudija i rešavao sporove.  
Suzana botaničarka je osnovala  
Univerzitet koji je služio i kao Muzej.  
Džim prvak u skoku u vis  
Bio je zadužen za sprovođenje zakona,  
Skakao je na njih kada nisu bili dobri.  
Bil tesar je sebi sagradio crkvu,  
Propovedao je tamo svake nedelje.

Ali Meri ekscentrična udovica...  
Svako veče prošla bi glavnom ostrvskom ulicom,  
Pored berze, gradske skupštine,  
Pored zatvora i kasarne.  
Pored prodavnice suvenira 'Prospero',  
Pored filmskog studija 'Robert Luis Stivenson'  
Pored motela 'Danijel Defo'.  
Prošla bi nervozno i sela na mol od okamenjene lave,  
Zadihana, zbunjena,  
Kao da je nešto izgubila,  
Kao u ljubavnika,  
Širom otvorenih očiju zagledala bi se  
U uobičajeni čudesni zalazak sunca<sup>14</sup>.

Pesma nas, pre svega, primorava da se suočimo sa osećanjem lišenosti zbog opredeljenja za praktičnu, tehničku inventivnost pre nego za vrstu kreativnosti koju nadahnjuje ljubav. Ono, međutim, što je tim izborom izgubljeno – eros, bilo kao strast u ličnim odnosima ili bezlični orgiastički princip koji nas vuče u zagrljaj prirode – izgubljeno je zajedno sa jezikom, ili zato što je izgubljen jezik, kojim je 'divlja misao' bila u stanju da sunce preobrazi u ljubavnika. Zato što jedina od svih oseća taj gubitak, Meri ne pripada ostrvskoj zajednici. U logocentričnoj kulturi ona je ekscentrik: u društvu u čijem se središtu nalaze Zakon i njegove hipostaze – Država, Nauka i Novac – ona je marginalna figura: dobrovoljni izgnanik iz građanskog života i političkog govora, osoba koja se uzdržava od glasanja jer prividno različite opcije ponuđene u skupštini ne dovode u pitanje sistem institucionalizovanih, 'svetih' vrednosti: ne dovode u pitanje ni kasarnu, ni berzu, ni zatvor. Zbog svoje prijemčivosti za pejzaž, zbog sposobnosti da u jednom tako uobičajenom prizoru kao što je zalazak sunca čuje nemi ljubavni poziv, Meri je potencijalni, ali samo potencijalni, umetnik: iseljenik iz modernog polisa, ili tačnije povratnik koji, našavši se opet u svojoj prvobitnoj domovini, još uvek ne može da obnovi prekinute veze, da se savim repatrizuje, jer je zaboravila maternji jezik.

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<sup>14</sup> Adrian Mitchell, *The Castaway, or A Vote for Caliban*, Geoffrey Summerfield, (ed.), *World's Seven Modern Poets*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987, 208–9 (prev. L. P.).

Umetnik je, naravno, Adrijan Mičel, autor pesme, i on je na Merinoj strani: on glasa za Kalibana, mogućnost izostavljenju iz svih konstruktivnih političkih programa, potvrđujući time da je udovičino odbijanje da glasa za bilo koju od opcija koje predviđa sistem, njena politička neopredeljenost, u stvari jedino istinsko životno opredeljenje. 'Kaliban' je višestruka aluzija: odnosi se, pre svega, na istoimeno čudovište iz Šekspirove *Bure*, sina užasne boginje Sikoraks, koja je suvereno vladala svojim ostrvom, dok na scenu nije stupio Prospero – čarobnjak, otac, uzurpator, Zakon – i prekinuo njihovu nemu idilu. Majku je prognao, a sina naučio da govori i podjarmio ga. Ne sasvim: dar govora Kaliban je koristio da izusti najbolju poeziju u celoj drami, ali, takodje, i najžešće psovke i prokletstva. Pošto nije uspeo da ga pripitomi, Prospero ga je sputao i zatvorio u pećinu – podsvest vrlog novog sveta kao onaj ostatak značenja – i bića – zauvek neprevodivog u njegov Zakon, zauvek van njegovog Zakona i zauvek opasnost po Zakon. Kaliban je, takođe, anagram za reč kanibal, pa nas stoga podseća na još jedno literarno ostrvo, i na još jednog urođenika – Krusoovog Petka. Kruso je, međutim, i naivniji i arogantniji od Prospera, baš kao što je Defo i naivniji i arogantniji od Šekspira. Kruso i Defo – obojica Petkovi gospodari – uspevaju, dajući mu novo ime i jezik, da svog ljudoždera progutaju, da ga prevedu i ugrade bez ostatka u svoj sistem značenja, i da nam tako zaveštaju iluziju da na mestu na kome je Petko nekada postajao i sa koga je govorio oduvek zjapi praznina ili odsustvo, oduvek vlada tišina; vakuum što ga postmoderni teoretičari apsolutizuju, poistovećujući ga sa ništavilom.

Atena je glasala za Oresta i zakon polisa, a protiv demonskih Erinija. Mičel daje svoj glas Kalibanu i svim paganskim demonima prognanim u tišinu, ponavljajući ideju Kucijevog romana *Neprijatelj* da, sve dok kroz umetnost ne nađemo načina da vratimo jezik nemuštom, nećemo saznati pravu istinu o sebi. Mislim da poezija Šejmase Hinija upravo to čini. Pesma 'Undina', na primer, nastala je, kaže nam autor u eseju 'Reči u osećanja'<sup>15</sup>, u pokušaju da svojim isprekidanim glasom dopre do glasa undine, rečne vile i hladne device iz paganskog mita, koja je dobila dušu i postala ljudsko biće kroz

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<sup>15</sup> Seamus Heaney, 'Feelings Into Words', *Preoccupations*, Faber & Faber, 1980, 41–60.

iskustvo fizičke ljubavi. 'Undina' pripada zbirci čiji naslov (*Vrata prema mraku*) već dovoljno govori o Hinijevom shvatanju poezije. Opisujući svoju tehniku, Hini kaže da 'rima, asonanca, aliteracija ili metafora dobijaju svoj pravi smisao tek kada pesniku otkriju načine da iskorači iz svojih normalnih kognitivnih granica i suoči sa neizrečenim'<sup>16</sup>. Pjesma, kaže on, počinje kao ljubavna čežnja, žudnja za domom; njene reči su kao strele odapete u stvarnost da bi se pojam doma proširio i obuhvatio ono što postoji, stvarno ali skriveno, kao izvor pod naslagama žabokrečine. Njene reči su, takođe, kao vedro spuštene u bunar: kada se uže zategne, pesnik zna da je zahvatio nešto od vode koja će ga nadalje uvek mamiti da joj se vrati: zna da je otvorio pukotinu u skrami koja prekriva njegove unutrašnje dubine. Stare reči, kao što je reč undina, čuvari su tajni i prošlosti. Ponesen, kako sam kaže, tamnim virom u samom njenom zvuku, opčinjen njenom metaforičnošću (undina – rečna vila, unda – talas) Hini je, pišući ovu pesmu, ponirao sve dublje kroz slojeve kolektivnog sećanja svoje rase, da bi dosegao, kao rašljar do podzemnih tokova, do one zone u duši gde još uvek živi mit koji je bio u stanju da objedini, u ritmu jedne reči, ženu i vodu, plimu i oseku, uzdizanje i opadanje, ispunjenje i iscrpljenost; i, pošto pjesma govori istovremeno o humanizujućoj moći seksualnog iskustva i o navodnjavanju zemlje, do mita u kome zemljoradnja nije bila samo praktična delatnost već i ljubavni čin, replika svetog braka.

Zasekao je vres, sivi mulj izbacio  
Da me pusti da svojim kanalima prođem  
A ja, od rđe čista, potekoh za njega.

Zastao je konačno, gledajući me nagu,  
Kako tečem bistro, naizgled nehajno.  
Tad krenu uz moje talase i penu

Tamo gde kanali put kraj reke seku.  
Tu mi zari ašov duboko međ' bedra  
I uze me k sebi. Ja progutah

Jarak njegov zahvalno, od ljubavi se šireć'  
Po njegovom korenju, uz stabljike žita.  
On nauči tada, da niko sem mene

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 46–47.

Blagi rast i odraz ne može mu dati.  
Spoznao me tako potpuno, svaki ud  
Izgubi svojju slobodu hladnu. Čovečna, topla uz njega.<sup>17</sup>

Ja lično volim da čitam 'Undinu' kao odgovor na 'Ljubavnu pesmu Dž. Alfreda Prufroka'. Eliotova pesma je dobro poznata, te ću samo podsetiti na završne stihove, jer se tu, kao i u 'Undini', junak susreće sa mitskim vodenim bićima. Ishod toga susreta sasvim je drugačiji nego u Hinijevoj pesmi. Pošto se nije usudio da svojim 'sudbonosnim pitanjem', metafizičkim ili ljubavnim, svejedno, poremeti konvencionalni tok jedne pomodne čajanke, i potom neko vreme bespomoćno kružio zamršenim gradskim ulicama (bezizlaz je ne samo prostorni, već takođe kognitivni, a naslov – 'Ljubavna pesma' – ironičan), Prufrok odlazi u šetnju morskom obalom; prizor uzgibanih talasa podseća ga na sirene – koje je nekada video u snu? koje vidi sada u nekoj vrsti halucinacije? – promena u glagolskom vremenu čini odgovor neizvesnim. Njihov glas, međutim, ne dopire do njega ili, tačnije, kako on to sa izvesnom nostalgijom zaključuje, nije upućen njemu. Skrivene aluzije i implicitni kontrasti između slavnog Odiseja i njegovog patetičnog dvojnika, Prufroka, razotkrivaju tužnu jalovost i težak moralni poraz iza prividnog uspeha patrijarhalne zapadne civilizacije. Ako je Odisej, jedan od prvih mitskih heroja zapadne kulturne epopeje, morao da zapuši uši da bi odoleo zavodljivoj pozivu sirena da skrene sa puta svoje separatističke civilizacijske misije i opet uroni u neizdiferencirani primordijani element iz koga se tek izdvojio, za Prufroka, modernog antiheroja, pravu opasnost od gubitka identiteta ne predstavlja pesma sirena, već glasovi „žena što u sobi klize gore dole, o Mikelandelu govore”. Pomodni akcenat i isprazno ćaskanje Londonskih salona je ono što čujemo u ljudskim glasovima koji ga bude iz kratkotrajnog transa na morskoj obali: i to dvosmisleno buđenje, taj povratak, ne u stvarnost, već u narkozu gradskog života, to utapanje u 'reči grada' – jednako je smrti.

Čuh sirene kako pevaju jedna drugoj.  
Al' ne verujem da će pevati meni.

Videh kako na talasima jezde ka pučini  
česljajuć' belu grivu talasa zamršenih  
vetrom koji šara sred voda uspenušanih.  
Oklevali smo u morskim lagunama

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. (prev. N. Tučev).

Kraj sirena ovenčanih algama  
sasvim klonuli  
Dok glasovi nas ljudski ne probude,  
i onda se utopimo.

Da se na kraju ukratko vratim eseju 'Zar ništa nije sveto?' U svom zaključku Ruždi objašnjava zašto je ipak odoleo prolaznom iskušenju da književnost proglasi svetinjom. Jedina konstantna estetika, kaže on, jeste estetika promene i preobražaja; književnost je jedini način da se ideja o životu kao o procesu odbrani od ideologije zauvek pronađene apsolutne istine; sakralizujući književnost, pretvorili bismo je u njenu suprotnost, postali ono protiv čega se borimo. Šejmas Hini, s druge strane, sažeto izražava svoje viđenje poezije navodeći sledeći Vordsvortov stih: „Želim... duh prošli u svetilištu da sačuvam / za obnovu buduću”. Mislim da je reč 'svetilište' ovde legitimna, čak i sa stanovišta Ruždijeve estetike: Hini je koristi da opiše one svoje pesme, kao što su 'Undina', 'Rašljari', 'Herkul i Antej', gde su spajanje arhetipskih ljubavnika – čoveka i rečne vile, zemlje i vode – ili pak traganje za podzemnim vodenim tokovima, ili, opet, živototvorna spona između Anteja i materinske zemlje, takodje metafore za blagotvorno prožimanje antitetičkih načela: poretka kulture, rigidno strukturisanog i narcisoidno zatvorenog u sopstvene granice, i amorfne, fluidne, otvorene principe prirode. Bez obnovljene svesti o suštinskoj, životnoj važnosti ovog reciprociteta – koji je u paganskom mitu imao status svetinje – ne može se, po Hinijevom uverenju, a takođe po mišljenju antropologa kao što su Robert Grejvz ili Levi-Štros,<sup>18</sup> očekivati nikakva kreativna promena – nikakav 'blagi prinos'.

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<sup>18</sup> Primedba da ne možemo da se svi vratimo zemljoradnji i baštovanstvu krajnje je frivolna. Ne radi se o tome da treba obnoviti arhaične forme, već, kako insistira Robert Grejvz, mentalni stav implicitan u paganskim svetkovinama posvećenim Velikoj majci i njenom sinu, i primeniti ga na sve vidove života, jer 'uprkos brižnoj pažnji koju poklanjamo zelenim pojasevima, parkovima i privatnim baštama,...on je utonuo u zaborav'. U međuvremenu, dodaje Grejvz, nikakav napredak ne možemo očekivati od prividno drugačijih, 'novih oblika obožavanja Oca - asketskih ili epikurejskih, autokratskih ili komunističkih, liberalnih ili fundamentalističkih' (*The White Goddess*, 479–482). Levi-Štrosova antropološka istraživanja takođe ne podrazumevaju bespomoćnu, nostalgичnu čežnju za nemogućim povratkom arhaičnoj prošlosti već nadu da će se 'sinhronizovanjem kulture i prirode i konačnim integrisanjem ljudskog života unutar njenog celokupnog psiho-hemijskog konteksta' skrenuti pravac u kome se kreće istorija i izbeći katastrofa' (*The Savage Mind*, The University of Chicago Press, 1969, 8).



Pokušaji da se Hinijeva u suštini modernistička tematika nostalgije i mitskog sećanja svede na puki postmoderni formalistički eksperiment<sup>19</sup> su simptomatični. Kao i nastojanja da se diskredituje arhetipska kritika, oni su deo globalne strategije akademskog i političkog postmodernizma čija je svrha da, eliminišući sećanje na alternativne mitske tradicije i kulturne modele, onemogućí i poslednji otpor latentnom mitološkom obrascu na kome se, još od doba klasične Grčke, temelji imperijalistika istorija zapada, te da nametne, kao jedinu moguću, koncepciju budućnosti – totalitarne, tehnološke, tanatomanske – koja iz tog obrasca proizilazi.

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<sup>19</sup> Vidi poglavlje 'Ana-' u Thomas Docherty, *Alterities: Criticism, History, Representation*, Clendon Press, 1996, 112–126.

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## Summary

### **Myth and Literature: The Fate of Archetypal Criticism**

The paper is a defense of archetypal criticism now ousted, along with other humanist theories of art, from the mainstream literary theory. Against the current thesis that a mythological approach to the understanding of literature and culture is backward-looking, permeated by impotent nostalgia and, above all, calculated to prevent change and progress, I refer to several outstanding archetypal critics and anthropologists to contextualize an analysis of a novel by J. M. Coetzee, and two poems by Seamus Heaney and Adrian Mitchell. These are chosen to support the paper's chief contention that "the return to myth", usually invoked as the greatest indictment against archetypal criticism, is a meaningless phrase; instead of a choice between myth and demythologised society, the past and the future, tradition or progress, modern man is faced with a choice between the existential models and ethical values projected in two different mythological traditions and between two different conceptions of the future deriving from them. Recreating in their works the principles of the Great Mother and pagan nature worship, artists such as Coetzee, Mitchell and Heaney do not plead for a regressive, mythic fatalism, still less an acquiescence in the tyranny of nature, but continue the literary tradition which, since Aeschillus and Sophocles, has tended to undermine the idea that the Law of the Father is man's inescapable fate, and thus liberate him from the tyranny of patriarchal culture.

2000

## BEYOND MYTHS OF SEPARATION: GENDER AND DIFFERENCE IN THE POETRY OF ADRIENNE RICH

Apart from its aesthetic merits, the poetry of Adrienne Rich seems to me to have the virtue of indirectly straightening out at least some of the controversies that abound in recent feminist literary criticism. I specifically have in mind the issues of difference and gender as they condition writing: the question, that is, of what - if anything - constitutes the essentially female writing. There are hardly two identical answers to this question. The reason for this often confusing variety<sup>20</sup> lies, partly at least, in the fact that too many feminist writers guard jealously their positions without having fully examined their theoretical premises. The failure of the critic/writer to define clearly her own terminology or the failure of the critic/reader to understand thoroughly the terminology used by others is bound to result in mutual misreading. For example, Anglo-American and French feminisms both accuse each other of biological essentialism, and one is not likely to understand this dispute unless one is aware of the different meanings they give to the terms "woman" and "feminine". Anglo-American

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<sup>20</sup> It must be frustrating to those who enter freshly the feminist debate to discover that whichever of the two stances - women are the same or women are different - they adopt, they will be dismissed as sexist. Thus, Luce Irigaray condemns the patriarchal "logic of the same" whereby woman is forced into subjectless position, her function being to reflect back man's meaning to himself (Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1985: 22). However, to plead that women are different seems to be equally mistaken because in extolling the female, the woman writer does not break the pattern of patriarchal binary thought whereby the female is defined in relation to male. Stephen Heath, for example, insists that "to lay emphasis on difference and the specificity of women (as of men) in the paradigm male/female is a gesture within the terms of the existing system, for which precisely women are different *from* men" (Stephen Heath, "The Sexual Fix", *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Mary Eagleton, Basil Blackwell, 1986: 221).

feminists, such as Elaine Showalter, for instance, center on "women" - real biological entities, who, at this moment in history, are forging a politics based on shared experience and needs. French interest, on the other hand, focuses not on women but on "woman", who, in Alice Jardine's words, is not a person but "that which has been the master narratives' own non-knowledge, what has eluded them, what has engulfed them. This other-than-themselves is almost always a space of some kind (over which the narrative has lost control), and this space has been coded as *feminine*, as *woman...*"<sup>21</sup> Thus, when the French talk of *l'écriture féminine* they do not mean the tradition of women's literature that Anglo-American feminists have labored to uncover, but, as Julia Kristeva insists, a certain mode of writing that unsettles fixed meanings.

However, although the cultural gap between the French and Anglo-American approaches is wide, it is not unbridgeable. This is how Jardine's summary of some of the oppositions is reported by Mary Eagleton:

The Anglo-Americans emphasize "oppression", the French "repression"; the Anglo-Americans wish to raise consciousness, the French explore the unconscious; the Anglo-Americans discuss power, the French pleasure; the Anglo-Americans are governed by humanism and empiricism while the French have developed an elaborate debate on textual theory. But Jardine ends with a hope for contact between the Anglo-American "prescription for action" and the French preoccupation with the "human subject's inscription in culture through language". Her way forward looks to a cautious and critical marriage between the two positions.<sup>22</sup>

Although the passage does not mention explicitly the issue of gender or difference, I quoted it because its conclusion is relevant to the purpose of this essay. Namely, I propose a reading of Rich's poems as moving in the direction of the marriage, albeit poetic rather than critical, Jardine hopes for. In order to demonstrate the way in which Rich's poetry effects a reconciliation between the two seemingly in-

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in *Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Mary Eagleton, Longman, London and New York, 1991: 9.

<sup>22</sup> *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, 206.

compatible approaches to the question of sexual identity and female writing I feel it necessary to dwell a moment longer on those aspects of Elaine Showalter's and Julia Kristeva's theories which bring out the difference most clearly.

In her book *A Literature of Their Own*, Showalter divides the tradition of women's writing from 1840 to the present into three phases which she calls Feminine, Feminist and Female. During the Feminine stage women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture, and internalized its assumptions about female nature. The distinguishing formal sign of this period is the male pseudonym, while the feminist content is typically oblique, displaced, ironic or subversive. In the Feminist phase, from about 1880 to 1920, women reject the accommodating postures of femininity and use literature to dramatize the ordeals of wronged womanhood. In the Female phase, ongoing since 1920, women reject both imitation and protest and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature.

In a rough correspondence to these stages of gradual emancipation in women's literature, Showalter makes a distinction within feminist criticism between feminist critique and gynocriticism. Feminist critique is male-oriented in that its subjects include images and stereotypes of women in male literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in male criticism, and fissures in male-constructed literary theory. Gynocriticism, on the other hand, concentrates not on women as readers, but on women as producers of texts: on history, themes, structures and genres of literature by women. Instead of studying stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, and the limited roles women played in history, instead of, that is, learning what men thought women should feel, gynocriticism is turning to the authority of women's writing in order to learn what women really feel and experience. Thus, just as the rejection of imitation and protest in Female literature indicates a liberation from two forms of artistic dependency, gynocriticism, Showalter claims, represents a breakaway from the angry or loving critical fixation on male literature:

Gynocriticism begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women betwe-

en the lines of male tradition, and focus instead on the nearly visible world of female culture.<sup>23</sup>

Thus the task confronting feminist critics is to identify the unique difference of women's writing. Their aim, and, according to Showalter, that is apparently as far as feminist criticism can go, is to seek out a feminine aesthetic, or "essence": a language specific to women's writing, whose difference is guaranteed by the "femaleness" of the author.

In contrast to gynocriticism, which sees woman-centered and difference-centered literary studies as the final stage of feminist literary emancipation, Kristeva claims as the ultimate purpose of feminist criticism a decentered vision - one that goes beyond difference and beyond gender. Her refusal to deal with female texts exclusively implies a belief that historical oppression of women, as Jardine points out in her summary, cannot be properly understood if it is not related to the psychological repression of what Jacques Lacan terms the Imaginary.

Lacan's work<sup>24</sup> is essentially a rewriting of Freud's teaching from the standpoint of linguistics. According to Freud, as we know, the object of primary desire is, psychologically, the body of the mother, and anthropologically the body of the mother earth. However, just as with the historical development of patriarchy this desire becomes a taboo, thus in the Oedipal phase of individual development the desire for the mother is frustrated by the father, or by what Lacan calls the Law.

Lacan's concern is primarily with the linguistic aspect of this process. According to him, the transition from the pre-Oedipal phase, or the Imaginary - marked by a sense of unity, presence and plenitude - into the Oedipal phase, or the Symbolic - marked by lack and absence - coincides with the acquisition of language. The repressed desire for the primary reality, the mother's body, is never completely

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<sup>23</sup> Elaine Showalter, "Towards a Feminist Poetics", *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. K. M. Newton, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1988: 269.

<sup>24</sup> For my discussion of Lacan's and Kristeva's notions of psychoanalysis and language I am indebted to Terry Eagleton's excellent commentary in his *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Basil Blackwell, 1986: 163-79.

neutralized, and language becomes the surrogate which symbolically fills the void, the gap which has opened between desire and its prohibited object. All language is metaphorical precisely because it replaces some wordless direct possession of the thing itself. In entering language then our destiny is apparently to be forever severed from the real, that inaccessible realm which is always beyond signification, always outside the Symbolic order, that is, always outside language. And since language is both condition and consequence of identity, identity itself is founded on the dissociation of being from thinking. Unlike Descartes' rationalist formula "I think, therefore I am", which reduces being to thinking, Lacan's own formula "I am not where I think, and I think where I am not" recognizes being as the Other, as that which, paradoxically, makes thinking and identity possible only by virtue of its absence. Although Lacan is not interested in cultural and anthropological implications of his psychoanalysis, if applied to the analysis of culture, his concept of the Symbolic would endorse our white, male-dominated, class society as the only possible cultural model. Moreover, the ability to conform to its norms would be the only criterion of sanity.

Now Kristeva herself starts from the concept of the Symbolic as a realm where language happens and identity is established. However, whereas Lacan would consider whoever fails to enter the Symbolic register of language as simply psychotic, Kristeva shows how the Symbolic order itself can develop into a kind of madness. In her essay "Psychoanalysis and the Polis"<sup>25</sup> she suggests that there is an analogy between the language of modern society and the language of paranoia and claims that the political delirium, together with the atrocities committed in its name, is but a symptom of the pathological need to banish beyond the boundaries of what our paranoid ideology calls reality the dark mystery of being, the "unnamable mother": to sever what Freud calls the umbilical cord between the conscious and the unconscious, reality and language, the Imaginary and the Symbolic.

Kristeva is aware that the Symbolic is, of course, inevitable; and so are consciousness and language. However to prevent it from turning into a discourse of delirium, language must be perpetually re-

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<sup>25</sup> In *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: An Introduction*, eds. V. Lombrapoulos and D. N. Miller, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1987: 363-378.

newed; and what renews it is the heterogeneous energy of the unconscious, a play of forces and drives which represent the residue of the pre-Oedipal stage. For language as such to happen, this heterogeneous flow must be repressed, but the repression, for Kristeva, is fortunately not total. In modern literature the speech of the body appears as a pulsational pressure inside the language itself: in its tone, rhythm, and also in contradiction, meaninglessness, disruption, absence and silence. This phenomenon, which Kristeva terms the semiotic, has a function similar to that ascribed by Jung to visionary art. Working within "ordinary" language, it threatens to disintegrate its sacred social meanings, and deny all fixed, abstract truths. And since the ideology of modern society relies on such fixed signs as God, father, state, reason, property, order - modern literature, by producing a shock in the consciousness of the reader, forces him to question the absoluteness of all such signs. It dissolves the tight divisions between the feminine and the masculine and deconstructs all the binary oppositions - norm/deviation, sanity/madness, life/death - on which societies as ours depend for their power.

Thus just as Jung located the source of visionary art in the realm of the mother, Kristeva maintains that the semiotic is the feminine of the text because it stems from the Imaginary, which is bound up with the child's contact with the mother's body, whereas the Symbolic is associated with the Law of the father. Yet, because the Imaginary, or the pre-Oedipal, phase recognizes no gender differences, the semiotic is by no means a language exclusive to women. Thus it was possible for Kristeva and French feminists in general to shift their attention from the sex of the author to the sexuality of the text and to claim at the same time that this kind of criticism is not a turning away from women but a route back to women.

This last point suggests a link between French feminism and Ted Hughes' analysis of the failures of patriarchal culture in his 1992 study *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*. This work can be read as a restatement, in historical and archetypal terms, of Kristeva's psycholinguistic theory. Hughes is at pains to demonstrate that the repression of the feminine, recorded first in the exemplary act of the killing of Mother Goddess Tiamat by her son Marduk and perpetuated in subsequent patriarchal myths and the history which they



generated, is in fact a suicidal act. For as mother and as sacred bride, giving life and love, and confirming and supporting her son's and lover's rational, ordered existence, but also as Queen of Hell, an orgiastic, amoral and even non-human being associated with the mysteries outside the rational ego and threatening to disrupt its self-control, the Goddess of Complete Being was a projection of the totality of the hero's own psyche. Since she is one and indivisible, his attempt to separate her into two, suppress her demonic and make a binding contract with her divine aspect, is doomed to failure - he has to reject both: as Shakespeare's Adonis does, when he abandons the role of lover to become a warrior instead. But, as the fate of Tarquin and of all the tragic heroes shows, the denial, exile or annihilation of the Goddess in whatever concrete woman she happens to be embodied is at the same time the hero's estrangement from, suppression or destruction of his own soul.

Thus Shakespeare's foregrounding of male experience of woman is not sexist: the agony, violence, madness and death of his tragic protagonists is a stubborn investigation of the consequences for male psyche of the crime against the feminine. Rather than indulge in the depiction - sentimental or sadistic as it often is in male literature - of the victimization of women by men, Shakespeare offers an insight into the hidden damage of the Western soul as it affects both victims and victimizers, the oppressor and the oppressed, with equally intense suffering.

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The suffering produced by the painful inner split between the "animus" and "anima" aspect of her own soul has from the very beginning been a recurrent obsession of Adrienne Rich's poetry. Her handling of this theme has changed with years, however. Combining the seemingly incompatible positions of Showalter and Kristeva into natural and inevitable stages in the process of her growing poetic and sexual self-awareness, she has developed towards a vision that goes beyond gender and difference. Indeed, her quest for a unified self, for a synthesis that would bring her back to herself, culminates in her mature poetry in a re-arousal of forbidden desire whose force pierces the "frozen web" of most binary oppositions that govern the structure

of patriarchal thought and language, severing them from and insuring their power over the reality of being. Against Lacan's repressive psycholinguistic theory, she attributes to all true poetry the power to reconnect being and thinking by releasing and re-naming of repressed desire. The statement of the American poet Diane Glancy – "I moved towards being in my poetry" - quoted by Rich in her book of essays *What Is Found There*, describes equally well her own poetic work, whose movement involved "the uncovering of appetites buried under the fabricated wants and needs we have had urged upon us, have accepted as our own". For...

our desire is taken from us before we have had a chance to name it for ourselves (what do we really want and fear?) or to dwell in our ambiguities and contradictions...As a poet, I choose to sieve up old shrunken words, heave them, dripping with silt, turn them over, and bring them into the air of the present...Poetry unsettles apparently self-evident propositions - not through ideology, but by its very presence and ways of being, its embodiment of states of longing and desire.<sup>26</sup>

But this belief in the validity of her own desire, displayed so self-confidently in her later poetry, came only after years of self doubt and guilt induced by her defiance of such self-evident propositions as, for example, that woman's destiny was selfless serving of others and man's egotistic self-realization. They are recorded in the 1950' and 1960' collections of her poetry, which, as I hope to show, recapitulate the evolution of women's writing traced by Showalter. Although they overlap, the Feminine, Feminist and Female stages are discernible both in themes and techniques in Rich's poems of that period.

Her beginning as a poet can be traced back to a forgotten moment in childhood when, as she says, describing what is in effect a Lacanian entrance into the Symbolic, "my mother's feminine sensuousness, the reality of her body began to give way for me to the charisma of my father's assertive mind and temperament...and he began teaching me to read".<sup>27</sup> As if to prove that the childhood fantasy of

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<sup>26</sup> Adrienne Rich, *What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics*, Virago Press, London, 1955, 1993: xiv-xv.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Helen Vendler, *Part of Nature, Part of Us: Modern American Poets*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1980: 263.

paternal seduction had a grain of symbolic truth in it, she remembers that at first she wrote for the terrible critical eye of her father: seduced by his charm, and controlling cruelty, into the implicit trust in the paternalist cultural heritage, she pleased him by writing in imitation of male masters. In this initial Feminine phase her poems echo the style of Donne, Yeats, Auden, while her use of "she" instead of "I", or even of the male persona when dealing with the specifically feminine lot, betray the insecurity of a woman trespassing on the grounds reserved for men. Trying hard not to identify herself as a female poet, she paid careful attention to form and craftsmanship and produced poems praised for their gracefulness, for their cool and composed detachment and objective, observant tone. Yet, in spite of those self-distancing strategies, those "asbestos gloves" that allowed her to handle materials she couldn't pick up bare-handed, the poems such as "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" (1951), could not conceal glimpses of the split she even then experienced between "the girl who wrote poems, who defined herself in writing poems, and the girl who was to define herself by her relationship with men"<sup>28</sup>:

Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,  
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.  
They do not fear the men beneath the trees;  
They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.

Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through the wool  
Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.  
The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band  
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand.

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hand will lie  
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.  
The tigers in the panel that she made  
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.

This opposition between the woman's imagination, worked out in her tapestry, and her life-style, "ringed with the ordeals she was mastered by" established a permanent motif in Rich's poetry. Approached only obliquely in this early poem, it was to be explored more directly

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<sup>28</sup> Adrienne Rich, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision', *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, 58.

and personally in what I regard as her Feminist and Female stages. This new development, involving a movement beyond imitation and a breakaway from literary tradition, coincided with her departure from her father's home. The theme of homelessness, both filial and literary, is treated in a prophetic way in "The Middle-Aged" (1955), where she identifies herself with the Magi, for whom "the palaces behind have ceased to be/Home" and who recognize that

Our gifts shall bring us home: not to beginnings  
Nor always to the destination named  
Upon our setting-forth. Our gifts compel,  
Master our ways and lead us in the end  
Where we are most ourselves.

Already a wife and a mother of two children, Rich discovers that marriage, inspired as it was by a "passionate need to reconstruct/The columned roofs under the blazing sky" - the parental domain - is not "the site of love" or "the place where we are most ourselves". Both the idea and the image are picked up again in "Roofwalker" (1961):

Was it worthwhile to lay -  
with infinite exertion -  
a roof I can't live under?  
- All those blueprints,  
closing of gaps,  
measuring, calculations?  
A life I didn't choose  
chose me: even  
my tools are the wrong ones  
for what I have to do.  
I'm naked, ignorant,  
a naked man fleeing  
across the roofs...

Although her female identity is still masked by a male persona, the poem announces a period in which imitation of traditional forms gives way to a longer and looser mode than Rich ever trusted herself with before. This formal shift, a result of her newly acquired ability to write, for the first time, directly about experiencing herself as a woman, is matched by a change in emotional attitude to her own femaleness.

Instead of recording, in carefully cadenced stanzas, her acquiescence in a world where woman must learn not "to call her man/From that estranged intensity/Where his mind forages alone" ("An Unsaid Word", 1955), she now claims this intensity of the mind for herself. However, the numbing effects of traditional marriage on woman's imagination and feelings are inescapable, and the 1963 collection *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* records the inevitable frustration and anger at this loss of the self. In "Peeling Onions", she sees herself as estranged and "dry-hearted as Peer-Gynt/...no hero, merely a cook", and notes harshly that only peeling onions can provoke her unwept tears. "A Marriage in the Sixties" describes a yearning for a contact which she knows in advance is impossible. For her husband and herself,

Two strangers, thrust for life upon a rock,  
may have at last the perfect hour of talk  
that language aches for; still  
two minds, two messages.

And as the external separation between them widens into an unbridgeable gulf, across which "My words reach you as through a telephone / where some submarine echo of my voice / blurts knowledge you can't use" ("The Lag"), the inner conflict comes to the brink of insanity. Section No 2 of *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* concerns a woman who thinks she is going mad: she is haunted by voices telling her to resist and rebel, voices which she can hear but not obey:

Banging the coffee-pot into the sink  
she hears the angels chiding, and looks out  
past the raked gardens to the sloppy sky.  
Only a week since They said: *Have no patience*

The next time it was: *Be insatiable*.  
Then: *Save yourself; others you cannot save*  
Sometimes she's left the tap stream scald her arm,  
a match burn to her thumbnail,

or held her hand above the kettle's snout  
right in the wooly stream. They are probably angels  
since nothing burns her anymore, except  
each morning's grit blowing into her eyes.

The incipient breakdown is caused by the passionate need and the powerlessness felt by a woman in traditional marriage to transform reality by what Wallace Stevens called the Necessary Angel of imagination. In her own attempt, at the time, to analyse the real nature of the conflict, Rich makes a distinction between the passive day-dreaming, fantasizing which need not be acted upon, and the active, and subversive, processes of imagination:

For a poem to coalesce, for a character or action to take shape, there has to be an imaginative transformation of reality which is in no way passive. And a certain freedom of the mind is needed - freedom to press on, to enter the currents of your own thought like a glider pilot, knowing that your motion can be sustained, that the buoyancy of your attention will not be suddenly snatched away.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, as she adds using terms remarkably similar to Derrida's "freeplay", if the imagination is to transcend and transform experience, it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives perhaps to the very life one is living at the moment:

You have to be free to play around with the notion that day might be night, love might be hate; nothing can be too sacred for the imagination to turn it into its opposite or to call experimentally by another name. For writing is re-naming. Now to be maternally with small children all day in the old way, to be with a man in the old way of marriage, requires a holding back, a putting aside of that imaginative activity, and demands instead a kind of conservatism.

No wonder, then, that she experienced the subversive exercise of imagination, tending as it does to deconstruct the very reality to which as mother and wife she is committed, as a failure of love in herself. And although she envisaged a synthesis which would unite "the energy of creation and the energy of relation", in the early sixties' it was still to come.

Meanwhile, in the title poem of *The Necessities of Life* (1966) we encounter a woman looking back upon her life with a mixture of rebellion and acquiescence. It is, as Helen Vendler remarked, an obituary to a whole section of life: from youthful passion and ambition, when the self, Jonah-like, was blissfully dissolved in dreams of its

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 60.

own fulfillment; through the Egyptian bondage of marriage and child-bearing, when the self was devoured by others, until, "wolfed almost to shreds", she learned to make herself unappetizing, preserving the minimal vitality to be able "with economical joy / now and again to name / over the bare necessities"; to the final tentative resurrection, when piece by piece, the self re-enters the world. It is a mock resurrection, though: the society a woman joins when the mists of child-bearing lift is that of old wives, and the triumph, if there is any, consists in the falsely mature acceptance of the unacceptable.

The poems in *Leaflets* (1969) mark a period of transition leading to a direct questioning and rejection of the idea that the anatomy is destiny, to a challenge, that is, of a traditional distribution of gender roles whereby woman's sacrifice of imagination is experienced as bare necessity. The poet's readiness to identify with the red fox, the vixen, whose only past is "a thrill of self-preservation" and "who has no archives / no hairlooms, no future / except death" signals the intention to release the instincts from their confinement within the culturally imposed identity and enter what she was to call in a later poem "that part of the brain / which is pure survival". The recovery of the body coincides with the recovery of the poetic self whose loss was mourned in *The Necessities of Life*. As Rich herself comments, "Orion" was "a poem of reconnection with a part of myself I had felt I was losing - the active principle, the energetic imagination, the half-brother, whom I projected, as I had for many years, into the constellation Orion"<sup>30</sup>:

Far back when I went zig-zagging  
through tamarack pastures  
you were my genius, you  
my cast-iron Viking, my helmed  
lion-heart king in prison.  
Years later now you're young  
my fierce half brother, staring  
down from that simplified west  
your breast open, your belt dragged down  
by an old-fashioned thing, a sword  
the last bravado you won't give over  
though it weighs you down as you stride

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 62.

and the stars in it are dim  
and maybe have stopped burning.  
But you burn, and I know it;  
as I throw back my head and take you in  
an old transfusion happens again:  
divine astronomy is nothing to it.

Indoors I bruise and blunder,  
break faith, leave ill enough  
alone, a dead child born in the dark.  
Night cracks open over the chimney,  
pieces of time, frozen geodes  
come showering down in the grate.

A man reaches behind my eyes  
and finds them empty  
a woman's head turns away  
from my head in the mirror  
children are dying my death  
and eating crumbs of my life.

Pity is not your forte.  
Calmly you ache up there  
pinned aloft in your crow's nest,  
my speechless pirate!  
You take it all for granted  
and when I look you back

it's with a tarlike eye  
shooting its cold and egotistical spear  
where it can do least damage.  
Breathe deep! No hurt, no pardon  
out here in the cold with you  
you with your back to the wall.

It is no accident, as Rich explains in her comment, that the words  
"cold" and "egotistical" appear in the poem and are applied to herself.  
For the choice, in 1969,

still seemed to be between "love" - womanly, maternal love, altruistic  
love - a love defined and ruled by the weight of an entire culture, and  
egotism - a force directed by men into creation, achievement, ambition,  
often at the expense of others, but justifiably so. For, weren't they



men, and wasn't that their destiny, as womanly selfless love was ours? We know now [in 1971] that the alternatives are false ones - that the word "love" is itself in need of re-vision.<sup>31</sup>

Yet, the false alternatives persist into the next volume and can be detected beneath the surrealist surface of the poem "I Dream I am the Death of Orpheus":

I am walking rapidly through stations of light and dark  
thrown under an arcade.

I am a woman in the prime of life, with certain powers  
and those powers severely limited  
by authorities whose faces I rarely see.

I am a woman in the prime of life  
driving her dead poet in a black Rolls-Royce  
through a landscape of twilight and thorns.

A woman with a certain mission  
which if obeyed to the letter will leave her intact.

A woman with the nerves of a panther  
a woman with contacts among Hell's Angels  
a woman feeling the fullness of her powers  
at the precise moment when she must not use them  
a woman sworn to lucidity

who sees through the mayhem, the smoky fires  
of these underground streets  
her dead poet learning to walk backward against the wind  
on the wrong side of the mirror.

Both poems dramatize the socially instituted sexual difference as an inner opposition between the energy of creation and energy of relation. In this deadly internal combat between the "woman" and the "poet" it is only the death of the one that seems capable of feeding the life of the other. As the poet in "Orion" is released from prison and the old transfusion of creative energy happens again, both the erotic and maternal flow dry up, and the woman dies to the world of relation. In the second, antithetical poem, the invisible authorities severely limiting the potential power of the woman are precisely the naturalized fiction of gender differences, the Law of the Father depriving woman

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 63.

of speech, forcing silence upon the feminine. It is this law that assigns a mission to the woman to kill the poet in herself, and it is only by obeying it to the letter that she can save herself as a woman. Yet they both survive their “deaths”, although just barely: the woman in “Orion” sufficiently to feed the children with the crumbs of her life, and to make sure to shoot her “cold and egotistical spear / where it can do least damage”; and the dead poet in “Orpheus” rises again to learn to walk backwards against the wind.

Yet, stuck as they both are in the same deadlock position, confronting equally partial and disabling options, the poem on the death of Orpheus represents an advance on “Orion”. The volume it comes from is called, significantly, *The Will to Change* (1971) and together with Rich’s subsequent poetry, especially that of *Diving into the Wreck* (1973), records her resolute plunge into herself and beyond herself in quest of a place where she is one and undivided. It is at this point that the range of her poetry, centered as it was on woman’s experience of frustration, anger, protest or acquiescence - Showalter’s Feminist and Female phases - widens to include a sexually decentered vision, which alone, according to French feminists, can explain the suffering of both men and women by revealing the unseen, articulating the unsaid of culture. Indeed, Rich’s will to change appears first of all as the will to insight, or vision: it emerges in “Orpheus”, embodied in the “woman sworn to lucidity / who sees through the mayhem, the smoky fires / of these underground streets”. And in “August” (1972), it reappears as a will to knowledge, declared with greater explicitness, made more poignant and urgent by the fact of her husband’s suicide two years before:

if I am flesh sunning on rock  
if I am brain burning in fluorescent light

if I am dream like a wire with fire  
throbbing along it

if I am death to man  
I have to know it...

But neither body, mind, nor imagination - least of all the destructive difference of gender - can be explained by objective knowledge:

They say there are ions in the sun  
neutralizing magnetic fields on earth

Some way to explain  
what this week has been, and the one before it!

Astrophysics is rejected for the sake of myth. It is in prehistory as it surfaces in her nightmares that the truth is to be found: she locates the source of suffering in that primordial act by which woman was dispossessed of her mother right and her son snatched away from her and claimed by the father:

His mind is too simple, I cannot go on  
sharing his nightmares

My own are becoming clearer, they open  
into prehistory

which looks like a village lit with blood  
where all the fathers are crying: *My son is mine.*

Similarly, contemplating the decay of her marriage and the death of her husband in "From a Survivor" (1972) she realizes that their failure was not special to them, and could be understood only in a larger perspective of a cultural disaster:

I don't know who we thought we were  
that our personalities  
could resist the failures of the race.

Lucky or unlucky, we didn't know  
the race had failures of that order  
and that we were going to share them

Like everybody else, we thought of ourselves as special...

Next year it would have been 20 years  
and you are wastefully dead  
who might have made the leap  
we talked, too late, of making  
which I live now  
not as a leap  
but a succession of brief, amazing movements  
each one making possible the next

The leap they might have made, but did not, I interpret as a stepping out of the gender-enclosed and mutually estranging identities prescribed by the Symbolic order and a temporary immersion in the realm of the Imaginary - an experience which would have enabled their two separate narratives, 'two minds, two messages' to meet at last. But the encounter would have been impossible without the deconstruction of the language of the Symbolic: and it is this doubt about the adequacy of ordinary language, inseparable from her mistrust and final rejection of patriarchal tradition, that is the most radical sign of Rich's will to change. To seek the new self, capable of receiving and transmitting messages from its own interior, by means of conventional language is useless, because it can only perpetuate the old separate self it was invented to deal with. For, as she says, despairing of communication, "if no two are alike / then what are we doing / with those diagrams of loss?" ("The Snow", 1972)

Thus, in "Planetarium" (1971), the discourse that can only draw diagrams of loss - absence would be Lacan's term - is forsaken in favor of the speech that would eventually get to the source of our common humanity by re-finding the body and making it fully present to the mind. The poem was written, as the motto informs us, while thinking of Caroline Herchel, astronomer, and represents a synthesis of a sort, as in it "at last the woman in the poem and the woman writing the poem become the same person".<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the astronomer's gaze outward beyond the frontier of the known universe is not opposed, but rather balanced by, or made equivalent to, the poet's gaze inward into the undiscovered interior space. Heartbeat of the pulsar is powered by the same energy that pumps 'the heart sweating through the body' and the poet herself becomes an instrument for faithful transcription of bodily drives and pulsations into images:

I am bombarded yet     I stand  
I have been standing all my life in the  
direct path of a battery of signals  
the most accurately transmitted most  
untranslatable language in the universe  
I am a galactic cloud so deep

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

so involuted that a light wave could take 15  
years to travel through me And has  
taken I am an instrument in the shape  
of a woman trying to translate pulsations  
into images for the relief of the body  
and the reconstruction of the mind.

The intention is radical, the tone self-confident; yet in “Diving into the Wreck” she has, once again, to face the fact that the instrument for the relief of the body and the reconstruction of the mind is that very self whose wholeness has been impaired: “We are the half-destroyed instruments / that once held to a course / the water eaten log / the fouled compass”; and it is left to her alone to make the plunge she might have made with her husband and assess the damage. The poem explores both “the failures of the race” and the possibilities of language. It is important to remember that Kristeva never proposed the semiotic as the alternative to the Symbolic, but as a pressure working within it to undermine its absolute meanings. An irrevocable return to the Imaginary would be an obliteration of consciousness, not its renewal: and the diver in the poem senses the danger of self-oblivion as she goes further down into “the deep element”:

And now: it is easy to forget  
what I came for  
among so many who have always  
lived here  
swaying the crenellated fans  
between the reefs  
and besides  
you breathe differently down here.

Her intention is not to abandon language but, as a another poem of the volume re-states it, “to go back so far there is another language / go back far enough the language / is no longer personal”. And thus, she resists the temptations of the deep and reminds herself that what she came for is both to examine the evidence of disaster and salvage what vitality remains:

I came to explore the wreck.  
The words are purposes.  
The words are maps.

I came to see the damage that was done  
and the treasures that prevail.

And if the worst damage has been caused by forcing unequal  
selves and lives upon men and women, then, by implication, the vita-  
lity that can be salvaged for future restoration is precisely the ability  
to forsake the distinction between them, and see them both as crippled  
creatures, scarred by the very processes of socialization and nurture  
that once had been the poet's - and our - possession and treasure:

This is the place,  
And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair  
streams black, the merman in his armored body.  
We circle silently  
about the wreck  
we dive into the hold.  
I am she: I am he

whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes  
whose breasts still bear the stress  
whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies  
obscurely inside barrels  
half-wedged and left to rot...

The ultimate purpose of diving into the past or into the self and  
the dissolution of inner divisions, then, is not the escape from but the  
re-finding of personality. Structuring of experience is inevitable for  
language and consciousness to take place, but the structures governing  
patriarchal language and consciousness have hardened into impene-  
trable barriers separating, as Rich has repeatedly pointed out, not only  
men from women, but "private from public, Vietnam from the lovers'  
bed, the deepest images we carry out of our dreams from the most  
daylight events out in the world".<sup>33</sup> The knowledge gained by exami-  
ning these barriers, however, is only one step towards the relief of the  
body and the reconstruction of the mind: it is, indeed, like "studying  
the crystal" ("The Snow"). By identifying herself with both man and  
woman in "Diving into the Wreck" and sharing their common grief,  
Rich takes another necessary step already anticipated in "The Snow",  
where each unique snow crystal was allowed to melt into a tear. And

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<sup>33</sup> Letter of October 25, 1972.

in another poem, called significantly “Re-forming the Crystal” (1973), the process of re-structuring of identity enters its final phase. The new joyous self emerges, its old shell no longer dissolving in grief, but cracked by the force of indiscriminate erotic desire:

I am trying to imagine  
how it feels to you  
to want a woman

trying to hallucinate  
desire

centered in a cock  
focused like a burning glass

desire without discrimination:  
to want a woman like a fix

In a poem that combines verse and prose passages, refusing to be restricted by traditional formal options, the traditional psychological alternatives are also swept away at last: the choice is no longer between serving the self and serving others: “the poet” and “the woman” lose their gendered identities and “creation” and “relation” finally unite as the speaker recognizes that the energy she serves is one and the same, and “could be used a hundred ways”, equally disruptive of crystalized pattern of available relationships:

My desire for you is not trivial...But the energy it draws on might lead to racing a cold engine, cracking the frozen spider web, parachuting into the field of a poem wired with danger, or to a trip through gorges and canyons into the cratered night of female memory, where delicately and with intense care the chieftainess inscribes upon the rock of the volcano the name of the one she has chosen.

This last possibility, with which the poem ends, has been prepared for in a preceding verse section, where the rebirth of the self is achieved by the rejection of the *Nom du Pere* in both its senses, as the name visible on her identity papers, and the invisible, internalized Law of the Father:

Tonight I understand  
my photo on the license is not me,  
my

name on the marriage contract was not mine.  
If I remind you of my father's favorite daughter,  
look again. The woman  
I needed to call my mother  
was silenced before I was born.

Thus Rich's prophesy that "our gifts shall bring us home.../ where we are most ourselves", uttered at the beginning of her career in the fifties, comes true in the poems written since the seventies. She describes them as "coming home to the darkest and richest source of my poetry: sex, sexuality, sexual wounds, sexual identity, sexual politics...".<sup>34</sup> And, she might have also added, coming home to the mother. For the longing to break down artificial barriers that she claims to inspire everything she writes has been fulfilled, in the poetry following *Diving into the Wreck*, in the final demolition of the most absolute barrier of all, that between the conscious self and the memory of the mother's body. In contrast to Freud's and Lacan's notion of psychic health, founded as it is upon the absence of the mother, in both anthropological and psychological senses of the word, the woman in "Re-forming the crystal" finds the cure for her divided mind by re-viving the racial memory of the Goddess of Complete Being and the personal memory of her own dispossessed mother.

The two conceptions of identity are juxtaposed quite explicitly in "Splittings" (1974). The agony of being separated from her lover leads the poet to ask whether separation and loneliness are inevitable human condition, or whether the pre-Oedipal bond with the mother can be remembered and recreated in an adult love relationship:

I am not with her I have been waking on and off  
all night to the pain not simply absence but  
the presence of the past destructive  
to living here and now...

Does the infant memorize the body of the mother  
and create her in absence? or simply cry  
primordial loneliness? does the bed of the stream  
once diverted mourning remember wetness?

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.



## I THE MYTHIC PERSPECTIVE

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She knows that the pain of division is inseparable from the mind that divides, that what blots her lover from her is not so much time zones or miles as the internalized prohibitions against unconditional love. The poem ends with her resolute declaration against this myth and a choice to love with all her intelligence:

I will not be divided from her or from myself  
by myths of separation  
while her mind and body in Manhattan are more with me  
than the smell of eucalyptus coolly burning on these hills

I want to crawl into her for refuge lay my head  
in the space between her breast and shoulder  
abnegating power for love  
as women have done or hiding  
from power in her love like a man  
I refuse these givens the splitting  
between love and action I am choosing  
not to suffer uselessly and not to use her  
I choose to love this time for once  
with all my intelligence

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As in this particular poem, so in Rich's other poems of the seventies, collected in *Twenty-One Love Poems* (1976) and *The Dream of a Common Language* (1977), it seems that the love learnt from the mother can resurface only in a lesbian relationship. Rich's refusal to live by myths of separation has also included a refusal of "compulsory heterosexuality". At this point, one might be inclined to question her interpretation of lesbianism as "an act of resistance", as "a form of nay-saying to patriarchy",<sup>35</sup> and wonder whether it may not be the symptom rather than the remedy to patriarchal dichotomies and divisions: whether the regrouping of women without men may not perpetuate the problem of sexual difference, rather than solve it. For what was the purpose of all that painful de-creating of sexual opposition inside the self, if not to create a basis for a reconciliation of the sexes in the

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<sup>35</sup> Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, 24.

outside world? Yet, while these dilemmas are theoretically valid, I believe them inapplicable to the options Adrienne Rich decided to live by. For her choice to love with all her intelligence meant more than a change in her personal sexual preference, it was part of a radical political re-direction of her affective and creative energy towards all those deemed unworthy of love, freedom and dignity. In fact, since the eighties, Rich's poetry has been concerned less with gender and more with justice, her feminism (less and less a space where her thinking could fulfill itself), turning into an active struggle for the rights of marginalized groups – not only the gays, but increasingly the blacks, the Mexicans, the poor white, the Third-World nations under the post-Cold War economic and military attacks of the US Empire. Possessing a revolutionary mindset, however, her deep disappointment with the failure of her fellow countrymen to outgrow their national myth and face the historical truth it masks did not turn Rich into a cynic or a nihilist. Her subsequent collection of poems – *North American Time* (1986), or *In the Dark Fields of the Republic* (1995) – were written, as she defined herself in a 2001 retrospect, by an American skeptic, passionate skepticism being her way of continuing:

I began as an American Optimist, albeit a critical one, formed by our racial legacy and by the Vietnam War. I became an American skeptic, not as to the long search for justice and dignity, which is part of all human history, but in the light of my nation's leading role in demoralizing and destabilizing that search, here at home and around the world. Perhaps just such a passionate skepticism, neither cynical nor nihilistic, is the ground for continuing.

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## Rezime

### **Protiv mitova disocijacije: rod i razlika u poeziji Adrijane Rič**

U radu se ukazuje na način na koji se poezija Adrijane Rič može čitati kao prilog pomirenju naizgled nepomirljivih shvatanja angloameričkih i francuskih feminista o pitanjima seksualnosti i razlike. Pesnički razvoj Adrijane Rič prikazan je kao kretanje kroz nekoliko faza, donekle podudarnih sa onim koje su opisane u teorijama E. Šouvolter, i Julije Kristeve: od imitacije tradicionalnog muškog pisma, do perioda

revolta i traganja za autentičnim ženskim izrazom i konačno do vizi-  
je ucelovljenja koja nadrađa patrijarhalno shvaćene pojmove polnosti  
i razlike. Svojom sposobnošću da probudi zabranjenu želju, poezija,  
kako obrazlaže Adrijana Rič u svojim esejima, i demonstrira u sop-  
stvenim pesmama i životu, podriđa nasilnu hijerarhiju unutar jezičkih  
i egzistencijalnih binarnih suprotnosti te Frojdom, i Lakanom,  
shvatanju identiteta, zasnovanom na odsustvu, gubitku ili razdvajanju,  
suprotstavlja koncepciju ucelovljenog jastva, u kojoj je obnovljeno  
sećanje na preedipalnu majku, telo prisutno i dostupno umu, a biće i  
mišljenje sjedinjeni jedinstvenom stvaralačkom energijom.  
1999–2001.

## WRITER AS ELEGIST: MEMORIES OF LOSS AND ORIGIN IN MCLEOD'S SHORT FICTION

### *Contemporary theory and the meaning of nostalgia*

I began to think and write about Alastair McLeod's strikingly beautiful stories while still unaware that the conference my paper was intended for was on otherness in Canadian culture. I had practically finished the essay before I realized how its subject fitted into the theme of the conference. McLeod does not write about the native traditions of the North American Indians, or those brought over by the immigrants from Asia – these most obvious, racial others that have helped define, by repudiation or exclusion, the Canadian and the western cultural identity in general. His stories tell instead of what is the integral part of the white settlers' heritage - the immemorial Celtic modes of life that the immigrants of Scottish and Irish origin transplanted to their new home in Canada. Having survived through centuries of deliberate cultural marginalization and suppression in Britain, these traditions struck fresh roots and flourished for a time in the soil of Nova Scotia, the austere beauty of Maritime landscape absorbed into the Gaelic language and lore. Now the memory of these ancestral tribal cultures is rapidly receding into the past and joining the Indian pagan traditions in the realm of otherness. What seems to doom them is not any violent disinheritance but merely the inexorable logic of cultural change which, on the analogy with the inherently developmental biological evolution, we all too often identify with improvement.

Small wonder that McLeod's elegiac stories have been described as conservative, by a literary world cluttered, as Jane Urquhart explains in the Afterword to McLeod's 1986 collection of stories, with theories and 'isms'. It is not theorizing in itself that is to blame though but the kind of confused theorizing that fails or refuses to distinguish

between change as expansion and renewal (which indeed is what life demands) and change as diminishment and decline. It is only when this distinction is blurred that nostalgia becomes a conservative sentiment, and is treated as a failure at correct interpretation of and identification with the upward movement of history. The example of this kind of theorizing is provided by Francis Fukuyama whose quite illegitimate appropriation of Marx enabled him to proclaim the worldwide expansion of capitalist free market a long desired, triumphant end of history. (Fukuyama, 1992)

Another theoretical trend equally inimical to nostalgia is represented by various brands of deconstructive thinkers given to historical and ethical relativism. For them nostalgia is not so much a shrinking away from teleological movement of history, as from an existence without origin and goal, from a kind of directionless kinetics of *freeplay*, which they exalt into a universal human condition. Elegiac reminiscence, in this view, is an urge to arrest the processes of life itself, a disguised metaphysical fear of temporality and difference. For these postmodern thinkers the memory of the past as somehow more satisfying and richer than the present is merely a fiction. Like so many myths of the vanished Golden age, or the lost garden, it projects a yearning for an origin which never existed, some impossible fullness of being invented to assuage the anxiety before the abysmal world of incessant becoming<sup>36</sup>.

It is these two readings of history and of the self that lie behind the by now almost automatic habit to dub writers (including the great modernists) concerned with mythological origins and ethnic roots conservative. The ideological uses of this kind of theorizing are specially obvious in the post-colonial and multiculturalist debate, where an inordinate amount of energy has been wasted on the false dichotomy between ethnic particularity and cosmopolitan universality: for surely, the current cultural re-colonization of the few remaining free nations of the world will run more smoothly once the reading public, or, if possible, even the writers, are persuaded that to be provincial is the opposite of being cosmopolitan. As a matter of fact, the reverse is

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<sup>36</sup> For a classic statement of this doctrine see Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences', in David Lodge, ed., *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, Longman, 2000, 89-103.

true. F. R. Leavis reply in 1967 to those who dismissed as provincial his insistence on the cultural continuity in English education is still relevant: 'Better than to be provincial than cosmopolitan, for to be cosmopolitan in these matters is to be at home nowhere, and he who is at home nowhere can make little of any literature – the more he knows the larger his ignorance'. He added prophetically that 'it is an American ethos that prescribes these cosmopolitan cures for our provinciality, and the idea that being provincial is what we suffer from is itself American'. He concluded that instead of looking for a sense of purpose in America, which for all its wealth and power is in a no more satisfying spiritual condition than England,

we should fight to preserve what is essential our cultural heritage – the heritage that is only kept alive by creative renewal...and get it shared as widely as possible with the third realm, which the technologico-Benthamite world despises and ignores, in order to see what a living cultural tradition may do for humanity. (Leavis, 179-183)

The conclusion is worth quoting because it anticipates another stumbling block in the multiculturalist debate: the initial dilemma between ethnicity and cosmopolitanism has been recently resolved by a cynical denial of any possibility of choice. It is true that the immensely publishable exoticized 'ethnic writing' into which some postcolonial authors have been seduced and the highly commercialized folklorist revivalism are mistaken ways of countering cultural globalization. For what is revived in this way is not the spirit of original native tradition but its visible, simplified external expression: those tiny decorative bits -- dances, clothes, cuisine – exotic surrogates that trade well because they feed the spiritually famished audience who can no longer identify the nature of their hunger. But it does not follow from this that the ethnic or national past has become simply inaccessible. The claim that it has is one reason why multiculturalist and postcolonial studies, initially founded to protect the ethnic 'others', have really become a program of cultural noninterference.

The Leavis quotation is important because it points the way to the shared living tradition which is a true alternative to both ethnic stereotyping and the uprooted desiccated universalism. Thus he provides a perspective from which the meaning of McLeod's, and also the great

modernist writers' 'conservatism' can be properly understood. Leavis shares this perspective with the archetypal critics, and other thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse. They all assume that reminiscence is essential to all literature, that beneath the rich variety of its forms, all art is recollection; and that in remembering, and 'conserving' the past, the artist is engaged in the ethically most radical task. This view derives from their refusal to compromise with the postmodern de-originating theories of history and the pro-imperialist politics more or less successfully concealed under the slogans of material progress and democratic improvement. For these critics western conception of history has been mostly a hindrance to creative change, so that its course, despite, or rather in proportion to the technological development, is a steady spiritual decline. If this is so, then the great writers from the classical Greek tragedians, through Shakespeare to D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Margaret Atwood and J. M. Coetzee, have been the most eloquent in naming what, in fact, has been the common goal of all western art: it is to locate the moment when the decisive wrong turn was made, ('When did we go bad?' asks the heroine of *Surfacing*) and reach beyond it to the spirit of that past which Wordsworth sought to enshrine for future restoration. For them all, writing has been a kind of Janus-like, double-faced mental archeology, at once looking backward and forward in time: as Wordsworth's spiritual heir, Seamus Heaney, put it, 'poetry is digging, digging for finds that end up being plants.' (Heaney, 263)

The paths those backward and inward journeys have taken were different, for they always started where Leavis claimed all great art starts: at home, in the local and regional. Yet they invariably lead to the discovery of the common heritage, to the 'one and one story only' that, according to the poet and anthropologist Robert Graves, the business of the western artist has been to retell. (Graves, 1955) Thus it was by following the underground streams of Irish legends that Heaney arrived at the transnationally valid myth of Hercules and Antaeus and reworked it into a poem about the function of poetry. Initially the story of the overthrow of Antaeus, the son of Gaia, by the sky-born Hercules was meant to celebrate the newly acquired emancipation of the patriarchal Greeks from their hitherto earth-bound destiny. Heaney's poem, on the contrary, is a lament over this tragic anthropological re-



orientation. His Antaeus is not an aggressive challenger but a mold-hugger, tied to the earth by bonds of blood and emotion. Hercules's motives, on the other hand, are usurpation and mastery. His chief asset is intelligence: it is a "spur of light", helping him take the measure of the dark powers feeding of the territory; he uses it as a "blue prong" to graipe his opponent out of his element and lift him up into the air, beyond the reach of the earth's strength-reviving maternal embrace. Antaeus, weaned at last, falls into a dream of origin and loss: of the cradling darkness of caves and souterrains, the hatching grounds, the river-veins, the secret gullies of his strength: he bequeaths them all to the elegists. Their poetry is a reminder that, driven underground, there still exists an alternative to the monstrous concept of progress engendered by Hercules' triumph: to a history whose underlying impulse to master 'the other' finds its expression in the twin phenomena of imperialist politics -- the conquest and dispossession of the races still bound to the soil by the Antaeian love -- and the inward conquest of the blood by the brain.

*Between sons and fathers: Betrayal in 'The Boat' and 'The Lost Salt Gift of Blood'*

McLeod transposes the primordial Antaeian scenario into elegiac stories of the vanishing rural traditions of Nova Scotia, but manages to endorse their spiritual values without any false exotic idealization of the material practices to which they were attached. The immemorial modes of life still persisting in the outports are rendered lyrically yet with historical precision. The first settlers were forced to emigrate from Britain by Scotland's Highland Clearances, and by extreme poverty; scarcity and excessive physical toil have marked the lives of their Canadian descendants for the next three hundred years. Besides poverty, frequent loss of human life due to primitive conditions of work has been a reason for the younger generation's decision to move to the more civilized urban west. Thus the narrator of 'The Road to Rankin's Point' remembers the death of his grandfather, who lost his footing on a particularly tricky piece of the brutally steep, ice-covered road. He recalls other deaths in the family caused by accidents at

work: a sudden bolt of a horse sent one into the teeth of a mowing machine, another was drowned in a sea storm, and still another, separated from his sealing ship by an unexpected obliterating blizzard, froze on the lunar ice fields of early march. But he remembers too the more bizarre and ironic deaths of those of the younger generation, who moved west, seeking the safety of regulated urban order far removed from the uncertainty of the elements and unpredictability of suddenly frightened animals. Real estate brokers and vice-presidents of grocery chains, they had their lives terminated by accidents as modern and affluent as their careers had been: choking on a piece of steak at an expensive restaurant, from too much sun on the beach while jogging at five A.M. 'Perhaps the death by affluence is the same as death by physical labor', meditates the narrator. That it is not is suggested by his own belated return to Rankin's point. Having spent the years of his absence teaching the over-urbanized students of Burlington in the classrooms that always seemed overheated, he comes back now, diseased and dying, to his grandmother and through her, 'back to the knowledge of being and its end as understood through second sight and spectral vision and the intuitive dog and the sea-bird's cry...back to anything rather than to die at the objective hands of mute cold science.' (McLeod, 1989, 154) Now that it is too late for healing, to be able to sink back into the embrace of the elemental purity of his original environment is a final consolation: 'almost as the diseased and polluted salmon', he says to himself, 'who knows of no cure for the termination of his life, I have returned now to swim for a brief time in the clear waters of my earlier stream.' (144)

We do not know what particular subject the hero of the 'Return to Rankin Point' taught, but it is significant that the narrators of the next two stories I want to focus on are teachers of literature. This defines their theme not merely in terms of a choice between wholesome poverty and decadent prosperity but more ambivalently by what seems to be a contrast between the provincial spiritual inertia and the growth of the mind promised by literary education. Yet they both turn out to be subtle and disturbing explorations of the betrayal by the academically trained mind of the very spirit of poetry - a kind of disloyalty of which Robert Graves accused the poets who, geared to the urban industrial machine, and with an eye on steady income, pay

part-time lip service to the Muse, forgetting that she demands whole-time and whole-hearted devotion or none at all.

The protagonist of 'The Boat' owes his career to his father, a fisherman not by choice but necessity, whose true love was not the sea but books. Rows and piles of books of all sorts cluttered his room where, after a long day on the boat, he withdrew from his wife and family to spend the evening in a cloud of cigarette smoke and lost in reading. Through this room, against the wish of their mother, who considered reading a waste of time and work a synonym of moral integrity, one by one, passed the four daughters, before they decided that they were tired of darning socks and, lured by the promise of a spiritually more spacious world, disappeared into distant western cities. When the son's turn came to follow in their steps, the father was already too sick and old to fish alone and the boy, finding that the two things he loved so dearly, the sea and literature, bluntly excluded each other, decided heroically that *David Copperfield* and the *Tempest* had to go for ever. To forestall this sacrifice the father drowned himself.

Surely the appalling beauty of this story is partly due to the incantatory prose memorializing the father in dying, but to read it only as a homage to the father is to fail to notice the complex ironies woven into the narrative. I am not sure that the reader is meant to take at its face value the narrator's comment that his mother being of the sea, her horizons were the very literal ones, confined between the two end points of the harbor she daily scanned with her dark fearless eyes; nor the end of the story, where the narrator's guilty vision of the abandoned mother, looking upon the sea with love and on the son with bitterness because the one has been so constant and the other so untrue, gives way to the more painful memory of the rotting body of his drowned father, his life given in exchange for the expansion of horizons higher education would bring to his son. Yet they often do: for the father's death and its cause appear mutually ennobling, investing each other with solemn and poignant significance; and they respond with unqualified admiration, feeling their assumptions about the spiritual rewards of higher education and university career re-enforced by this voluntary self-sacrifice.

I believe that the purpose of the story is not to confirm but question these assumptions. At its very beginning, one is struck by the

sense of isolation and dull, oppressive routine in the narrator's urban life; the thirty-year career of a university teacher may not have contributed to it, but it has apparently done nothing to alleviate it. When a dream of his childhood wakes him up at four in the morning, there is no one in his flat to share it with, and a few restless lonely men at an all-night café, although his likes, are not close enough for him to admit that tears streaming down his face are not rain. He seems to be weeping for the loss of the father, but looming even larger in this recurring dream is the memory of the boat, named after his mother *Jenny Lynn*, and embodying the whole way of life she so jealously and inefficiently tried to protect from external threat and inner betrayal. She sensed the danger of both when her husband took a group of tourists on a morning boat ride, their gay and expensive frivolity stressed by the way they tried to look both prim and wind-blown, like girls in the Pepsi-Cola ads. Later in the afternoon the father accepted the invitation to their cabins; he got very drunk there and sang for hours before the cameras and into the tape-recorders of the alien audience all the old sea chanties, by which generations of men like him had pulled the ropes, and then Gaelic drinking songs, brimming with sexual puns, and war songs, wild with the unyielding courage of the ancestral chieftains, and finally laments. His listeners understood neither the words nor the spirit of these songs. Their uncomprehending delight, and applause, and the cash with which they rewarded the performer, subtly transformed what was a part of the oral traditions that had for centuries been the moral guidance of the so-called uneducated generations into its own exotic travesty, its commodified parody. Accepting both the flattery and the money, the singer confirmed his conscious complicity in this unholy transaction. But when he brought his earnings to his wife that evening she refused to touch it and spent the next evening guarding the doorway against the intrusion of her husband's admirers, until they reluctantly went away.

As the narrator recalls his own ambiguous response to this episode our understanding of what binds the son to the dead father deepens: watching the father's incongruous bulky figure in a small lawn chair and under a beach umbrella, listening to his familiar, yet unfamiliar, booming voice, 'I felt', the narrator remembers, 'ashamed yet proud, saved yet forever lost, unable to control my eyes, which wept

for what they could not tell'. Already divided in his loyalties beyond reconciliation, the boy weeps in an anticipation of his own inescapable unfaithfulness. Surely as a teacher of literature he might have remained symbolically true to both his mother and father. But where Heaney's poet, lacking the ancestral skill with the spade, and digging instead with his pen, succeeds, McLeod's teacher was bound to fail: remembered with pride and shame, the spectacle of his drunken father catering to the shallow tastes of his condescending audience becomes a matrix shaping the son's future, paving the way for the compromises he too would make. Although the narrator does not dwell on the paradox of being at once saved and damned, the reader must confront it: for what ultimately is the justification of literary vocation? And how does one go about teaching literature, if to do so one has to renounce the reality which the purpose of literary fictions is to re-invent and celebrate?

At the story's beginning there are no hints that the narrator has found this kind of redemptive pedagogy; as we go along we suspect on the contrary shameful concessions he must have made to those de-centering theories and pedagogies that ensure success but estrange both the teacher and the taught from their subject. And in the concluding passage of the story the implications of his choice are, if ever so obliquely, examined once again. The last image, of the remains of his father, found seven days after he drowned, is another, though less direct, reference to the *Tempest*: not much of his father had been left physically, as he lay there with seaweed in his hair, for his hands were shredded ribbons and the fish had eaten his testicles, and the gulls had pecked his eyes. We hear in this the echo of Ariel's song about the mock-death of another blinded and erring father, before he is restored to a proper spiritual vision: 'Full fathom five thy father lies;/ Of his bones are coral made;/ Those are pearls that were his eyes;/ Nothing of him that doth fade /but doth suffer a sea-change/Into something rich and strange.' The change the sea wrought upon the body of McLeod's deluded, sea-hating father is not a transformation into something rich, yet: his physical dissolution merely brings out the inner condition of a man who disowned his origin and misled his son into the same tragic error. Nevertheless his death in the storm is also charged with more positive Shakespearean symbolism: it does suggest the need for the

kind of transformation that the characters of Shakespeare's romances undergo in the end. It may even signal that the necessary adjustment of perception has begun, even if only unconsciously, in the narrator's mind, and even if the painful memory of the father's sacrifice will never allow him to make this knowledge fully conscious and complete.

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The theme is resumed and expanded in the 'The Lost Salt Gift of Blood'. Although more willing to see clearly, the narrator of this story achieves only partial clarity of vision. Yet the obscure and disconnected fragments of the past preserved in his deficient memory fall gradually into a pattern that the reader can interpret with less hesitation than the abundant ambiguities of the 'Boat'. The narrator's plight is also comparable to that of the hero of J. M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*. A teacher of literature at the Cape Town University, the latter is guilty of a sexual abuse of a female student, an act he first confounds with the spontaneous erotic love praised by the romantic poets. The narrative traces the gradual adjustment of perception until he finally recognizes his personal crime against love as inseparable from the racial crime against the native blacks of South Africa and both as having origin in the inner "apartheid," the divorce of the intellectual mind from the soul. To atone for these sins and heal his broken soul he leaves the city and goes back to the farm of his childhood where he begins to compose an opera – bringing words and music together being a cure for the male intellectual hubris. McLeod's teacher suffers from the same divided condition, but in his case it is incurable. The insight he achieves he cannot translate into action, for although he can now see more clearly, he is still incapable of seeing 'feelingly', and thus remains beyond redemption.

The story opens with a lyrical evocation of the purity and beauty of a piece of landscape on the coast of Nova Scotia, a place, as the narrator remarks sadly, emotionally more distant from Detroit and Toronto than from Ireland, to which the rocky edges of the harbor seem to loom yearningly. It is from one of the large American Midwest cities that, after a long absence, the narrator himself has come back to the tiny fishing village some way up the coast. He is welcomed

there by a family of three people, an old man and woman and their grandson, the link of middle generation unaccountably missing. But the explanation is not provided until the simple integrity and mutual affection of these people, and the cleanliness of their primitive, salt smelling cabin have been given prolonged and melancholy attention.

During dinner the tense silence of the grown-ups hints at some tragic failure on the narrator's part. There are clues too in the old ballads the boy sings to the guest about a faithless lover and a dead girl Jenny, and in the narrator's unspoken enigmatic response to their words: 'Fog does not touch like snow, yet it is more heavy and more dense. Oh, moisture comes in many forms!' (McLeod, 1989, 62) A partial disclosure follows as soon as the two men are left alone, in the host's account of the death of his daughter and her husband when their pickup crashed into a utility pole on the Toronto Queen St. West a few years before. Bad visibility caused by heavy fog contributed to the accident, reads the newspaper clipping the old man shows his visitor. The eventual revelation of the narrator's identity occurs later that night, when in the darkness of the sleeping house he gropes his way to the door of the boy's room and bends his ear to hear 'the even sound of my one son sleeping'. He hesitates to open the door knowing that the son he has disowned is no more beckoning to him than the non-existent voices which minutes earlier, like a foolish Lockwood, he approached the window of his room to hear. Nor is there a boiled egg, or a shaker of salt with a glass of water on the chair, he muses, as the nature of his crime gradually emerges out of the flood of his confused reminiscence. He remembers that there was once a belief held in the outports that if a girl would see her true lover, she had to boil an egg, scoop out half the shell, fill it with salt, take it to bed and eat it, leaving a glass of water by the bedside. In the night her future husband or a vision of him would appear and offer her the glass. She could do it only once.

There are gaps in the narrative and the dates are not certain but we may infer that this ritual preceded the night of lovemaking when the narrator's son was conceived, and that he did not stay to see him born, or left immediately after his birth. For he recalls that eleven years earlier bright young graduate students were collecting this type of belief and old songs for the archives of North America, and hopefully

for their own fame. Carried away by his success in this scholarly enterprise, he remained persistently blind to the emotional loss and moral defeat that it involved. He too had exchanged reality for literary fictions, or dreams as he calls them, for fame. Divorced from personal experience and reduced to a means of professional advancement, the traditional customs and old ballads, and later poems and novels from which he quotes abundantly, have been rendered ineffectual, incapable of interpreting him to himself. Even now that he has met his estranged son and first known himself as a character from these stories - a faithless lover and an absent father, a foolish Lockwood, and Yeats's embittered Cuchullain - these literary reminiscences still stand between him and reality, and hinder the depth understanding of the comparisons they inspire. What they make visible is the invisibility: they are shadows without reality, conjuring up closed surfaces they cannot unlock, 'flickers of imagination touching restlessly the walls of memory', or illuminating the fog, that, like the fog on the Toronto road on which the woman he had deserted perished, still envelops his way. He yearns to see it more clearly, but cannot because the insight into the past he finally gains is as cerebral as was his tempering with literature, because, once again, he has defined conceptually what he cannot understand experientially - and his melancholy self-mockery shows that he is aware of it. He sees now that he has collected many things which he did not understand but is still the man who 'would like to penetrate the mystery of fog by capturing it in a jar like the beautiful childhood butterflies that always die in spite of the air holes punched with nails in the covers of their captivity - leaving behind the vapors of their lives and deaths'. His newly acquired self-knowledge, in short, is negative. He knows that he does not know, or rather that he does not know enough to recover what he knows he has lost:

And perhaps now [he meditates bitterly] I should go and say, oh son of my *summa cum laude* loins, come away from the lonely gulls and the silver trout and I will take you to the land of Tastee Freeze where you may sleep till ten of nine. And I will show you the elevator to the apartment on the sixteenth floor and introduce you to the buzzer system and the yards of the wrought-iron fences where the Doberman pincher runs silently at night. Or may I offer you the money that is the fruit of my collecting and my most successful life? Or shall I wait to meet



you in some known or unknown bitterness like Yeats's Cuchullain by the wind-whipped sea or as Sohrab and Rostum by the future flowing river? Again I collect dreams. For I do not know enough of the fog on Toronto's Queen St. West and the grinding crash of the pickup and of lost and misplaced love. (McLeod, 1989, 69)

Unlike Coetzee's teacher, who decides, after his disgrace, to remain on the farm and expiate his sin, McLeod's teacher excuses himself in the morning and starts back to the city. Before he leaves though he is presented with a smooth round stone - the parting gift of his son, who likes to collect them on the beach. Polished to almost perfect luster by the relentless work of the waves, given by the son who has never received anything from him, the stone is a reminder of the realities that the father, a collector of dreams, has sinned against. The sea, the girl with her shaker of salt, the salt-smelling room of their brief love, the child - his own flesh and blood, and the memory which McLeod tells us in another story lives in the blood - all these meanings are fused in the richly suggestive metaphor of the story's title: "The lost salt gift of blood".

*Keeping faith with the Muse: The theme of Orpheus in 'Tuning of Perfection'*

'Tuning of Perfection' tells of a man who will not forget. No intellectual, Archibald is the incarnation of intuitive wisdom, a natural worshipper of what once were the prime emblems of poetry. The purpose of poetry, Robert Graves reminds us in his statement of the great poetic theme,

is the religious invocation of the Muse. ... This was once a warning to man that he must keep in harmony with the family of living creatures among which he was born, by obedience to the wishes of the lady of the house; it is now a reminder that he has disregarded the warning, turned the house upside down by the capricious experiments in philosophy, science and industry, and brought ruin on himself and his family. 'Nowadays' is a civilization in which the prime emblems of poetry are dishonored. In which serpent, lion and eagle belong to the circus tent, ox, salmon and boar to the cannery, racehorse and greyhound to the

betting ring; and the sacred grove to the saw-mill... In which money will buy almost anything but truth, and almost anyone but the truth-possessed poet. (Graves, 1961, 14)

A lumberman in love with his mountain forest, a passionate lover of his wife in his youth, and a singer enamored of old Gaelic ballads, McLeod's Archibald is an Orpheus who remains faithful to all his loves. He is now seventy eight, and is still treating his forest as if it were a garden, hauling more timber with his horses than his neighbors with all their devastating heavy equipment, yet keeping the mountain mysteriously fresh and replenished. He still lives high up there where he first climbed, at the time when everybody was moving down in the opposite direction, to build a house for himself and his future wife to be alone together in. Both sang tirelessly as they worked on it. A year after his wife died giving birth to the fifth child, the only son he might have had, Archibald was quietly astonished by his widowed sister-in-law's marriage proposal and even more by the coarseness of its terms. For the next fifty years his sexual abstinence has remained an object of equally obscene jokes. Yet, ironically enough, the authors of these very jokes decided that there was something sexually disturbing and unnatural about his four daughters living alone with their father, so the relatives took the children over from him to give them a proper upbringing. Since then Archibald's chief company has been the memory of his wife, with whom he often talks silently when awake and who often visits him in his dreams; and a couple of monogamous eagles whose loss of vigor lately, as he watches them flying ever lower so that the male has to touch his mate to infuse her with new energy, has filled him with the anxiety for the future of their young. He did not know that their fatigue was due to the ecological damage caused to their habitat by chemicals; nor did he realize, until his friend Carver told him, that the pet mare he believed he had sold for work was actually meant for birth control pills: she was to be kept pregnant all the time so women wouldn't be. To his uneasy question, 'What do they do with the colts?' Carver replied carelessly that they threw them away. Of all the instances of mindless blasphemy against the natural bonds of love that Archibald witnesses or is told about, the most haunting is the image of the dead colts dumped out together with carcasses of other unwanted animals on manure piles behind

barns. His melancholy foreboding intensifies steadily until he feels somehow betrayed by forces he cannot control. Still the narrative's skillful and immensely eloquent intertwining of images of life and relentless forces that threaten their sanctity builds towards the crucial scene of Archibald's last act of personal resistance.

Its full significance emerges if we perceive in it the outline of the Orpheus myth. A story about memory, love and art, it is, in fact, in the background of all of McLeod's short fiction. But one among its many interpretations is of particular relevance to 'The Tuning of Perfection'. According to a psychoanalyst critic Ruth Gisela Clausmeier, the power of Orpheus's song to quell wild beasts and move trees dates from the time when he served Dionysus, an archaic deity of spontaneous creative ecstasy and a faithful husband of Ariadne. At this stage Orpheus's sole inspiration was his mother, Calliope, the one with the beautiful voice, and the mother's incarnation, his wife Eurydice, and not yet his father Apollo, the god of emotional restraint and formal perfection. Eurydice's death and the injunction against the backward glance registers the shift in the Greek culture away from the Dionysian towards the Apollonian art. But what the Greeks demanded from their poet, when they cut him off from the source of his inspiration, was in fact impossible: an art at once perfect and yet emptied of the memory of completeness of being once embodied in woman's love. If the English verb 'to remember' has derived etymologically from the noun 'member' and has preserved the latent meaning of 're-mem-bering', re-assembling the torn and scattered body parts, the verb 'to dismember' may also have the reverse symbolic meaning of 'to make forget', 'to mentally fragmentize'. If this is so, the dismemberment of Orpheus may be understood as an external symbolic equivalent of the violent interruption of his mourning for the past, of inner fragmentation that results from forgetting. In the light of this interpretation, the prohibition against nostalgia, by the fashionable theories of art and culture that I mentioned at the beginning of the essay can be seen as a repetition of this ancient cultural crime.

Unlike his counterpart from the 'Lost Salt Gift of Blood', Archibald remains impervious to the temptation to forget. The last of the Cape Breton singers of his kind, he can still reproduce the exact words, and the authentic spirit of ancient Gaelic songs. He does

not mind the folklorists either, who discovered him in the sixties, and offers patient advice when they come to consult him about articles on, for instance, ‘The Mnemonic Devices in Gaelic Line’. When he first hears about the invitation to participate in the ‘Scots Round the World’ festival of Gaelic song in Halifax that year, he responds with mild interest and caution. His doubts mount however as he begins to realize that he would not be allowed to do it “his way” and what sham the supposed revival in fact is. At the audition, moved to tears by the song about lost love he has not yet finished, he is interrupted by the producer and briskly informed that his face satisfies the criteria of high visibility on which the success of the big show will depend, but that the ballads themselves pose problems: they are too long and too mournful. To tune them up to postmodern mass media ‘no-leisure-from-pleasure’ concept of perfection he is instructed to sing them faster, omit half of the stanzas and, for God’s sake, change the titles such as ‘Oh how heavy is my heart’. That evening, like Orpheus descending into the underworld to seek his Eurydice, Archibald sinks into a long uninterrupted dream of his dead wife. They often sang together in his dreams but on this night she only sang: ‘Every note was perfect, as perfect and clear as the waiting water droplet hanging on the fragile leaf or the high suspended eagle outlined against the sky at the apex of its arc. She sang until the first rays of the sun began to touch the mountain top, and then was gone’. (McLeod, 1986, 113)

In the myth, after Eurydice’s final disappearance, Orpheus was converted to the Apollonian sense of perfection, and scorned women ever after. Archibald’s confidence that he should sing it “his way” or not at all was strengthened after his dream: he woke up refreshed in a way he had seldom felt since sleeping with his wife so many years before. He cancelled the trip to Halifax, to the immense disappointment of his granddaughter who was hoping for a chance to sleep in without her husband bothering her, and other relatives keen on shopping in a large city. Archibald’s family were replaced by another group of singers lead by the “adjusted” Carver. The producer had initially eliminated him, because his face was badly scarred and would spoil the visual effects he was after. But Carver and had in the meantime grown a beard to cover his disfigured mouth and did not mind that

his song, 'Brochan Lom', was not even a song but a bunch of nonsense syllables strung together, for he knew nobody would have understood the words even if they had made sense. And he needed the money for a new power saw engine. He did not spend what he had earned on a new engine though. Drunk, with a fresh cut on his temple that no moustache or beard could hide, he appears suddenly one rainy night and solemnly places five boxes filled with bottles of bootlegged liquor on Archibald's floor. The most abstemious man on the mountain, Archibald is moved even more by the total inappropriateness of this expensive gift, for he is aware of its cost in many ways. It is a token of Carver's remorse for the betrayal of everything the old man stands for and everything he himself still remembers in his deepest self.

To remember truly is like being wounded, remarks the narrator of another story in the collection, entitled 'Vision':

You can imagine the scar tissue that will form and be a different color and texture from your skin. You know this even as you are trying to stop the blood and trying to squeeze the separated edges of skin together once more. Like trying to squeeze together the separated banks of a newly discovered river, so that the stream will be subterranean once more. It is something like that, although you know in one case the future scar will be forever on the outside while the memory will remain forever deep within. (McLeod, 1986, 128)

Carver's words at the end of the story – 'Look, Archibald... We know. We know. We really know'-- briefly intone this recurring motif: they bring together Carver's scars and his buried memory. Abrupt and meager as they are, they articulate the inner, 'blood' knowledge lost to the faithless father in 'The Lost Salt Gift of Blood'. Summoned by Archibald's stubborn integrity to his own moral core, Carver becomes, for a symbolic moment, the son the old man might have had.

The moment is also an allegory of the reading experience. Seamus Heaney wrote once that the function of the cultural heritage transmitted by literature is to summon us to the answerable center of ourselves. This healing process is the theme not only of *Disgrace* but of all Coetzee's novels, from *Dusklands* to *The Lives of Animals*. They

are written to honor the other: the dark-skinned races of the world who still live in the Antaeon garden, and also “the idea of gardening” buried in white man’s racial memory, which Coetzee calls the “dark self”. It is encouraging that despite the increasingly fierce campaign to eradicate this memory, writers who stood up in its defense, Heaney and Coetzee, should both be recipients of the highest prize for literature. McLeod is not a Nobel Prize winner but his two slim volumes of elegiac stories place him among the greatest of the writers committed to memorializing the ethos of the Antaeon tradition.

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## Rezime

### **PISAC KAO ORFEJ: SEĆANJA NA GUBITAK I POREKLO U PRIČAMA ALASTERA MEKLAUDA**

Tri pripovetke Alastera Meklauda – 'The Boat', 'Tuning of Perfection' i 'The Lost Salt Gift of Blood' – izabrane su da potkrepe dve glavne tvrdnje iznesene u ovom radu: prva je da se zajedno sa starosedelačkim tradicijama severnoameričkih Indijanaca i onima koje su sa sobom doneli azijski doseljenici – najočigledniji *drugi* naspram kojih se konstituisao kulturni identitet belih Kanađana – iskonski keltski običaji i verovanja koje su škotski i irski doseljenici preneli u svoju novopronađenu zemlju sada takođe neumitno sele u sferu *drugog*. Impuls da ovekoveči i sakralizuje duh ove predačke plemenske kulture, koji prožima svu Meklaudovu prozu, neki kritičari su označili negativno kao konzervativni stav prema prošlosti; održivost ove kritike drugo je važno pitanje koje se u radu problematizuje. Naspram književnog i kulturološkog tumačenja nostalgije kao retrogradnog sentimenta, u radu se navode iskazi i uvidi arhetipskih kritičara, antropologa i književnih stvaralaca u prilog teze da vrsta sećanja koja se pokazala ključnim podsticajem za najveća ostvarenja zapadne umetnosti, pa i Meklaudovih priča, poput boga Janusu sa dva lica, nije jednosmerna konzervativna težnja ka formalnom idolopokloničkom čuvanju prošlosti, već ka kreativnom obnavljanju njenih živih vrednosti, ili, kako je to Šejmas Hini rekao u jednoj pesmi opisujući pisanje kao simbolični spoj arheološkog iskopavanje i sađenja biljaka: 'digging for finds that turn out to be plants'.

2005.

## STRUCTURALISM AS A CRITIQUE OF CULTURE: MYTH IN FRYE, LEVI-STRAUSS, BARTHES

In this paper I want to argue that the use of myth in the works of N. Frye, R. Barthes and C. Levi-Strauss sets these authors apart from the majority of structuralist thinkers, making them an important link in the humanist tradition within the history of cultural and literary criticism. While they share a belief basic to all structuralism that what we call reality is not a given but a construct and a single aspiration to penetrate to the hidden mechanism of its construction - or the deep structure - Frye, Levi-Strauss and Barthes do not end up, as most structuralist and poststructuralist thinkers do, in a pessimistic, or sometimes cheerful, assertion of human helplessness against the determining force of whatever deep structure - ideology, language, subconscious, the law of the father - they have identified as underlying the visible manifestations of social and individual life. On the contrary, in their interpretation of myth, as well as of identity, literature and culture, human emancipation is a crucial, though not necessarily stated, assumption - indeed, it is the justification, the *raison d'être* of their, often formidably abstract, theoretical systems.<sup>37</sup> It is in this uncompromised, emancipatory sense of the word 'humanism' - the sense assumed by the revolutionary poet Blake, from whom N. Frye claimed he had learnt everything he knew about myth; or defined by Marx in his interpretation of history, which both Barthes and Levi-Strauss acknowledge as the formative influence in their own intellectual development - that I group them together as humanists.<sup>38</sup> It would be of course impossible

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<sup>37</sup> In that respect they do not fall under Terry Eagleton's generalized condemnation of structuralist literary criticism as analytical exercise devoid of purpose, and of structuralist thought in general as vertiginously ahistorical, static, incapable of offering cogent social criticism, and irrelevant to social transformation. (Eagleton, 1983: 123-126)

<sup>38</sup> Despite the fact that the anthropologist Levi-Strauss and the semiotician Barthes took over their concepts from Saussure's structural linguistics, and are invariably described



on this occasion, and also unnecessary, to provide an exhaustive account of these authors' very complex, and, in Barthes's case, changing ideas: in what follows I will confine myself to merely indicating those of their views that, as a teacher of literature committed to humanist tradition, I have found to correspond with my reading experience.

The aspects of Frye's Levi-Strauss's and Barthes's theories most relevant to my experience as a reader of culture and literature are those that seem to originate in the ideas of Giambattista Vico. A proto-structuralist thinker of the early XVIII century, he exploded some of the prejudices central to the Age of Reason when he published his *The New Science*, with its epochal redefinition of myth: myth, he claimed, was no longer to be seen as a result of primitive man's ignorance of the world but as his way of structuring it. The purpose of myth, in Vico's revolutionary theory, was to impose a humanizing, graspable

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as card-carrying structuralists, they belong together with Frye, an archetypal literary critic unaffected by linguistics. Like Frye, Levi-Strauss and the early Barthes offered a truly viable alternative to the structuralist tradition that developed the unstated implications of Propp's and Greimas's neutral linguistic analysis of literary texts into an explicit assertion that man is not the agent but the effect of language. Although Levi-Strauss's analysis of primitive myths bears some resemblance to Prop's analysis of folk tales, it is his waspish criticism of Prop, usually overlooked, that is much more indicative: reducing fairy tales to their common 'grammar' and leaving out the 'vocabulary' or the meaning of particular tales, and finally cutting them off from their origin in human need, Prop's method, Levi-Strauss contends, has dissociated what finally cannot be dissociated, and rendered his analysis sterile.

The following brief passage from Roland Barthes's first book, *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) would place this author too among humanist tradition within structuralism: his study of literature is a discipline both linguistic – concerned with the literary use of language – and, in a broader sense, humanistic – concerned with human intention, with the choice of ends and means under the social and historical pressures in which men actually live. In this early phase we find him claiming that language is indeed a given, but writing is a personal choice, executed in an intimate, almost biological mode of expression, rooted in the psycho-physical constitution of the individual:

Language and style are blind forces; writing is an act of historical solidarity. Language and style are objects; writing is a function: it is the relationship between creation and society, it is the literary language transformed by its social destination, it is form considered as a human intention and so linked to the great crises of history.

Barthes however belongs to those critics who easily change faith, a point I will return to in Conclusion.

shape upon the world in order that it may be known.<sup>39</sup> Like a metaphor or symbol, myth is not an error, but a kind of metaphysics. Man thus is pre-eminently a maker, projecting in the myth he creates the world in which he wants to live, whose shape is largely the shape of his own mind: this primary, mythical matrix is then reproduced, or mirrored in the world of social institutions, customs and conventions. Hence, the science of man and his social structures must begin with the investigation of his myths. However - and this is another of Vico's invaluable insights that also inform Frye's, Barthes' and Levi-Strauss's analysis - this structuring process is a twofold affair of considerable complexity. If the shape of man's world springs from his mind, the fact is soon forgotten, suppressed by the principle *factum=verum*. In other words, once structured by man, his societies and institutions become potent agencies for further structuring: laws, customs and rites act as a forceful brainwashing mechanisms whereby human beings are made to forget their historical origin, and acquiesce in a man-made world as if it were given, natural, true and hence immutable.

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Frye's debt to Vico is immediately recognized in the major premise of his essay 'Archetypes of Literature', a condensed statement of his overall structuralist position. It is that literature, and by implication, culture, can be studied systematically only if we assume an organizing principle connecting the vast variety of particular works into a coherent structure, and that this unifying principle is myth: or rather, a limited number of archetypes to which literary genres, symbols and images can be ultimately traced back. The function of myth, according to Frye, is to reconcile the basic existential paradox, the opposition of desire and reality: it is to transform the given, inhospitable world, frustrating or indifferent to human desire, into the created world where man feels he can belong. In turning environment into a home, the first myths gratified primitive man's antithetical impulses, to assert his independence from nature, yet establish with it a meaningful relationship: thus, as constructs springing from human imagination, myths and rituals acted as a dividing line, safeguarding

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<sup>39</sup> For my account of Vico I am indebted to Terrence Hawkes. (See Hawkes, 1977: 11-15)

social community from being re-absorbed into nature, but at the same time, through a synchronization of the rhythm of human life with that of his environment, ensuring that the bond with nature was not completely severed<sup>40</sup>. One of Frye's examples is a song accompanying work during harvest. Work is a necessity in man's life, but in order to become a truly distinctive feature of his humanity, it must be transformed from a passive, automatic response to external constraints into a voluntary effort. This transformation of necessity into freedom is the meaning of the ritual song accompanying a harvest, but also of whole mythical cycles depicting a quest, (and also of the literary narratives deriving from them.) It is in the different outcome of the first, encyclopedic, mythic quests that the distinction between chief literary modes originates: the tragic and ironic modes end in the frustration of desire; the romantic and comic in its triumph. But the desire that motivates both, Frye insists, is the same and has a source in a Titanic, Promethean dream of total intelligibility of human effort, in an epiphany of the goal of all endeavor – a free human society.

Frye's theory of myth as a projection of man's aspiration to triumph over all sort of necessity or bondage develops into another reminder of Vico's views, one of particular interest to a historian. Vico's observation of how the world fashioned by man in turn proceeds to fashion him, trapping his mind, as if in an anesthetic grip, in the illusion of living in the natural, or given reality, has a parallel in the distinction Frye makes in his *Critical Path* between the 'myth of freedom,' focused on the value of the individual, and the 'myth of social concern,' bent on the preservation of social cohesion. They may be considered phases of a single myth, in fact, indicating the trajectory of its dialectical change: originating in a dream of freedom, every myth in the process of its institutionalization inevitably becomes a myth of social concern: apparently threatened by the potential danger of anarchy implied in the ideal of the free individual, society demands

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<sup>40</sup> That these initial myths of synchronization were replaced by myths of complete dissociation, and that the shift coincided with the patriarchal takeover of the earlear, Goddess-oriented, socially egalitarian order, is never considered by Frye as contributing to the defeat of all subsequent myths of freedom and revolutionary programs, founded as they were on patriarchal set of priorities. For further elaboration of the concepts 'myths of synchronization' and 'myths of dissociation', and a critique of Frye's theory of myth, see Petrović 1997: 13-57

that freedom be restricted or eventually sacrificed to totalitarian dogma, which, at its worst, breeds hatred for all forms of humanity that do not share its particular obsessions.

This dialectic informs the model Frye elaborates in *The Anatomy of Criticism* of the phases through which European literature has passed so far. Like the first, Classical, the second, Christian cycle, consists of five phases – mythic, romantic, high-mimetic, low mimetic and ironic – defined by the diminishing amount of power attributed to the hero. Its mythic beginning belongs to the realm of freedom, where the hero is a god or a godlike man, Christ, whose supernatural resurrection is merely an imaginative projection of love as a power transcending necessity, or law, whether natural or social. Yet as Christianity changed from a new faith in love, spread by groups of persecuted individuals, into a state religion, it gradually turned into a reactionary myth of social concern – a doctrine of fear and hatred, denying the individual the right to recreate in his personal experience the original symbolic drama of death and resurrection. Science first appeared at the time which in Frye's cycle coincides with the low mimetic phase, whose hero is divested of supernatural power and is merely one of us. Nevertheless, Frye notes in his *Critical Path*, science was part of a new revolutionary myth of human emancipation, a result of the humanist rebellion against the traditional theological prohibitions against the freedom to love and freedom to think and explore. This was reflected in the new, low mimetic modes of comedy and the novel, which began hopefully in the realistic observation of a world to be perfected by man's creative power. The failure of this project is recorded in the modernist irony. The works of modern literature depict a technological brave new world hospitable to mindless consumers, not lovers and creators – the maladjusted who in their turn repudiate it, often at the cost of their lives. Or we confront the demonic scenes of bondage, cruelty and frustration, as in *1984* or Kafka's *Process*, whose anti-heroes are helpless victims crushed by forces they no longer can comprehend or even identify.

I may have objections to this interpretation of history as incomplete, but for the moment I prefer to dwell a bit longer on what I think is Frye's permanent contribution to cultural and literary criticism. It is his conviction that literature can be a realm where ideology is resisted, not re-

produced, where the world in which the prevailing myth keeps us trapped, which we have taken for granted as inevitable and inescapable, can be re-examined, and rejected. Writing about the prevailing demonic imagery of the ironic literature, Frye points out that its purpose is not to elicit sadistic pleasure in cruelty, just as the purpose of romance and comedy is not an indulgence in an escapist, irresponsible fancy of a never-never land of impossible fulfillments. Literature, Frye points out, invariably presents life as either better or worse than it actually is, because it reflects not life itself, but its possibilities (incidentally, one of those simple but fruitful propositions that should never be allowed to remain on the junk heap of ideas discarded by postmodern theorists). Just as the apocalyptic imagery of romance and comedy visualizes a world we would like to belong to and might strive for, the demonic imagery of contemporary ironic literature makes shockingly visible the nature of the world we call ours, and inspire us with the energy of repudiation.

Irony thus contains a principle of its own overcoming. Like Nietzsche, who predicted in *The Birth of Tragedy* that science would ultimately exhaust its power to interpret and direct human life and would be eventually replaced by myth, Frye also glimpses in ironic literature outlines of mythic plots and figures. The return to myth is not to be confused with a restoration of the old, or setting up of new gods. On the contrary, it will consist in recovering the power projected upon the gods, reclaiming it for the human mind. It will amount to something Blake was the first among the romantic poets to accomplish. In fact, Frye's essay 'The Expanding Eyes', a retrospective glance at the influences that shaped his own development as a critic and teacher of literature, is a tribute to Blake. To understand the Resurrection not as an event that follows the historical sequence of Creation-Fall-Incarnation, but as 'an everlasting gospel', as Blake did, is to return to our original identity, a final point of a 'journey that ends when the human creator recovers his creation from his Muses, and lives again, like Job, with the daughters of his memory transformed into a renewed presence.' In translating the Resurrection back into a myth of human imagination, Blake's *Prophecies* became for Frye a paradigm of what literature in general is capable of: it tells us how the human imagination operates and is thus an untapped source of mental energy, an expander and transformer of vision: '[I]t seems strange', he writes, in response

to what he considers so many fashionable but mistaken approaches to literature, 'to overlook the possibility that the arts, including literature, might just conceivably be what they have always been taken to be, possible techniques of meditation, in the strictest sense of the word, ways of cultivating, focusing and ordering one's mental processes on the basis of symbol, rather than concept.' (Frye, 1976: 117).

A proof of the vitality of Frye's insights is that, besides Blake's visionary poetry, they can still be used as a valid interpretive framework in an analysis of contemporary literary texts. To give but one recent example: Steve Tesich's play *On the Open Road* is a political and moral allegory: its two protagonists, Angel and Al, initially seduced by the corrupt version of freedom, learn eventually to distinguish it from its original embodiment in Christ, and choose to recreate it at the cost of their own lives. As victims of some cataclysmic transition, they are at first determined to provide themselves with all the qualifications necessary to enter the Promised Land of the Free: the most troubling condition, of which they are informed by a Christian priest, is to murder Christ, who has come once again among people, and is delivering his message no longer in words, which nobody would stop to listen, but through music, playing the cello. Possessed of a very acute historical sense, Tesich, like Frye, knows what in the Christian tradition is its institutionalised version, concerned with social cohesion and control, and what the repressed but still persisting, original myth of freedom. Translating Christ, as once the heretical Pelagius did, and as did Blake, and Dostoevski, into a symbol of the immanent divinity in man, Tesich reminds us, once again, that the spiritual values the Church was established to support, and which it usually betrayed shamelessly, still persist as a capacity to 'love without a motive.' Refusing to fulfill the ultimate condition, and for the sake of 'freedom' free themselves of their conscience, Al and Angel end up crucified: not yet saved, but now that they truly experience the Kantian harmony they formerly knew only as a mechanically memorised form of words – 'The starry heaven above, the moral law within', not entirely lost either.

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I hinted just now that there are points in Frye's argument where I am not in complete agreement with him. If I do find most of con-

temporary engaged writing, particularly drama, analyzable in terms of Frye's assumption of the power of literature to make visible the distinction, blurred today, between the truly desirable existence and its surrogates, between freedom and its travesty, there nevertheless remain some serious omissions in Frye's interpretation of mythical and literary cycles, and the principles of their alternation. I particularly have in mind the degeneration of revolutionary myth of freedom into a reactionary myth of social concern, which in Frye's account remain unrelated to external objective causes, and seem to happen automatically out of some internal inbuilt necessity. It never occurs to Frye that revolutions fail, that dreams of freedom are regularly betrayed because the teleological questions, questions of purposes and goals - of freedom from what?, and freedom for what? - are as a rule not properly asked, or carefully answered, or that answers have been conceived and acted upon locally and temporarily within a vaster, preexisting, but unexamined condition of dissociation - that is, of the condition of permanent, deeply engraved divisions and hierarchies first ushered in by the advent of patriarchy. The event seldom figures in Frye's interpretation of mythological or social history, and remains unrecognized as a major factor explaining the repeated defeat of all subsequent myths of freedom and revolutionary programs. It does not, for example, occur to him that Prometheus, in his view a quintessence of all revolutionary human aspiration, might be an ambiguous symbol: that the scientific revolution was doomed because it was carried out by men whose Promethean hubristic intellect was already divorced from their souls, who would therefore soon succumb to Faustian temptations, preparing the way for that paradigmatic European imperialist - Conrad's Kurtz - conceiving, with his 'lucid intelligence' and 'mad soul', 'grand plans' on which he would himself, when it was too late, pass a judgement: 'The horror, the horror'.

Yet, even if the fatal significance of patriarchal myth for the overall history of the West remains a blind spot in Frye's own archetypal criticism, what he does see and say about myth, culture and literature never collides, as the theories of most poststructuralist authors do, but easily blends in with new revolutionary insights into the causes of our cultural failures and alternatives open to us today.

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The anthropology of Levi-Strauss, even though not particularly concerned to condemn patriarchy, can be read as filling some of the gaps in Frye's structuralist narrative of European mythology. Myth for Levi-Strauss, as for Frye, is a container of human meaning, man's way of knowing, and orienting himself in the world; and the fact that obviously there are more than one way of doing this invites comparison and choice. Levi-Strauss's commitments are wholly to the primitive oral cultures which were the subject of his investigation and which he takes as a criterion of health, authenticity or spontaneity that have been lost in the western society. Although he claims that structuring experience in terms of binary oppositions is common to both primitive and modern man, Levi-Strauss's anthropology is essentially a tribute to the creativity of the mythological or 'savage mind', which, unlike the logical mind, finds a way past the antithetical kind of thinking, and thus avoids 'violent hierarchization', a mental manoeuvre at the root of repressive western metaphysics.

In his essay 'Myth and Incest', for example, Levi-Strauss, in line with his major premise that myths disclose their meaning only if considered in relation to one another, brings together within a single analytic frame several myths of the North American Indians, the Oedipus myth and the Grail myth to demonstrate the way the primitive mind establishes wise analogies between the natural and human orders ensuring moral and ecological equilibrium essential to the survival of both. Having once arranged experience into two corresponding sets of oppositions (incest, summer, plague vs. sexual abstinence, winter, sterility; and arrogant speech aiming at usurpation vs. complete rejection of words), instead of choosing between these extremes, primitive man let himself be instructed by nature: in an analogy with the cycles of seasons, where neither the eternal summer (the unleashing of natural energies to the point of corruption, plague and decay), nor the eternal winter (to the point of sterility and death), are allowed to prevail, he chose the middle way: exchange of women rather than the extremes of incest or sexual abstinence, and exchange of words in frank communication rather than arrogant speech with ulterior motives or complete verbal abstinence.

In establishing numerous similar correspondences between systems of differences within natural and human order, the mytholo-



gical, or 'savage,' mind managed to accomplish what Frye indiscriminately and wrongly, attributed to all myth: mark human society off from natural surroundings, yet ensure at the same time the reciprocity or analogy between the two orders that would prevent the human world from extricating itself completely from, or turning itself against, the element out of which it had evolved. The ontology underlying the Indian myths investigated by Levi-Strauss corresponds in fact to that of the earliest myths of sychronization as Eliade described them. It is as if man's first response to the recognition of his independence was the need to attune his life with the rhythms by which the totality he has just separated from lived (Eliade, 1965: 156); and it is this need, to re-identify with the eternal natural recurrence those few primordial creative gestures that first signalled the appearance of freedom, that the 'savage mind' asserts its superior wisdom.

What destroyed this kind of untamed, analogical or synchronizing thinking was not, according to Levi-Strauss, a shift to patriarchal mythology, but it *was* the emergence of dissociative, antithetical thinking, characteristic of patriarchal myths. It coincided, according to Levi-Strauss, with the advent of the post-Renaissance, rationalist, Cartesian humanism, the invention of Man as a Promethean hero of intellect who, in Levi-Strauss's interpretation of the myth, is a hubristic being, separate from nature, and concerned to operate *on* it, logically and destructively, rather than co-operate *with* it analogically. It suppressed the essential similarity of the primitive and civilized minds and turned the former into the 'other', and the primordial way of life it cultivated from times immemorial into the image of the garden that, as G. Steiner comments in his highly sympathetic and perceptive assessment of Levi-Strauss's anthropology, the white men, possessed by some archetypal rage at having been excluded from it, have sought to lay waste wherever they found it. (Steiner, 1974:32)

Levi-Strauss's structural analysis of the oral traditions of these vanishing native cultures, especially in *The Savage Mind* and *Tristes Tropiques*, is inseparable from his commitment to the ethos they embodied, from the condemnation of, and a sense of guilt for belonging to, the predatory civilization that eradicated them, but inseparable also from the hope that they may still offer a model for a possible recovery of wholeness, otherwise only preserved in modern poetry. For Levi-

Strauss's guilt and nostalgia are not an impotent regressive longing for the impossible return to the archaic past of natural innocence, but an evidence of the properly humanist, or revolutionary, historical sense, at once backward looking and projective, intent on 'reintegration of culture and nature and finally of life within the whole of its psychochemical conditions.' (Levi-Strauss, 1969:138-9).

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The use Barthes makes of myth in his *Mythologies* (1957) seems at first to differ sharply from Frye's and Levi-Strauss's approaches. The book is a linguistically founded study of culture as a system of significations - or mythologies, which, in Barthes analysis, have a wholly conservative function. Myth, Barthes explains in 'Myth Today', a long theoretical essay at the end of the book, is a second order language, or a meta-language, which feeds on the primary language-object, robbing it of its revolutionary power. Primary language is transitive, i.e., political: because it speaks its object, it is the language of action, used by a man who is a producer. Myth, on the other hand, is intransitive, depoliticized mode of speech: it speaks *about* objects in a way that empties them of their history, of the memory that once they were made, and celebrates them instead as natural, eternal, unchangeable. This appeal to nature, this constant transformation of *anti-physis* into *pseudo-physis*, serves to provide an alibi for the *status quo*: myth prevents people from questioning and re-forming their institutions, ultimately, Barthes concludes, 'myth is a prohibition for man against inventing himself'.

A seeming departure from their views, Barthes's primary and secondary, or mythic, languages correspond, in fact, to Vico's and Frye's understanding of the dialectics of myth: for Barthes focuses on that point in a life of a myth when, in Frye's terms, it loses its initial creative and liberating potential, and becomes a reactionary myth of social concern. Barthes identifies the latter with the French bourgeois ideology, and his book is at once the most accessible and the most devastating of his works of cultural demystification. Short, witty essays on various items of everyday life - from the ideologically highly charged advertising, press coverage of elections, news reports on the doings of royal families, to the seemingly innocent items, such as guide books,

detergents, steak and wine - all analyzed as examples of stratagems employed by the ruling bourgeoisie in order to prevent those they rule, and themselves, from ever even conceiving a possibility of another way of life. The bourgeois, as Barthes defines the species, cannot imagine the other: 'identification', 'privation of history', 'exoticism' and 'inoculation' are major strategies whereby he assimilates other forms of life, other cultures and races, into his own, or relegates them to the margins of humanity, where they become a depthless exotic spectacle; the history they are in this way deprived of is the history of the oppression by the white colonizers. Occasionally the bourgeois will admit to some minor offence, but only in order to obscure, to 'inoculate' himself against recognizing, the major crimes his imperialist culture is guilty of.

The famous example Barthes gives of the first two strategies is a photograph on the front cover of *Paris-Match* of a Negro in a French uniform giving a French salute. Now a black man, seen under different circumstances, is, in terms of Barthes' semiotics, a full sign: he has his particular, personal and racial identity, and his own history attached to him. Yet the effect of the photography is to evaporate his content, to turn him into an empty form, to which a new concept is attached: that of French Imperialism. The fact of imperialism is not concealed, it is on the contrary stated, but as a self-justifying, natural phenomenon. What the photograph is made to signify is 'that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any color discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors.' (Barthes, 1987: 116).

Like Frye and Levi-Strauss, Barthes too is concerned with possibilities of resistance. He identifies two: if myth is the depoliticized speech of the oppressor, there are only two types of political language, those spoken by the oppressed and by the poets. In contrast to the 'intransitive' mode of mythical language, designed to immobilize and celebrate, the language of the revolution is 'transitive' speech, aiming at emancipation and transformation of reality. It strives to penetrate behind signs to the reality the signs distort or obliterate. So does the language of poetry. Not all poetry though, and certainly not French classical and realistic literature with its assumption of reality as unpro-

blematic, given and readily available surface of things, to be faithfully reflected in clear and elegant prose. The poetry Barthes has in mind is modern and experimental: it distinguishes between signs and reality, and strives to purge, or decode, layers of accumulated mythologies covering things. Modern poetry, Barthes writes, tends to 'transform sign back into meaning: its ideal, ultimately, would be to reach not the meaning of words, but the meaning of things themselves'. Thus, paradoxically, the poets who most experiment with linguistic forms are the least formalist, for they believe that the meaning of words is only a form, with which they, being realists, cannot be content. Their ambition is to create an anti-language, a kind of 'spatial tangible analogue of silence, in which *the thing in itself* will once again speak its original unmediated undistorted meaning'.(Barthes, 1987: 133)

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The purpose of this brief comparative analysis of Northrop Frye, Claude Levi-Strauss and the early Roland Barthes has been to point to what I believe is the more important of the two ingredients that make up their work: if their structuralism is both scientific and belongs to the humanist tradition of thought, it is the latter – the preoccupation with values, the willingness to ask the teleological questions and articulate moral judgments, indeed the sense of inevitable interpenetration of the analytical and the ethical in their texts - that constitutes their enduring quality. What I have in mind is perhaps best expressed by Dan Sperber, when he observes in his text on Levi-Strauss that 'in his case structuralism [i.e., scientism] has become an uninspiring frame for an otherwise stimulating and inspiring picture'. (In Sturrock, 1979:25).

This does not coincide with the general assessment of these authors' significance. While structuralism was still in its heyday, it was precisely for its scientific, value-free approach - originating in the Russian formalism, particularly Propp's investigation and systematization of Russian fairy tales - that its contribution to the understanding of literary and cultural phenomena was appreciated. The ambition to do more than merely describe, in Trilling's words, 'to criticize, judge, condemn and perhaps revise culture,' that persisted in structuralists such as Levi-Strauss, Frye and the early Barthes, was easily overlooked. Then, as the structuralist vogue faded, and the postmodern lu-

dic, relativistic outlook came to prevail, their aspiration to scientific, objectively founded and total explanations were discarded along with their humanist concern with values.

In 'Structure, Sign and Play in the History of Human Sciences' Jacques Derrida undertook to deconstruct Levi-Strauss, demonstrating at first the untenability of Levi-Strauss's methodological procedure. What his ulterior motive seems to have been though, as it transpired at the end of his famous essay, was to invalidate Levi-Strauss's humanism, and make an end once for all to all romantic endeavor to translate old mythic stories into new utopian scenarios. As an alternative to Levi-Strauss's 'structuralist thematic of broken immediacy, this negative, saddened, nostalgic, Rousseauistic, guilty humanism', Derrida proposed what has become since a chief legitimation of postmodern historical amnesia – he proposed 'the affirmation of ... the world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin...' (Derrida, 1981, 292)

Roland Barthes deconstructed himself. He departed from the position exemplified in *Mythologies*, and joined, again temporarily, the anti-humanist code-and-convention school of criticism. In his *S/Z* (1970) the writer as an origin and the reader as a goal of meaning are replaced by a system of linguistic codes standing outside and above the individual user, unalterable by individual volition. His essay 'The Death of the Author' ushers in his final, post-structural phase, where Barthes finally drops any pretence to scientific analysis, indeed to any coherent truth and meaning, and embraces instead whatever is plural and centrifugal, offering no longer political action, but something close to Derrida's *freeplay*, the *jouissance* born of multiplicity and indeterminacy, as the only mode of resistance to the bourgeois culture.

As to Northrop Frye, who, unlike Barthes, refused to be seduced by postmodernist fashions, Terry Eagleton's dismissive question summing up his hostile account of Frye's work in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* – 'But who now reads Northrop Frye?' – is enough to indicate the low esteem in which (Neo)Marxists of the eighties held both structuralist, archetypal, and humanist criticism.

The latest developments however seem to endorse my own favorable view of these authors' contribution to the understanding and critique of European culture. The growing interest in the Third-World cultural histories, particularly the pre-Columbian mythology of the

Latin American native peoples, as well as in the results, long ignored, of the archeological and anthropological research in European prehistory, pointing to its matriarchal mythology and ethos as factors contributing to the millennia of peace and social justice, provide a contemporary context in which Frye's, Levi-Strauss' and Barthes' insights into the way myths function, though not necessarily or explicitly anti-patriarchal, gain fresh significance. In fact, in the works by authors such as the archeologist Maria Gimbutas, the Nobel Prize winner novelist J. M. G. Le Clezio, or the South American philosopher and writer Eduardo Galeano, dedicated to the revision of the official European history from the standpoint of the peoples, myths and values it had to suppress or eradicate to maintain its own centrality, there resurfaces the original, humanist dream of justice and freedom, modeled on the earliest human communities and their mother-centered myths, first scientifically described in Engels's *The Origin of Family, Private Property and State*, but also compatible with Frye's notion of the myth of freedom, Barthes' demystification of the French bourgeois mythologies and Levi-Strauss's reverence for the vanished tribal cultures. For the fully articulated contemporary expression of this Janus-like, simultaneously backward and forward looking historical sense, and as a way of bringing my argument to a close, I would like to quote from Galeano's *Book of Embraces*. It is a short text appropriately called 'Traditions of the Future' and deserves to be reproduced in full:

Certain voices from the American past, long past, sound very futuristic. For example, the ancient voice that still tells us we are children of the earth and that our mother is not for sale or for hire. While dead birds rain on Mexico City and rivers are turned into sewers, oceans into dumps and forests into deserts, this voice, stubbornly refusing to die, heralds another world different from this one that poisons the water, soil, air and soul.

The ancient voice that speaks to us of community heralds another world as well. Community – the communal mode of production and life – is the oldest of American tradition, the most American of all. It belongs to the earliest days and the first people, but it also belongs to the times ahead and anticipates a New World. For there is nothing less alien to these lands of ours than socialism. Capitalism, on the other hand, is foreign: like smallpox, like the flu, it came from abroad. (Galeano, 1992: 135)

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## Rezime

### MIT I KRITIKA KULTURE: FRAJ, LEVI-ŠTROS, BART

Nasuprot opšte prihvaćenom mišljenju da su strukturalizam i njemu srodno mitološko razmišljanje 'vrtoglavo ahistorični' te prema tome irelevantni za teoriju revolucionarnog društvenog preobražaja, u ovom radu ponuđeno je komparativno čitanje odabranih tekstova tri strukturalistički orijentisana autora, Nortropa Fraja, ranog Rolana Barta i Kloda Levi-Štrosa, kao značajnih priloga kritičkom, odnosno razvojnom humanističkom tumačenju kulture. U obrazlaganju suštinske kompatibilnosti njihovih, prividno nespojivih, definicija mita i njegove dvosmislene funkcije u oblikovanju društvenih struktura jednog istorijskog doba, kao polazište se koristi Vikova teza, formulisana u knjizi *Nova nauka*, da svaki mit sledi jedan dijalektički princip, utoliko što se njegov prvobitni kreativni impuls zaustavlja i zaboravlja u procesu institucionalizacije, te ono što je nekada bio Frajev revolucionarni 'mit društvene slobode' završava kao Bartove reakcionarne 'mitologije'. Ovo vodi glavnoj tezi u radu, a to je da različite ideološke implikacije mitova, ili pojedinih faza jednog istog mita, na čemu Fraj, Bart i Levi-Štros zasnivaju svoju humanističku ideju o uvek otvorenoj mogućnosti političkog i egzistencijalnog izbora, jeste ono što poziciju ova tri autora čini interpretativno superiornom u odnosu na većinu savremenih, antihumanistički nastrojenih analitičara, čija strukturalistička tumačenja, bilo da su psihoanalitički ili lingvistički zasnovana, po pravilu osporavaju mogućnost razlike i izbora, te stoga jedva da zaslužuju samozvani status radikalne kritike kulture.

2013.



## II TRADITIONS, TRANSFORMATIONS, COMPROMISES: LITERATURE AND THE UNIVERSITY IN THE POST-MODERN ERA

Postmodernism in particular bears witness to the disintegrative power of late capitalism. It is something in the very essence of our present social order which structurally inhibits integrated thinking, which undermines the very foundations of rationality and sanity and morality...something at the very core of contemporary experience which blocks access to totality, which keeps theory flying so far apart from experience and leaves experience groping so helplessly in the dark.

Helena Sheehan

It is not the creator's – the writer's – job to compromise: that is the job of the manufacturers. We must be more radical. When manufacturers compromise, they change our dreams; when creators do not compromise they change reality.

E. Bond



## POSTMODERNISM AS A FAUSTIAN BARGAIN: RAVENHILL'S *FAUST* (*FAUST IS DEAD*)

I would much sooner subject Derrida to the criteria of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, than Dostoevski and Tolstoy to Derrida's criteria

J. .M. Coetzee

I have always been more willing to dwell on what artists have to say about criticism and theory than what critics say about art. Thus I find a brief, punning remark by Heiner Muller (1984, 137) – besides Coetzee's laconic comment, probably the most summary treatment postmodernism has received so far – more rewarding on close examination than many pages of postmodern discourse on literature. Asked for an opinion about what might constitute the truly postmodern drama and theater, he replied: 'The only postmodernist I know of was August Stram, who was a modernist and worked in a post-office'. Underlying this joking dismissal is a number of implied convictions about the meaning not only of modernism and postmodernism, but of art in general: Postmodern art, Muller is saying, is inconceivable; it is a contradiction in terms. The artist can never be anything else but a modernist, or else he stops being an artist. Had Muller bothered to theorize these assumptions, they would amount, I believe, to a contemporary re-statement of the kind of endemic romanticism which is defined by a belief in the type of genuine individual and the highly independent, imaginative, questing mind, through which romanticism persists and is perpetuated in modernism. Viewed from this perspective, postmodernism, in so far as it means an obliteration of this kind of the creative self, its dispersal, to use the current idiom, into a plurality of subject positions inscribed within language, is the negation of art.

The term 'postmodern' has its uses, of course. It is employed meaningfully to describe the massive material and political changes

– all contributing to the triumph of neo-conservative global society – that marked the end of the millennium. It is valid, too, when applied to a mood or a state of mind accompanying, or generated by, these changes – ranging from resigned acceptance to euphoric celebration – which pervades popular media culture and is endorsed, whether intentionally or not, by major postmodern theorists. The effectiveness of their theories, as some of them cheerfully testify, depends on the kind of discourse that tries to persuade without the notion of traditional argument<sup>1</sup>. This, in fact, involves what Eco (Eco, 1987, 231), speaking of McLuhan's ecstatic welcome of the media culture, called a *cogito interruptus*: the imposition upon the reader, carried out in the most insidiously illegitimate way imaginable, of the kind of reasoning that 'rests on the equivocation of a *cogito* that is denied, arguing in the modes of denied rationality'. But it is perhaps not necessary to subject these theories to a logical deconstruction, such as Eco so brilliantly and wittily performs, in order to examine their validity. For much of what is confusing in postmodern discourse can be understood if one approaches it from a pragmatic angle: if one asks not how postmodern thinkers arrived at their anti-humanist propositions but why these views became so rapidly and so immensely popular. Asking the Grail question – 'Whom do you serve with this?' – may in fact show the term postmodern to be hardly more than an accurate description of the intellectual and moral compromise by which postmodernism's leading proponents have hyper-adjusted themselves to postmodernity; and of their theories, which, on closer inspection, prove to be a sophisticated example of hypocritically correct political thinking. The perspective was first suggested to me by Nietzsche, and once again proved fruitful as I read *Chomsky on MisEducation*. The Introduction, by Donald Macedo and Chapter 2: 'Democracy and Education' deserve special attention.

In the Introduction Macedo describes the strategies employed by the dominant sector in the US since the sixties in order to contain the general democratic participation of masses of people in questioning

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<sup>1</sup> Sarup writes: 'Lyotard supported Marxism but he now sees it as one of the grand narratives he is against. He writes about the force of language beyond truth and wants to develop a theory of philosophical fiction – a discourse that tries to persuade without the traditional notion of 'argument'.' (Sarup 1993, 154).

their government's criminal involvement in the Vietnam War. One of them was the Trilateral Commission which dropped all pretensions about schools as democratic sites, charged with the teaching of democratic values, and declared them instead as institutions responsible for the indoctrination of the young. The colonial model of education perfected for this purpose aims to prevent the development of the kind of thinking that enables one to read the world critically and to understand reasons and linkages between the facts: the priorities of education are reduced to the pragmatic requirements of the market, whereby students are trained to become 'compliant workers, spectorial consumers, and passive citizens.' (Chomsky 2000, 4)

Whereas the ruling class makes no apologies for the undemocratic role of schools, Macedo continues, to maintain capitalism's cultural hegemony it has been necessary to create a cultural middle management composed of teachers, professionals and experts, who are expected, through a reward system, to propagate the myth that schools are democratic sites where democratic values are learned. Among various means these cultural commissars resorted to in order to achieve their mission one of the most insidious was to place the responsibility for 'the social catastrophe of the sixties' precisely on those who sought to avoid it by a democratization of institutions, and a change in relations of power: 'Thus it became necessary to frontally attack the experiments in democracy that questioned the unethical and sometimes criminal behavior of the governments and squarely put the blame on the great society programs not only for financial losses but also for the drop in high school test scores, drug problems and a generation of children and youth with no fathers, no faith and no dreams other than the lure of the streets.' (Chomsky 2000, 2)

Macedo's comments are confined mostly to the situation in grade schools in the US, but can also clarify the point I want to make about the postmodern theories currently promoted in leading American and European universities. It is not an irrelevant coincidence, for example, that in the late sixties and seventies the major teaching posts in the US universities, hitherto held by the teachers and philosophers of German origin and some of them deriving from the Frankfurt School, people like Marcuse, Adorno or Fromm, whose common standpoint in criticizing the consumer society was that of traditional humanist values, began

to be taken over by a new set of postmodern thinkers, mostly French, whose anti-humanist orientation soon became the order of the day. This replacement, I believe, was part of the campaign Macedo speaks of: the newly installed teachers were promptly assimilated into the 'bought priesthood', their ideas, whether they intended it or not, contributing to a common endeavor, namely, to prevent independent critical thought while appearing to defend it. Thus, for instance, Fukuyama's jubilant proclamation of Good News – the end of history which has reached its supreme goal in the globally achieved liberal democracy and the capitalist free market – depends on a cynical distortion of the meaning of democracy and a consequent falsification of historical facts, as Derrida pointed out in his reply to Fukuyama. But there is a group of postmodern thinkers, including, besides Lyotard, Baudrillard and Foucault, Derrida himself, whose views are less accessible to critical analysis than Fukuyama's rather obvious hypocrisy. For one thing, they are highly ambiguous, combining quite incongruously their radical critique of ideology with the acquiescence in, or even fascination with, various manifestations of its ubiquitous power. This hardly gives us reason to be optimistic about the possibility of resistance and transformation, for, as a recent critic of postmodernism (Haber 1994, 101) reasonably asks, 'if ...individuals are wholly constituted by the power/knowledge regime Foucault describes, how can discipline be resisted in the first place?'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This, by the way, is one of the very few valid insights the book provides. Haber's critique of postmodernism soon turns into a demand for a kind of ultra postmodernism: Thus Lyotard's attempt to transcend the relativism of his position by an appeal to Kant's categorical imperative as a ground for 'the justice of multiplicity' is, according to her, a betrayal of his initial, more desirable, 'pagan', 'Nietzschean' (!) concept of 'multiplicity of justices', paganism being a name for 'a situation in which one judges without criteria.' (32 -33). This should be compared with the contrary, and much more cogent argument to be found in *Culture First! Promoting Standards in the New Media Age*, edited by K. Dyson and W. Homolka in 1996. In the Preface postmodernism is criticized precisely from the standpoint of Kant's criteria, without which the 'development and exercise of moral intelligence', and 'reflective judgments that intellectual inquiry should enable us to make' are impossible. It is through the abandonment of these criteria and the 'fascination with and celebration of free-floating media images, the openness and lack of objective content of "texts" and power of the "reader" to define and create textual meanings' that postmodernism has provided professional groups, from advertisers and marketing specialists to media studies lecturers, with an ideology that justifies their roles and serves their interests.

(How, one might add, could the sixties happen in the first place?) The difficulty of finding the possibility of a revolutionary vocabulary is not a problem that haunts only Foucault, the comment goes on, but also many other proponents of post-structural politics. Yet – and this is a *cogito interruptus* at its most insidious – their target seems to be precisely those traditional thinkers who did possess the kind of revolutionary vocabulary that they themselves lack. The strategy Macedo unmasks – that of blaming the cultural catastrophe of the sixties on what only could have prevented it – is also employed by postmodern cultural critics: they justify their anti-humanism by seeking not only to instill the view that the humanist tradition has proved definitely wrong in its emancipatory hopes but, in fact, to blame it for the failure of these hopes<sup>3</sup>.

Quite a different picture emerges in Chomsky's essay 'Democracy and Education': it is not the conventional one, the author warns, 'but it does have one merit, at least – namely, the merit of accuracy.' (Chomsky 2000, 38) Chomsky identifies the humanist tradition with the independent Left, which grew out of the Enlightenment and included progressive thinkers, from the grossly misunderstood Adam Smith, and his contemporary J. S. Mill to Dewey and Russell, together with the leading elements of the Marxist mainstream, mostly anti-Bolshevik, and, of course, the popular libertarian and labor movements long preceding Marx. He reminds us that the values common to them all were formulated in reaction against what Adam Smith called 'the

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, the current political bankruptcy of liberalism before the onslaught of the right is due to the inherent insufficiency in the liberal humanist tradition: historically, once it ceased speaking for the Third Realm and allied itself exclusively to the bourgeoisie, tacitly upholding the *laissez-faire* doctrine, it was a matter of favourable circumstances (the demise of the communist Eastern Block was one) before it could mutate into its current Neo-liberal version with the crass economic competition and exploitative possessive individualism as its sole social and moral principles. Yet the chief target of the postmodern critique is not the capitalist *laissez-faire* – to which they offer no alternative either – but those principles about the critical and creative potential of the human mind and action that is the legacy of the Enlightenment shared by Liberal humanism and Marx – principles, which, even though insufficient in themselves to bring about a socialist revolution, are nevertheless, as Marx well knew, crucial to its success. A wholesale dismissal of the liberal humanist tradition, or its endorsement, without disambiguating the term, can be confusing. One might have wished that Chomsky had done so before he went on to pay (justified) tribute to those great liberal thinkers and educators.

inherent vile maxim of masters of mankind: all for ourselves, and nothing for other people’ – the guiding principle of capitalism which ‘nowadays we are taught to admire and revere’. In contrast to this vile maxim Smith stressed sympathy, the goal of perfect equality and the basic human right to creative work. Chomsky (2000, 42) recalls that the founders of classical liberalism, people like Wilhelm von Humboldt, also ‘regarded creative work freely undertaken in association with others as the core value of a human life.’ In support of humanist conception of education, he quotes Russell and Dewey, in whose views we readily recognize the orientation shared by teachers and critics such as Leavis and Trilling, Fromm and Marcuse. Russell claimed that the goal of education is ‘to give a sense of value of things other than domination, to encourage a combination of citizenship with liberty and individual creativeness, which means that we regard a child as a gardener regards a young tree, as something with a certain intrinsic nature, which will develop into an admirable form, given proper soil and air and light’. (Chomsky 2000, 38) Together with Russell, Dewey considered these ideas revolutionary: if implemented, they would bring about a more just and free society in which ‘the ultimate aim of production is not production of goods, but the production of free human beings associated with one another in terms of equality’. (Chomsky 2000, 37)<sup>4</sup>

To the tradition delineated by Chomsky one should add the names of nineteenth century thinkers Bernard Bosanquet and T. H. Green, evoked by Quentin Skinner, Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Cambridge, in the Isaiah Berlin Memorial Lecture delivered to The British Academy in December, 2001<sup>5</sup>. Professor

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<sup>4</sup> It was Dewey who finally identified the obstacle to this ideal of the free individual to be the capitalist Great Society, which was not a Democratic Great Community, and which produced stunted, underdeveloped ‘lost’ individuals. He placed the reason at the door of political economy. Writing in *Individualism Old and New* (1930) he argued that ‘the chief obstacle to the creation of of a type of individual whose pattern of thought and desire is enduringly marked by consensus with others, and in whom sociability is one with cooperation in all regular human association is the persistence of that feature of individualism which defines industry and commerce by ideas of private pecuniary profit’. (Qtd. in Westbrook 1991: 434)

<sup>5</sup> Published under the title ‘A Third Concept of Liberty’ in *London Review Books*, 4 April 2002.



Skinner used the occasion to raise serious doubts about the validity of contemporary political theory, and its power to define a program for liberation. He spoke about two traditional concepts of liberty. The first, negative liberty, is identified with absence of interference; it is freedom from external constraint. This negative definition must also include, but it no longer does, a concept of freedom as independence, that is, the knowledge that the exercise of our rights will not depend on the goodwill of others. This is significant. But what is of even greater interest in the present context is that in contrast to this juristic concept of negative liberty as freedom *from* interference or *from* dependence, there has traditionally been recognized a fuller or positive understanding of the term as freedom *for* self-realization. Professor Skinner quotes Isaiah Berlin who suggested that for all those who wished to give a positive content to the idea of liberty, ‘the freedom of human agents consists in their having managed most fully to become themselves’. One of them was a nineteenth century thinker T. H. Green, who wrote that ‘real freedom consists in the whole man having found his object’, it is ‘the end state in which man has realized his ideal of himself’. This argument can be carried a step further, says Skinner, if we recognize that what underlies theories of positive liberty is the belief that human nature has an essence, and that we are free if, and only if, we succeed in realizing that essence in our lives. Now Skinner deplores the fact that contemporary political theory, especially in Britain and the USA, has quite neglected the positive view of liberty. Only the first definition of freedom as absence of interference has been preserved as orthodox. But detached from the sense of freedom as being identical with whatever is the true inherent goal of man, liberty, Professor Skinner insists, may, and has become a name for what is actually servitude. To talk of liberty then, as our politicians and engineers of the new world order do, is to speak the language of tyranny. This, I think, extends to the enormous majority of postmodern theories. They are exactly what Roland Barthes – but the early, critical, Barthes – said bourgeois mythology was: ‘a prohibition for man against inventing himself.’

To help ensure a counter-revolution, while appearing to serve progressive goals, postmodern cultural analysts employ all sorts of confusing and highly illegitimate argumentative procedures to persuade

us that the views upheld by thinkers quoted and praised by Chomsky or Quentin Skinner are essentially reactionary, in unacknowledged yet deep agreement with coercive regimes: for example, the humanist idea of the free, creative individual is deliberately conflated with the economic notion of acquisitive, aggressive ego or with bourgeois private man, and then accused of contributing to the triumph of the capitalist principle of ‘mastery over a world of slaves’, which, incidentally, the Noble Prize winning economist James Buchanan frankly endorsed as the ‘genuine aspiration of every person in an ideal situation.’ (Skinner 2002, 39) As postmodern thinkers proceed to suggest ways of resistance to cultural enslavement, ironies increase and become quite mind boggling. Thus the remedy does not lie, as people like Macedo or Chomsky, who still believe in humanist education, claim, in the ‘teaching of the truth’ i.e. in the development of the kind of knowledge that would ensure a ‘global comprehension of the facts and their *raison d’être*’ (Skinner 2002, 9); nor in the ‘pedagogy of hope’ demanding from educators ‘to discover what historically is possible in the sense of contributing to the transformation of the world...’ (Skinner 2002, 13) For have not Lyotard & Comp. taught us that truth is epistemologically and morally indistinguishable from falsehood? That to read, whether words or the world, with a view of arriving at a coherent moral interpretation is to perpetuate the sin of teleological thinking which is a form of mastery? That all total explanations are totalitarian, all global projects coercive, and that the history made intelligible by the great systems of narrative knowledge is, fortunately, a thing of the past, its end coinciding, again fortunately, with the death of man as knower. That homogeneity, unity or universality can be politically coercive and do accompany the regimes of terror is true – there is no better evidence than the eradication of differences by the current capitalist re-colonisation of the world. But, when as a counter-strategy to the terror of the political logic of the same, the postmodern theorists prescribe a universal multiplicity – of language games, of free interpretations, of subject positions, none of which can claim to superior truth or justice – they end up as champions of a compulsory epistemological and ethical relativism which prevents political clarity and thus eliminates one of the few remaining strategies of self-defense against the power of dominant culture.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> That postmodern theory is politically suspect, representing a threat to the transformation it claims to seek, has been recognized within the context of postcolonial studies. Nancy Hartsock writes: ‘Somehow it seems highly suspicious that it is at the precise

Another is art. Here, as elsewhere, what in reality is a terrorist action is disguised as a rescue operation: postmodernism has invaded literary debate carrying the banner of democracy and promising to free us from the hegemony of cultural elite. But far from being democratically inspired, the demolition of the difference between 'high' culture and pop is, in fact, calculated to insure that whatever was potentially revolutionary in the canon is reduced to a clever ideological manipulation and repudiated. Combined with the universally accepted axiom about the demise of the self, the assault on the canon is aimed ultimately against that high authority of the artist in his quarrel with culture on which, according to critics like Trilling (1967, 90-91), or Marcuse, the culture's accurate knowledge of the self, and hence the possibility of effective transformation, depend.<sup>7</sup> If in postmodern critique of the Enlightenment the target is

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moment when so many groups have been engaged in "nationalisms" which involve redefinitions of the marginalized Others that suspicions emerge about the nature of the subject, about possibilities for a general theory which can describe the world, about historical "progress". Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic?' (Nancy Hartsock, 'Foucault On Power: A Theory For Women?'; qtd. in Haber 1994: 107.)

<sup>7</sup> Only briefly touched upon by Trilling, this problem is discussed at length in the chapter 'Art and Revolution' of Marcuse's *Counterrevolution and Revolt*. Marcuse's criticism of what in the seventies was called cultural revolution and what we have since learnt to call postmodernism begins by questioning whether the efforts to break with bourgeois art are 'really steps on the road to liberation', or whether, in view of the strong antibourgeois elements in the literature since the XIX century, they may not be 'falling in line with the capitalist redefinition of culture', with the adjustment of culture to the requirements of contemporary capitalism. If, to the proponents of cultural revolution, 'it is precisely this "inner truth" [of "bourgeois" literature], this depth, and harmony of the aesthetic imagery, which ... appears as mentally and physically intolerable, false, as part of the commodity culture, as an obstacle to liberation', then we may assume that the cultural revolution aims 'far beyond bourgeois culture, that it is directed against... art as such, literature as literature.' Against its contradictory, and essentially counter-revolutionary, tendencies – on the one hand, to give word, image and tone to the feelings of 'the masses' (which are no longer revolutionary) and, on the other, to elaborate anti-art, or anti-forms which are constituted by the mere atomization and fragmentation of traditional form – stand those, Marcuse claims, which, while radically revamping the bourgeois tradition, preserve its progressive qualities.

rational coherence and intellectual comprehensiveness, in the current campaign against Romanticism and Modernism it has been necessary to discredit the aspiration both to formal unity and spiritual wholeness: the belief, crucial to artists from Shakespeare and Blake to Conrad and Lawrence, that emotions participate in cognitive processes and ethical decisions; that valid perceptions and responses to the world are those that involve our sensibilities, and that truth is accessible only when we ‘see feelingly’. It seems that the degree of the vilification of this principle is what makes the contemporary author publishable. We read, again and again, that the romantic ambition to recover the repressed emotions is their greatest blunder, or fraud, since authentic feelings or desires are a pre-Freudian illusion and/or a bourgeois lie.<sup>8</sup> Or if they do exist, as another line of attack concedes, then poetry evokes them only to arm us for ‘the battle with that enormity.’ (Paglia 1993, 19) ‘Poetry’, says Camille Paglia (1993, 18), currently one of the brightest academic stars in the US, ‘is a connecting link between body and mind. Every idea in poetry is grounded in emotion. Every word is a palpitation of the body’. But if ‘poetry mirrors the stormy uncontrollability of emotion, where nature works its will’, it does so – when it has not succumbed to romantic and modernist decadence – only to inspire ‘horror and disgust’, which are ‘the reason’s proper response to nature’ and enclose us more firmly within the glorious world of technological artifacts. ‘Art is shutting in order to shut out.’ (Paglia 1993, 29)

<sup>8</sup> Thus Raman Selden explains his preference for contemporary anti-humanist, anti-romantic theories by implying that in privileging the emotion and ascribing to them the power to heal the split subject, the romantics somehow supported the Imperialist view of culture! (See Selden 1989, 3-6.) This, and similar pronouncements, are symptomatic, and comparable to Lacan’s dismissal of spontaneous emotion or desire as a formative psychological principle or subversive social force. Lacanian unconscious, unlike the romantic or even Freud’s unconscious, is no longer a repository of the other, i.e., of the real, the biological, the natural, it is thoroughly invaded by the Other, i.e. by the symbolic, the cultural Law of the Father; desire, far from being a spontaneous urge *for* the other, is the desire *of* the Other; finally the purpose of psychoanalysis is to reconcile the subject to the fact that his identity is a matter of accepting his radical self-expropriation, of realizing that he does not belong to himself, but to the system: ‘Life does not want to heal... What, moreover is the significance of healing if not the realization, by the subject, of a speech which comes from elsewhere, and by which he is traversed?’ (Qtd in Felman, 1994: 89.)

In one way or another, we are being persuaded that art's proper function is not to include and coordinate but to exclude and disconnect. It is no wonder then 'that pure and random play of signifiers that we call postmodernism' should be recommended, by a postmodern Marxist (Jameson 1991, 96), as the best anti-dote to the modernist aesthetics of formal unity or expressive totality. Frye's suggestion (Frye, 1976, 117) that 'the arts, including literature, might just conceivably be ... possible techniques for meditation, ways of cultivating, focusing, and ordering one's mental processes, on a basis of a symbol rather than concept' is just one among the junk heap of discarded notions. The desirable effect is that of TV and video, forms *par excellence* of postmodern art: 'a sign flow which *resists meaning*, whose fundamental logic is the exclusion of the emergence of themes' (Jameson 1991, 96) and which, therefore, will be bad or flawed whenever an interpretation proves possible.

This brings us back to what I believe is the point of Muller's joke, namely, that postmodern art is a contradiction in terms: that what is currently promoted as postmodern art is either not art or it is not postmodern. For such deliberate interruptions of the processes of knowing, and of feeling, such a trivializing reduction of knowledge and experience to a meaningless kinetics of intellectual and aesthetic games and the resulting blurring of moral vision, fashionably prescribed as a criterion of what constitutes 'postmodern art', is, in fact, contrary to the purpose of art, which still is what it was for Conrad (1984, xii-xiii): 'to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions...and ... make you feel,... above all, make you *see* ...that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask'.

Many contemporary artists would subscribe to this view. Unlike Muller, or Coetzee, they do not stop at casual jokes at postmodernism's expense or simply let their art speak for itself. For, intimidated by the formidable obfuscation of post-modern interpretation, most readers, and especially students of literature, have forgotten what Bruno Bettelheim (Bettelheim and Rosenfeld 1993) called 'the art of the obvious'.<sup>9</sup> This arrest of critical thought that the exposure to

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<sup>9</sup> An experience of one of my students at The Edinburgh Summer School of English in 2001 may serve as an illustration of how postmodern theory cuts us off from the perception of the obvious. My student was attending a postgraduate seminar on modern novel. He read a paper on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and scandalized practically all

postmodern ideas brings about was certainly one of the reasons why Edward Bond has found it necessary, in addition to his plays, to write books of essays, where he identifies postmodernism as a manifestation of the death drive of our civilization. 'Western democracy', he writes in *The Hidden Plot*, 'has become a secret Culture of Death', and postmodernism is its final phase:

Postmodernism is a turning point not yet an end. It is as if human life were a last dream flickering in the minds of the dead. Soon they will fall asleep forever. For a while we can still hear the echo of human language; it is not spoken in our courts, legislatures, factories, and seldom in our schools and theaters. But we still hear its echo on the walls of prisons, madhouses, children's playgrounds, the derelict ghettos of our cities... Our task is to teach the dead to listen. (Bond 2000, 8-9)

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of his young colleges by saying that the story was, among other things, about western imperialism. What he had assumed everybody would agree about, what was obvious to him, became, unexpectedly a matter of fierce contention: they denounced his reading as a misreading; or rather, as so simplistic, so naive, so unsophisticated that as to be no reading at all. It took him considerable time and effort to compel his listeners to remember the relevant parts of the story and concede, though reluctantly, that yes, there may be some such theme, but anyhow, imperialism belongs safely to the past, hence it is no longer part of the work's (post)modern meaning. The meaning, presumably, consisted in its being a sum of formal devices, whose purpose was to subvert referentiality, forestall closure and precipitate the reader into abysmal indeterminacy of unresolvable aporias. Now I cannot help remembering that for Kenneth Burke the purpose of any literary formal device was a strategy for survival. Whatever devices Conrad used, they were employed to initiate an urgent examination of the possibilities and conditions of survival, moral, above all, and ultimately physical, in a world driven by greed to its apocalyptic end. Francis Copola understood that much, at least. The students in Edinburgh did not. One should stop and think of it: A hundred years after Conrad wrote his story, his exposure of the hidden motives and devastating effect of the colonial civilizing mission, as we are entering the new millennium and history continues in the same direction, the power states of civilized west showing no intention of renouncing their imperialist tradition except for wrapping it up in new excuses, at the moment when it is more urgent than ever to see clearly through these deceptions and establish connections, students of literature and of culture are being trained in what I can only call interpretative blindness. They have assimilated the postmodern techniques of *cogito interruptus* successfully enough to confuse a thorough, comprehensive, responsible reading of the word and the world with the sin of interpretative closure – and then to confuse this confusion, this intellectual and moral frivolity, with sophistication.

If postmodernism is ‘a state every species must enter before it becomes extinct’, to survive, he insists, we must be radical, we must not compromise. It is not the creator’s, the writer’s, job to compromise: that is the job of manufacturers. When manufacturers compromise they change our dreams; when creators do not compromise they change reality. Bond’s refusal to compromise is evident in the very manner he says what he says. He does not make the concession even of entering any frontal theoretical polemic with postmodern thinkers, because it would involve speaking their language, which corrupts our imagination. But the utterly personal, and highly resonant words and images that he uses to evoke the problems and difficulties of being human build up a philosophy that is an indirect refutation of the whole of postmodern anti-humanist orthodoxy: of its axioms about the death of man; about the totalitarian nature of comprehensive explanations; of the notion that teleological thinking is a delusion of the past. He takes it for granted, for example, that there is such a thing as human nature and that demand for justice is its imaginative birthright, part of its radical innocence; that human nature does not feel at home in this world and that a child’s cry is a rebellion against the world’s injustice; that the purpose of schools is to stifle the child’s anger and its imagination, and adjust it to social madness; and that drama – art – is a struggle to regain our sanity and recreate our humanity: that is, to reimagine the world in terms of values that the alchemy of the capitalist economy turns into dross. Drama – if it is not corrupt, and most contemporary drama is – reminds us that being human involves asking questions – questions that cannot be answered yet that must be answered. Not ‘what’ questions, the answers to which are mechanistic and fragmentary and warranted by the objective order of things, but ‘why’ questions, which are holistic: asking about one thing, one has to ask about all things; the answers must be total and they emerge from imagination or utopian dreams. ‘There could be no stories of human beings without Utopia,’ he says, no drama whose theme is not justice. (Bond 2000, 4)

Even within the academic establishment there have been hints lately that postmodernism has reached an impasse and that it is time we looked for a way beyond it. One such hint, surprisingly enough, comes from Francis Fukuyama<sup>10</sup>. Another, earlier and more radical than

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<sup>10</sup> Francis Fukuyama, who in 1992 has announced the End of History, has been worried recently about the future of human nature. Human nature, he warns in his latest book

Fukuyama's, is to be found at the end of *Postmodernism for Beginners*, where the authors remind us that shortly before his death, Foucault called for a re-thinking of the Enlightenment, observe that Europe is haunted by two specters, that of Marx and of romanticism, and conclude, in the last paradoxical sentence, that 'the only cure for postmodernism is the incurable illness of romanticism'. My own position is different in so far as I assume that while the contemporary artist cannot help being

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*The Posthuman Future* (reviewed by Bryan Appleyard in 'The Threat to Factor X', TLS, May 17, 2002) is threatened with extinction by experiments in biotechnology. At present millions of schoolchildren in America are 'cured' from 'attention deficiency disorder' by Ritalin, while cases of depression are treated with Prozac. The former, Fukuyama observes correctly, medicalizes an invented illness – schoolboys are not programmed to sit still in classrooms; the latter promotes the most prized of contemporary attributes, self-esteem, without one having to do anything worthwhile. He points to a disconcerting sexual symmetry between Prozac and Ritalin: women with low self esteem take prozac to give them a serotonin high – the alpha male feeling; young boys are given Ritalin to make them more passive and compliant, more feminine. One can anticipate a future, says Fukuyama, when the two sexes will merge into that androgynous median personality, self-satisfied and socially compliant, which is the current politically correct outcome in American society. Prozac and Ritalin are only one of the ways in which biotechnology may flatten our conception of humanity. This must not happen, says Fukuyama – and here he sounds very much like Professor Skinner – or else all talk about liberation, equality, freedom, will be merely a politically correct form of words. To be meaningful, equality requires a substructure of the metaphysic of human nature, what he calls 'the essential factor X: it cannot be reduced to the possession of moral choice or reason, or language, or emotions, or consciousness, or any other quality, that has been forth as a ground for human dignity. It is all those qualities coming together in a human whole'. To protect its sanctity, Fukuyama calls for the immediate establishment of institutions with real enforcement powers to regulate biotechnology.

At the beginning of my paper I referred to Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* as an example of *cogito interruptus*. This new publication is not quite free from it either; Fukuyama still displays that superb postmodern capacity to overlook the obvious: that children should not feel at home in America and must be controlled by chemicals does not at all undermine his thesis that western liberal democracy is Paradise regained where history may safely abolish itself; nor does he wonder what the inherent logic of this best of all worlds might be if it is capable of generating such a monstrous future. But despite the contradictions, the book *is* good news. Or perhaps, even because of the contradictions: it is encouraging to hear a man who did so much to make postmodernism the doctrine of the capitalists suddenly stand up against the chief premises of both: against anti-humanism and technocracy. We need clarity of vision, and even if the doors of perception are only partially cleansed, it is a step towards it.



implicated in postmodern condition, his art is 'always already' on its way beyond it. I propose to test this view by reading Mark Ravenhill's play *Faust (Faust is Dead)* in the light of Coetzee's comment quoted above: to see, that is, what the result may be when some of the major postmodern ideas are re-interpreted by art.

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Gay, HIV positive, but fending off the fatal end by combo therapy, still on anti-epilepsy pills, and on his own admission 'just as confused by advertising as anyone', Ravenhill must have personally experienced what postmodern theory calls the destruction of the subject, multiple sexualities, or simulacrum. His art is an attempt to understand that experience. An explorer of hyper reality, he begins by checking whether the directions inscribed at its entrance really lead to the Promised Land or rather deeper into hell. The answer suggested by his plays, particularly *Faust*, is quite unequivocal. Its hero, Alain, is a composite character, reminiscent of Fukuyama, Foucault, Baudrillard: we glimpse him first in a TV chat show – Madonna's presence and comments contributing to the postmodern mixing of styles – being introduced to the American public as a famous French philosopher, and the author of two widely acclaimed books, one on sexuality, the other entitled *The End of History and the Death of Man*. In the next scene we find out that he is gay, too. To Pete, a seemingly cool, but disoriented and deeply troubled adolescent whom he meets by chance and eventually rapes, he confides the reason why he has left his university teaching post in France and come to 'to live a little' in the West Coast of America: In Europe, where obsolete humanist traditions still persist 'we are ghosts, trapped in a museum, with the lights out and the last visitor long gone.' For him and for so many children of the twentieth century, he goes on as Pete videos him, America is the only true home: it is in America, where the 'death of man' can most authentically be experienced, that paradoxically 'we really believe that we are alive, that we are living in our own century'. If, at this point, Alain may sound like one of Eco's Parusiacs, Ravenhill certainly does not belong in this category: the end of history, if it has come to an end, is no Good News. The Faustian situation established by the title indicates clearly that if America is the symbolic realm of postmodern man's posthumous life, then he is condemned to live it in

hell. As the play unfolds, as Pete accompanies Alain across America on an educational journey involving forced sex, drugs, a suicide of another boy, the Internet obsessed Donny, and Alain's own decision to end his life, this hell becomes synonymous with the world drained of feelings.

There are no new feelings, Eliot said once speaking of the poet's task. The business of the poet is not to find new feelings, but to combine the existing ones into new wholes, within which the truly significant emotion might emerge. Slightly modified, this notion would serve to describe Ravenhill's (and other contemporary artists') strategy in the face of postmodern indifference, which is to search, from play to play, for new images, new, ever more disturbing ways of juxtaposing them, in order to demonstrate the *absence* or perversion of feelings and locate the responsibility. Reading Ravenhill's plays in this key, rather than as sums of formal devices, enables us to resist the *cogito interruptus* imposed by current interpretations of the 'anti-social' behavior of the young. By a neo-conservative thinker, such as Daniel Bell, for example, the unnerving mixture of brutality and hedonistic escapism that constitute the lives of Ravenhill's characters should be attributed to the unwholesome effect of modernism. According to Bell, Madan Sarup informs us,

modernist culture has infected the values of everyday life. Because of the forces of modernism, the principle of unlimited self-realization, the demand for authentic self-experience and the subjectivism of hyper stimulated sensitivity have come to be dominant. This unleashes hedonistic motives irreconcilable with the discipline of professional life in society. In his view, hedonism, the lack of social identification, the lack of obedience, narcissism, the withdrawal from status and achievement competition is the result not of successful capitalist modernization of economy but of cultural modernism.(Sarup 1993, 144)

Quite contrary to this hopelessly muddled interpretation, Ravenhill's plays trace modern sickness not to a desire for self-realization but to its prevention, and place the responsibility on the capitalist ideal of 'the mastery over the world of slaves'. Thus in *Shopping and Fucking* he relates the crippled lives of a group of young drifters, reduced to drugs, masochistic fantasies and prostitution, to the inversion which according to the early Marx precipitated the fall of western man – the one demanding that the exchange of love for love should be substituted by the exchange of money for money.

Not quite completed yet, the process requires a joint enterprise of all ideological state apparatuses, from television, school, church, to those responsible for the mental health and protection of the young. Thus, on leaving a mental hospital where he was treated for drug addiction, Mark is warned that emotional dependencies are just as, or even more, addictive, that craving personal attachment is his greatest weakness, and that he should avoid it at all costs. He tries at first to follow this advice and carefully confines his relationship with the fourteen-year-old Gary to a strictly financial transaction. Gary has been raped, ever since he was nine, by his stepfather, but his single appeal for help was met by the social worker's matter-of-fact question: 'Does he use a condom?' Mark's final attempt to save him comes too late: his explanation that 'the world has offered us no practical definition of love' and that Gary yearns to be owned because he has never been loved, cannot prevent the fatal climax of Gary's masochistic fantasies in a morbid ritual of enslavement and rape.

Gary's voluntary death is also part of a bargain whereby the process of his reluctant killers' conversion from the faith (however residual) in feelings (however perverted) to money-worship is finally accomplished. The sum Gary paid them to murder him had been meant to ransom their own lives from Brian, a TV editor and lover of soap opera (his favorite a grossly distorted version of *Hamlet*), a sadistic drug pusher and an authoritarian father masquerading as his son's savior. He allows them, however, to keep the three thousand pounds they owe him as a reward for having learnt the crucial lesson: that money is civilization and civilization money. The change of faith is sealed as Brian forces upon them the veneration of the new, the only authentic, *Bible*, the one whose first words are 'Get. The money. First.' The getting may be cruel, he explains – it may necessitate the suffering of numberless children such as Gary – but their deaths will be redeemed by the happiness of the generations to come, particularly of his own boy. To drive this point home he has already shown them a video of his son playing the cello – a poignant image of prelapsarian purity and beauty, at which he wept uncontrollably but then abruptly switched off to show them another tape, of two of his men with a Black and Decker drilling out an eye of a wretch who has proved unteachable. This gruesome exercise was undertaken and recorded as

an admonition to all those who fail to understand that the flow of cash, kept up by any means including drug dealing, is the only way to a future paradise – a world where impure chemicals will finally be replaced by a more innocent anesthetic of television and shopping. He concludes his tragicomic capitalist gospel with a horribly sentimental conflation of his own criminal enterprise with the kind of work Irena embraces at the end of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*: "We must work. What we've got to do is make the money. For them... We won't see it, of course – that purity. But they will. Just as long as we keep on making the money... For that is the future, isn't it? Shopping. Television'.

The use of Chorus, at crucial points in *Faust*, serves a similar purpose. It is the disembodied collective voice narrating the process of systematic emotional starvation to which the American youth are exposed from the moment they enter school, until they are taught to repress their natural needs and feed on surrogates. The earliest memory Chorus conjures up is of a seven year old insomniac, who whimpers night after night at the world being such a bad place, but eventually learns to cry so mother, worried crazy that teachers are doing evil things to him, won't hear him ever again. At a later stage the voice is of a teenage delinquent, who smashes the window of a store and gets himself a VCR, the latest model, and to the mother's exasperated cry that had he listened to God, he would have gone to the food store, replies that there is no point of food in the house when you have nothing to watch while eating it. Next it tells of the Minister of a local church deciding to install a terminal and modem right there in the church so the young people can spread the word way into the future. When the mothers protest, seeing that they are losing their kids to the Net, he reminds them of the Lord's mysterious ways, which may seem to take their children away, but are in fact working for a brighter world, and appeals to them to raise the funds for more terminals. For a moment, preceding the critical episode of Donny's suicide, Chorus speaks in his voice, recalling his childhood attachment to a slushie-machine in a store where his mother worked night shifts and he consoled himself gulping cherry slush until his mouth, teeth and tongue were red. The machine was suddenly removed, and deprived of that compensation, Donny developed symptoms of 'pathological' aggression, first against the teachers at school, (the doctors typically overlooking the obvious

and blaming his anger on some toxic substance in cherry slush<sup>11</sup>), and then against the only object still in his control: his body, on whose

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11 Bettelheim's argument in *The Art of the Obvious* is highly relevant to this episode. In the chapter entitled 'The Laziness of the Heart', Bettelheim accuses modern child psychiatry research projects of assuming that the emotional disturbance of children under observation is due to all sorts of biological factors and chemical disbalance, and disregarding the obvious contribution of the unnatural and inhuman social environment, including the research environment itself, which would elicit abnormal reactions in even perfectly healthy persons. Instead of enabling empathy, which is the obvious first step in the treatment of autism, the conditions of the research are deliberately designed to reproduce and re-enforce the autistic situation. The refusal to relate to the disturbed child, according to Bettelheim, is not justified by the ideals of scientific objectivity, as it is usually claimed, but is due to the laziness of the heart. (Bettelheim, 1993: 104-145).

Another illuminating comment is to be found, once again, in *Chomsky on MisEducation*. Among the sources of information used to document his devastating report on the life conditions of children in America are the results of a UNICEF study called *Child Neglect in Rich Societies*. The author, Sylvia Ann Hewlett, points out that in European and other less developed countries, where the standards of child-rearing, initially higher than in America, have further risen in the last fifteen years. By contrast, and despite much talk of traditional and family values, 'the anti-child spirit is loose in the US and Great Britain'. The effect on children of the economic, emotional and moral deterioration of family background in these countries, due to what is euphemistically called 'the ideological preference for free market' (which in reality affects only the wages of the poor, while the rich still enjoy a high level of public subsidy and state protection) and 'flexibility in the labor markets' (which simply means 'you better work extra hours, without knowing whether you have a job tomorrow, or else') is that of 'silent genocide': A sharply increased reliance on television for the supervision of what are called 'latchkey children', kids who are alone, is a factor in rising child alcoholism and drug use and in criminal violence against children by children and other obvious effects in health, education, ability to participate in democratic society, even survival. Hewlett's book, published in 1999, has not been reviewed yet; instead, in book review sections devoted to this topics, eminent magazines feature publications whose authors, full of somber forebodings about the fall of IQ's, the decline of SAT scores and so on, attribute these alarming symptoms to bad genes. (Well, if not the art of modernism, what else could have caused this decadence, but nature!) 'Somehow', Chomsky's bitterly ironic comment runs, 'people are getting bad genes, and then there are various speculations about why this is. For example, maybe it's because black mothers don't nurture their children, and the reason is maybe they evolved in Africa, where the climate was hostile. So those are maybe the reasons, and this is really serious, hardheaded science, and a democratic society will ignore all this at its peril, the reviewers say. Well disciplined commissars know well enough to steer away from the obvious factors, the ones rooted in very plain and clear social policy'. An eloquent illustration of this policy is that when Hewlett wrote her book, 146 countries had ratified the international Convention on the Rights of the Child, and one had not: the US. (Chomsky 2000: 48-52)

surface he now cuts red patterns of bloody razor marks, hoping that one day Jesus will explain why he does that to himself. Finally Chorus modulates into the voice of an adult, who is still looking about for the signs that the world is getting better, as mother promised it would, but finding none, discovers that he does not feel a thing about it. And like Donny, who remembers the facts but has been conditioned to forget their meaning, he too wonders who made him that way.

It is this lack of comprehension that dooms the desperate attempts of Pete and Donny to reverse the process described by Chorus and recover the reality of experience. The reference to Faust supplies additional irony: Faust is in hell because he has sold his soul. Pete is ready to sell his in order to buy his way out of the postmodern simulacrum. He hates his father, a software magnate, and a self-appointed Messiah, who has just worked out an answer to the millennium. His solution, quite in line with the postmodern recommendation of disconnected multiplicity as a cure against over-determination, is chaos. Like one of Jim Morrison's Lords, who use art to confuse us<sup>12</sup>, he has put on a disc a hundred of the word's most famous masterpieces, which, instead of purging and focusing perception – in Pete's already muddled understanding it would mean 'mooding out the wrong mood down on you' – have been programmed to keep perceptions as blurred and chaotic as possible. Pete is on the run from his father, but has taken the trouble to steal the disc first and is now going to offer it back for a sum so vast, it will buy him 'so many totally real experiences.' Again, when he first makes a pass at Alain, mistaking him for the Artists and Repertoire agent, he intends it is a bargain on behalf of his rock idol, Stevie, whose lyrics ('Got a killer in my VCR/ Killer in my Rom/ Killer on the cable news/Killer in the floss I use...') and the way he sings them 'like he really totally means it, which is like, totally marketable', bring back the memory of the sixties', of 'Kurt's spirit ... yeah... teen spirit' – and of the anger

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<sup>12</sup> In Morrison's 1969 collection of poetry *The Lords: Notes on Vision*, we read:

The Lords appease us with images. They give us  
books, concerts, galleries, shows, cinemas.  
Specially the cinemas. Through art they confuse us  
and blind us to our environment. Art adorns  
our prison walls, keeps us silent and diverted, and indifferent.

which no longer seems possible. The moment the misunderstanding is cleared up, Pete withdraws, with an apology, as it were, for not quite fitting into the theory of multiple sexualities: he is ‘cool’ about the ‘whole guys thing’, but it just happens that he himself is not that way. Yet, seduced by the aura of authority in Alain’s voice, Pete agrees to his conditions, hoping through this transaction to earn the spiritual illumination that, beneath his coolness, he secretly yearns for. Just like his father, however, and like the God-on-line Minister, the postmodern philosopher turns out to be a false prophet too. Far from helping Pete learn what his real desires are, the teacher violates what natural integrity his disciple has still left. The act is carried out under the aegis of Foucault, Baudrillard, and all those philosophers who claim to be Nietzsche’s spiritual heirs.

As Raymond Tallis reminds us in his article ‘Truth About Lies’ (2001, 3), the denial of objective truth brought Foucault much fame and uncritical admiration. He did not, however, always behave as if he actually believed it – nobody could – but when he did, the consequences, for his disciples and lovers, were brutal. Dismissing the talk of a strange new disease as a mere effusion of words coming from anti-sexual forces of authority, he went on searching for ‘new truths’ in sadomasochistic sexual adventures at Berkley, where he was a visiting professor. Even later, when he must have known that he was infected, he did not ‘communicate the death-or-life-dealing truth to his partners’, and the resulting death toll, given that Foucault was wealthy enough to buy anything he wanted, can only be surmised.<sup>13</sup> Alain does

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<sup>13</sup> Tallis’s text is valuable for more than one reason. A witty and mercilessly dismissive review of Jeremy Campbell’s *The Liar’s Tale*, it invites incredulous laughter at preposterous lengths one is prepared to go to defend postmodernism. To do so Jeremy Campbell first confuses human failure with success, which is typical, but then resorts to evolutionary biology for an alibi, which in view of postmodern hostility to nature is very untypical. *The Liar’s Tale* rests on the argument that truth has been overrated and falsehood has had an unfair press. The author welcomes postmodern skepticism, notably Foucault’s denial of the truth of objective truths, and then invents a whole tradition of thinkers who allegedly attacked the privileging of truth over falsehood: from postmodern patron saint, Nietzsche, all the way back to Parmenides. But he does not stop there: after Ockham, Plato and Parmenides, even orchids which look like insects have their fifteen minutes. Thus nature is enlisted in the cause of lying. Since survival is all, lying is not an artificial, deviant or dispensable feature of life. On the contrary,

not infect Pete with quite the same disease, but the analogy, though not complete, is nevertheless striking. The reference to Baudrillard is also unmistakable. Baudrillard suggested that the only form of self-defense against the flood of media images is to regard them as detached from any reality, as mere signifiers without signifieds, surfaces emptied of meaning. (Fiske 1989, 180) But, of course, if a deliberate refusal of meaning can give any protection, it is the protection of blindness or indifference. The strategy Baudrillard recommends is precisely the one used to create what Robert Brustein called ‘dumbocracy in America’, and thus ‘manufacture consent’ to what would outrage a person unprotected in this way. It is also used by Alain to gain Pete’s consent to his own abuse. As he masturbates Pete, Alain instructs him to conquer his spontaneous revulsion by viewing the whole affair through his camcorder, as an unreal TV spectacle. And it works – Pete doesn’t feel a thing. As a practical introduction to the nihilistic sermon of hedonism and cruelty that he later preaches to Pete, the episode also reveals the degree to which Nietzsche’s philosophy had to be falsified before it could be enlisted for postmodern cause<sup>14</sup>. To Nietzsche (1988, 336-

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‘deceitfulness is a kind of ethics, small lies serving nature’s larger truth.’ He instances orchids, that mimic the look of female insects and so invite pollination by males, cuckoos and butterflies and concludes: ‘Where simpler species disguise themselves with borrowed plumage, we obfuscate with words, plant doubt in minds we are able to read.’ The consequences of the denial of truth, Raymond Tallis writes, are rarely so immediate, attributable and brutal as they were in Foucault’s case. This may explain, in his opinion, why those who attacked truth were treated with such respect and rewarded so handsomely in the twentieth century, when a 2, 500-year tradition of (often insincere) denial or relativizing of truth climaxed in an orgy of tenured skepticism. If this is so, all the more reason to persist in giving art a chance to reveal the less visible connections and attribute the crimes of the twentieth century to those truly responsible for them.

<sup>14</sup> Despite his occasional overstatements, which his anti-humanist interpreters like to read out of context, the core of Nietzsche’s philosophy and ethics, as Fromm’s non-selective and far more intelligent reading demonstrates, was fundamentally humanistic. As his dictum – Good is what makes me grow – testifies, Nietzsche sought for criteria that would rescue morality from Christian ascetic authoritarianism and bourgeois respectability. (See E. Fromm, 1949: 123-126.) The true significance of Nietzsche’s philosophy in the context of the nineteenth-century seismic intellectual and moral shifts emerges with exceptional clarity in what I believe is the most comprehensive, intelligent and inspired interpretation of Romanticism and Modernism. In the section on Emerson and Nietzsche in Ljiljana Bogoeva-Sedlar’s *Options of the Modern: Emerson, Melville, Stevens* we read:



337), nihilism was an *intermediary* period, ‘before there is yet strength to reverse values’ and ‘create the world as it ought to be’; his will to power was the will to spontaneously productive life, experienced as joy rather than any hedonistic pleasure; and the unequivocal purpose of cruelty was to overthrow whatever inhibits, from within or without, this joyful self-overcoming and self-creation. This *creative* cruelty mutated into Derrida’s unspecified ‘monstrosity,’<sup>15</sup> to become, in Alain’s ‘free

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“Henceforth be masterless” could not have remained the only slogan guiding man toward a more satisfactory future. Rejection of old masters, the negative definition of the self, had to be re-worked into a positive credo, into an affirmation of those values for the sake of which the radical transformation of the past was undertaken. The old masters were gone, but man could not survive without a source of moral authority, a system of values with which to master into meaning both himself and the world. ...And even Nietzsche, the most violent destroyer of old tablets, sings his invocation of the Unknown God... The Satanic “Non serviam” was thus often merely a proclamation of the readiness to serve someone else, namely the power that moved the New self discovered within the confines of the Old. (Bogoeva-Sedlar 1993: 60)

Her Afterword ends with a reminder that postmodern appropriation of Nietzsche involves a reversal of the values he most passionately held to: ‘A confusion must be avoided and a distinction made: saying yes to the whole creative output of nature is not the same thing as saying yes to everything being produced in culture. Especially the culture of postmodernism. Ultimately, it is a question of responsibility. Nietzsche, whom Paglia quotes repeatedly, was the fiercest and most uncompromising critic of *culture*. Yet we find “Even the love of *life* is still possible...” recorded in his last published documents.’ (247).

<sup>15</sup> Derrida’s allegedly Nietzschean affirmation of free play in his ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences’ is defined in purely negative terms and thus exemplifies the negative concept of freedom that may become, as Quentin Skinner warns, a disguised tyranny: it is ‘an affirmation of a world of signs, *without* fault, *without* truth, and *without* origin’; it is a *repudiation* of the ‘humanist ethic’ of ‘self-presence’, a *rejection* of the romantic ‘saddened, nostalgic, guilty’ interpretation of man and history; it is a liberation *from* ‘remorse’. What this freedom is *for* is not specified; instead its imminent coming is merely welcomed in the rhapsodic anticipation, at the end the essay, ‘of the birth... of some as yet unnamable ...formless, mute, infant and terrifying form of monstrosity’. In his essay ‘The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation,’ Derrida is more explicit: here cruelty is identified with life – the non-verbal instinctual energy released when the author, text and aesthetic illusion of theatrical representation have all been smashed up. Yet, it may be instructive to return once again to Marcuse and compare his objections (partial and constructive, for as as he makes clear, revolution is the goal of both) with Derrida’s unqualified celebration of Artaud (incidentally, one of the very few artists that he has singled out for praise). In abolishing the distancing aesthetic form, or ‘the secondary alienation’ of art, Mar-

interpretation', a pretext for an act of ultimate destruction: rape.

Alain's sermon of cruelty leads to another tragedy. His prescription that 'we must be cruel to others *and* to ourselves' is translated by Pete and Donny into a final attempt to revive their numbed sensations by self-inflicted wounds. The pain they feel as they cut themselves is the one remaining proof that they are still alive and the images of their lacerated bodies on their home page are transmuted into codes through which they communicate this message to the world. Yet seeing that the medium is obstructing his message, enclosing him in the spectral world of the virtual, Donny decides to prove that it is all 'for the real': he accepts Pete's challenge to meet him in the flesh, posts a message on his home page that 'he has had enough of it all just being pictures', and that he is on his way to a motel room where he intends to 'go for his jugular'. The reality of this last act of rebellion soon, however, dissolves into another spectacle. Donny's suicide, committed in Pete's and Alain's presence, but also viewed on the net by hundreds of subscribers, is immediately turned into the subject of every talk show and into a song Stevie performs unplugged and is now showing three times an hour on MTV. This epilogue is one of the most shocking among the play's demonstrations of how 'the potentially libertarian subcultures of the young are co-opted and their revolt transmuted into marketable commodity.' (Marcuse 1972, 84)

Yet Donny's defiant gesture is not quite emptied of reality, at least not for Pete and Alain, and death as liberation, as an exit out of the virtual, remains one of the two options defined at the end of *Faust*. Pete rejects it. Horrified at the brutal immediacy of Donny's blood-smearred, dead body and blaming it solely on Alain's doctrine

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cuse claims, and moving into the streets instead, the theater of cruelty appeals to the masses as masses, and not individuals; there, a 'constant sonorization' insisted on by Artaud – and praised by Derrida – is addressed to the audience 'long since become familiar with the violent noises and cries, which are the daily equipment of the mass media, sports, highways, places of recreation'. There, violent physical images fail to shock 'minds and bodies which live in peaceful coexistence (and even profiting from) genocide, torture and poison... They do not break the oppressive familiarity with destruction: they reproduce it.' (See Marcuse, 1972: 111-112.) Without fully endorsing Marcuse's criticism of Artaud's theatrical experiment, I want to point out that Ravenhill's cruel images, surrounded by what I would call the controlling cognitive context of the author's text, do shock.

of cruelty, he shoots him and returns to his father and the hopeless prospect of electronically controlled chaos. Alain, however, follows Donny's example: seriously wounded, he refuses medical help, and dies. Weariness, disappointment, desire for escape, guilt – whatever brought him to this decision, it is the final, decisive indication of his moral ascent beyond his real life prototypes. The first hint is the despair audible in whatever he says and shadowing both his hedonism and his cruelty. Another lurks in the two elusive parables that seem to obsess him. While they seem to add deeper, more disquieting resonance to the theme of the loss of feeling and the fragmentation of the self, they also may be read as evidence of his capacity for self-searching and remorse.

One tells of a Japanese businessman and a Dutch woman having lunch at a restaurant. The woman admits to being a poet and reads the businessman a love poem that he has inspired her to write; he shoots her, chops her up, and eats her, declaring all the while his undying love for her. Even in this minimalist form, the story is reminiscent of the great modernists', Ibsen's, for example, exposure of the west's inadequate knowledge of the self and the disorienting teleology deriving from it. Peer Gynt discovers at the end of his life-long pursuit of worldly success that he is 'defective goods', and that the only place he has ever been complete and whole is in Solveg's love. The successful Japanese businessman encounters his own estranged soul embodied in a love poem about himself – his cannibalism being an accurate measure of his hunger to re-possess it. The other – about a man who makes love to a beautiful woman, tells her that the part of her he finds most attractive are her eyes, and a few days later receives a gift from her, a shoe-box containing her two eyeballs – makes shockingly explicit the symbolic dismemberment implied in the fetishism of body parts. But these examples are also disguised confessions on Alain's part. The important questions he insists they give rise to: 'Who was cruel, the Dutch woman or the Japanese man?' and 'Who was the seducer and who was the seduced?'; the subdued hostility in Pete's response: 'I'm not so good at the whole metaphor thing'; and finally Alain's own answer that it was the woman who was cruel, because she understood the use of metaphor, and the man understood nothing – all combine to project Alain's sense of responsibility for the effect his own metaphors have produced.

That the absence of any ascertainable metaphysical truth or transcendental absolute makes all knowledge metaphorical is not any original, postmodern discovery, nor does it matter much. What does matter is the awareness that a choice of a metaphor is a moral commitment: for metaphors are interpretations and interpretations have power to shape conduct and thus generate their own confirmation. Speaking of the conflict of interpretations concerning human nature, Zygmunt Bauman (1995: 257) observed that we 'would never know for sure whether people as such are good or evil... But it does matter whether we believe them to be basically good or evil, and consequently how we treat them', for 'the image we hold of each other and of all of us together has the uncanny ability to self-corroborate.' To paraphrase Bauman, we may not ultimately know what the self is and what it may become, but to speak of the postmodern crisis of identity as 'the death of man' and 'the end of history' is to immobilize the creative energies that might take us beyond it.

These energies, according to Ravenhill, are love and anger. Blocked or perverted in *Shopping and Fucking* and *Faust*, they are, if only tentatively and partially, released in *Some Explicit Polaroids*, Ravenhill's version of *Look Back in Anger*. A socialist and an anarchist just out of prison, Nick agrees to subdue his still unflagging desire to smash up things only to satisfy the even more urgent need to take care of somebody: it is under this condition that he is allowed to win back his wife, who has renounced her youthful belief in great narratives of liberation, and convinced herself that playing the small game, according to the rules of that greater prison-house, the Thatcherite England, is a sign of adulthood. Yet she soon discovers that what binds her to Nick is the memory of his anger, and promises to turn him into what he used to be.

If Ravenhill's hope of a breakthrough involves a return to the romantic individualism, it is because any genuine alternative to postmodernism must begin with a breach of its prohibition against nostalgia. To search for absolute novelty is to perpetuate the discontinuity and fragmentation on which postmodern, or any other theories whose concealed purpose is mind control, thrive. Looking back in anger may in fact reveal that postmodernism is not as new as it is made to appear: that beneath its permissiveness and hedonism it belongs to a tradition of repressive ethics whose proponents, from the

great medieval defenders of the Church to ideologues of state power, imposed a concept of 'salvation' that required the destruction of the soul. Between this authoritarian ethics and the humanist upholding of the productive self, crucial to romantic tradition in art from Blake to the great modernists, there is, as Fromm repeatedly warned, not much else to choose. Ravenhill has rediscovered and attached himself to the latter, at the most inauspicious of historical moments, when postmodernism, seemingly on the wane, in fact, persists in the way we crave novelty: new excitement, new distraction, new language games. But if we desire a true alternative to postmodernism, and not merely the old Faustian bargain in a new guise, we'd better listen to the voice of the artist.

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### Rezime

## POSTMODERNIZAM KAO FAUSTOVSKA NAGODBA: REJVENHILOV *FAUST*

Pozicija koju zastupam u ovom tekstu jednostavna je i radikalna: postmodernizam, u onom smislu koji mu daju teoretičari književnosti, jeste pojam neprimenljiv na umetnost. Postmodernizam je validan naziv za ekonomske i političke promene koje su obeležile kraj prethodnog veka, za opšte stanje duha – od ravnodušnosti do klicanja – koje ih je pratilo, kao i za spektar novih ali srodnih teorijskih diskursa, utemeljenih na postupku *cogito interruptus*-a, koji su oboma pružili sofisticiranu akademsku podršku. Međutim, takvi namerni prekidi procesa mišljenja i etičkog vrednovanja koji se pripisuju ne samo postmodernoj kulturi, već i tzv. postmodernoj umetnosti, u suštini su strani umetničkoj svrsi, koja je i dalje ono što je bila za Konrada: ‘da omogućí uvid...u istinu...koju smo zaboravili da zatražimo’. Iako neizbežno implikovao u postmodernom društvu, umetnik (konradovski određen) nikada mu bez ostatka ne pripada, uvek je u činu otpora, iskoraka, prevazilaženja. U prilog ovom stavu, a da bi se demonstrirala sudbina nekih od ključnih postavki postmoderne teorije kada se podvrgnu umetničkoj reinterpretaciji, u drugom delu rada analizira se drama Marka Rejvenhila *Faust* (*Faust je mrtav*)

2003.

## UMETNOST KOMPROMISA: MAKJUANOVA *SUBOTA*

Italo Kalvino je jednom prilikom savremeni svet uporedio sa paklom; u takvom svetu, smatra on, jedino nam preostaje da prepoznamo one koji paklu ne pripadaju i damo im šansu. U kontekstu konferencije o književnosti i globalizaciji, Kalvinova mudra smernica nalagala bi da se u svom prilogu pozabavim nekim od onih mislilaca i umetnika koji, razotkrivajući 'paklenu' stvarnost tekućih globalnih promena, teže da pobude svest o mogućim društvenim i moralnim alternativama. Ja ću se, naprotiv, u tekstu koji sledi osvrnuti na dvoje savremenih autora, filozofa Martu Nusbaum, i romanopisca Ijana Makjuana, koji se stavljaju na stranu 'pakla', falsifikujući faustovsku prirodu svoje pripadnosti naizgled politički objektivnim, etički angažovanim analizama, i/ili sofisticiranim, estetski doradenim narativnim stilom. O Kalvinov savet ću se oglušiti zato što mislim da kada autori koji su nekada ulivali poverenje razočaraju, kada jedan etički filozof i jedan umetnik tako neetički i neumetnički podlegnu ideološkim klišeima, oni dobijaju vrstu novog, negativnog značaja koji zahteva komentar.

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Za proizvodnju i protok ideologije globalizacije, po rečima nedavno preminulog Pjera Burdijea, brinu se 'doksozofi', 'tehničari-mnjenja-koji-sebe-smatraju-učenim', a koji potiskuju prave filozofe i političke probleme postavljaju na isti način kao i poslovni ljudi, političari, i politički novinari (Burdije, 1999, 15). Ta ideologija, primećuje isti autor, sastoji se od najklasičnijih pretpostavki konzervativne misli svih vremena i svih zemalja. Ipak, ona zabrinjavajuće uspešno postiže svoj cilj, i to uglavnom upotrebom dva međusobno nespojiva argumenta, čija nelogična kombinacija kao da doprinosi njihovoj ideološkoj delotvornosti. Jedan argument sastoji se od racionalizacije novog ekonomskog porobljavanja



sveta kao surove ali ekonomski nužne planetarne promene; drugi se odnosi na veličanje novog poretka kao konačno ostvarene teleologije jedne progresivne istorije. S jedne strane, pribegava se upornom, dugoročnom simboličkom 'utuvljivanju' (novine i televizija), sve dok, kap po kap, nesvesno upijeni stavovi ne postanu svesna uverenja i dok ranokapitalistička vizija ljudskog života, kao nemilosrdne borbe za opstanak, ne postane jedina moguća, sampodrazumevajuća, očigledna opcija. (Burdije ukazuje na čitav skup pretpostavki koji se nameće kao neizbežnost: insistira se da je maksimalni prihod, dakle, produktivnost i kompetitivnost, krajnji i jedini cilj ljudskog rada; ili, pak, da je nemoguće odupreti se ekonomskim silama; ili se vrši korenito odvajanje ekonomskog od društvenog, koje se ostavlja po strani i prepušta sociolozima kao neka vrsta otpatka.) S druge strane, upotrebom svojevrsnog rečnika, sastavljenog uglavnom od namerno nedefiniranih i nepreciznih pojmova, ili eufemizama, ova se restauracija predstavlja kao revolucija.<sup>16</sup> Tako se rušenje nacionalnih ekonomskih i političkih granica radi nesmetanog prodora svetskog kapitala izjednačava sa revolucionarnim internacionalizmom, dok sve ono što se opire ovom novom ekonomskom imperijalizmu – briga o socijalnoj zaštiti radnika, državno uplitanje u tržišne procese, nacionalni interes – predstavljaju kao još uvek neprevaziđeni ostaci mračne (najčešće komunističke) prošlosti, koja koči razvoj.

Pomenute dokse, kao i njima svojstven jezik, najčešće se reprodukuju nesvesno: tekst pod naslovom 'Patriotizam i kosmopolitizam' (1994), eminentnog etičkog filozofa Marte Nusbaum, i roman *Subota* (2006) trenutno najpopularnijeg engleskog pisca Ijana Makjuana, primeri su svesnog saučesništva sa novim svetskim poretkom. Oblici njihove verbalne kolaboracije nisu istovetni. Marta Nusbaum pobuđuje kritičku skepsu ne toliko onim što kaže već onim što upadljivo prećutkuje u svom tekstu. 'Patriotizam

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<sup>16</sup> 'Pimera radi', piše Burdije, 'u Francuskoj se više ne kaže industrijalci, kaže se 'žive snage nacije'; ne govori se više o otpuštanju već o 'skidanju masnih naslaga'....Da bi se najavilo da će jedno preduzeće otpustiti 2000 ljudi, govoriče se o 'hrabrom socijalnom planu Alcatel-a. Postoji i čitava jedna igra sa konotacijama i asociacijama reči kao što su fleksibilnost, elastičnost, deregulacija, koja nastoji da ubedi u to da je neoliberalna poruka univerzalistička poruka oslobođenja.' (Burdije, 35) Istovetne ili analogne eufemizme koji se mogu čuti kod nas ne bi bilo teško pobrojati.

i kosmopolitizam' se nametnuo samim svojim naslovom: očekivala sam, na osnovu tekstova koji su mi poznati, jednu doslednu kritičku analizu aktuelne polarizacije između univerzalizma i nacionalizma, koju inače tako obilno i beskrupulozno zloupotrebljavaju neoliberalni ideolozi. Međutim neoliberalizam se u pomenutom eseju uopšte ne pominje. Marta Nusbaum je svojoj temi prišla na prevashodno apstraktan, teorijski način. To joj je omogućilo da naizgled legitimno podrži nadnacionalni, univerzalistički princip kao moralno superioran u odnosu na svako etničko ili nacionalno opredeljenje. Biti građanin sveta, *kosmou polites*, kaže ona, podsećajući nas na slične stavove grčkog ciničkog filozofa Diogena, i rimskog stoika Marka Aureliusa, znači pripadati zajednici ljudskih bića i podržavati princip jednakosti i uzajmnog pomaganja, nasuprot potencijalno konfliktogenoj lojalnosti, ne samo naciji već bilo kojoj etničkoj, rasnoj, klasnoj, rodnoj ili političkoj grupaciji. Tačno je, dopušta Marta Nusbaum, da je, u poređenju sa bogatom lokalnom slikovitošću, koja obuzima emocije i čula, ideja o kosmopolitskom identitetu racionalna i stoga može delovati bezbojno i dosadno. Ipak jedina nada za humaniji i dostojanstveniji život leži u nepokolebljivom pristajanju uz taj racionalni imperativ: iznad moralno opasnog patriotskog ponosa treba uvek da stoji prioritetno načelo pravde, iznad nacionalnih podela svest o moralnom dobru, koje se, budući da je dobro, mora primeniti na sva ljudska bića.

Kao opšti etički stav, ovaj argument Marte Nusbaum ne ostavlja mesta nikakvom prigovoru, izuzev eventualno sledećem: čitalac bi, naime, mogao da se zapita nema li u nacionalnim tradicijama i etničkim korenima ničeg dubljeg i značajnijeg od pukog lokalnog kolorita, i nisu li lokalne duhovne tradicije, svuda u svetu, svaka na svoj specifični slikoviti način, zapravo zapisi i nosioci upravo one opšteljudske pravde koja je spontani refleks ljudske prirode, i koja se naknadno racionalno mora učiti i usvajati tek kada se njeni prvobitni izvori zamute, zatruju ili zatru? Ovo, međutim, vodi u raspravu koja je samo indirektno u vezi sa mojom glavnom zamerkom, a ona se tiče upravo istorijskog vakuuma u kojem Marta Nusbaum sprovodi svoju analizu. Nije nužno pozivati se na Horkhajmera da bi se potkrepilo jedno, za mene, prilično očigledno zapažanje: naime, da jedan koncept, pojava, ili orijentacija mogu biti reakcionarni u određenom kontekstu,

i revolucionarni u nekom drugom. Marta Nusbaum, međutim, kao da ne opaža da se smisao pojmova univerzalnog i nacionalnog bitno izmenio tokom novije političke istorije, pogotovu od razbijanja pokreta nesvrstanih, pada Berlinskog zida, i sve bezobzirnije rekolonizacije Trećeg sveta. Ona stoga u svom eseju nijednom nije, ni kao hipotezu, uzela u obzir ono što je sada već redovna pojava, a to je da se princip pravde više ne poklapa sa univerzalističkim, već sa nacionalnim principom. Nekada desničarski, retrogradan, i genocidan, kao u slučaju nemačkog nacizma, buržoaski nacionalizam je zaista svoju pravu revolucionarnu alternativu imao u radničkoj internacionali, kao pokretu za opšte oslobođenje svih potlačenih. Danas, kada korporacijska internacionala briše pred sobom sve one nacionalne granice i razara (bombama i kulturnom propagandom) sve one lokalne kulture, i etničke duhovne tradicije koje se suprotstavljaju ekonomskom porobljavanju; kada zapadne supersile teže da iskorene i sam pojam nacionalnog suvereniteta u smislu u kome je do sada bio poznat i priznat, samo da bi obezbedila što potpuniju ekonomsku i vojnu dominaciju (ratovi proizvode kapital, a kapital je potreban da bi se vodili ratovi!) pre nego što se centar moći lagano ali neizbežno premesti na istok, – u ovoj konkretnoj situaciji nacionalizam, kao samozaštita manjih i slabijih država, može da bude samo revolucionaran i progresivan.

U ovom trenutku korisno je još jednom se pozvati na Burdijea, zato što je njegova analiza odnosa nacionalne države i šire internacionalne zajednice, za razliku od analize Marte Nusbaum, celovita i konzistentna. Postoje dva pojma nacionalne države, kaže Burdije, kao što se mogu razlikovati dve vrste internacionalizma. Konzervativna nacionalna država skup je birokratskih mera kojima se štite interesi vladajuće klase: dok bogatima obezbeđuje privilegije, za potlačene, ovakva država je represivna, kaznena tvorevina.<sup>17</sup> Drugi, socijalni, pojam nacionalne države podrazumeva skup interventnih mera i zako-

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<sup>17</sup> U Kaliforniji, piše Burdije, jednoj od najbogatijih američkih država, i, po nekim francuskim sociolozima 'rajam svih sloboda', budžet zatvora počev od 1994. godine iznosi više od budžeta svih univerziteta. Crnci iz čikaškog geta od države znaju samo za policajca, za sudiju, za čuvara u zatvoru i za *parole officer*-a. Nalazimo se pred svojevrsnim ostvarenjem sna vladajućih zemalja, pred državom koja se ...sve više svodi na njenu policijsku funkciju. (Burdije, 36)

na, stečenih kroz upornu i dugogodišnju borbu, kojima se obezbeđuju socijalna prava i ekonomska zaštita najbrojnijih i najproduktivnijih klasa. Trenutno stanje je takvo, piše Burdije, da nacionalna država u tom drugom socijalnom smislu ne treba da odumre: naprotiv, u interesu je nižih klasa da intelektualci, sindikati, udruženja, štite nacionalnu državu od miniranja spolja, od strane međunarodnih finansijskih sila, i od unutrašnjeg miniranja od strane saučesnika tih finansijskih sila. Taj nacionalni pokret otpora ne može se izjednačiti sa nacionalizmom u njegovom prvobitnom, desničarskom smislu. Niti je on, u analizi Pjera Burdijea, koja očigledno ne podržava nikakve lažne polarizacije, u suprotnosti sa univerzalnim principom pravičnosti. Naprotiv, iz te vrste nacionalnog državnog pokreta, kao njegov prirodni nastavak, trebalo bi da nikne jedna nova nadnacionalna zajednica, jedan novi kritički internacionalizam, čiji bi zadatak bio da štiti tekovine socijalističke države (*welfare state*) od zloćudnog neoliberalnog internacionalizma (Burdije, 45–46).

Kada je poredimo sa ovakvom konkretnom, u aktuelnoj praksi kontekstualizovanom analizom, jasno je zašto opšti etički postulati Marte Nusbaum pobuđuju nelagodnost. Ali nelagodno osećanje ne nestaje, naprotiv, postaje naročito izraženo, i u onim retkim trenucima kada, kritikujući nacionalizam, Nusbaumova ipak posegne za konkretnim primerima. Oni kao da dolaze iz nekog nepostojećeg, neprepoznatljivog, imaginarnog, odnosno, kao što ubrzo postaje jasno, iz ideološki iskrivljenog sveta. Tačno je da u nekoliko navrata autorka nacionalizam pripisuje eksplicitno Americi, i da je njen panegirik nadnacionalnom principu pravde, između ostalog, i neka vrsta dobronamernog saveta upućenog sopstvenoj naciji. Međutim, ta dobronamerna ovlašna zamerka ostaje samo deklarativna (i svodi se zapravo na američku politiku obrazovanja), i u daljem tekstu funkcioniše kao moralni alibi da se primeri katastrofalnih posledica agresivnog militarističkog nacionalizma potraže daleko od Amerike i njene istorije, u Indiji, recimo, tačnije u jednom romanu Rabindranata Tagore. Kada pak govori o potrebi da mladi Amerikanci u školama steknu multikulturalnu svest, onda to nije zato što bi to doprinelo sprečavanju notornih vojnih udara – koji su postali sinonim za američku spoljnu politiku od Drugog svetskog rata do danas – već da bi, recimo, blagovremeno saznanje o stepenu zagađenosti u zemljama trećeg sveta omogućilo

američkim ekolozima da zaštite svoj sopstveni vazduh od zagađenja. Stiće se utisak iz ovih primera da su nerazvijene zemlje zapravo pretinja zapadnom svetu, jer, kako opominje Marta Nusbaum, američki studenti moraju imati u vidu da bi nerazvijeni 'u svojoj želji da dostignu naše standarde života', neminovno izazvali ekološku katastrofu (Nusbaum, 1994).<sup>18</sup> Uzgred, treba spomenuti da implicitno značenje termina 'nerazvijene zemlje', kad god se upotrebi bez dodatnih kvalifikacija, sugerise da su 'nerazvijene zemlje' nerazvijene zato što je to njihovo prirodno stanje, a ne, kako je to duhovito i lucidno naglasio američki sociolog Majkl Parenti, 'zato što smo ih mi zaustavili u razvoju' ('because we underdeveloped them'). Niti se može naslutiti iz razloga koje Marta Nusbaum navodi u prilog internacionalizmu da, ako jesu zagađene, nerazvijene zemlje su zagađene ponajviše smrtonosnim otpadom, nuklearnim, između ostalog, koji izlučuju združena, internacionalna pohlepa civilizovanog Zapada. Napisan 1994, esej ne pokazuje svest o žrtvama delovanja osiromašenog uranijuma u ratu u Zalivu. Niti pokazuje svest o udelu Amerike i ujedinjene Evrope u razaranju Jugoslavije. Rat koji je te godine bio u jeku u bivšoj Jugoslaviji, vodio se upravo zato što je to bila jedna od malobrojnih preostalih evropskih zemalja zasnovanih na idejama za koje se Marta Nusbaum u svom tekstu inače tako ubeđeno zalaže, a kojih Jugoslavija, uprkos ultimatumima velikih sila i nacionalnih separatističkih pokreta u zemlji, nije htela da se odrekne. Nije za čuđenje možda što je Marta Nusbaum, stručnjak za antičku filozofiju, primere i potvrde svojih ideja

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<sup>18</sup> Za slučaj da licemerstvo (i apsurd) ove tvrdnje nisu odmah očigledni, dovoljno je prelistati knjigu *Zašto ljudi mrze Ameriku* Ziaudina Sardara. U poglavlju 'Amerika i svet kao Amerika' autor nas podseća između ostalog i na činjenicu da su SAD 2001. godine zgranule međunarodnu zajednicu odbivši da redukuju svoje emisija ugljen dioksida i tako sabotirale implementaciju Protokola iz Kjota donetog u cilju rešavanja problema ozonskih rupa. Umesto mandatorne redukcije potrošnje ugljen dioksida, predsednik Buš je smislio sistem kupovine i prodaje dozvola po svakoj toni tri glavna zagađivača (ali ne ugljen dioksida!) koji u stvari njegovoj zemlji omogućuje da poveća potrošnju ovih zagađivača za oko 38%. Objašnjenje je bilo lakonsko i tipično: 'Ovo je američki stav, zato što to odgovara Americi', rekao je Buš, i dodao da neće uraditi ništa što bi ugrozilo standard američkih građana. Amerika se takođe uporno suprotstavlja Konvenciji o biološkoj raznovrsnosti, prvom naporu međunarodne zajednice da uvede legalne standarde i norme za Genetski modifikovane organizme, i tako stane na put ogromnim opasnostima biotehnologije po sav živi svet na zemlji. (Sardar, 80-85).

našla u privatnim kosmopolitskim ubeđenjima rimskog filozofa i imperatora (i osvajača!) Marka Aurelija i Diogena iz robovlasničke Grčke, ali, s obzirom da se 1994. godine aktivno bavila međunarodnim problemima kvaliteta života u okviru Instituta za ekonomski razvoj pri Ujedinjenim nacijama, jeste čudno da te iste ideje nije prepoznala – kao što je to opet učinio Majkl Parenti, kao i sve veći broj nezavisnih analitičara globalizacije – i u jugoslovenskoj državnoj koncepciji. Da bi Jugoslavija nastala, podseća Parenti u svojoj knjizi *Ubijanje nacije*, Srbija, koja je jedina imala status samostalne nacionalne države, odrekla se tog statusa u korist šire shvaćene, multinacionalne zajednice, a ova svoje interese poistovetila sa nadnacionalnim interesima Pokreta nesvrstanih zemalja, čiji je bila inicijator i član (v. Parenti, 2000). Ipak, tobožnji zloćudni srpski nacionalizam, zbog kojeg je Balkan stolecima ratno žarište, jedan je od standarnih doksi globalizacije. Iako ona sama to ne tvrdi, Marta Nusbaum ipak indirektno podržava tu doksozofiju. Odbijajući da raščlani pojmove koje koristi, ona zapravo odbija da kritički interveniše u njihovoj masovnoj zloupotrebi, prećutno dozvoljavajući da se reči kao što su 'nacionalizam' i 'kosmopolitizam' izmeste iz konteksta iz kojih su potekle i svojim tradicionalnim konotacijama maskiraju aktuelno stanje u svetu. (Uobičajena pojava, kojoj Nusbaumova ide na ruku, jeste da se reč 'nacionalizam', sa svojim ehom nacionalsocijalizma, koristi da diskredituje svaki otpor internacionalnoj zaveri krupnih kapitalista i vojnih industrijalaca, baš kao što se pozitivne konotacije samog predložka 'internacionalni' koriste da kamufiraju njihovo bahato kršenje međunarodnih dogovora, zakona i ljudskih prava.)

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Ijan Makjuan je u svojoj podršci neoliberalnoj globalnoj ekspanziji mnogo eksplicitniji od Marte Nusbaum. Tako lažni i za sve veći broj mislećih ljudi apsurdni razlozi zvanično pripisani ratovima koji se u sklopu te ekspanzije vode, kao što je naziv 'Enduring Feedom' za 'humanitarnu operaciju' koja je Iračanima 2003. donela do sada najnehumaniji neokolonijalni režim, postaju sastavni deo političkog diskursa u romanu *Subota*, gde smešani sa drugim neodrživim kvazifilozofskim tezama i sentimentalnim nedomišljenostima, čine inače Makjuanovu poznatu gustu pripovedačku prozu otužno sladunjavom

i nepodnošljivo samodopadljivo. Saznajemo, na primer, iz teksta romana, a isto objašnjenje ponudio je očigledno ponosni autor i u nekoliko intervjuua, da je povod ovom delu bila želja da prikaže srećnog čoveka. Nesreća je mnogo zahvalnija za analizu, sreća je tvrđi orah, te prema tome – tako glasi argument – pravi izazov za modernog autora. Uzgred nam može pasti na um jedan drugi intervju, i jedno drugačije viđenje umetničke svrhe. Radi se o iskazu Steve Žigona, jednog od malobrojnih naših glumaca koji su odbili da se pridruže proevropskoj i pronatovskoj kampanji za 'srećniju i stabilniju Srbiju': „Zadatak umetnosti”, rekao je tada Žigon, „jeste da nas podseti da je u teškim vremenima poput našeg nepristojno biti srećan” (Kern, 2008, 60). S druge strane, sećam se i Jejtsa, kako uoči Drugog svetskog rata, pred kraj života, prkoseći svim svojim intimnim porazima i predskazanjima političkih užasa, u pesmi 'Čovek i eho' izriče, jednim pitanjem koje podrazumeva potvrđan odgovor, svoju filozofiju života i smrti: 'Hoćemo li se u toj velikoj noći radovati...?' Nema li možda Makjuan na umu tu vrstu duboke tragičke radosti, koju na samom pragu smrti donosi svest o sopstvenom stvaralačkom duhu i o tome da je on deo veće i besmrtno stvaralačke tajne života?

Ali ne, dovoljno je pročitati prvih desetak strana Makjuanovog romana i shvatiti da nije reč o takvoj vrsti radosti: sreća koju veliča roman antiteza je tragičkoj radosti života. Ona se sadržuje u zadovoljstvima povlašćene i zaštićene klase – egzotičnoj hrani i kulinarskom umeću, dobrom vinu, skupom nameštaju, persijskim tepisima, raspustima u porodičnom zamku u Francuskoj, blagodetima bračnog seksa, kao i satisfakcijama koje donosi profesionalna kompetencija i uspešna karijera. Sve to ima Makjuanov protagonist Henri Peroun, ugledni neurohirurg, vlasnik unosne privatne klinike u Londonu. On je srećno zaljubljen u svoju ženu, koja pored prozračnog sjanog tena koji je zadržala iz mladosti poseduje i poslovnu energiju uspešnog pravnik; u odličnim je odnosima sa svojom čudesno talentovanom i, opet, prelepom decom: ćerkom koja studira na postdiplomskim studijama u Parizu, i već ima objavljenu knjigu pesama, i sinom, koji pored toga što zna sve što se ima saznati o istoriji džez i bluza, takođe svira gitaru 'kao anđeo'. U životu izvan porodičnog kruga, znalacki i uspešno obavljena hirurška operacija pribavlja Perounu vrhunski doživljaj samopotvrđivanja; no ne radi se samo o narcisoidnom uživanju u

sopstvenoj stručnosti, kako već pomalo iritiran čitalac počinje da stiče utisak, već, kako nas eksplicitno uverava autor Makjuan, o njenom humanom učinku. Ipak, za ovom altruističkom satisfakcijom nimalo ne zaostaju blagodeti posedovanja, oni se zapravo doimaju kao doživljaj istog reda i intenziteta. Tako, na primer, nakon izvesnog perioda vozačkog snebivanja pred jeftinijim vozilima na putu, Peroun konačno prihvata sebe kao vlasnika i gospodara svojih skupih novih kola: 'Iskreno rečeno, oduvek je potajno verovao da je dobar vozač: kao u operacionoj sali, odlučan, precizan, defanzivan taman koliko treba...' Gledajući svoj 'srebrni mercedes sa krem sedištima, parkiran ukoso na uzvišici kraj seoskog puta, obasjan mekom svetlošću naspram breza, rascvetalih vresova i gromovito crnog neba – kao ostvarenu viziju nekog tvorca reklama – prvi put je osetio nežnu radost posedovanja...taj trenutak bio je vrhunac ljubavi, od tada su se njegova osećanja složila u blago, povremeno zadovoljstvo'. (Makjuan, 2006: 71). Toj spokojnoj radosti posedovanja presudno je doprinelo razuveravanje njegove žene, koja ga je konačno ubedila da može bez griže savesti da uživa u svom mercedesu, jer 'isti takav vozi i Harold Pinter'.

U prethodnim romanima Ijana Makjuana neki manji, ali zloslutni spoljašnji incident, bio bi dovoljan povod da aktivira potisnute sile samonegacije i razori ovaj građanski ideal iznutra. U *Suboti*, naprotiv, latentna brutalnost skrivena pod prividom civilizovanog buržoaskog obilja i porodičnog sklada uglavnom se projektuje spolja, na *druge* – na siromašne belce i na muslimanske ekstremiste. Roman počinje ubičajenim makjuanovskim motivom: uznemirujućim zloslutnim prizorom zapaljenog aviona koji Peroun vidi sa prozora svog luksuznog stana na još uvek mračnom londonskom nebu tog subotnjeg jutra, 15. februara 2003, dana kada su se na ulicama Londona odigrale dotada najveće antiratne demonstracije u znak protesta protiv najavljenog napada na Irak. Prizor nije londonska verzija 9/11, kako se Peroun pribojavao, ali je dovoljan da podstakne već postojeća strahovanja da 'njihovom načinu života' preti islamski fundamentalizam, i da produbi njegova ambivalentna osećanja u vezi sa antiratnim protestom. Jer, naravno, Makjuan se postarao da svog junaka snabde moralnim dilemama. Ali one su neuverljive, i, kao i ravnoteža koju naizgled obezbeđuju antiratna ubeđenja njegove ćerke i sina, postoje da bi u romanu uspostavili privremeni privid 'višeglasja', a potom, u jednoj



opscenoj sceni moralnog egzorcizma u posljednjem poglavlju, bile podedonosno raspřene.

U jednom odista angažovanom romanu, problematizovanje jednostranih, reduktivnih, politički korektnih verzija i tumačenja – ono što Bahtin naziva subverzijom autoritarnog monološkog diskursa – odrazilo bi se na svim razinama dela, u dijaloškim tenzijama koje se ne bi mogle ukinuti bez nekog zaostatka značenja, u napetosti unutrašnjeg monologa, koja se hrani duboko doživljenim, ali podjednako prihvatljivim (ili podjednako neprihvatljivim), pa stoga i teško razrešivim suprotnostima, u samom izboru 'objektivnih korelativa,' koji su u karakterizaciji likova presudniji od formulisanih i izrečenih uverenja. Jedan primer za sada dovoljan je da dočara potpuno odsustvo stvarne ravnoteže suprotstavljenih gledišta u Makjuanovom romanu: nijedno od Perounove dece ne učestvuje u maršu jer imaju nešto drugo da rade, tako da njihov pacifizam, kao i antiratni stav jednog Perounovog kolege, inače iskazani u nekoliko dijaloga koji su puka izmena političkih klišeja, dobijaju dodatni prizvuk autorske prevare. Dijalozi postoje samo da bi maskirali stvarnu autorovu nameru, a to je da se čitalac poistoveti sa Perounovom tačkom gledišta. Sam Peroun, koji tog jutra još uvek nije definitivno raščistio sa svojim 'dilemama', i nedvosmisleno se opredelio za intervenciju u Iraku, ne pridružuje se protestu zbog redovne subotnje partije skvoša koju nizašta na svetu ne bi propustio, ali još više stoga što prema demonstrantima oseća uzdržan prezir. Oni su frivolni: 'Tolika količina javne sreće je sumnjiva. Svi su očarani ovim okupljanjem na ulicama – ljudi kao da grle sami sebe, a ne jedni druge', (Makjuan, 66), neočekivano kritički primećuje ovaj apologeta sopstvene *privatne* sreće i potrošačkog blagostanja. Natpis na većini transparenta – *Ne u moje ime* – njemu zvuči kao 'gnjecavo pravdoljubiva poruka (koja) nagoveštava jedan vedar novi svet protesta, u kome razmaženi potrošači šampona i bezalkoholnih pića zahtevaju da se osećaju dobro, ili čak lepo' (Makjuan, 68). Konačna osuda demonstranata izriče se na kraju romana, pri pogledu na 'jedno *Ne u moje ime* kako na polomljenoj stabljici leži među čašama od stiropora, odbačenim hamburgerima i netaknutim lecima Britanskog saveza Muslimana'. Zaobilazeći hrpu pivskih limenki i praznih tetrapaka i tri nenačete kutije kokica, Henri oseća da je njegova prvobitna odbojnost prema ovim lakovernim miroborcima sa zbrkom u glavi opravdana, jer oni nisu ništa drugo do egocentrični potrošači, koji uživaju isto-

vremeno u lagodnom kapitalističkom životu i u radosnim zaverama sa mračnim silama islamskog ekstremizma. Naravno, ovo je još jedan Makjuanov trik, još jedan propagandni potez u odbranu privilegija tzv. 'visoke' srednje klase, (koje i sam već duže vreme uživa). Ono što bi Makjuan hteo da nam kaže, kako ironično primećuje autor jednog od vrlo retkih objektivnih prikaza *Subote* koji se mogu naći na internetu, jeste to da su 'oni koji se potrudu da doputuju do centra Londona i demonstriraju protiv rata samozadovoljni potrošači. Oni koji tu subotu provode baveći se drugim stvarima, napr. igrajući skvoš, ili u 'šoping-u', ili svirajući gitaru, nisu egocentrični već superiorna stvorenja, obdarena kompleksnijim unutrašnjim životom' (Ellissharp, 6).

Sa pričom o maršu i islamskom ekstremizmu prepliće se druga pripovedačka nit, o 'opasnostima' koje zapadnoj demokratiji prete iznutra, od strane siromašnih i izopštenih. Još na početku romana, na putu do sportske sale, Peroun ima manji saobraćajni incident, a potom sukob sa sitnim krimanalcem Baksterom i njegovom bandom. Od njihovog nasilja Peroun se spasava tako što zahvaljujući svom profesionalnom obrazovanju uspeva da identifikuje smrtonosni degenerativni neurološki poremećaj kod Bakstera, Hantingtonovu bolest, i da ga svojom dijagnozom zbuni i ponizi pred podređenim pratiocima. Osećanje krivice zbog zloupotrebe medicinskog znanja (uzgred prilično neumesno, jer se radilo o samoodbrani: ovo je opet jedna prevara, pokriće za nedostatak moralne inteligencije tamo gde ona ne bi smela da zataji!), pritiska Perouna sve do drugog, mnogo dramatičnijeg susreta sa Baksterom, kada te večeri ovaj provali u kuću Perounovih, preteći da pretvori proslavu povodom porodičnog sastanka u krvavi pir. Sledi još jedan melodramski trik, preuzet iz filmova o Džemu Bondu, i opasnost je definitivno odstranjena. Naime, čekajući da se Perounova ćerka Dejzi svuče da bi je silovao, Bakster pravi fatalnu grešku i upušta se sa žrtvom u razgovor. Njoj to daje priliku da odrecituje jednu pesmu, poznatu Arnoldovu *Dover Beach*, predstavljajući je kao svoju. Fasciniran i ganut, Bakster zaboravlja na silovanje, što otac i sin koriste da ga u zajedničkom napadu savladaju, zadajući mu pritom potencijalno smrtonosne povrede.

Baksterov prepad u Perounovoj mašti analogan je iracionalnom fundamentalističkom nasilju; zajedno sa muslimanskim otmičarima aviona, londonski kriminalac vid je 'jednog novog neprijatelja, sa mnogo pipaka, punog mržnje i fokusiranog žara' (72). Simbolično

značenje završne, klimaktične scene je tako nedvosmisleno: dok policijski helikopteri nadgledaju rasturanje antiratnog skupa, a u domu Perounovih dotadašnji neistomišljenici – otac, ćerka i sin – spontanom ali savršeno koordinisanom akcijom eliminišu Bakstera, vidimo kako se zapravo državne represivne snage udružuju sa naukom, i konačno sa umetnošću, da zapadnom kapitalizmu pomognu da prebrodi krizu. Ranija Perounova utešna opaska – da se svet nije fundamentalno izmenio, da će 'krize uvek postojati, ali će sve leći na svoje mesto: i islamski fundamentalizam, i skorašnji ratovi, klimatske promene, uplitanje politike u međunarodnu trgovinu (sic!), nestašica obradive zemlje, i pitke vode, glad, siromaštvo i sve ostalo' (Makjuan, 72) – definitivno ustupa mesto nedvosmislenom uverenju da se svet jeste izmenio, i da se pretnje 'civilizovanom' – 'njihovom' – načinu života, mogu i moraju osujetiti silom.

Ideja o neprestanom usponu civilizacije, gde naravno prednjače zemlje zapadne Evrope, zapravo je jedna od doksi koja Perounu, i očito Makjuanu, pomaže da prevaziđu sve moralne nedoumice koje su u vezi sa klasnim podelama i globalnim kapitalizmom prvobitno možda imali. Radi se o razvojnoj koncepciji istorije, analognoj Darwinovom evolucionizmu, u kojoj su tehnološka dostignuća i materijalni standardi vrhunska svrha života, a instrumentalna racionalnost vrhunska vrлина ljudske vrste, uteha i iskupljenje za njeno poreklo u nemilosrdnom ratu prirode, u gladi i smrti. Tragovi prirodne agresivnosti opstaju u svima nama, po toj teoriji, ali racionalni ljudi poput Perouna umeju da ih kontrolišu, kanališući svoje smrtonosne impulse u, recimo, sportsko nadmetanje (partija skvoša kao dozirano oslobađanje agresije opisano na 16 strana jedno je od od Makjuanovkih opštih mesta). Oni manje racionalni pojedinci ili narodi takvi su zbog neke nasledne manjkavosti, ili eventualno ativističkog religioznog fanatizma. Ljudi kao Bakster nemaju sposobnost samokontrole koju su civilizovani, superiorni primerci vrste, poput Perouna, uspeli da razvijaju, pa su zato nasilni. Oni takođe pate od hereditarne nesposobnosti da zarade sebi za život. Neurohirurg Peroun, naravno, zna sve o tome: Bakster je otpadnik i nasilnik, ne zato što živi u klasno podeljenom svetu, već zato što ima genetsku grešku na hromozomu četiri. Perounova kompetencija je, s druge strane, po ovoj teoriji veliko opravdanje njegovih povlastica u odnosu na Bakstera. Filozofija kompetencije, piše Burdije, svojevrsna

je teodiceja bogatih, koji oduvek sanjaju o prirodnom alibiju za svoje društvene privilegije. Tako kompetencija, zaključuje Burdije, kao jedan vid društvenog darvinizma, dodaje tradicionalnom puritanskom etičkom opravdanju klasnih razlika (siromaštvo je znak nemoralna, bogatstvo uzornosti i zasluge) novi intelektualni argument: 'Siromašni nisu samo nemoralni, alkoholičari, bolesni, oni su i glupi, neinteligentni – odnosno neracionalni' (Burdije, 48).

Pohvala racionalnosti u romanu *Subota* dolazi i sa još jedne strane. Racionalnost su (kaže Makjuan u jednom intervjuu) nezasluženo opanjkali umetnici od romantičara do modernista. Njegova ambicija u ovoj knjizi bila je da suprotstavi nauku umetnosti, ne da bi, kao u ostalim svojim romanima, pokazao manjkavost dosledno racionalnog pogleda na svet, već, naprotiv, da bi demonstrirao njegovu superiornost u odnosu na intuitivno emotivno razumevanje. Racionalnost nam, kaže on, pomaže da stvari domislamo do kraja – i pravično: bezbrojni su primeri iz života gde je pravedno ponašanje ishod doslednog i racionalnog rezonovanja, pre nego emotivnog impulsa. Čak i da prihvatimo ovo privilegovanje razuma, ne pitajući se da li su osećanja sama po sebi nepouzdana etički kriterijum, ili ih takvim čine razni vidovi naknadnih potiskivanja i zloupotrebe (primedba je u suštini ista kao i ona upućena Marti Nusbaum u vezi sa njenom tvrdnjom da je racionalni kosmopolitizam, a ne emotivno sugestivniji lokalni identitet, osnova pravičnosti<sup>19</sup>) – ostaje činjenica da ćemo primer racionalne dosled-

<sup>19</sup> U prilog ove primedbe mogli bi se navesti brojni stvaraoci i humanistički mislioci, kritičari zapadne kulture. Ovom prilikom citiraću delove iz teksta Edvarda Bonda pod naslovom "Sloboda i drama", koji vrlo sažeto ilustruju njegovo, Makjuanu i Marti Nusbaum sasvim suprotno shvatanje odnosa racionalnosti, pravičnosti i humanosti. Humanost odnosno ljudskost, piše Bond, 'ne stvara se, niti se brani mišljenjem. To se čini kroz moralno rasuđivanje. Moralni sud uključuje misao ali je složeniji od misli.' Prvi stvaralački čin moralnog suđenja, piše Bond, dešava se vrlo rano, neposredno po čovekovom rođenju, i manifestuje se kao novorođenčev plač, koji je zapravo preverbalni imperativni zahtev za pravdom. U Bondovoj transpoziciji biblijskog stvaranja, novorođenče doživljava sebe kao svet, i ono je to koje svojim zahtevom za pravdu stvara Boga, a ne obratno: Svojim revoltom protiv onog što doživljava kao nepravdu novorođenče, 'taj svet – ta monada – stvara 'Boga, i to je prvi čin stvaranja. To je stvaranje suda, i označava prvi, a ne poslednji, dan. Kasnije, kada zemaljski autoritet zaposedne stvarnost, stvorice ideologiju koja obrće prirodni sled stvari. ...Ljudskost je preokret unazad, od ideologije ka kreativnosti novorođenčeta'. Ključnu ulogu u ovom preokretu unazad igra drama, odnosno umetnost. (Bond, 205-7)

nosti za koju se Makjuan zalaže u svojim izjavama pred novinarima uzalud tražiti u njegovom romanu. Perounovo 'dosledno i potpuno preispitivanje' razloga za rat u Iraku ne ide dalje od svedočenja jednog njegovog pacijenta, žrtve pritvora u Sadamovom zatvoru (čija priča, uzgred, zvuči kao da je doslovce preuzeta sa CNN-a). Ovakav *cogito interruptus*, uobičajen u TV reportažama ili dnevnicima, zapanjuje u romanu umetnika za kakvog smo držali Ijana Makjuana, i pošto dolazi na samom početku romana, za trenutak verujemo da je reč o ironiji. Ovo je, međutim, stav koji Peroun deli sa svojim tvorcem. Trauma koju je Makjuan doživeo 9/11. bila je, tvrdi on, odlučujuća za njegov potonji izričit pristanak uz Buša i Blera. Pritom ni u autorovoj 'doslednoj, racionalnoj analizi', ni u analizi njegovog junaka, nema mesta za milione i milione žrtava američkih intervencija koje su pale samo tokom prethodnih godina Makjuanovog spisateljskog života, da ne pominjemo broj mrtvih ugrađenih u uspon racionalne zapadne civilizacije od, recimo, genocida u Americi na početku modernog doba u XVI veku do završne faze istrebljenja preostalih američkih strosedelaca u amazonskim džunglama, pobijenih iz helikoptera iz kojih su im prethodno, da bi ih namamili, 'civilizatori' bacali slatkiše. (Taj zločin je dramatisovao Kristofer Hampton u svom istorijsko-dokumentarnom komadu *Divljaci*.) No ove žrtve nisu putovale prekokeanskim avionima, niti su se videle na TV ekranima. Zamisliti i ubrojati te žrtve u konačni bilans zahteva drugačiju racionalnost od Makjuanove računice, zahteva racionalnost koja nije antiteza već deo intuitivne, empatičke, u krajnjoj liniji umetničke mašte.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Među ne tako malobrojnim tumačenjima 9/11-og koja odaju tu vrstu moralne imaginacije, izdvojila bih komentar Džeremije Rajta, sledbenika teologije oslobođenja (*liberation theology*). U svojoj propovedi povodom tog događaja, Rajt se pozvao na Bibliju, poredeći osvetnički udar na centre američke terorističke moći sa osvetničkim besom u ropstvo prognanih Jevreja. Mržnja prema tiraninu i zavojevaču o kojoj govori Psalm 137, pozivajući zauzvrat čak i na ubistva novorođene dece, identična je sa revoltom koji danas osećaju svi obespravljani i porobljeni narodi sveta: 'Ljudi od vere', rekao je tom prilikom Rajt, 'od mržnje prema naoružanim neprijateljima - onim vojnicima što su zarobili kralja, onim vojnicima što su razorili grad, spalili sela, spalili hramove, spalili tvrđave, odveli ih u ropsto - prešli su na mržnju prema nenaoružanim i nevinim, prema bebama, bebama. ... A opasno je, deco moja voljena, stajati na takvom mestu. Ali tu su stajali ljudi od vere 551. godine pre Hrista, a tu stoje mnogi ljudi od vere danas. Od mržnje prema naoružanom neprijatelju došli smo do mržnje prema nenaoružanim i nevinim. Želimo osvetu...'

Na kraju preostaje da se upitamo o tome kakav je stvarno Makjuanov stav prema umetnosti. U već pomenutom, inače odličnom eseju o romanu *Subota*, tvrdi se da je Henri Peroun Makjuanov alter ego u svemu *izuzev* u njegovoj skepsi prema književnosti (Ellissharp, 9). Međutim, Perounova humanost i lekarska etika – koje doživljavaju konačnu apoteozu u lekarevoj racionalnoj odluci da operiše Bakstera i tako spasi život čoveku koji je upravo hteo da mu pobije porodicu – osobine su koje je stekao *uprkos* ravnodušnosti, nerazumevanju i čak odbojnosti prema pesmama i romanima koje mu ćerka revnosno preporučuje ne bi li ga oplemenila. Ova važna pojedinost na kojoj se (neuverljivo) insistira u više navrata u romanu govori o izvesnoj podudarnosti Perounovog i Makjuanovog stava. Kao i njegov junak, koji primećuje da sa godinama sve više liči na Darvina, kome je u starosti Šekspir bio odvratn, tako i Makjuan, veličajući Darvina u svom privatnom životu, nalazi za potrebno da svoje prevrednovanje nauke potkrep i jednim novim, pomodnim i frivolnim omalovažavanjem umetnosti. To je izglada još jedan vid radikalne 'promene vere' koju je doživeo Makjuan tokom zadnjih nekoliko godina.

Zapravo, možda i ne tako radikalne. Čitajući brojne intervjuje (kojima Makjuan pokazuje da ume da uživa u novostečenoj slavi i da ceni ukazane mu počasti) stičemo utisak iz njegovih osvrta na sopstvene književne početke, da pisanje za njega zapravo nikada nije proizilazilo iz neke duboko doživljene moralne vizije. Njegovi prvi romani, uznemirujući i subverzivni, zbog kojih je dobio nadimak *Mr Macabre*, plod su, kako sada kada mu je popularnost obezbeđena sam priznaje, želje da šokira. Njegovo pisanje, kaže on dalje, oduvek je bilo 'reaktivno', motivisano potrebom da bude različit. Naravno svaka vredna umetnička poruka nastaje u otporu prema automatizovanim konvencijama, u borbi da prevaziđe stil koji je postao prepreka komunikaciji. Ali kod Makjuana se ne radi samo o stilističkim

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Iako je osveta mesto na kome 'Bog ne želi da nas ostavi' jer 'Bog želi iskupljenje...i celovitost', na čemu Rajt takođe šekspirovski insistira, ona je razumljiva i najčešće neizbežna reakcija na nepravdu. Edvard Bond kaže istu stvar kada tvrdi da kvarenje ljudske prirode 'prizilazi iz sukoba između imperativne potrebe za pravdom i praktične činjenice da smo primorani da živimo u nepravdom društvu. Zbog ovog sukoba imperativni zahtev za pravdom postaje potreba za nepravdom. ...Osveta je patologija pravde....' (Bond, 2006, 218)

eksperimentima i inovacijama, koji su nužni deo nastojanja da se jedna naslućena vizija sveta, jedan mogući smisao ili intelektualno otkriće, jedna opsesivna tema, iz dela u delo, što preciznije artikuliše i iznova istraži u promenljivim okolnostima društvenopolitičke stvarnosti. Kod Makjuana se pre radi o odsustvu upravo jedne takve vizije, koja se rađa iz neke neodoljive unutrašnje potrebe. Stoga kod njega, umesto razvojnog kontinuiteta, dolazi do proizvoljnih, odnosno 'reaktivnih', ličnim interesom uslovljenih promena fundamentalnih shvatanja, jednom rečju do intelektualnih i moralnih kompromisa, koji su danas, nažalost, pod raznovrsnim političkim pritiscima i ucenama, sve češća pojava među piscima, naročito onim piscima čiji motivi nikada nisu bili nedvosmisleno i nepokolebljivo služenje istini, niti pokoravanje nekoj unutrašnjoj nužnosti.

O poražavajućoj masovnosti ove pojave svedoči i kontroverza među engleskom književnom elitom nastala povodom 'rata protiv terora' 2006. godine. Pošto se mesecima niko od poznatih akademskih imena nije suprotstavio otvoreno rasističkim, islamofobičnim i ratno-huškačkim izjavama omiljenog engleskog romanopisca (i Makjuanovog prijatelja) Martina Ejmisa, to je učinio ugledni profesor i marksistički književni kritičar Teri Iglton. Usledio je trenutni združeni istup univerzitetskih profesora i romanopisaca čiji je protivnapad bio usmeren ne samo na Igltona kao pojedinca, već, kako komentariše An Talbot u svom izveštaju o ovom sukobu, 'na vekovima izgrađivanu društvenu svest, koja se iskristalisala zahvaljujući prosvetiteljskom intelektualnom pokretu i vrhunac dostigla u marksizmu i velikim borbama radnika za društvenu ravnopravnost...'. U njenom opisu falsifikovanja zapadne humanističke tradicije kojoj pribegavaju Ejmis i njegovi istomišljenici lako se prepoznaje i Makjuanova izvitoperena verzija evropskog racionalizma. Ejmis i njegovi istomišljenici, teže da 'iskorene sve što je bilo humano i progresivno u zapadnoj intelektualnoj tradiciji, da bi potom njenu unakaženu karikaturu uzdigli kao ideal koji se mora braniti – ako treba i silom – protiv varvarstva koje navodno nadolazi sa istoka i otelotvoreno je u islamizmu'. Štaviše, u kaznama, odnosno nagradama za (ne)pristajanje uz ovakvu ideologiju naziru se i motivi za *Subotu*:

Kampanja koju su pokrenuli promišljeni je pokušaj da se marksizam i svaka progresivna misao stavi van zakona na

univerzitetima i u širim intelektualnim krugovima. Veza sa marksizmom, po svemu sudeći, čini međunarodno poznatog profesora nepodobnim za rad na univerzitetu...Predlogom da se Igltonu da otkaz britanska literarna elita šalje poruku mlađim i manje poznatim profesorima, ambicioznim piscima i studentima da je marksizam neprihvatljiv i da bi im bolje bilo da usvoje Ejmisov nakaradni stav ako očekuju da im se knjige objavljuju, da napreduju, ili da dobiju bilo koju ocenu iznad šest minus (Talbot, 2007).

Za roman *Subota* Makjuan je dobio nagradu *Black Tate Memorial*, priznanje, uzgred, koje je dodeljeno i Henriju Kisindžeru.

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Pomenuta kontroverza, kao i Makjuanova *Subota*, mogle bi da budu povod da se još jednom preispitaju pretpostavke, Igltonove između ostalih, o društvenoj ulozi književnosti. U kontekstu sukoba Ejmis/Iglton pokazuje se, s jedne strane, ironična neadekvatnost Igltonovog sopstvenog komentara da je pogled na svet otelovljen u savremenom engleskom romanu (tu je uvrstio i Makjuana i Ejmisa) 'častan, human, prosvetljen' i da poseduje 'moralnu ozbiljnost'! (Iglton, 2005, 337). Ova za Igltona neočekivano blagonaklona tvrdnja nalazi se u postskriptu njegove studije o engleskom romanu, objavljene samo godinu dana pre nego što je autor postao meta pomenutog, i vrlo nečasnog, napada od strane Martina Ejmisa. Taj događaj, s druge strane, ne čini Igltonovu prvobitnu mnogo strožu ocenu modernističke književnosti kao čuvara buržoaskog poretka, izloženu između ostalog u *Književnoj teoriji* (Iglton, 1985, 34–43), nimalo prihvatljivijom. Kao i u slučaju mnogih drugih marksista, Igltonov marksizam, od ogromne koristi za razumevanje društvene stvarnosti, često je, u njegovim ranijim književno-kritičkim publikacijama, ometao nepristrasno čitanje konkretnih književnih tekstova, koji su prebrzo postajali povod za razobličavanje buržoaskih iluzija, koje su se navodno mogle detektovati u romanima velikih modernista, kao i u kritici koja ih je podržavala, recimo Livisovoj, o vanvremenskim mitskim istinama, i univerzalnim vrednostima literature. Slučaj 'Ejmis', međutim, pokazuje da je tekuća žestoka kampanja za porobljavanje umetničke savesti, a ne nekakva inherentna nemoć romana kao ideološki determinisanog, buržoaskog žanra 'da se adekvatno suoči sa zlom, pohlepom i nasi-



ljem', pravi uzrok što savremeni engleski romanopisci, uprkos 'časti, humanosti i prosvćenosti', ipak nisu 'dorasli globalizovanom svetu terora i transnacionalnih kompanija' (Ibid., 337). Jer dovoljno je setiti se Dikensa, Hardija, Emili Bronte, Konrada ili Lorensa – nezavisnih stvaralačkih umova koje je Livis svrstao u svoju 'veliku romanesknu tradiciju' – da bi se uvidelo da je Igltonova deterministički zasnovana negativna kritika romana neprimerena prirodi književnog procesa bar isto toliko koliko i esencijalističke definicije književnosti kao transcendentne, ideološki nedodirljive sfere, koje on podvrgava tako neumoljivoj osudi (i podsmehu). U stvari, među onima koje je Iglton svojevremeno optužio za greh humanističkog univerzalizma i esencijalizma najistaknutije mesto imao je, sasvim nezasluženo, i F. R. Livis.

Ovo je možda trenutak da se zapitamo ne bi li livisovski pristup književnosti zapravo mogao da posluži kao korektiv neomarksističkom determinizmu, jer je nekad, pre nego što su te dve orijentacije postale nespojive suprotnosti, objedinjavao potencijalno najplodnije uvide marksističke teorije i humanističke književne kritike. Daleko od neke transcendentalne superiorne suštine, baš kao i od pukog ideološkog govora, roman, za Livisa, predstavlja dinamični prostor u kome se preispituju teleološka pitanja, vrednosti 'za koje i od kojih čovek živi', a način na koji se to čini u konkretnom delu može ga okvalifikovati kao veliku, ili pak minornu književnost, ili, najzad, puki kič, u zavisnosti od, kako je jednom prilikom Livis rekao, zastupljenosti blejkovskih principa 'energije, ljubavi i lične nekoristoljubivosti' – koji nisu niti apriorna datost romana, niti su pak njegova apriorna nemogućnost.

Zbog sposobnosti romana da bude etički najosetljiviji tumač društvene stvarnosti, ali i da degradira u medijum politički korektnih poruka (a ponekad i vulgarno oštroomne pobune – primer za ovo drugo je *Lucky Jim*, Kingslija Ejmisa, koji je svom sinu Martinu očigledno zaveštao spisateljsku frivolnost – činjenica da Iglton nije mogao da uoči u sinovljevim romanima ono što je Livis odmah prepoznao u očevim rečito govori o razlici u kritičkoj percepciji!), Livis je insistirao na analitičkoj sposobnosti uočavanja, tumačenja i vrednovanja tananih različitosti u pripovedačkoj emociji, inteligenciji, jeziku. Livisovi književno-kritički sudovi, kao i kriterijumi na kojima su se

zasnivali, namerno su previđani u potonjoj književnoj teoriji i kritici, ili su odbačeni kao elitistički, a umesto njih, u ime demokratizacije umetnosti, uveden je u (post)strukturalističkom diskursu opštenivelišući pojam 'pisanja' kojim se urušava granica između tzv. 'ozbiljne' književnosti i vidova masovne kulture. Nisu, srećom, svi shvatili novi trend kao imperativ! Jedan od autora koji su se bavili tzv. 'popularnom' literaturom, a da pritom nisu izgubili iz vida razliku između književne umetnosti i stereotipovima zasićene zabavne literature, jeste Umberto Eko. U svojoj briljantnoj semiotičkoj analizi narativnih strategija u romanima o Džemu Bondu, Eko se fokusira upravo na način na koji se Flemingov tekst *razlikuje* od umetničkog književnog teksta. Priznajući mu virtuoZnu deskriptivnu veštinu kojom dočarava prisnost svakodnevnog, običnog detalja, Eko primećuje da ovi deskriptivni pasusi nemaju nikakvu tematsku relevantnost za dalji tok romana, koji se razvija kroz stereotipne manihejske binarnosti, pogodne za promovisanje autorove rasističke i seksističke ideologije. Ti tehnički savršeni, ali tematski nerelevantni pasusi ipak imaju određenu funkciju – oni su pišćev trik, i tu su da romanu pribave epitet Literarnog, oni su znak da se nalazimo u prisustvu Književnosti. Flemingovi bi romani, sa svojim brojnim klasićnim aluzijama, i tehnićkom veštinom, bili prijatno štivo za sofisticiranu rasonodu, zaključuje Eko, pod uslovom da ih čitamo sa ironićnom distancom; mogućnost, pak, da njihov gotovo opsceni spoj 'umetnićkog' deskriptivnog stila i potpunog odsustva polićke i moralne svesti ipak izazove (kvazi)poetsku emociju, svrstava ih u najopasniju vrstu šunda (Eco, 1979, 172). Za Makjuanovu *Subotu* bi se isto moglo reći.

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### Summary

## THE ART OF COMPROMISE: McEWAN'S *SATURDAY*

The readers who disregard the arguments of 'doxosophy' – Bourdieu's term for politically correct representations of current globalising processes – and look to literature, particularly the novel, for more reliable interpretations, must be deeply disappointed. An alarming number of the contemporary English novelists are not only unequal to the challenge, they actually renounce their former leftist convictions,

in order to offer, in their novels, an unequivocal support to global military interventionism. MacEwan's *Saturday* is an example. The analysis of his novel, together with an account of an essay by Martha Nussbaum, are intended as a demonstration that both these texts, despite the pretense to political objectivity and ethical disinterestedness, are in fact elaborations of some of the key 'doxa' in neo-imperialist discourse – among them appeals to the cosmopolitan ideal, and the promotion of social Darwinism as excuses for corporate capitalism and the use of military force in the current re-colonization of the world, in particular for the attack against Iraq. In the conclusion, theoretical implications of the contemporary English novel's failure to engage critically with with current social realities are briefly considered.

2008

## **‘PLAY UP, PLAY UP, AND PLAY THE GAME’: ON GLOBALIZATION, MULTICULTURALISM AND THE UNIVERSITY**

‘Play up, play up and play the game’ is a quotation from Pinter’s *Birthday Party*. The phrase is uttered by one of the two mysterious Kafkaesque strangers that break into the secluded life of the protagonist, the self-deluding and hitherto intransigent Stanley, whose one virtue has been the spiteful refusal to give up his privacy and re-assume his role in the losing game of prestige and power. He is subjected to cross-examination, at once atrocious and comic, and other grotesque torments until he is reduced to an uncomprehending, speechless, catatonic wreck and then taken to an unspecified institution to be remodeled into a ‘good subject’. The torturer’s exhortation to ‘play up, and play the game’ is not addressed to Stanley, though it includes him, but to his partner, apparently not sufficiently purged of conscience to perform the assigned job with professional coolness.

Pinter’s drama abounds in violence, but as *The Birthday Party* and his other plays demonstrate, he is not so much interested in violence itself, as in the excuses people invent to mask or justify it. An effective dramatic transposition of these self-justifying mental strategies at first sight, the phrase ‘Play up, and play up and play the game!’ gains additional, documentary significance when we recognize that it is not Pinter’s invention but a quotation from a once popular English jingoist poem. It is in fact on the basis of this poem that its author, Sir Henry Newbolt, earned his reputation in 1897. *Vita Lampada* is about a schoolboy cricketer who grows up to fight in Africa - for what cause is left conveniently unspecified. There, in the panic of the battle and facing death, the boy is stirred to heroic action and self-sacrifice by schooldays memories of a critical moment in the cricket playground, when “his Captain’s hand on his shoulder smote /‘Play up! Play up! And play the game!’”

It is true that after the WWI, at whose outbreak it contributed to the unbridled war propaganda, the verse fell out of favor and Newbolt himself came to dislike it, calling it 'the Frankenstein monster I created 30 years ago' Yet the game the poem champions is still played, its chief rule, which has to do with a way of thinking, unaltered: let us believe that the conception of progress entertained by the master class is the synonym of whatever is good or civilized, let the belief be so firm and unshakable that in effect it obliterates the memory of exploitation, violence, and genocides committed worldwide in its name<sup>21</sup>. If anything has changed since Newbolt's time, it is that, as Aimee Césaire noted, the hypocrisy is all the more odious, as it is less and less likely to deceive.<sup>22</sup> In the 1890's, it was relatively easy for most average stay-at-home British citizens to believe in the high-sounding rhetoric camouflaging the true motives of the colonial war in Africa - one had to be a Conrad and actually go to the Belgian Congo to discover that behind severed heads on poles, and various other heinous sights, (such as piles of severed children's hands, or eyes or ears<sup>23</sup>;) were not due to the natives' gruesome irrationality but to the rationalized greed of the white civilizers. Nowadays, the pretence of ignorance is more difficult to maintain: with a regular daily coverage of (pre-emptive) attacks upon sovereign nations of the world, and easily accessed non-official interpretations of these criminal acts by independent investigative journalists and dissenting thinkers, the usual worn out rhetoric of official explanations has, or should have, lost all credibility. Yet the Great Game<sup>24</sup> continues: apparently there must be a willingness on the part of a large and heterogeneous class of citizens to tolerate deception. It is not only a matter of simply starting 'the

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<sup>21</sup> See D.G. Kelly, 'A Poetics of Anti-Colonialism', an introduction to Aimee Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 2000, 27

<sup>22</sup> See Aimee Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 31. His remark was made in the fifties, but it is as valid today as it was then, indeed the entire book is.

<sup>23</sup> Reported, for example, in Charles Monbiot's 'The Holocaust We Will Not See', published in *Guardian*, 11<sup>th</sup> January 2010, and 'How Britain Denies Its Holocausts', published in *Guardian*, 27<sup>th</sup> December, 2005, both to be found on [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com).

<sup>24</sup> Called so by John Pilger in 'Breaking the great Australian silence' a speech given on 5 November 2009 in Sidney to mark his award of Sidney Peace Prize (<http://www.johnpilger.com/page.asp?partid=555>)

forgetting machine’, as Aimée Césaire described the mental strategy the XIX century bourgeois used against unwelcome knowledge<sup>25</sup>; or of practicing doublespeak and doublethink, the maneuvers deployed in western democracies long before the phrases were coined by Orwell, and subsequently interpreted misleadingly as referring to exclusively Stalinist methods of avoiding the truth. (In fact doublethink and doublespeak followed naturally once Christian values and/or humanist ideals became the ideological rationale for the colonial oppression and slavery. Let us remember, for instance, that the American Constitution, whose alleged purpose was the legal implementation of the egalitarian humanist ideals proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence, managed to uphold the institution of slavery without once using the word slave!<sup>26</sup>) What is alarming nowadays is that truthfulness is no longer considered morally indispensable, or even desirable, so that deception has paradoxically become ‘open’. In ‘the post-truth era’, as Ralph Keyes, following Steve Tesich, re-names postmodernity, instead of masking deception, we rationalize it: ‘Even though there have always been liars, lies have usually been told with hesitation, a dash of anxiety, a bit of guilt, a little shame...Now, clever people that we are, we have come up with rationales for tempering with truth so we can dissemble guilt-free.’<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Discourse on Colonialism*, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>26</sup> See N. D. Jayaprakash, ‘The World’s Oldest Democracy: Myth and Reality’, *Dissident Voice*, March 15, 2009. (<http://dissidentvoice.org>). A comparable hypocrisy is described by James Heartfield - that of the French politicians and intellectuals - in justifying the continued occupation of Algeria: it was, they maintained, the respect for equality, democracy and The Rights of Man that demanded the assimilation of Algeria into France. Thus a former French resistance fighter Jacques Roustelle declared that ‘we would be arrant swine to abandon to their own destiny people who count on us to liberate them from their own ancestral and religious dependency.’ As in the current wars in the Near East, Heartfield writes, ‘the meanings of humanism, universalism and liberation are twisted to mean their opposite. People are to be liberated from themselves’ See James Heartfield, ‘Algeria and the End of French Humanism’, Ch. 6 of *The ‘Death of the Subject’, Explained*, Sheffield, Hallam University, 2002, (<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/defeat-french-humanism.htm>)

<sup>27</sup> Ralph Keyes, *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life*, St. Martin’s Press, 2004, 12 (Quoted in an unpublished master thesis by Igor Petrovic, *Between Fact and Fiction: The Uses of Documentary Material in Contemporary Anglo-*

No doubt, this long-lasting campaign against (principally political) truth owes its success to the almost unflinching collaboration of educational institutions in the west. Newbolt's poem was written as homage to the British school, for spreading

.....the word that year by year  
While in her place the School is set  
Every one of her sons must hear,  
And none that hears it dare forget.  
This they all with a joyful mind  
Bear through life like a torch in flame,  
And falling fling to the host behind -  
“Play up! play up! and play the game!”

that is, to implant the illusion that their death in a scramble for loot was a noble sacrifice in the cause of enlightenment. By the late fifties, along with Pinter's very oblique attack on educational politics, the

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*American Political Drama*, University of Nis, 2010, p. 111) A corollary to this guilt-free lying is another recent phenomenon, a shameless admission of crime and injustice, and a growing indifference of the general public when an occasional truth thus breaks through the smokescreen of falsehoods and hits one in the face. To mention but one example, from John Pilger's 2004 documentary *The Stealing of a Nation*: After decades of legal evasions and outright lies, involving the British and American highest political levels, including the royalty, to justify the illegal evacuation of 2000 indigenous population from the island of Diego Garcia in order to build an American military base there, we witness the 1973-75 US Secretary of Defense J. Schlesinger's contemptuous disbelief at Pilger's concern with the injustice and immorality of the whole affair, and his blunt assertion that 2000 displaced people, many of whom died as a result of their displacement, is nothing compared to what both the US and British governments 'have done in the past, particularly in the XX century, not to mention the XIX Century'. While some viewers are conceivably revolted at such demonstrations of callousness, there are certainly more and more of those that tend to adopt a desired cynical attitude (well, are not war and domination a natural condition!), or acquiesce in the implied or stated rationalizations of such crimes to the effect that 'no atrocity is too great a price in a struggle for 'peace and democracy'. The approval by political scientists of what has recently been called 'Democratic Imperialism', is to be found in an article by Stanley Kurtz, 'Democratic Imperialism: A Blueprint' (2003); a 2004 publication edited by Filip Spagnoli under the title *Democratic Imperialism*; the same phrase appears a year later, in a conference paper entitled *Democratic Imperialism: The Emerging Paradigm of U.S. Foreign Policy* presented by Avery Plow at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association. All the three are referred to critically in (Bogoeva-Sedlar 2009: 38-39).



English university was quite unequivocally denounced by the angry young men of working class background for training the future political cadre in doublethink, so that, in the words of Osborne's protagonist, the end product of the traditional 'Oxbridge' education was an individual who possessed a deep-seated suspicion that he and his pals had been plundering and fooling everybody for generations, yet managed to keep it safely latent because he had also developed such haziness about social and human realities that he actually deserved 'a medal inscribed *For the Vaguerly in the Field*'. 'It takes some doing nowadays,' Jimmy observes bitterly of brother Nigel's self-protective stupidity, 'But they knew all about character building at Nigel's school, and he'll make it all right...He'll end up in the cabinet one day'<sup>28</sup>.

Nowadays, rewards await especially those among the contemporary intelligentsia who derive from the ethnic or racial groups most harmed by the colonial past and/or by the current neocolonial politics, yet who agree to reproduce their masters' deceptive myths. Among the most sophisticated ways of doing so is opting for one of the varieties of mainstream post-colonial/multiculturalist theory served on the academic buffet, which seem to speak on the behalf of the Other (or difference), yet beneath their many ambiguities and deliberate evasions, are reliable promoters of the model of the future designed for the Third World countries by the New World Order engineers.<sup>29</sup> Thus, to mention but one example, there is a strong probability that Home Habra's academic superstardom has something to do with the spectacular postmodern 'vaguer' of his discourse, which allows him, and his readers, to overlook the disastrous human consequences of globalization (or 'Democratic Imperialism') and praise it instead as a cosmopolitan dream finally come true.

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<sup>28</sup> John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*, Faber, London, 1960, p. 20.

<sup>29</sup> Postcolonialism has its roots in postmodernism, and postmodernism, to paraphrase Ralph Keyes once again, is not merely a morphological precedent for 'post-truthfulness': through its routine dismissal of objective truth, postmodernism helped shape the post-truth zeitgeist, and provided it with a philosophical alibi. Thanks to postmodernism, being overtly concerned with telling the truth is now considered 'a sign of depleted resources, a psychological disorder, a character defect, a kind of linguistic anorexia.' (Keyes, op. cit, 142, quoted in I. Petrovic, op. cit. 113)

Although the relation of Homi Bhabha to Franz Fanon is an issue I will have to say more about later, at this point I want to note how thoroughly Homi Bhabha has mastered the methods of the French bourgeois intellectuals whom Fanon, echoing Osborne's mockery of the British elites' 'vaguery', labeled 'bewilderers'<sup>30</sup>. Bhabha's work can surely be analyzed in terms of Fanon's view that colonization is not to be understood only in territorial, but also in psychoanalytic terms: a colonized people, according to Fanon, are those who have interiorized the colonialists' values and as a result have developed a national inferiority complex<sup>31</sup>. One aspect of this process is referred to in *The Wretched of the Earth*, written in 1961, at the time of Algeria's fight for liberation. There are two kinds of Algerian intellectuals, Fanon asserts there.<sup>32</sup> Both, he explains, stem from the native elite with whom the colonialist bourgeoisie, once it faced the demise of its political domination, sought dialogue concerning values. This was a rearguard action, he notes, planned to carry on the colonialist cultural domination, even after the political and economic control had been lost. This was achieved through the gift of university education, which, offered to the chosen few among the native population, was meant to inculcate in them the sense of the eternity of the essential qualities of the West. But only some of its beneficiaries ultimately responded in a desired manner. For those native intellectuals that later actually lived through a long, armed struggle for freedom had this whole European narcissistic superstructure, long implanted in their minds, smashed in the renewed contact with their people and the communal values re-enforced by the united effort and the common goal of the combat. It is in the areas that

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<sup>30</sup> In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Weidenfeld, New York, 1963, p. 38. The designation refers to moral teachers and counselors within France, the purpose of whose moralistic pronouncements – which, Fanon writes, is 'to separate the exploited from those in power...to hide the domination' in order to preserve it - is part of European legacy taken over by the native intellectual elites in the so-called post-colonial countries.

<sup>31</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Pluto Press, London, 1986, p. 9 ff.

<sup>32</sup> See *The Wretched of the Earth*, 45-48. Fanon's analysis is based on his personal experience in the Algerian war of independence but is meant to be representative of the decolonizing processes everywhere. The cultural colonization through the co-option of the native intellectual remains one of the chief strategies in the postcolonial period.

had not been shaken enough by the struggle, and hence missing its non-individualistic, non-calculating, collectivistic atmosphere and vocabulary, that one found those ‘know-all, smart, wily intellectuals,’ with the manners and forms of thought picked up during their association with the colonialist bourgeoisie still intact in them. ‘Spoiled children of yesterday colonialism’, ‘affranchised slaves’ or, as Fanon also called them, ‘slaves who are individually free’<sup>33</sup>, they were (and still are) guided chiefly by the assimilated European motto ‘look out for yourself’- whether that means sheer loot, or some subtler form of self-promotion.

I have a special reason though for focusing on Homi Bhabha in this respect: this particular postcolonial intellectual was mentioned in the invitation letter to this conference on change, with a quotation from one of his texts used to suggest a possible approach to the topic. Rather than play the Multiculturalist/Cosmopolitan Game though, I would like to draw critical attention to some of its habitual moves, using a few passages from Homi Bhabha as samples – enough, I believe, for an alert reader to see how the bewildering effect is produced. To begin with the passage quoted in the announcement letter: globalization is represented there as if it were something as spontaneous and inevitable as natural change and even improvement: a welcome encounter of the old and the new, a multicultural interpenetration setting us free from national narrow-mindedness and bringing the broadening of outlook. A similar view is put forward in Bhabha’s seminal book, *The Location of Culture*: There he describes the postmodern condition as an end of ethnocentric prejudice, superseded by the new internationalism resulting from a history of postcolonial migrations. If there is a hint of human misery in these upheavals, as Bhabha’s occasionally allows, it is promptly dissolved in the celebratory imagery of a new beyond to which the migrations and/or displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities lead: the crowning metaphor, borrowed from Heidegger, is that of a building of a bridge that ‘always differently...escorts the lingering and hastening ways of men to and fro, so that they may get to other banks...The bridge *gathers* as a passage that crosses.’<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>34</sup> Homi Bhabha, ‘The Location of Culture’, in J. Rivkin and M. Ryan (eds), *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Blackwell, 1998, p. 936.

I cannot think of a simpler and more cogent reply to this kind of specious cosmopolitanism than a passage from Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*. He begins by reminding his readers that all such arguments have their distant origin in the practice of Christian pedants, whose dishonest equations (*Christianity = civilization, paganism=savagery*) were to cover the genocidal policies against the Indians, the Yellow peoples and the Negroes of the world. Césaire proceeds:

That being settled, I admit that it is a good thing to place different civilizations in contact with each other; that it is an excellent thing to blend different worlds; that whatever its particular genius may be, a civilization that withdraws into itself atrophies; that for civilizations, exchange is oxygen; that the great good fortune of Europe is to have been a crossroads, and that because it was the locus of all ideas, the receptacle of all philosophies, the meeting place of all sentiments, it was the best centre for the redistribution of energy.

But then I ask the following question: has colonization *really placed civilizations in contact?* Or, if you prefer, of all the ways of *establishing contact*, was it the best?

I answer *no*.<sup>35</sup>

Césaire's answer is as valid now as it was in 1955, but needs to be re-stated in historically concrete terms to counteract tireless obfuscations of fashionable bewildereders. The consent they seek to manufacture about globalization as a mutually beneficial contact of civilizations is at the moment being effectively undermined in the work of some of the currently active materialist, Marxist-oriented cultural critics. I will refer to two of them, Phillip Lawrence and Amrohini Sahay. Basically an expansion of Césaire's pithy retort, their texts 'Lost in Space' and 'Transforming Race Matters: Towards a Critique-al Cultural Studies' are worth paraphrasing because the authors engage with, expose and invalidate some of the notorious maneuvers in the kind of postcolonial theory Bhabha has come to represent.

Thus Philip Lawrence's critical attention is caught by Homi Bhabha's use of spatial metaphor. Besides the bridge image quoted above, *The Location of Culture* abounds in other metaphorical

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<sup>35</sup> *Discourse on Colonialism*, 33.

references to space, which re-enforce his chief argument in favor of globalization: thus the new postcolonial culture is interstitial, located in-between, transcending or escaping clear cut political or ideological boundaries. But it is precisely these spatial metaphors, according to Lawrence, that account for the vagueness of his arguments. The space they invoke is thoroughly abstract: the in-betweenness constantly referred to is indefinite, a field of endless play. If Bhabha's declared intention has been 'to constitute a postcolonial, critical discourse that contests modernity through the establishment of other historical sites, other forms of enunciation', where, Lawrence Phillips asks, 'does this history manifest itself, where are these other interstitial sites of enunciation?' The indeterminacy of their location, Lawrence concludes, generates an unintentional irony in relation to the book's title, bringing into question the political 'location' of Bhabha's own work.<sup>36</sup>

The answer to this last question is spelled out in Amrohini Sahay's text 'Transforming Race Matters...'. Among many insights provided by her powerful analysis are those that enable the reader to relate abstractions and evasions in Bhabha's treatment of space to the more crucial omissions in his treatment of difference. These blind spots, she explains, Bhabha shares with the entire mainstream postcolonial theory that has followed major postmodern philosophers, such as Derrida and Foucault, away from the coherent, comprehensive analysis of the extra-linguistic reality into the affirmation of endless play of differences within the hermetic inside of discourse. As a result of this 'linguistic turn', any objective and unifying principle which could explain these differences as part of a global structure of exploitation has been conveniently elided.

Thus two chief solutions to the problem of ethnic difference proposed within the Postcolonial studies both ignore the crucial social difference, which is economic. Yet, Sahay rightly insists, this persistent 'epistemological segregation' between questions of cultural and class difference renders both these ostensibly democratizing undertakings at best empty and ineffective. Thus the so-called 'appreciative' politics

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<sup>36</sup> See Lawrence Phillips, 'Lost in Space: Siting/citing the in-between of Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, *Scrutiny 2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa*, Vol. 3 No. 1, 1998, pp. 16-25.

of difference (rooted in experiential theory of race) seeks to correct the traditional Eurocentric 'universalism' by a new valorization of previously excluded cultural or ethnic experiences and practices.<sup>37</sup> But because its proponents fail, or refuse to distinguish between the original, pre-colonial cultural specificities and those that had developed as a consequence of the centuries of colonial plunder, still less demand a reparation for it, this affirmation of difference ends up as a politics of local cosmetic changes, whose ultimate effect is to re-secure the conditions under which exploitation may continue.<sup>38</sup> The second, Bhabha's, version of cosmopolitan politics proceeds from the theory of difference known as ludic. Being culturally and linguistically constituted, or constructed, differences, according to Bhabha, should be deconstructed through a cosmopolitan merging of nations and languages in the new 'transnational' or 'translational' spaces opening up through processes of globalization. The 'hybridity,' 'interstitiality,' 'in-betweeness' that Bhabha champions, along with the ambiguity and slipperiness of the language in which he does so, are part of a general postmodern project allegedly to go beyond all binary thinking as the foundation of all oppressive ideologies.

As most postmodern responses to the problem of power and repression, however, Bhabha's is disingenuous. His middle-ground position, his escape from, or obliteration of clear-cut cultural difference, indeed his whole conciliatory tactic, rooted in Derrida's and Foucault's anti-binarism, is ultimately, according to Sahay, a *political* class strategy, meant to blur the lines of opposition between the oppressors and the oppressed: but 'to blur these lines', she claims, 'is to neutralize power [or difference] as a struggle concept through which the powerless are enabled to wage a concerted struggle against the powerful.'<sup>39</sup> Thus, 'far from a compassionate act in solidarity with the oppressed' they pretend to be, both these corrections, the affirmation of difference and the erasure of difference, must in the

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<sup>37</sup> Amrohini Sahay, 'Transforming Race Matters: Towards a Critique-al Cultural Studies', *Cultural Logic*, Vol. 1, Number 2, Spring 1998 (<http://clogic.eserver.org/1-2/sahay.html>)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Fanon's French bourgeois 'bewilderers' bent on hiding domination!

end be seen for what they are: ‘an opportunistic narrative on the part of a few privileged intellectuals to legitimate their complicity with the system of exploitation, and to avoid coming into political conflict with the powers that be’. Bhabha’s repeated advertisement of his own theory as enabling or endorsing non-consensual thought and conduct is thus another of his hypocrisies: the ‘location’ of Bhabha’s politics, to answer Lawrence’s rhetorical question in quite concrete terms, is in what Sahay describes as the “broad current of ‘democracy-promotion’ campaign of the North-Atlantic ruling class, which is globally deployed to mitigate the increasingly sharp social and political tensions of the so-called new world order, and manufacture politico-discursive ‘consensus’ for Northern capital’s world-wide free-market politics”<sup>40</sup>

If I on my part were to single out the most glaring demonstration of Bhabha’s consensual politics, I would point to the passage in the *Location of Culture* where he obligingly parrots the politically correct condemnation of the role of the Serbs in the 1990’s civil war in former Yugoslavia:

The hideous extremity of Serbian nationalism proves that the very idea of a pure, ‘ethnically cleansed’ national identity can only be achieved through the death, literal and figurative, of the complex interweaving of history, and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood’....<sup>41</sup>

He then proceeds to point beyond the [Serbian] ‘psychosis of patriotic fervor’, to ‘an evidence of a more transnational and translational sense of the hybridity of imagined communities’ in the works of contemporary postcolonial artists, who represent their own particular national plight through allegorical reference to political crisis elsewhere in the world. The fact that he never specifies the exact nature or cause of the crises he offers for comparison and contrast, is just another indication of his deplorable lack, or willing suspension, of any ‘transnational’ and ‘translational’ historical sense, whose minimal exercise would have precluded his abject reproduction of the assigned version about the hideous Serbs, and lead him instead to see their role in the conflict in

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> ‘The Location of Culture’, op. cit., p. 936.

the Balkans as one among several radically nonconsensual responses to the transnational capital's expansion and the new wave of violent 'thirdworldization' it entails – as those who refuse to 'play up, and play the game', spoilsports such as Harold Pinter, Diana Johnston, Edward Hermann, Michael Parenti, John Pilger, or Michael Chossudovsky, have done, and as Franz Fanon would certainly have done<sup>42</sup>.

Yet it is none other than Franz Fanon that Bhabha chooses to enlist in support of his argument: a cynical maneuver which, like Barak Obama's grotesque posturing as Martin Luther King's spiritual heir, is calculated to lend moral and intellectual credibility, even a revolutionary glow, to his politically correct 'enunciations.' Thus at those 'interstitial' (to use still another of his terms) points in Bhabha's discourse, when the usual flow of thick postmodern verbiage is interrupted by an unexpected mention of tangible and concrete *economic* aspects of globalization – such as capitalism, or suffering or poverty - the new perspective such words might open is immediately closed or obscured by what I would call aestheticization, while the dishonesty of this move is covered by a false analogy with Fanon. Take, for example, this passage:

The transnational capital and the impoverishment of the Third World certainly create the chain of circumstance that incarcerate the Salvadorean or the Filipino. In their cultural passage, hither and thither, as migrant workers...they embody the Benjaminian 'present': that moment blasted out of the continuum of history. Such conditions of cultural displacement and social discrimination – where the political survivors become the best historical witnesses – are the grounds on which Franz Fanon...locates an agency of empowerment.<sup>43</sup>

In support of which he then produces a utopian passage from Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*:

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<sup>42</sup> Especially if we have in mind that Fanon's uncompromising view that decolonization (and by extension any radical struggle to overthrow the system of exploitation) is a necessarily violent process, non-violence in this context being a bourgeois doctrine preached both by the colonial bourgeois and the native elite, the former bent on preserving the privilege (itself gained and maintained through excessive violence) and the latter in hoping for their own personal share in it. See *The Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 59-61.

<sup>43</sup> 'The Location of Culture', 939.



As soon as I desire, I am asking to be considered. I am not merely here-and-now, sealed into thingness. I am somewhere else and for something else. I demand that notice be taken of my negating activity in so far as I pursue something other than life; in so far as I do battle for the creation of a human world – that is a world of reciprocal recognitions.

I should constantly remind myself that the real *leap* consists in introducing invention into existence.

In the world in which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself...<sup>44</sup>

Decontextualized, these two passages may seem superficially similar, but seen in the context, not only of the books they were taken from but the whole of Bhabha's and Fanon's work, they mean profoundly different things. What 'negating activity', 'invention', or 'empowerment' mean for Bhabha is the opposite of what they mean for Fanon. For Bhabha, the negating activity implies a negation of the native history, with its memory of the potential alternative worlds that the colonial oppression has prevented from unfolding, and an acceptance of the compromise with new forms of domination. To mask the true nature of his position he applies grotesque mental acrobatics to make Fanon's conception of negating capacity resonate with his own. He relates the phrase 'negating capacity' to Fanon's being "too aware of the dangers of the fixity and fetishism of identities within the calcification of colonial cultures to recommend that 'roots' be struck in the celebratory romance of the past..." and then proceeds to equate it with his own celebratory conception of the 'negating activity' as 'indeed, the intervention of the beyond that establishes a boundary: a bridge, where 'presencing' begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world - of the unhomeliness that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations...'<sup>45</sup>

The equation is, beneath its slipperiness, quite illegitimate. It is true that Fanon did not share the nostalgic belief in the repetition of the pre-colonial past, which indeed is impossible: but he never recommended any 'cross-cultural initiations,' any reconciliation or

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 939.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 940

compromise with European traditions either – except implicitly with those revolutionary trends and utopian dreams that Europe itself had betrayed and stifled. For the rest, his warning to his countrymen was never, in their own interest and that of Europeans, to repeat Europe, for that would be merely an ‘obscene caricature’. Compare, for instance, the clarity and passion of his plea, in the Conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth*, to the slick deviousness of the Bhabha passage above:

Come then, comrades, the European game has finally ended; we must find something different. We today can do everything, so long as we do not imitate Europe, so long as we are not obsessed with the desire to catch up with Europe...Europe now lives at such a mad, reckless pace that she has shaken off all guidance and all reason, and she is running headlong into the abyss; we should do well to avoid it with all possible speed...When I search for Man in the technique and the style of Europe, I see only a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders...Let us combine our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us try to create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth.

This is the true meaning of ‘doing battle’ for ‘something other than life... for the creation of a human world,’ in the passage Bhabha quotes and misinterprets. This creative battle, in which life is at stake, has nothing in common with the ‘struggle for survival’ of the refugees living at the frontiers of cultures or with its artistic reflection in the kind of refugee literature Bhabha now believes should replace what Goethe meant by world literature. As opposed to Fanon’s creative battling, negating the thingness to which the conditions of uninterrupted exploitation reduce him, and to his ‘somewhere else’, which is a joyous vision of a freshly invented, free and just world, Bhabha jubilates in the struggle for survival which is a disguised acquiescence in the status quo: his transcendence of history is a matter of ‘hybrid aesthetic’ which ‘delights in texture and sensuous surfaces’, leaving the underlying economic and political injustice intact. Thus the spectacular imagination of Pepon Osorio, a Nuyorican writer Bhabha singles out for praise as the ‘great celebrant of the migrant act of survival’, is not captured so much with ‘the high drama of birth and death,’ or ‘the statistics of infant mortality, of the silent spread of AIDS in the Hispanic communities’: to Bhabha approval, Osorio finds

his beyond in the ““interstices of a range of practices: the ‘space’ of installation, the *spectacle* of social statistics, the transitive time of the body in performance””<sup>46</sup>— all of which, of course, sound as familiar postmodern compensatory idealizations, providing the subject trapped in the material impasse and forced into a thing-like political passivity with the illusion of agency, movement, transcendence.

No, Homi Bhabha does not belong to the tradition of Franz Fanon, and instead of wasting precious time on him, I might have more profitably focused on those who do. The dissenting trends committed to active struggle for a greater justice worldwide are numerous and heterogeneous, from the leftist governments in South America, through the expanding liberation theology movement in both Americas, to individual independent journalists and cultural critics of the kind I have just mentioned. But I want to draw attention to another trend, emerging from within the university itself, that could be justly associated with Franz Fanon’s political and moral principles. Unlike Marxist theorists I have quoted, whose exposure of the hidden reactionary agenda of the declaratively leftist postmodern cultural theories is a wholesome exercise but necessarily reproductive of the jargon it seeks to dismantle and thus confined to the sophisticated intellectual circle, there are academic events whose significance reaches beyond the academic theorization towards a general public and practical action. Such was the 1996 International Conference on Globalization and Culture, sponsored by Duke University and the University of California, whose participants, besides Noam Chomsky and F. Jameson, were mostly less well known Third World academics.<sup>47</sup> They not only refused to play the

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 939. (Italics added) It would be in fact amusing to subject these pronouncements to further analysis, which might reveal, for instance, how, in addition to Fanon’s ideas, Bhabha misuses the early Roland Barthes’ notion of transitivity, i. e. of ‘transitive’ mode of speech, which ‘speaks the objects’ and is the political, transformative language of action, as opposed to ‘intransitive’ mode, which speaks ‘about the object, and is depoliticized, static and celebratory. (See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Paladin, 1987, pp. 145-6) Bhabha’s use of the adjective ‘transitive’ would then be deceptive, counting on its Barthesian revolutionary connotations, while, in fact, denoting the opposite, static and celebratory, mode.

<sup>47</sup> The papers appeared in a 1998 publication, co-edited by Frederic Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, and entitled *Cultures of Globalization*, published by Duke University Press, Durham and London.

Postcolonial Game, but also (with very few exceptions) to spend their effort on any polemical discussion with it, except to note in passing its ideological collusion in the current globalizing processes. Instead they confronted the material effects of these processes in an idiom as lucid, straightforward and concrete as that of the liberation movement fighters of the fifties and the sixties. They were practically unanimous in condemning globalization as deleterious on all levels<sup>48</sup> and, again like their predecessors, pointed to the necessity of active resistance. They specifically agreed upon the following items:

1. Postcoloniality is a dubious term, since there has been no ‘post’ to the colonial practice; as part of the intended global deception, it should be rejected and replaced by the correct view that globalization is the last phase of the uninterrupted, 500-year-old system of colonial domination. As stated by one of the contributors,

‘post’ in post-colonial is therefore a false term, since colonialism continues through TNC, just as plunder, once associated with the armada, the East Indian Company, the slave trade etc, now continues under other names: aid, free trade, loans, speculation, and even development.<sup>49</sup>

Change, if any, has been for the worse. Thus, in a quotation from Ernst Utrecht, provided by Subramani, the participant from Fiji, it is stated that ‘even reports by conservative international organizations and institutes engaged in social research... have shown that the exploitation of the indigenous population by TNCs is more rigorous, often more disastrous, than it was in the colonial period.’<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Even F. Jameson, usually stopping short of unequivocal criticism of political postmodernity and its supportive cultural theory, declares in the Preface that, seen ‘from a somewhat different angle,’ ‘everything changes,’ i.e., ‘it is no longer the bureaucratic state apparatus [of the former ‘totalitarian regimes’] that restricts the burgeoning of local cultures and local political freedoms, but rather the transnational system itself that menaces national autonomy, and that on all levels: socially..., culturally..., politically..., economically...’ (Preface, *Cultures of Globalization*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1998, pp. xiv-xv)

<sup>49</sup> Sherif Hetata , ‘Dollarization, Fragmentation and God’, *Cultures of Globalization* , p. 275.

<sup>50</sup> Subramani, ‘The End of Free States’, *Cultures of Globalization*, p. 158.

Illustrated in the same text by a Fijian poem called ‘Multinational Corporation’, the claim is solidly supported throughout the whole volume by unambiguous figures – both the poem’s simple metaphors (‘You are a banyan/ That lives on other trees/ You twist your giant roots around me/And squeeze me by the neck/Until I have no breath/ You cut my flesh to the bones/You suck my blood to the last pint...’) and the staggering statistics disclosing the horrible reality (of Nike sweatshops, among other things<sup>51</sup>) one would never have suspected was there from Bhabha’s happy account of ‘bodies in performance’.

2. Viewed also from a philosophical perspective as a world-system, capitalism (or modernity) was therefore declared to have reached its terminal crisis. Having constituted nature as an infinitely exploitable object, and human subject as the instrument of surplus value, it is now, in Enrique Dussel’s words, confronting its absolute limits: ‘the ecological destruction of the planet, and the extinguishing, in misery and hunger, of the great majority of humankind’<sup>52</sup>

3. The solution, if there is any, is certainly not to be expected from those philosophical projects, ”naïve, ridiculous, irresponsible, irrelevant, ...even complicitous, that are closeted in their ’ivory towers’ of sterile Eurocentric academicism.”<sup>53</sup> It emerges, paradoxically,

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<sup>51</sup> In Masao Miyoshi’s ‘Globalization, Culture and University’, p. 257. Besides spectacular profits big multinationals have gained through outsourcing, Miyoshi also reports those resulting from downsizing. Thus in a direct proportion to the number of jobs extinguished and workers laid-off since the 1980s, the CEOs’ pays have soared by 50 percent within years: for example, as a result of the union surrender, the Caterpillar’s president’s salary zoomed to 4.07 million dollars, up 53 %, in the following year. If in 1990 the gap in wages between the line workers and corporate CEOs was 60 to 1, in 1993, it was 140 to 1. Which means that now for the first time in the US the poor are becoming poorer in absolute terms, while the rich are getting disproportionately richer. Thus, with the undisguised approval from the highest representatives of the ‘the oldest democracy in the world’ (President Clinton’s public affirmation that ‘the most fundamental responsibility for any business is to make a profit,’ is one example), ‘the American society is divided in a way that it has never been before. (255-6) Absolutely essential among these capitalist profit-oriented policies and strategies, Miyoshi is careful to point, is war. Another, silent partner is Multiculturalism and other emergent cross-border studies. (264)

<sup>52</sup> Enrique Dussel, ‘Beyond Eurocentrism’, *Cultures of Globalization*, 19-21

<sup>53</sup> Cf. a passage from Fanon’s Conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth*:

‘from within the third limit of capitalism, its ultimate incapacity to subsume the economies, populations, nations and cultures that it has been attacking since its origin .... Excluded from its horizon and cornered into poverty’, but possessing an indomitable will to survive, these Others are now ‘a locus of resistance from whose affirmation the process of the negation of negation of liberation begins.’<sup>54</sup>

4. Moving in the direction of a true internationalist idea, this resistance of ‘the wretched of the earth’ finds support in nationalist movements too. Far from a reactionary or undemocratic option, as Bhabha would have it, nationalism, a contributor from Korea argues, can be a positive force in combating the TNCs and the flow of transnational culture. Nor are national literatures, which satisfy ‘the need to preserve or revivify ethnic regional heritage’ really opposed to the concept of world literature, destabilized as it is by the postmodern theory, with its deconstructive critique of Great Literature, its dismantling of the Canon, with its ‘death-of-the-author’ proclamations, etc. Hence, runs the conclusion – very different from Homi Bhabha’s promotion of the kind of de-historicized and depoliticized frontier aesthetics to the status of true World Literature – ‘if a dignified life by any definition appears impossible without creative continuation of what is best in our past, much of it available only in literature and letters’ (and many Koreans feel that this is so), then the espousal of the concept of national literature in the Third World countries should converge with ‘the needs of those very model nations whose own finest traditions are being swept away by globalizing tide’<sup>55</sup>.

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All European thought has unfolded in places which were increasingly more deserted and more encircled by precipices; and thus it was that the custom grew up in those places of very seldom meeting man. A permanent dialogue with oneself and an increasingly obscene narcissism never ceased to prepare the way for a half delirious state, where intellectual work became suffering and the reality was not at all that of a living man, working and creating himself, but rather words, different combinations of words, and the tensions springing from the meanings contained in words.

<sup>54</sup> Dussel, *op. cit.*, 21.

<sup>55</sup> Paik Nak Chung, ‘Nations and Literatures in the Age of Globalization’, p. 220. The author notes another special threat to World Literature: ‘market realism’, which in the age of global consumerism has reduced literature to a branch of entertainment

5. Finally all the contributors concerned with the role of the university in the era of globalization, agreed that, despite the persistent ideological siege throughout its history, the university nevertheless has a revolutionary potential. Nowadays its foremost responsibility is to refuse the degrading role of the globalisation's service station. This requires, on the one hand, a holding out against the external pressure of administrators and social and economic managers to quantify education<sup>56</sup> and, on the other, a reinvention of revolutionary pedagogies that would wrench cultural and literary studies out of the grip of the mainstream 'hybridity-accommodation- pragmatism' approach and ally them with those Others who are now 'the locus of resistance.'<sup>57</sup> 'When do we begin to fight? And how do we – the workers in Dayton, Ohio, and those of us in university - form an alliance?' With this question Masao Mioshi ends his presentation. It is not a skeptical question but as urgent and hopeful as the Fijian participant's conclusion to his distressing account of the effects of multinational companies on their latest prey, the Pacific Islands: 'Let us hope,' Subramani writes, 'that this celebration at the university inaugurates a new era in which we seek a suitable pedagogy for resisting the rapidly diminishing free zone in our lives in the region and the world at large'.

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industry. If market realism has replaced socialist realism, Nak Chung points, it is largely due to postmodern literary theory, whose assumption is that discrimination between the superior and inferior works is sheer elitism. Thus with the 'de-centering' of Shakespeare and Tolstoy, the emancipatory engagements with reality valued equally by Goethe and Marx have given way to a demand for self-contained and self-referential fetishized upmarket literary commodities, an art that ends up fawning before the media magnates. (225)

<sup>56</sup> See Miyoshi, op. cit. pp. 261-2. Various institutional decisions are made without any reference to substantial pedagogic or intellectual matters, but based solely on quantified assessment (the number of students enrolled, the ratio student-professor, the job-market prospects, and not on a course's intrinsic merit, for example). The 'relevance,' which once referred to 'presumed integrity of the university as an interpretative agency of the general public,' now implies 'the partnership of universities with industry as the key to successful economies of the twentieth century.' The result is that professors, who 'once...presumably professed...are now merely professionals, entrepreneurs, careerists, and opportunists, as in the corporate world.' (267)

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 267.

The reason I dwell on this conference should be obvious: held more than ten years ago, it became a focus of the responsible, original and authentically engaged exchange about the issue that has since only gained in urgency, but that here, in Serbian universities, have most of the time been treated according to the rules of the Great Game: dissenting opinion on globalization, if not stifled, is either passed over in silence or isolated and neutralized as an irrelevant eccentricity.<sup>58</sup> Now I do not think it Quixotry on my part (though it must sound so to some of my colleagues) to wish to point out that if ‘postmodernism is mimicry’ (to modify slightly Subramani’s comment<sup>59</sup>), the academic community in the west still offers more than one model for emulation.

In my conclusion I would like to return briefly to Pinter. As always with Pinter characters, the identity of the two intruders in *The Birthday Party* remained unspecified to the end of the play and was an enigma to some of the first viewers, for whose sake Pinter provided

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<sup>58</sup> The suppression of (dissenting, or progressive) politics from scholarly discourse is not a local or new phenomenon. On the contrary, it has a transnational, more than half-a-century long history, originating in CIA’s cultural campaigns launched immediately after the WWII as part of the Cold War. In his excellent review of F. S. Saunder’s 1999 book *Who Paid the Piper: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*, James Petras writes:

The CIA’s cultural campaigns created the prototype for today’s seemingly apolitical intellectuals, academics and artists who are divorced from popular struggles and whose worth rises with their distance from the working classes and their proximity to prestigious foundations. The CIA role model of the successful professional is the ideological gatekeeper, excluding critical intellectuals who write about class struggle, class exploitation and U. S. imperialism, ‘ideological’ not ‘objective’ categories, or so they are told.

(...) The issue is not that today’s intellectuals or artists may or may not take a progressive position on this or that issue. The problem is the pervasive belief among writers and artists that anti-imperialist social and political expressions should not appear in their music, paintings, and serious writing if they want their work to be considered of substantial artistic merit. The enduring political victory of the CIA was to convince intellectuals that serious and sustained political engagement on the left is incompatible with serious art and scholarship. Today at the opera, theater, and art galleries, as well as in the professional meetings of academics, the Cold War values of the CIA are visible and pervasive: who dares to undress the emperor? (*Monthly Review*, November 1999. (<http://www.monthlyreview.org/1199petr.htm>))

<sup>59</sup> Subramani, op. cit., 155



the following comment: ‘Goldberg and McCann? Dying, rotting, scabrous, decayed spiders, the flower of our society. They know their way around. Our mentors. Our ancestry. Them. Fuck ’em.’<sup>60</sup> Which is to say, as I interpret it, that the two bullies are not important in themselves: their role, when they break in upon Stanley, is to be catalysts, unintentional agents of a potentially genuine spiritual birth, because they provide (as any large-scale attack on national integrity also does), the testing circumstances for Stanley’s powers of resistance. It is his defeat at their hands, and its causes – which, as Pinter hinted in the same letter, lie in his evasion of self-knowledge, his infantile self-delusion – that are at the heart of the *Birthday Party*’s theme. It is for the sake of this urgently needed self-examination – where do we stand in relation to the ‘shit-stained...tradition’, embodied in Goldberg and McCann? – that in his later plays Pinter made its avatars more recognizable politically: as Des and Lionel in the unambiguously named play *The New World Order*, two torturers going about their gruesome job on a political prisoner, until ‘the purity of his mission’, which is ‘to keep the world clean for democracy’ throws one of them into a paroxysm of weeping self-righteousness; and their employers, the obscenely rich, frivolous and cruel elite, visualized in *Party Time*. As their stylish party is in progress, they do not allow the sinister hints of some unspeakable violence outside to interfere with their vacuously happy chatter. The one person, a woman, who dares to inquire about what’s going on is soon bullied into silence, and after a brief moment of discomfort the chatting and laughter are resumed. In the already quoted Sidney speech ‘Breaking the Great Australian Silence’, John Pilger singled out *Party Time* as his favorite Pinter play. He concluded his brief comment about it with a question that most Pinter plays are meant to elicit, and to which at the moment I have nothing to add: ‘How many of us live in that apartment?’

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<sup>60</sup> Harold Pinter, *Various Voices: Prose, Politics 1948-1998*, Faber, 1998, p. 10.

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### Rezime:

## **'IGRAJ IGRU DO KRAJA': O GLOBALIZACIJI, MULTIKULTURALIZMU I UNIVERZITETU**

„Igraj igru do kraja!”- fraza je preuzeta iz Pinterove drame *Rodjendanska proslava*, a u radu se koristi kao uvod u raspravu o manje ili više sofisticiranim izgovorima ili teorijama kojima se pribegava da bi se maskirala ekonomska stvarnost globalizacije. Nasuprot ovim igrama kompromisa, u koje spadaju i institucionalizovane 'mainstram' postkolonijalne i multikulturalne studije, a iz kojih su rođene akademske zvezde poput Homi Babe, sve se više oseća uticaj opozicionih tendencija. Jedan pažnje vredan primer je svakako konferencija 'Globalizacija i kultura' održana 1996 pod pokroviteljstvom Univerziteta u San Dijegu. Neki od argumenata iz priloga objavljenih u zborniku konferencije navedeni su u drugom delu rada, kao potvrda da se na (nekim) svetskim univerzitetima danas obnavlja revolucionarna postkolonijalna misao oličena u delu Franca Fanona, te kao podsticaj da se u vezi sa aktuelnom pro-globalizacijskom politikom, promisli i iskaže ono što se do sada u našoj akademskoj teoriji i praksi najčešće smatralo nezamislivim i neizrecivim.

2010.

## **DARKNESS WITH A DIFFERENCE: CONRAD'S AND NAIPAUL'S AFRICA**

Like all records of experience that tackle the ineffable, *Heart of Darkness* is not so much a book we read as a book that reads us. Hence the controversy about the kind of meaning and truth – or sometimes the absence of these – yielded by Conrad's impressionistic, ambiguous, circular narrative has not abated. The interpretations attached to the novel have been contradictory or mutually exclusive, and the final assessment, whether favorable or not, often founded on the wrong kind of argument – on ideological projections foreign to the text and reducing or misinterpreting its complexities. The responses so far have ranged from the initial self-complaisant approbation of the novel as another literary tribute to the empire<sup>61</sup>, to the more thoughtful praise of its subversive effect, demolishing not only the rhetoric of good intentions concealing the ravages of King Leopold's rule in the Congo, but indeed the entire Mayan veil of illusions wrapping the horrible metaphysical truths on whose suppression civilization itself depends. The latter position is that of Lionel Trilling, in whose introduction to the course of *Modern Literature*, Conrad was grouped together with three supreme masters of suspicion, Nietzsche, Freud and Marx, as precursors of the great quarrel with culture that, according to him, constitutes the defining meaning of literary modernism. (Trilling,

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<sup>61</sup> Neither the reading public nor the critics rejected the novel when it was published, but apparently preferred to read it as a story of glorious adventure, dismissing the atrocities committed by Kurtz as unrealistic or finding various justifications for it. On 10 December 1902, in the Manchester *Guardian* unsigned review of the story, the author wrote: "It must not be supposed that Mr. Conrad makes *attack* upon colonization, expansion, even Imperialism." (In Armstrong, 2005, 309) Other critical reviews published at the time maintained that Conrad actually borrowed the indigenous practices and through some morbidity of imagination, transferred the culpability for unspeakable rites - for example, the human heads on the poles, from the natives to Kurtz. (Hochchild 1997, 40)

1967) A reversal followed when the tidal wave of radical post-colonial thought and practice almost swept Conrad's novel (along with other canonical texts) away from its place of honor in the syllabuses on modernist oppositional literary tradition, into a rubric of the books that should cease being taught, for their deep complicity with Western racist ideology makes untenable their hitherto unquestioned status of great works of art. Chinua Achebe, whose words I am paraphrasing, softened somewhat his indictment of Conrad's "bloody racism" but never changed his view substantially.<sup>62</sup> Limited as I believe it was, but inspired by his uncompromising commitment to post-colonialism as the revolutionary, liberating program, Achebe's criticism of Conrad stirred a debate that persisted through the period of post-modern exhaustion and disappointment, when post-colonial discourse lost its enabling *arche* and its vindicating *telos*, endowing Conrad's ambiguous narrative with a double life.

This important claim comes from Edward Said. In one of its lives, what Said calls the novel's "sovereign inclusiveness" [symbolized by the closed group of Marlow's listeners, all colonial officials, aboard the *Nellie*], "has been reproduced by those who speak today for the West...The inflections of this discourse are to exclude what has been represented as 'lost' by showing that the colonial world was, religiously and ontologically speaking, lost to begin with, irredeemable, irrecusably corrupt...It focuses not on what was shared in the colonial experience, but on what must never be shared, namely power and rectitude. Rhetorically, its terms are ...the organization of political passions which lead inevitably to mass slaughter." The effect of this discourse, Said goes on to explain, is to draw the like-minded people, the aggressive Westerners most of all, away from ongoing interchange into a "regrettably tight little circle" wherein stand the blameless, the just, the omnicompetent, those who know the truth about themselves as well as the others: outside the circle stand "a miscellaneous bunch of querulous whiners and wailers". It is with these outsiders that Conrad's narrative lives its second life. The indications, detected by Said, of a possibility of the perspective external

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<sup>62</sup> First formulated in a speech titled 'An Image of Africa', in 1975, the charge was repeated in various printed versions, and passing references, the last in a speech delivered in 1998. ( See Hawkins 2005, 365)

to the representations provided by Marlow and his listeners, makes the story resonate with the terms of Rushdie's "Outside the Whale": Rushdie points to outsideness not merely in opposition to the closed interiority of a private retreat from dehumanizing ideology that Orwell recommended in his essay 'Inside the Whale', but as an exit from the ideological closure of Euro-centric, totalizing imperialist view, accompanied as it is by historical indifference and political resignation, into the dialectic of history and politics of liberation. Besides Salman Rushdie, to this latter tradition of post-colonial intellectual, Said assigns contemporary writers such as Ngugi wa Thongo in Kenya, and Faiz Ahmed Faiz in Pakistan, but the list is much longer, and includes, among those who responded directly to *Heart of Darkness*, or to the (post)colonial history of the Congo, the names of Sven Lindquist, Aimé Césaire, and Barbara Kingsolver. V. S. Naipaul, I will contend, belongs among the former group: indeed, as Said comments ironically, Naipaul's move has been "the most attractive, and most immoral" in that he has become "a standard bearer of a small band of Third World intellectuals who have allowed themselves quite consciously to be turned into a witness for the Western prosecution." (Said, 1986, 50-54)

I propose to make this statement my own, by demonstrating that *A Bend in The River* involves a radical misinterpretation of Conrad's tradition Naipaul seeks to appropriate as his legacy. To do so I find it necessary to revisit briefly *Heart of Darkness* and defend it from what I see as Chinua Achebe's ultimately one-sided, if brilliant, censure.

### ***Conrad's darkness...***

One of the threads to be distinguished in Conrad's narrative leads from Marlow's initial innocent remark that the imperial conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing unless redeemed by an unselfish belief in the idea – "something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer sacrifices to" (Conrad 1993, 10) – to the absurd and obscene ritual he comes upon at the Outer station, of a crowd of "faithless pilgrims" worshipping

ivory, the word, like the name of some kind of fetish, ringing in the air, whispered, sighed. (33). By the time Marlow reaches the farthest point of navigation, the sacrifices he observes en route, offered at the shrine of this “flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly.” (23) – The black carriers with a bullet in their heads, the chain gang, the heads on the poles surrounding Kurtz’s hut, the unspeakable rites Marlow is told he presided over – will have withered all the residual faith in the imperial project Marlow may have still retained. The scenes of native suffering and humiliation have long since been established as based on historical facts and I will ignore this aspect of the novel, except to draw attention to the recent research, by Sven Lindquist, published under the title “*Exterminate All The Brutes*” as a fresh historical re-contextualization of Conrad’s fictionalized report, testifying compellingly to the originality of Conrad’s anti-imperialist stance.<sup>63</sup> Yet Sven Lindquist’s evidence is mostly extra-literary and does not really meet the indictment of racism Chinua Achebe grounds in the novel’s texture, particularly in the way the farthest point of navigation is made to coincide with the culminating point of Marlow’s experience, merging the historical penetration into the heart of the dark continent with the symbolic descent into the darkness of the European soul. It is here, in Marlow’s uncanny evocation of the other – the jungle, the blacks, and finally Kurtz’s madness of soul – that Conrad, aware as he was of the evil of imperialism, paradoxically joined the racist philosophy on which it sharpened its iron tooth. (Achebe, 2005, 349).

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<sup>63</sup> A result of a thoroughgoing investigation of documents surrounding the book, but also of a journey re-tracing Conrad’s route into “the heart of darkness”, Lindqvist’s report is valuable in many ways. It is, among other things, a reminder of significant coincidences: the short story *An Outpost of Progress*, a draft for *Heart of Darkness*, appeared in the jubilee issue of the journal *Cosmopolis* on June 22 1897, Queen Victoria’s celebration of her 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary on the British throne, with the entire world paying tribute to the empire whose rule over almost a quarter of the world and its population was proof enough of its scientific, political and moral superiority. Conrad’s story ends with one of its two protagonist, imperial agents in Africa, hanging on a cross, where, disgusted with himself and the empire he represented, he crucified himself: when the company Director finds him, he looks like Christ and a gruesome joker, sticking his black swollen tongue out, not only at his superior but also at the whole illusion of European progress. It also reminds us that *Heart of Darkness* was published in the same year as Kipling’s poem on “the white man’s burden”.

The objections listed by Achebe to Conrad's portrayal of the Africans are many – from the fact that they are not considered worthy of names, language or point of view, to the derogatory, or explicit animal imagery Marlow uses to refer to them. These however are all merely local instances of a single underlying desire to “set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifested”. (Achebe 2005, 337) To serve as the antithesis against which the white civilization could compare and call itself progressive and enlightened, Achebe claims, both Africa and Africans are presented by Conrad as the symbol of the evolutionary past which the Europeans have luckily left behind in their progressive development towards higher humanity, but which, unfortunately, has left traces in their subconscious of which they do not want to be reminded. The words monster and monstrous are what Achebe finds most offensive in *Heart of Darkness*: the horror Marlow feels at his discovery of common humanity he shares with monstrous natives, like the suggestion that the monstrous passions Kurtz succumbed to were the effect of his contact with the jungle and its inhabitants, constitute, for Achebe, the most indisputable proof of Conrad's racism. He quotes the key passage:

We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there - there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were - No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it - this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. Thy howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity - like yours - the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. (Conrad 1993, 51).

This certainly reflects Darwin's theory of evolution, but the implications it acquires in the novel as a whole must, I believe, be distinguished from the uses made of *The Origin of the Species* in the prevailing ideology of race and empire, whether openly genocidal or benevolent<sup>64</sup>. Instances of the former are abundantly documented in

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<sup>64</sup> It is important to note, in fact, that racist theories did not derive necessarily from Darwin's work. It was, on the contrary, the theory of the origin and extinction of species that was appropriated a posteriori to give 'scientific' justification to the already strong racist discourse invented to serve the European genocidal expansionism. First articulated



Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, all coming from European famous philosophers and humanists, who were quite frank about their murderous intentions.<sup>65</sup> Most of the time, however, the colonial

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in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the quasi-biological, genetic foundation for racial hierarchy replaced the hitherto religious arguments and became fully established with John Knox's *The Races of Men* in 1850, with the Anglo-Saxon assigned the top and African Negroes the bottom line on the scale. But the view that the extermination of the 'lower, flawed races' by the higher and civilized was a biological necessity, and the racial violence it unleashed, became possible only after the revolution of the rifle from roughly 1854 through 1870 to 1890, was complete, and steam-driven boats armed with canons ensured an absolute technological advantage, enabling the colonizers to whet their appetites for as much loot as possible. From that moment on, Sven Lindquist writes, Africans were doomed. Fighting against European weapons the Africans did not have and knew nothing about, they had no chance even when they offered the strongest and most courageous military resistance to the British forces, as the African Dervishes did in the battle of Omdurman in Sudan in 1898. They were crushed, with eleven thousand Sudanese killed in battle and without any of the 16 thousand wounded spared, while the British lost only 48 men. The victory was won by the superior weapons and cannons, which prevented the Sudanese from getting closer than three hundred yards from the British soldiers, a distance at which their own weapons were quite useless. Translating this military superiority into intellectual superiority Winston Churchill, the celebrated English hero, and later winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, was able to write in 1930:

Thus ended the battle of Omdurman – the most signal triumph ever gained by the arms of science over barbarians. Nothing like the battle of Omdurman will ever be seen again...It was not like The Great War. Nobody expected to be killed... To the great mass of those who took part in the little wars of Britain in those vanished light-hearted days, this was only a sporting element in a splendid game. (In Lindquist 2007, 67)

In *Heart of Darkness*, written a year after the battle of Omdurman, Conrad's Marlow contemplates the European newly developed "art of killing at a distance" in one of the book's key scenes: The French man-of-war shelling the African coastal area - a necessary maneuver, he is informed, against the "invisible enemy" - strikes Marlow like some "lugubrious drollery," "as unreal as everything else - as the philanthropic pretense of the whole concern, as their talk, as their government, as their show of work." (35) The scene is enough to suggest the vastly different conclusions drawn from the evolutionary premise by the current racist and imperialist ideologies and by Marlow. If Conrad did occasionally resort to the evolutionary trope, it was, despite Marlow's initial, tentative and conditional condoning of the imperialist project, ultimately an argument *against* "the fantastic invasion."

<sup>65</sup> Thus the French humanist Ernest Renan was as explicit as Hitler about the necessity of subjugation of the non-white and non-European people. In the hierarchy he elaborated, the Chinese and the Negroes were the race of workers and land tillers, and inherently servants of the European noble race of masters and soldiers. As a

discourse served to conceal the real motives and actual genocidal practices in the colonies behind nice sounding statements of noble intentions. Even if some of those prophesying goodwill did not pretend, but honestly believed in “white man’s burden,” the beneficial purpose was still built on racist assumptions, and, as Achebe was among the first to point out, perpetuated racial stereotypes of the mystical and dangerous Other, a pre-human creature so low on the evolutionary ladder that he had yet to acquire proper cultural forms of life, including language, law or sense of justice and morality, which he could do so only with the infinitely patient effort and benevolence of the “civilized” Europeans. Usually the two kinds of racist attitudes coexisted, overlapping secretly, the conscious benevolent attitude screening the deeper unconscious murderous hatred. This is why it was very easy to forget the noble intentions and, from an ignorant creature in need of help, see in a native a deformed and corrosive element which destroyed whatever came into contact with him, and hence better exterminated for the sake of human progress.

This is the second narrative, of Kurtz’s degradation and fall – but it is not to be identified with the narrator’s own point of view. In fact, the nearer Marlow gets to Kurtz the greater is his moral distance from the colonial enterprise and indeed from the illusions he temporarily seems to have entertained about European superiority,

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result, Renan writes in *La Reforme Intellectuelle et Morale*, we must strive “not to equality but to domination. The country of a foreign race must become once again a country of serfs, of agricultural laborers, or industrial workers. It is not a question of eliminating the inequalities among men but of widening them and making them into a law”. (In Césaire 2000: 35)

Another among the examples listed by Césaire is Carl Siger, author of an *Essai sur la colonisation* (Paris, 1907), where he openly advocated the use of repression and violence in the colonies, which he viewed as places appropriate for the ‘civilized’ whites to give vent to their sadistic inclinations towards the Other. The gratification of these urges would be condemned in the ‘civilized’ Europe, but deserved all approval if practiced away from home. Siger says:

The new countries [colonies] offer a vast field for individual, violent activities which, in the metropolitan countries, would run up against certain prejudices, against a sober and orderly conception of life, and which, in the colonies, have greater freedom to develop and, consequently, to affirm their worth. Thus to a certain extent the colonies can serve as a safety valve for modern society. Even if this were their only value, it would be immense. (Césaire 2000, 41-42)

until at the final meeting, having intercepted Kurtz's attempt to escape from the boat and crawl back to the native fires, listening to his grandiloquent and insane plans, Marlow pronounces one of those uncompromising judgments on western civilization that lead Lionel Trilling to identify hostility to culture as the distinguishing element of literary modernism: the secret ailment of this seemingly wonderful specimen, the best Europe could offer, is the madness of soul: more precisely the tragic split between his intelligence, which was perfectly lucid and his soul which was mad. It is true that the question how and why Kurtz's soul went mad is never answered unequivocally, yet despite references to "forgotten and brutal instincts", "the memory of gratified and monstrous passions," awakened by the wilderness, on which Achebe's denunciation of the book as racist rests, a careful reading reveals that his soul has been latently mad all along and that its madness is a European disease.

To resist Achebe's compelling argument, one has to attend to the distinction Marlow makes between two kinds of restraint. He often seems to imply that what Kurtz lacked, crucially, is the external restraint – far from Europe, with 'the butcher and the policemen'; the whisper of public opinion round the corner, Kurtz is free to do as he pleases. Yet at the same time as he suggests it, Marlow also subverts any easy conclusion that the reason for Kurtz's unlawful behavior is his separation from civilization. For in the absence of these external prohibitions to ensure impeccable behavior, the only thing to fall back on is an inner restraint. It is not a matter of education, or principle, it is not acquired, Marlow insists, but an inborn strength, our core humanity - what the psychologist Alice Miller calls "crucial prerequisite of sympathy and understanding" (Miller 1983, 6), and what life within culture has destroyed in Kurtz: a sane, uncorrupted soul, that which, according to an increasing number of anthropologists, constituted the species' erstwhile identity and which still enables one to feel a 'sense of distant kinship' with all humanity<sup>66</sup>. Rimbaud similarly re-

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<sup>66</sup> Authors such as Sven Lindquist and Alice Miller provide insights that support this interpretation. They have established the missing link between the savage disciplinary measures used in the colonies and the soul murder committed legally by the practice of 'poisonous pedagogy at home, a sadistically strict upbringing whose purpose was to break the children's will, repress natural emotions, and make them unquestionably

discovered his soul not as that which sets him apart, as his Christian teachers instructed him, but that which connects one living being with another across all boundaries of race and color. “I am a nigger, I am a beast”, Rimbaud exclaimed in defiance of the entire European tradition and its conception of the self so eloquently and so horrifyingly embodied in Conrad’s Kurtz. (In Wilson 1959, 276) “The whole of Europe contributed to the making of Mr. Kurtz,” Marlow has noted earlier in the book: the larger implications of this comment, initially confined to Kurtz’s personal genealogy, have by this culminating point in the novel become clear. The godlike, arrogant eloquence of Kurtz’s humanitarian statement of purpose in the pamphlet on the suppression of savage customs, - which first filled Marlow with foreboding - and the post script, scribbled later, - “Exterminate all the brutes” - can now, as Marlow listens to Kurtz’s final outburst of sincerity, be seen as a discourse of delirium projecting European philosophical and religious dichotomies, its idealistic exclusions. Having severed all the ties with his fellow men, indeed having “kicked himself loose from the earth,” Kurtz has reduced himself to the “hollow sham” with nothing left inside but the crave to overpower and possess.

Before he actually meets him, Marlow distinguishes Kurtz from the faithless pilgrims, but it turns out now that Kurtz too was motivated by greed. He “has collected, bartered, swindled, or stolen

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obedient. The result was violent and (self)destructive behavior sampled in Miller’s study by Hitler, a serial child-killer, and a suicidal drug addict. Lindquist on his part associated the birch whip his father used for punishments to the *chicotte*, the deadly instrument of corporal punishment used for the ineffectual black slaves in the Congo. Among the techniques of the poisonous pedagogy, Miller enlists humiliation and prohibition against anger. Because experiencing rage is successfully blocked, its victims need to live it out later: it transforms into a conscious hatred that can be self-destructive or directed against substitute people and released in the manner which is partly tolerated by the society - such as controlled sadism in raising their own children, or uncontrollable violence against “inferior” human beings in the colonies. Here is the implied, if not stated, genesis of Mr. Kurtz’s madness of soul. There are no references in Conrad to Kurtz’s childhood and what he might have suffered then, because we are offered only the finished product. Nevertheless, the discrepancy between Kurtz in Europe and Kurtz in the Congo, as well as the fact that he is capable of inflicting such brutal punishments on the natives, indicate that his monstrous passions are not the call of nature, but the effect of culture: that his violent behavior in Africa is a projection of what had been violated in himself.

more ivory than all the other agents together” (67), thus betraying his less material aspirations. Kurtz’s greed is not merely for material possession though, but suggests a kind of perverted metaphysics. Marlow’s first sight of Kurtz is of a bald man with a high forehead, and white as ivory, with his mouth wide open, “as if he wanted to devour everything around him.... You should have heard him say, ‘My ivory.’ Oh, yes, I heard him. ‘My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my—’ everything belonged to him”. (70) It is this metaphysics of greed that explains Kurtz’s presiding over the unspeakable rites that some critics believe included cannibalism, and also the urge behind his cry directed at the African wilderness: “Oh, but I will wring your heart yet!”(90) In this possessiveness, Kurtz is paradigmatic of the entire patriarchal tradition, whose ontology, writes Baudrillard, has always been governed by a predatory impulse. As opposed to the archaic human communities where social life revolved around the concepts of “give” and “exchange”, the life in the western society has always been shaped by the need to “take, grab, kill, devour”. (Baudrillard, 93) This is the deepest motivating power behind Kurtz’s relationship to the natives, to ivory, and to the wilderness itself

Thus what for Achebe constitutes the chief evidence of Conrad’s racism – “Marlow’s disquieting sense of distant kinship”– can, with proper adjustment of perspective, be read as his most valuable contribution to the imperialist counter-discourse, articulated in terms of non-Eurocentric humanist ethics as described by Erich Fromm in his *A Man for Himself*, and involving a concept of an inherent, biologically provided script of moral behavior – that which Kurtz has lost and Marlow preserved. It is true that, unlike Rimbaud, Marlow is first appalled, rather than ecstatic, about his kinship with prehistoric humanity, but this is the result of what Fromm, like E. Said, attributes to the inevitable cultural filter through which each new experience passes before we can know it. Conrad (like Freud, who, according to Trilling, discovered the darkness, but did not endorse it!) belonged to his rationalist culture to the extent that unfamiliar native customs, like manifestations of insanity, struck him as incomprehensible frenzy. Yet he was sufficiently a man ahead of his time to subject these culturally conditioned impressions to intuitive critical scrutiny and modify them: As the journey progresses, and Marlow’s illusions

about Europe wither, he begins to compare favorably the conduct of the natives to that of the white colonizers. Thus he observes in the behavior of the black crew the capacity for self-restraint so horribly missing in their white masters. Appalled by Kurtz's cruel excesses, he feels "at one bound to have been transported into some lightless region of subtle horrors, where pure, uncomplicated savagery was a positive relief, being something that had a right to exist- obviously- in the sunshine." Most significantly, in view of Achebe's objections to Conrad as purveyor of comfortable myths of white supremacy, Marlow learns to hear in the noise of the native drums a signal of a message as meaningful potentially as the church bells of Europe – thus hinting at an alternative, only partly acknowledged by Said, beyond the imperialist self-enclosed exclusionary narrative.

One of the narrative strategies used by Conrad to "make the reader see" beyond this closure is the subversion throughout the novel of the conventional white/black and light/dark symbolic contrasts. Conrad plays with these terms by reversing the traditional chromatic meanings built into the prejudice of white superiority, until, by the time he finishes his story, the last words – "the heart of immense darkness" – have accrued meanings that go beyond "the uttermost ends of the earth" in whose direction the Thames is now flowing, and evoke the "whited sepulcher" of Brussels – an image of central darkness superficially whitewashed - "the mournful gloom" gathered above the "monstrous city" of London, and Kurtz's own discourse, delivering not light but "the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness".

### *... and Naipaul's*

V. S. Naipaul's relation to Conrad has been established on the basis of several obvious, but external analogies. Born in Trinidad, during the British colonial rule, but of Hindu origin, the recipient of the scholarship that enabled him to study at Oxford, Naipaul identified himself with Conrad, another expatriate settling down in Britain after years spent sailing to the far ends of the world. Both outsiders, they are sometimes seen as travel writers drawing inspiration for fiction

from their own experiences. The life in (post)colonial societies, seen from the standpoint of neither colonizer nor colonized, but a neutral third party, is a theme, according to some critics and Naipaul himself, common to the fiction and essays of both. In the Nobel Prize press release from October 11 2001, Naipaul, the author of travelogues and fiction about the Caribbean, India, African and Near East countries, was called “Conrad’s heir as the annalist of the destinies of empires in the moral sense: what they do to human beings,” the implication being that they are equally committed to the exposure of hidden truths.

Yet the imagery of “darkness” Naipaul borrows from Conrad to suggest further their thematic bond lacks the rich and subversive ambiguity it has in Conrad’s work, and serves mainly to project Naipaul’s increasingly bleak and hopeless vision of post-colonial societies. Thus Naipaul’s trip to India in 1962 resulted in the book *An Area of Darkness*, a pessimistic depiction of post-colonial India, while from his later trip and stay in Africa came the novels and essays that gave ground for observations, in a *Guardian* review of his work, that Naipaul’s vision of the post-colonial world darkened as he embraced the “two spheres of darkness” which he came to see as his subject: the childhood world of an ancestral India, and the colonial world beyond his West Indian upbringing” (Jaggi: 2001a) As a rule, the anarchy, greed, corruption, and civil wars in those regions covered by the word darkness seem to be inherent to native traditions, rather than to their violent disruption by the overly maligned imperialists

In the most explicit reference to Conrad, his essay “Conrad’s Darkness and Mine”, Naipaul complains that he cannot write as freely as great European novelists because he never had the advantage of living in organized society:

My colonial world was more mixed and secondhand, and more restricted. The time came when I began to ponder the mystery - Conradian word - of my own background: that island in the mouth of a great South American river, the Orinoco, one of the Conradian dark places of the earth, where my father had conceived literary ambitions for himself and then for me, but from which, in my mind, I had stripped all romance and perhaps even reality. (Naipaul 2003, 111)

Analyzing Conrad’s fiction in the same essay, he immediately discovered, or thought he had discovered, the proper explanation

for the problems of his post-colonial society. Conrad, in his view, provided an honest vision of the so-called half-made societies which are destined to fail in their development:

The new politics, the curious reliance of men on institutions they were yet working to undermine, the simplicity of beliefs, and the hideous simplicity of actions, the corruption of causes, half-made societies that seemed doomed to remain half-made: these were the things that began to preoccupy me. They were not things from which I could detach myself. And I found that Conrad—sixty years before, in the time of a great peace—had been everywhere before me. Not as a man with a cause, but a man offering, as in *Nostramo*, a vision of the world's half-made societies as places which continuously made and unmade themselves, where there was no goal, and where always "something inherent in the necessities of successful action ... carried with it the moral degradation of the idea." Dismal, but deeply felt: a kind of truth and half a consolation. (Naipaul, 213, 112)

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*A Bend in the River*, inspired by Naipaul's journeys to Zaire, the former Congo, in 1965 and 1966, projects this mistaken and limited view of both Conradian mysteries and African realities. The title is itself a quote from *Heart of Darkness* and it opens appropriately with the protagonist Salim sailing, like Marlow, up an unnamed river to the interior of an unidentified African country. Both travel to the innermost region of the continent where they reach certain understanding of the circumstances in which they find themselves: Marlow witnessing the horrors of colonial rule, and Salim testifying to what he sees as the horror of African independence.

Salim, Indian born and raised on the Eastern coast of Africa, suffers a sense of displacement that mirrors Naipaul's own problem with cultural identity. Like Naipaul, an Indian outsider in the Caribbean, and later in Britain, he has to choose between cultural traditions the one he will bond to and, again like Naipaul, he embraces Europe. Disappointed with the ineffectiveness, passivity, lack of national self-confidence and vigor of his Hindu community in East Africa, resigned as they are to historical defeat and reduced to quiet struggle for mere physical survival between two conflicting social forces, European and African, Salim feels that he must strive for his own interest as



an individual. His wealthy and educated friend Indar goes to study in England; Salim, deprived of these privileges, decides to follow in the steps of his Europeanized uncle Nazruddin and accepts an offer to buy a shop in a city ‘at a bend of the river,’ seeking, ironically, the advantages of modern Europe in the heart of dark Africa. As Salim immediately informs the readers, the country, having won its independence, is reverting fast to pre-colonial chaos, in which the town, once a European settlement, has been all but destroyed. The European suburb was burnt down in one of the first insurrections, and the bush, which to Salim suggests an antithesis of civilization, is taking over.

What remains of the former European settlement are the abandoned houses, stripped of what the Africans needed, and crumbling. This, together with the sight of the lawns and gardens left unattended, a monument knocked down, and the names of the streets changed after the independence, is what specially irritates Salim. The Africans did all they could to rid themselves of the symbols of colonial intrusion, but he perceives it as a consequence of the deep, incomprehensible rage, something essentially African, rather than the effect of the brutal foreign rule endured for years. His hopes of Africa’s modernization wither: observing the site in ruins, he feels it is “a place where the future had come and gone” (Naipaul 1989, Part One, chap. 2)<sup>67</sup>. It is not only that the traces of past violence are still visible everywhere, what makes matters worse is that the country is on the verge of another war, the anticipation of the conflict and bloodshed that will erupt towards the end of the novel causing Salim a sense of deep insecurity

In the meantime, however, despite all his premonitions, Salim seems to be doing pretty well as a shop keeper in a city temporarily inhabited, once again, by people from all parts of the world. His devotion to business is only one facet of his general point of view, which has been correctly identified as that of European petit bourgeois. (Raja 2005: 224-239) Hence his individualism, his primary interest in being a businessman, irrespective of whether it is in Africa, or somewhere else, as long as rebellions and turmoil of any kind do not

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<sup>67</sup> All references are to the 1989 Kindle edition of the novel.

disrupt peace and safety indispensable to the prosperity of a merchant. It certainly explains his very few willing alliances with the natives, above all, his cooperation with an African woman named Zabeth, a *marchande*, his regular customer and business partner.

In relationships to other characters, Salim also projects a range of stereotype images characteristic of white puritan middle class male. They all involve an emotionally defective attitude to the other (ranging from indifference to scorn and hatred), no matter whether the other is defined in terms of class, race, or sex. When his family sends him their former slave, a young Hindu-African named Ali, whom everyone in the town start calling Metty (a version of the French word *métis* for a person of mixed racial origin), to take care of him, Salim is not excited, but accepts him as a servant. Metty's transformation from slave to his servant allows Salim to remain in the role of the master, which he understands as a natural privilege of the man of superior class and race. He also considers Metty's position a privilege, or good luck, for a person of his class and mixed race. He considers Metty lazy and unreliable by nature, and spoilt by mostly unearned material support and care he has received both from his well-meaning Hindu owners, and now from Salim. Thus, in his attitude to slavery, Salim reproduces the European rationalization of what has been its greatest crime against humanity as a form of protectorate. Meditating on the history of slavery, particularly the way black natives from the interior were captured by European slave hunters and transported to the coast, Salim imagines the captives "positively anxious to step into the boats and be taken to safe homes across the sea." (Part One, chap. 1) The same, or even more generously protective, is the role assigned by Salim to the Hindu slave-holding immigrants living on the eastern coast of Africa:

To an African, a child of the forest, who had marched down hundreds of miles from the interior and was far from his village and tribe, the protection of a foreign family was preferable to being alone among strange and unfriendly Africans. This was one reason why the trade went on long after it had been outlawed by the European powers; and why, at the time when the Europeans were dealing in one kind of rubber, my grandfather could still occasionally deal in another. This was also the reason why a secret slavery continued on the coast until the other

day. The slaves, or the people who might be considered slaves, wanted to remain as they were. (Part One, chap. 1)

As a definer of Salim's racial and class views, the most significant among his acquaintances is Zabeth's son Ferdinand. Brought to the town to study at the lyc ee where he can get white man's education, and live a different and better life, the boy arouses deep and manifold resentments in Salim. Like any puritan believing in hard-won rewards, Salim envies the education Ferdinand (and other young Africans) receives at the polytechnic, without having had to make any effort to obtain this privilege.

Yet I couldn't help thinking how lucky Ferdinand was, how easy it had been made for him. You took a boy out of the bush and you taught him to read and write; you leveled the bush and built a polytechnic and you sent him there. It seemed as easy as that, if you came late to the world and found ready-made those things that other countries and peoples had taken so long to arrive at - writing, printing, universities, books, knowledge. The rest of us had to take things in stages. I thought of my own family, Nazruddin, myself - we were so clogged by what the centuries had deposited in our minds and hearts. Ferdinand, starting from nothing, had with one step made himself free, and was ready to race ahead of us. (Part One, chap.5)

Second, he distrusts the *kind* of education Ferdinand gets at both the lyc ee and the polytechnic and its effects on Ferdinand's infantile African mind. As Ferdinand grows up, Salim ruminates resentfully, he will be taught to develop ideals about his society as rising and developing towards complete and proud self-sufficiency, which will become simplified and jumbled in the boy's mind. For Salim, Ferdinand is the new kind of post-colonial African, who find themselves important and evolved, while missing any stable and mature identity. Wearing a blazer and striking different poses, in imitation of his various teachers, Ferdinand appears to him as unreal, an outward affectation covering an inner void:

When I had considered him a mystery, distant and mocking behind his mask-like face, I had seen him as a solid person. Now I felt that his affectations were more than affectations, that his personality had become fluid. I began to feel that there was nothing there, and the

thought of a lycée full of Ferdinands made me nervous. (Part One, chap. 4)

Finally, Ferdinand's idea of his own importance unsettles Salim because he believes it is threatening. He suspects that, with a generation of Ferdinands about, "there wasn't going to be security for anyone in the country." Ferdinand's quiet demand that he should pay his trip and studies in America infuriates Salim because the attitude Ferdinand's expectation implies is that "I owed him something simply because I was willing to help." Salim's indignation at the suggestion of his debt to any African, although more acceptable perhaps, nevertheless echoes the Europeans' persistent and shameless denial of any responsibility for Africa's contemporary plight and their steady arrogant refusal, as at the Conference in Durban in 2001, to even consider the need to pay the due reparations.

Salim's unreserved respect is saved for one person though, Father Huismans, the European scholar and the head of the lycée in the town at the bend of the river. His presence is comforting, because his attitudes, interests, and knowledge make the town "less barren". Passionately interested in the old African culture, Father Huismans (Naipaul's corrective version of Kurtz?) often disappears in the African interior, exploring and collecting traditional masks and other relics of African heritage. While admiring them, Father Huismans is also convinced that they are remnants of a culture doomed to extinction: necessary to keep as symbols of "true Africa he saw as dying or about to die." Like a proper Social Darwinist, quite sure of European superiority, he sees no alternative to its disappearance before the more advanced white Christian culture. Hence, worried as he is about the past, he has no anxiety about the present, or the future of the country. He anticipates what he calls temporary setbacks in its development towards the European ideal, but has no doubt that "the civilization of Europe would always become a little more secure at the bend in the river; the town would always start up again, and would grow a little more each time." (Part One, Ch. 4)

Thus Salim's appreciation of Father Huismans' work is inseparable from the milder form of evolutionary racism the two men have in common. Salim is grateful to Europeans for providing the history and knowledge to which Africans themselves (much as his

Hindu ancestors in Africa) pay little attention, distracted as they are, according to Salim, by inter-tribal wars. Unaware of what was most valuable in their own culture, Africans should be happy, he feels, to entrust it to their European ‘betters,’ who know how to appreciate and preserve what was best in it before, ironically, their own countrymen destroy it all in the name of progress.

The fact that Father Huismans is murdered during one of his trips to the villages in the interior, his body mutilated, and the head placed on a stake – in, one suspects, deliberate reversal of the reprisals meted out by Mr. Kurtz - only proves to Salim how ungrateful, and indeed, how unconscious the African freedom fighters are of the value of their own art and history. It does not occur to Salim that the rebels who kill Father Huismans consider his work of collecting African relics an insult to the African religion, because it represents a reduction of the living symbols participating in the spiritual processes enacted in tribal rituals, to mere artifacts, meaningless dead things gathering dust, or, even worse, a theft, a pile of extravagant objects that visitors take and scatter around the world. On the contrary, Father Huismans’ tragic end adds to Salim’s building impression that any attempt by the well-meaning whites to civilize Africa is futile.

It is not only racial prejudice that Salim shares with his model white culture, but also patriarchal attitudes towards women. Conspicuously contemptuous of the women around him, he shows certain respect for Zabeth as a businesswoman, but refers to others as indiscriminately promiscuous, either because of unbridled lust, or because they need money. Both for him indicate an absence of moral standards, but this again provides *him* with a moral alibi when he feels the urge to visit the brothel to gratify, as he confesses himself, his “fantasies of conquest with the woman as the willing victim, the accomplice in her own degradation”(Book II, ix). If this is his manner of assuring that he is a man, it is also a familiar psychoanalytical scenario underlying the archetypal western puritan manhood.

The African women are not the only ones on whom Salim projects patriarchal prejudices. He starts a relationship with Yvette, a European wife of his acquaintance Raymond he meets at the Domain, where the very few Africans who had the benefit of university education can mix with European intellectuals on seemingly equal terms. The

relationship is pleasing at first, because she belongs to the world of well-off, influential white intellectual elite favored by the current native government, whose ambition is to reproduce in the African periphery the cultural glamour of the metropolis. The attempt strikes Salim as sad and pointless at first, but he soon finds he enjoys the sophisticated atmosphere there, the significant part of which is Yvette. Yet, with the deterioration of the political situation, and the new rising tide of violence, their relationship disintegrates and he ends up seeing in her, not another casualty of colonial history, but, as a critic noted, one of those women who do not allow a man to think clearly and make timely decisions, but prevent him from following his destiny (King, 1993). As in his former relationships with prostitutes, his deep seated scorn and hatred of women surface, he beats her, and in final humiliation, spits on her genitals.

After this episode closes, the novel focuses on the direct political criticism of the independent African state, with the tyrannical Big Man as a key to the general moral and social deterioration. Rebellions break out, are suppressed, attempts are made to normalize or even improve the social life, yet beneath the thin illusion of normality, sustained by Big Man's furious propaganda straining to preserve the appearance of nationalist government while continuing secretly to cooperate with foreign imperialist in the ruthless plunder of the country, the threat of new violence intensifies. In response to the false authoritarian nationalism, the Liberation Army attacks the police and army forces, calling the people to rebel against the regime and return to the authentic old Africa. Their leaflet is worth quoting in its entirety:

The ANCESTORS shriek. Many false gods have come to this land, but none have been as false as the gods of today. The cult of the woman of Africa kills all our mothers, and since war is an extension of politics we have decided to face the ENEMY with armed confrontation. Otherwise, we all die forever. The ancestors are shrieking. If we are not deaf, we can hear them. By ENEMY we mean the powers of imperialism, the multi-nationals and the puppet powers that be, the false gods, the capitalists, the priests and teachers who give false interpretations. The law encourages crime. The schools teach ignorance and people practice ignorance in preference to their true culture. Our soldiers and guardians have been given false desires and false greeds and the

foreigners now qualify us everywhere as thieves. We are ignorant of ourselves and mislead ourselves. We are marching to death. We have forgotten the TRUTHFUL LAWS. We of the LIBERATION ARMY have received no education. We do not print books and make speeches. We only know the TRUTH, and we acknowledge this land as the land of the people whose ancestors now shriek over it. OUR PEOPLE must understand the struggle. They must learn to die with us. (Part Three, chap. 14)

The justice of their appeal, still less of their violence, is not acknowledged by Salim, nor apparently Naipaul, although it has been forcefully and famously defended in such important post-colonial texts as Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fleeing to London is search of safety, but soon driven back by the outsider's sense of marginal life there, Salim returns to Africa, keeping intact his belief that

...it [Europe] still fed us in a hundred ways with its language and sent us its increasingly wonderful goods, things which, in the bush of Africa, added year by year to our idea of who we were, gave us that idea of our modernity and development, and made us aware of another Europe — the Europe of great cities, great stores, great buildings, great universities. To that Europe only the privileged or the gifted among us journeyed (Part Three, chap. 15).

The contrast with comparable passages from Conrad – Marlow's memory of European cities as images of central, grave-like or hellish darkness - is complete. Appropriately enough Salim's narrative ends, as it began, recalling Conrad's Marlow. Yet the final inter-textual allusion works by contrast once again, producing semantic dissonance. Aboard a steamer, in flight from the "the great chaos coming," Salim leaves behind the shop, the town at the bend of the river, the noise and turmoil of war spilling along the banks, and plunges into the silent darkness far from the battle area. The last words, though, are the opposite of Conrad's, suggesting a desire on Naipaul's part to distance himself decisively from the ambiguous implications clinging to the image he has so far appropriated illegitimately for his own narrative and political purposes:

The steamer started up again and moved without lights down the river, away from the area of battle. The air would have been full of moths and

flying insects. The searchlight, while it was on, had shown thousands, white in the white light. (Part Four, Chap. 17)

The final change of direction from “impenetrable darkness” to “the white light,” serves the same purpose as the evasion of historical specificity throughout the novel: quite contrary from Conrad’s notorious vagueness, which depersonalized concrete Africans turning them into a symbolic backdrop against which to reveal and explore Europe’s abysmal moral failures, both Naipaul’s vagueness about facts and symbolic redirection towards white light are his contribution to a current massive historical revision and moral rehabilitation of European (post)colonial traditions. Not that the corrupt regime in the Independent Congo (for this is where we are, would anyone have guessed!) is the author’s invention: history *has* shown that dictators like Naipaul’s Big Man have governed the African countries. The state under the leadership of Mobutu Sese Seko (easily identified behind the anonymous Big Man) *was* corrupt, he *was* a despotic tyrant, and avarice *was* his and his men’s chief motive. But instead of providing a comprehensive historical explanation for this corruption, Salim/Naipaul chooses to focus on the violence and general anarchy and, attributing them to the liberation movements that demand a recreation of African indigenous traditions, dismiss the latter as untenable, indeed as validating the racist theory about the African dependency complex.

This myth, still cherished in the West, is endorsed in Naipaul’s novel not so much by what he says, as by what he fails to mention. It is the suppression of due information that distorts his presentation of the post-colonial Congo, and The Third World in general. Other commentators have also found Naipaul guilty of sins of omission. Salman Rushdie, for example, has demonstrated that Naipaul’s truth is “highly selective, a novelist’s truth masquerading as objective reality.” (Rushdie 1992, 374) This is in reference to Naipaul’s representation of the Islamic revival in Iran and another three Asian countries, in his travel book *Among the Believers*. Many dreadful things are done nowadays in the name of Islam, Rushdie admits, but there is immensely more to the Islamic traditions, just as its current fundamentalist revival cannot be understood without the analysis of the Western poisonous interference. Yet the book elides “everything that can’t be blistered by Naipaul’s famous Olympian disgust”, his deliberate simplification of



issues making *Among the Believers*, for all its brilliance of observation and depiction, a rather superficial book.

The same can be said of *A Bend in the River*. Naipaul passes in silence the real historical alternatives open to the Congo on the eve of its independence, and the criminal and shameful role of western powers in suppressing it. The name of Patrice Lumumba, whose program for the development of the free country was the unity of the tribes, and beyond it, the vision of the unified pan-African continent, in full possession of the resources the Europeans had appropriated and exploited as their own for so long – has been erased from the novel's memory. The silence about the conspiracy of world bankers, the Belgians, the CIA, President Eisenhower and the bribed black politicians surrounding Lumumba to destroy both him and the free Congo, demonstrates Naipaul's unforgivable will to ignorance; as does the failure already mentioned to provide the specific historical origin of what he prefers to describe as chaotic violence in the years following Lumumba's death. Rather than a result of the Africans' immaturity and dependency complex, the conflicts were initiated by a 'radical social movement for a "second independence," which arose to challenge the neocolonial state and its pro-western leadership. This mass movement of peasants, workers, the urban unemployed, students and lower civil servants found an eager leadership among Lumumba's lieutenants, most of whom had regrouped to establish a National Liberation Council (CNL) in October 1963'. (Nzologa-Ntalaja, 2011)

Comparing the painful contradictions of Conrad's narrative to Naipaul facile ironies, Said says:

But whereas Conrad wrote ... during a period of Europe's largely uncontested imperialist enthusiasm, contemporary novelists and filmmakers who have learned his ironies so well have done their work *after* decolonization, after the massive intellectual, moral, and imaginative overhaul and deconstruction of Western representation of the non-Western world, *after* the works of Frantz Fanon, ... *after* the novels and plays of Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Wole Soyinka, Salman Rushdie, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and many others. (Said 1994, xxi-xxii)

In fact, it is in Césaire's play *A Season in the Congo*, and, to add another name to the list, Barbara Kingsolver's novel *Poisonwood Bible*, that the anti-imperialist, as well as anti-racist, yet still empty narrative

space Said glimpses in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* becomes inhabited with living alternatives. Both provide a complete and accurate account of the Congo's post-colonial history, reinterpreting it in the light of the crucial period of the rise and downfall of Lumumba, and the preceding years of colonial oppression. The scope of this paper allows no more than a few brief observations. In both the central event is Lumumba's electrifying speech at the Proclamation of Independence, when he clearly dismissed any idea of collaboration with the former Belgian colonizers, or with the new 'democratic' US advisers, with their hawk's eyes riveted to the wealthy mines of the Congolese province of Katanga, and promised instead to make the Congo a place for justice, peace, and prosperity. It was this speech that doomed him. The responsibility of the European powers and of the USA leaders for this brutal murder, along with their motives, is evoked with painful detail. They demonstrate, in the memorable words of Césaire's Lumumba addressing his people after his arrest, how

faster than the lava pushes out of the volcano, a caste [is] born, of voracious and insatiable dogs, a caste of colonels and of new gentlemen, and it is that caste that has confiscated for their profit, for their own profit alone, the advantages that you had the right to expect from our Congolese revolution.(Césaire 2000, 116-117)<sup>68</sup>

Finally they expose the life under Mobutu's collaborationist government as a new form of colonial bondage: instead of *uhuru* (meaning real freedom to choose their future) promised by Lumumba, the Congolese got *dependa* (the uneducated Congolese' unwittingly apt distortion of the word *independence*, emphasizing the falsity of freedom it brought them). (Césaire 2000, 31, 93)

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<sup>68</sup> They provide a complete account of the conspiracy: In return for personal privileges guaranteed by the western allies, Moïse Tshombe effected the secession of Katanga, with Belgians lending the helping hand and supplying weapons and soldiers to the Katanga rebels, while the UN troops, to whom Lumumba had appealed for help, did nothing to resolve the situation. In the perverse way characteristic of European international politics, the blame was put on Lumumba himself: accused of being a Communist, and of causing chaos in the country, he was arrested in a *coup d'état* that Mobutu organized following the suggestion of an American advisor, who promised the general "everything" in return for this favor. Lumumba was transferred to Katanga, where he was beaten nearly to death, then shot, his dead body cut to pieces and burned, this gruesome operation carried out by Tshombe's black soldiers and their western allies.

A historical detail from *Poisonwood Bible* is especially distressing in this context. The episode takes place in the eighties and involves one of the narrators, Leah, coming across an issue of an old American magazine, dated February 18, 1961, containing an article in which the Americans were ‘informed’ of the current political situation in the Congo. There are photos, one showing Lumumba, with his pointed chin, as a demon threatening to corrupt and destroy the young country; the other is of Mobutu, looking out innocently and imploringly, like an unprotected child asking for help. At the time this was published in the USA, Lumumba had already been dead for a month. The article was obviously meant to manipulate the reading public, retroactively and post mortem, as it were, “manufacturing consent” to the criminal decision already reached and enacted – a “democratic” procedure to be repeated many times in the future operations the West would undertake to “liberate” the Third World from their totalitarian regimes.

Another telling and widely relevant detail in the novel concerns the global policy of new investments, which under the excuse of modernizing the Third World countries, have continued to deplete their natural resources, while ensuring their interminable economic enslavement. In an episode towards the end of *The Poisonwood Bible*, we learn of a new project in the Congo, undertaken in the 70s by a US firm in agreement with President Mobutu, allegedly for the benefit of the entire Congolese population. They proposed to finance a construction of an electric power line, connecting, through a vast inhospitable region of the jungle, the mouth of the Congo River to the mineral fields in Katanga. One of the protagonists of the novel records her justified suspicion, for in reality there is no need for such a grandiose construction, since there is enough energy from the nearby rivers to feed any power plant. The madness of the entire enterprise becomes obvious as every new section of the line is annulled by the collapse and decomposition of the already built sections, left behind to the eroding powers of the jungle, or to the natives to take what they need. In a passage reminiscent of Conrad, we read:

With no way to service a utility stretching across the heart of darkness, the engineers watched the monster’s tail crumble as fast as the front was erected. The whole of it was eventually picked clean in the way a forest tree gets cleaned by leaf-cutter ants: nuts, bolts, and anything

that might serve for roofing material trailed off into the jungle. Anyone could have predicted that exact failure. (Kingsolver 1998)

But, it was not madness, after all, as she realizes in the end, nor merely a misguided project, but a sinister business plan, carefully calculated NEVER to be accomplished, but to last interminably and thus justify billions of dollars of loans granted to the Congolese partners, with the sole intention of ensnaring the country into an interminable debt bondage paid in cobalt, diamonds, and other valuable ore<sup>69</sup>.

None of this is even hinted at in Naipaul's novel. Yet the true motives behind the conscious evasions and omissions that have become the trademark of his style cannot be masked, as this Nobel Prize winner seems to have attempted, by the posture of apolitical neutrality: "I tried to record the world accurately and without prejudice. To have a political view is to be prejudiced. I don't have a political view." (In Jaggi, 2001); nor by his cosmopolitan commitment instead to "our universal civilization," whose beautiful "idea of the pursuit of happiness," with so much contained in it – "the idea of the individual, responsibility, choice, the life of the intellect, the idea of vocation, and perfectibility, and achievement" – has finally come to a kind of fruition. (Naipaul, 1990) Has it really?! Even if we disregard the absurdity of thus identifying "our universal civilization" with the (irreparably compromised) national self-image incorporated in the US Constitution, the fact is, as Franz Fanon and Roland Barthes knew well, that all such universalist, "depoliticized" speech is both bewildering and politically heavily biased: when it enters

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<sup>69</sup> The colonial status of the officially independent African counties was prolonged by such acts as the contract forced on old French colonies, whereby those who signed it were obliged to continue paying the tax for the "civilizational benefits they received from their former colonial masters and are still enjoying". By the same contract they are obliged to keep their foreign reserves in the French Central Bank (from which they can retrieve only a small amount of money); to use the French language and French currency; to allow France to pre-deploy its troops and intervene militarily in their own country; while they themselves are forbidden to enter any alliances with other countries without the permission of France. Fourteen African countries are thus virtually still colonies, their resources plundered, their political will broken, their chance of true freedom completely eliminated, their soul all but murdered. Among those others besides Lumumba who tried to escape this humiliating arrangement, was the first president of Togo Sylvanus Olympio: *a coup* was plotted by the French and their proxies and the president was killed. (Koutonin, 2014)

the Third World intellectual's discourse, such as Naipaul's, it is a signal, in Said's words, that the author's interest is not at all in the Third World – which he never addresses – but in the metropolis, the approval of whose intellectuals he seems quite desperate to have, and which Naipaul has earned by transposing into his fiction and otherwise supporting what has been called the politics of “self-inflicted wounds.” (Said 1994, 53). It is in high demand these days, because it frees the intellectual and political elites of “our universal civilization” of the burden of that very virtue Naipaul so gallantly compliments them on – responsibility: with the sense of responsibility and guilt transferred conveniently to the colonial victims, the colonial masters can go on pursuing their “idea of happiness” in the appalling manner so faithfully documented by writers from Conrad to Césaire and Kingsolver.

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### Rezime:

## IZVEŠTAJI IZ 'SRCA TAME': KONRADOVA I NAJPOLOVA AFRIKA

Tematske veze koje spajaju Najpolove i Konradove romane dobro su poznate: na svog velikog prethodnika sam Najpol se pozivao u više navrata, aludirajući naslovima svojih publikacija na svoju pripadnost konradovskoj tradiciji. U književnim prikazima o Najpolu često se govori kao o 'Konradovom nasledniku i analitičaru imperijalnih sudbina', i kao nepristrasnom tumaču Trećeg sveta američkoj i britanskoj čitalačkoj publici. Najpolovi kritičari, s druge strane, osporavaju njegovim delima o postkolonijalnoj Africi svaku objektivnost, i smatraju ga promoterom mitova o superiornosti zapadne kulture koje je asimilovao zajedno sa obrazovanjem stečenim u Velikoj Britaniji. Uočavajući kontinuitet misli od Konrada do Najpola, neki od

njih, a najbeskompromisniji je Činua Ačebei, odbacuju oba ova autora, zbog rasizma koji navodno obojica podjednako projektuju u svojim romanima. Svrha ovog rada je da pokaže da su obe ove interpretacije neodržive. Oslanjajući se na uvide iz studije Edvarda Saida, *Kultura i imperijalizam*, u radu nastojim da ukažem na suštinski različite predstave o Africi (i Evropi) u izabranim romanima ova dva pisca: jer ako *Srce tame* sadrži povremene nagoveštaje evolucionističke teze o afričkim starosedeočima kao otelovljenju 'divljaštva' koje su Evropljani u svom kulturnom razvoju prevazišli ali koje još uvek vrebaju u dubljoj tmini 'civilizovanog' uma, Konrad je praktično jedini pisac svoga doba koji je na osnovu tih uvida izrekao nedvosmisleni osudu evropskog kolonijalnog projekta, i moralnih dostignuća (odnosno pada) celokupne evropske kulture. U romanu *Okuka na reci*, koji je nastao nakon 'radikalnog moralnog i imaginativnog zaokreta i dekonstrukcije zapadnih predstava ne-zapadnog sveta', Najpol nastoji da rekreira konradovske simbolične slike tame da bi opravdao tekuću imperijalističku politiku u Kongu i da bi u širem smislu potvrdio evropske vrednosti. Kao primer drugačije, objektivne, suštinski konradovske slike (post)kolonijalnog Konga, i kao istinsko svedočanstvo o udelu zapadnih sila u političkom scenariju koji je kratkotrajno obećanje slobode preinačio u trajno dužničko ropstvo, u zaključku rada dati su osvrti na roman *Biblija otrovne masline* Barbare Kingsolver i dramu *Jedna sezona u Kongu* Eme Sezera.

2015.



# „ŠTA SE TO DESILO SA MODERNIZMOM?“: TRADICIJA MODERNIZMA U ROMANU G DŽONA BERDŽERA

Objavljen pre gotovo jednog veka, esej T. S. Eliota „Tradicija i individualni Talenat“ nije nimalo izgubio na značaju. Uvidi formulisani u tom tekstu – o književnosti kao dinamičkoj strukturi u kojoj prošlost i sadašnjast simultano egzistiraju uzajamno se modifikujući, o pesničkom identitetu kao procesu samootkrivanja i samoprevazilaženja u kontekstu „žive“ tradicije, i iznad svega, o „istorijskom čulu“, ili „smislu za istoriju“ (*historical sense*), neophodnom da se, unutar složenog kulturnog nasleđa, živa tradicija, sposobna za kreativnu obnovu u sadašnjosti, razluči od onoga što je mrtva forma, ili književna stranputica – iako prevashodno namenjeni književnoj analizi, takođe su oduvek imali i širu kulturološku upotrebljivost. U tom širem smislu oni su danas, u eri postmoderne amnezije, aktuelniji nego ikad. Svedoci smo blatantnih revizija istorije, kojima se promovišu po ogromnu većinu čovečanstva pogubne tradicije, a spasonosne duhovne i političke alternative diskredituju. Primeri smišljenog falsifikovanja istorije i proizvodnje istorijskog zaborava brojni su, različiti po stepenu sofisticiranosti, počev od političkih stereotipa koje neumorno recikliraju mediji, do „po-mo“ teorija potkrepljenih intelektualnim manipulacijama koje se neguju u akademskom miljeu.

Jedan nasumičan i banalni primer (inače slučajni povod ovom radu) jeste epizoda redovnog kontakt programa na RTV Kopernikus iz marta 2012. Tema je bila – po ko zna koji put od „demokratskog“ prevrata 2000. godine – tolerancija; neizbežno, jer kao demokratija, i tolerancija spada u niz pojmova čije prvobitno složeno značenje treba predati zaboravu, odnosno preinačiti, reducirati, okrenuti u svoju suprotnost, unutar orvelovske kampanje svetskih razmera, koju je Arundati Roj s pravom nazvala „ritualno ubistvo jezika“ (Roj, 2002, 133). O smislu, pretpostavkama i vrstama tolerancije pisali su inače priznati autori, filozofi i umetni-

ci – nijedan međutim nije pomenut tokom jednočasovne rasprave koja se vodila te večeri na TV Kopernikus. Gledaoci su tako umesto promišljenih tumačenja koja bi im omogućila da problem (ne)tolerancije razmotre na objektivniji način, a to je u kontekstu fundamentalnog nasilja ugrađenog u same temelje zapadne kulture, koja svoj prestiž duguje makijavelistički dvosmislenim tradicijama (hrišćansko-robotovlasničkim, humanističko-kolonijalističkim, demokratsko-militarističkim – tradicijama kojih se, uzgred, ne odriče ni danas), slušaocima su te večeri još jednom servirana uobičajena mnjenja o netoleranciji kao srpskoj nacionalnoj odlici. Bilo je, doduše, pokušaja od strane jedne od učesnica da pitanje porasta agresivnosti u našem okruženju dovede u vezu sa „svim onim što nam se dogodilo devedesetih“, a potom i sa nasiljem kao antropološkom odrednicom patrijarhalne kulture, budući da ga u najranijim i najdugotrajnijim, matrifokalnim društvima nije bilo. Nije, međutim, istrajala u svom nastojanju da u raspravu unese naučniji, objektivniji ton, te je „tolerantno“, u smislu koji se podrazumevao te večeri u emisiji, prepustila svojim sagovornicima da razgovor svedu na uobičajeni miks frivolnog humora, taštine i površne učtivosti, tanku glazuru kroz koju bi svaki gledalac čije istorijsko čulo nije sasvim atrofiralo lako prepoznao promociju politički korektne netolerancije. Naime pod zaštitnim znakom tolerancije, jedini muškarac među gostima, autor obimne knjige o Hilanderu i zvezda programa, odavao je sve vreme utisak prigušene, a u dva navrata, vrlo eksplicitne netrpeljivosti. Naglasio je nekoliko puta, sa očiglednim odobravanjem, pa i zadovoljstvom, da žene u Hilanderu nisu imale, niti sada imaju, pristup, jer bi njihovo prisustvo moglo samo da omete, a nikako doprinese, životu duha, kojim po definiciji mogu da žive samo muškarci. Posle nekoliko dobronamernih, popustljivih šala u vezi sa epohalnom netolerancijom zvanične hrišćanske tradicije prema ženama, ili tačnije prema *ženstvu* kao unutrašnjem načelu (što je, uzgred, po mnogim eminentnim autorima, jedan od najdubljih korena agresivnosti u patrijarhalnim kulturama), on se osvrnuo, tonom uzdražane indignacije, na one koji su „uništili naše duhovne tradicije, a ništa nam za uzvrat nisu ponudili“. Izbegavajući da ih sam imenuje, radije je naveo definiciju iz Vujaklijinog rečnika, gde „jasno piše“ da reč proleter znači „onaj koji nema ništa“, odnosno „fukara“. Ovakvi moralni sudovi ishod su nedovršenog misaonog procesa, i vrlo su lep primer onoga što je Umberto Eko nazvao *cogito interruptus* (Eco, 1987: 221–238), u ovom konkretnom slučaju

višestrukog interruptusa, te bi bilo potrebno mnogo vremena da se nastali konceptualni čvor do kraja razmrsi. Ograničiću se stoga samo na dve opaske. Prvo, poistovećujući duhovnost i religiju, a potom religiju i crkvu, pomenuti gost emisije samo je pokazao da je nesposoban da razluči živu tradiciju od njene zastarele, institucionalne forme. Drugo, upotrebljavajući reč 'fukara', turcizam koji potiče iz vremena Otomanske imperije, kada jeste označavala one koji nemaju ništa, osiromašene, obespravljene, i potlačene, ali i stav – prezir i netrpeljivost onih koji imaju prema onima koji nemaju – on se još jednom, deklarativno se zalažući za toleranciju, stvarno ideološki poistovetio sa istorijskim silama represije.<sup>70</sup>

Zapravo Markuzeova sintagma „represivna tolerancija“ najbolje označava ono za šta su se zalagali učesnici emisije. U istoimenom eseju Markuze razmatra smisao koji pojam tolerancije ima u razvijenim kapitalističkim društvima, pokazujući da je potpuno suprotan onome što on sam definiše kao objektivnu toleranciju. Ova potonja je aktivna i borbena, i zahteva netoleranciju prema preovladavajućoj politici, praksi, stavovima i shvatanjima, uz istovremeno tolerisanje vanzakonskih ili društveno neprihvaćenih, ali ka suštinskom napretku usmerenih, shvatanja i stavova. Naprotiv, ono što se danas podrazumeva pod tolerancijom, piše Markuze, podrazumeva pasivno prihvatanje radikalnog zla:

Tolerancija danas obuhvata politiku, uslove i oblike ponašanja koji ne bi smeli da se tolerišu jer sprečavaju, ili uništavaju, šanse za život slo-

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<sup>70</sup> Isti smisao imalo je objašnjenje koje je ponudila druga gošća u programu, inače psihoterapeut, o uzrocima aktuelne netolerancije kod Srba: oni se mogu naći u dugogodišnjem autoritarnom režimu koji nam je neizbežno usadio naviku jednoulmlja – za razliku, recimo, od Francuza, koji ne samo da tolerišu suprotne stavove, već se raduju kada naiđu na neslaganje u razgovoru. Pitamo se, neizbežno, kakvo istorijsko znanje, i intelektualna zrelost, stoje iza ovako kratkovidih i površnih zaključaka. Znači li to, da navedem radi poređenja samo dva istorijska primera, da je učesnicima ovog programa nepoznata činjenica da su zbog podrške alžirskoj borbi za nezavisnost, alžirske demonstrante u Parizu na neslaganje navikli Francuzi bacali sa mostova u Senu, dok je u isto vreme „autoritarna“ vlast u Jugoslaviji pozivala pripadnike svih nacija, rasa i vera, da dođu kod nas da studiraju? I takođe, ako su zarad očuvanja samoopredeljenja i nezavisnosti od blokovskih pritisaka, u Jugoslaviji činjene grube greške, one su do toga doba već bile spoznate i javno priznate; predsednik Sarkozy je, s druge strane, naložio pre samo par godina da se o francuskom kolonijalizmu u francuskim udžbenicima istorije govori kao o vrhunskom političkom i moralnom dostignuću zemlje.

bodan od straha i bede... Ona se čini dobrom, jer služi koheziji celog sistema na njegovom putu ka bogatstvu, i još većem bogatstvu... uz zaoštavanje borbe za opstanak i eliminisanje alternativa... Stručnjaci za obrazovanje, moral i psihologiju glasno protestuju protiv porasta mladalačke delinkvencije; manje bučno reaguju protiv oholog razmetanja, kroz reč, delo i sliku, sve moćnijim raketama i bombama – protiv zrele delinkvencije čitave civilizacije (Markuze, 1969: 97–99)<sup>71</sup>.

Markuzeov esej objavljen je 1969, u eri hladnog rata, kada su današnje razmere globalne neokolonijalne ekspanzija Zapada još uvek bila samo prikriveni dugoročni plan američke administracije, koji su mogli da prozru samo retki dalekovidni pojedinci – Čomski, na primer. Danas, kada je sve teže poverovati u ponuđene izgovore za agresivni prodor zapadnog tržišta u gotovo sve delove nekadašnjeg nesvrstanog Trećeg sveta, jedan od specifičnih oblika represivne tolerancije koje lansiraju ideolozi postmodernog svetskog poretka zove se 'dobrovoljni imperijalizam'. On označava dobrovoljno prihvatanje, od strane ekonomski novoporoobljenih zemalja, svog novog vazalnog odnosa. Ono što nam treba, kaže nam u tekstu 'Postmoderna država' objavljenom u knjizi *Preuređenje sveta: Dugoročne implikacije II. septembra* Robert F. Kuper, jedan od inspiratora Blerove politike i saradnik evropskog Saveta bezbednosti, jeste „nova vrsta imperijaliz-

<sup>71</sup> Od mnogih načina na koje se razotkriva represivni karakter moderne tolerancije naveću samo jedan, jer predstavlja dobar odgovor na primedbu o navodnoj francuskoj trpeljivosti prema oprečnom mišljenju. Markuze ističe da je krajnji cilj svake objektivne tolerancije, odnosno tolerantne razmene oprečnih stavova, istina, a uslov za postizanje tog cilja mogućnost uspostavljanja razlike između tačnog i netačnog. Prividna diskurzivna tolerancija u zapadnim demokratijama, međutim, moguća je samo zato što su taj cilj, i uslovi za njegovo postizanje, unapred neutralisani, i to vrstom cenzure koja ne pogađa toliko onog koji govori već Jezik same komunikacije: „Pod upravom monopolističkih medija – koji su i sami instrumenti ekonomske i političke moći – kreira se mentalitet za koji su ispravno i pogrešno, istinito i lažno predodređene kategorije kad god se dotiču vitalnih interesa društva. Ovo prethodi svakom izrazu i opštenju, i stvar je semantike: blokiranje delotvornog neslaganja, prepoznavanje onog što ne spada u establišment, ugrađeno je već u jezik namenjen za javnu upotrebu. Značenja reči rigidno je stabilizovano. Racionalno ubeđivanje, ubeđivanje u suprotno, praktično je onemogućeno. [...] Druge reči se mogu izreći i čuti, druge ideje se mogu izraziti, ali ...se one momentalno „vrednuju“ (tj. automatski razumeju) u terminima javnog jezika – jezika koji određuje „apriori“ pravac u kome se kreće misaoni proces. Tako se proces razmišljanja završava tamo gde je počeo: u datim uslovima i odnosima.“

ma, koji će biti u saglasnosti sa ljudskim pravima i kosmopolitskim vrednostima, koji neće nametati ništa već će se ostvarivati kao pokret dobrovoljnog samonametanja“ – odnosno dobrovoljnog prihvatanja uslova koje „slabima“ obezbeđuje zaštitu „jakih“, a bez čije bi intervencije „slabima“ red i zakon zauvek ostali nedostižni. Kuperov termin za ovako stvorenu državu je „kooperativna imperija“. Da bi se ovaj politički plan ostvario, međutim, neophodno je odgovoriti pozitivno na ono što Robert Kuper smatra „najvećim moralnim izazovom postmodernog sveta“, a to je „navići se na ideju dvostrukih standarda“ (Kuper 2002: 11–21).

Još jedan primer medijskog doprinosa istorijskoj amneziji: reč je o seriji na RTS 2 pod nazivom „Naši pisci u Holivudu“, u okviru koje je 9. marta 2012. gledaocima bio predstavljen dramski pisac Stiv Tešić. Tešić je 1957. godine napustio rodno Užice da bi se nastanio u Sjedinjenim Državama, gde je neko vreme pisao filmska scenarija za holivudske filmove u uverenju da je američki san sinonim za slobodu i pravdu. Kada su u periodu vijetnamskog rata usledile sumnje, a tokom NATO bombardovanja Jugoslavije i besramne medijske kampanje kojim je taj kriminalni čin propraćen, konačna i potpuna razočaranost, Tešić je odbio da se navikne na ideju dvostrukih standarda, i na izazov postmodernizma odgovorio tako što je ostao modernista: u svojim postholivudskim dramama (i svojim dodatnim građanskim angažmanom), on je beskompromisno stao u odbranu istine i morala, smatrajući, da je moral, u eri laži i nasilja, jedini preostali autentični oblik bunta.<sup>72</sup>

Dramsku transpoziciju ovog bunta predstavljaju četiri pozorišna komada, koje je jedan kritičar objedinio zajedničkim nazivom „moralna tetralogija“. Jedna od njih, drama *Na otvorenom drumu*, inspirisana je padom Berlinskog zida i autorovim slutnjama građanskih ratova koji će uslediti. Politička tema artikulisana je sa izvesne alegorijske distance, koju Tešić postiže uvodeći motiv Hristovog drugog dolaska. Iz nekog bezimenog, građanskim ratom opustošenog dela sveta, među preživelim koji masovno hrle ka isto tako neimenovanoj „zemlji slobode“ nalaze se i dvojica protagonista, Al i Ejndžel. Kao i žrtve realne tranzicione katataklizme, Al i Ejndžel odlučni su da za ulazak u obe-

<sup>72</sup> U intervjuu koji je dao 1992. godine časopisu *American Theatre*, Tešić je rekao: 'Jedini pravi buntovnik koji nam preostaje jeste moralna osoba.'

ćanu zemlju steknu sve tražene kvalifikacije, između ostalog dokaze da poseduju propisani nivo civilizovanosti, u kom cilju Ejndžel vuče za sobom kolica natovarena skulpturama pokradenim iz bombardovanih muzeja, dok mu Al pomaže da napamet nauči datume rođenja i smrti, te ključne idejne stavove slavnih zapadnih umetnika i filozofa. Ovo ubistvo umetnosti i umetničkog doživljaja, u opštoj težnji da se duhovne vrednosti podvrgnu birokratskim propisima i na razne načine kvantifikuju, nije jedina ucena koju u Tešićevoj drami jaki nameću slabima da bi ih zaštitili. Najvažniji uslov u okviru „dobrovoljnog samonametanja“ koji Al i Ejndžel treba da ispune da bi ušli u Zemlju slobode, a koji im saopštava sveštenik jedne hrišćanske crkve na samoj granici, jeste da ubiju Hrista, koji se još jednom vratio među ljude, i svoju poruku pokušava da prenese ne rečju, koju više niko ne sluša, već muzikom, svirajući čelo. Posedujući vrlo razvijeno čulo za istoriju, Tešić, kao i drugi veliki umetnici i humanisti pre njega, zna šta je u hrišćanskoj religiji prevaziđena i mrtva forma a šta njena živa, neprolazna vrednost. Prevodeći Hrista, kao što su to nekada činili jeretik Pelagije, revolucionarni romantičar Blejk, ili modernista Dostojevski, u simbol božanskog u ljudskom, Tešić nas podseća, još jednom, da duhovne vrednosti koje je hrišćanska crkva stvorena da podrži, a koje je najčešće bestidno izdavala, opstaju kao sposobnost za „ljubav bez motiva“ i za pozitivni moralni izbor. Pošto su odbili da se zarad ulaska u Zemlju slobode oslobode savesti, a umesto njih Hrista ubio sveštenik na granici, Al i Ejndžel završavaju raspeti na krstu. Još uvek ne sasvim spaseni, ali sada kada konačno poimaju celim svojim bićem sklad na koji je ukazivao Kant – „Zvezdano nebo nad nama, moralni zakon u nama“ – sa razumnim izgledima za spasenje.

Profesori književnosti i književni kritičari koji su 9. marta učestvovali u TV emisiji „Naši ljudi u Holivudu“ nisu u svom prikazu Tešićevog života i dela ni pomenuli dramu *Na otvorenom drumu*. S druge strane, komad koji čini jedan deo „moralne tetralogije“ *Brzinu tame*, jedan od komentatora prikazao je na način koji u potpunosti krivotvori smisao teksta i autorovu nameru. Naime već u prvoj rečenici koja se na nju odnosila, a bez ikakvog tekstualnog dokaza, predočeno je gledaocima da se ova drama (koja inače progovara o teškim moralnim posledicama vijetnamskog rata, a još više o isfabrikovanim tumačenjima kojima se istina o ratu u Americi i dalje uporno prikriva),

samo formalno bavi Amerikom i Vijetnamom, a suštinski je zapravo o našem ratu i raspadu porodice koji se dešava zato što smo se borili na pogrešnoj strani!<sup>73</sup> Treba li ovo tumačenje shvatiti kao demonstraciju „tolerancije prema oprečnom mišljenju“ za kakvu su se zalagali učesnici kontakt programa na TV Kopernikus? Ono je u svakom slučaju u dubokoj saglasnosti sa „demokratskim“ izveštavanjem američkih medija kada su po pravilu odbijali da objave pisma u kojima Tešić progovara protiv oficijelnih laži o intervenciji u Jugoslaviji, opominjući američku i svetsku javnost da se ispunilo predviđanje Hane Arent i da smo ušli u eru postistine, kada se ne samo filozofske, već i činjenične istine smatraju nerelevantnim i prenebregavaju!

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Osvrt na Tešićevo delo, a posebno njegova opomena protiv političkog simulakruma, prikladan su uvod u glavnu temu ovog izlaganja – a to je tradicija modernizma u savremenoj književnosti i kulturi. Naslov rada inspirisan je jednom od novijih publikacija o modernizmu, *Whatever Happened to Modernism?* (što bi u srpskom prevodu moglo da glasi, *Pa šta se to desilo sa modernizmom?*), autora Gabrijela Josipovičija. U ovoj studiji modernizam se shvata vrlo široko, kao odziv umetnika – slikara, pesnika, kompozitora – na krizu smisla izazvanu gubitkom magičnog doživljaja sveta (*disenchantment of the word*) ili, rečeno jezikom egzistencijalističke filozofije, na metafizičku prikraćenost kao suštinsko ljudsko stanje od kako je, sa početkom Renesanse, svet ostao lišen tradicionalnih transcendentálnih apsoluta. Za razliku od modernista – a to su, za Gabrijela Josipovičija, slikari od Direra do Pikasa i Fransisa Bejkona, odnosno književnici od Servantesa do Beketa – koji ne prestaju da preispituju smisao i granice svoje umetnosti i, prkoseći apsurd i entropiji, iskazuju ili stvaraju značenja koja potvrđuju i obogaćuju čovekovu ljudskost, postmoderna umetnost se zadovoljava da zabeleži odsustvo smisla i „smrt čoveka“, ili sa dvosmislenim entuzijazmom sudeluje u njihovom razaranju. Ne

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<sup>73</sup> Time je, u ovoj sasvim nekoherentno izvedenom profilu Stiva Tešića, neutralisan i pokušaj od strane jednog drugog učesnika da prikaže Tešićev angažman kao opravdan otpor tendenciozno selektivnom izveštavanju američkih medija, koji su odbijali da štampaju njegove dopise, ali su objavljivali politički korektno komentare rok i pop zvezda, poput Bjanke Džeger.

čudi stoga komentar Gabrijela Josipovičija kojim sažeto iskazuje duhovne domete savremenih britanskih romanopisaca: „Čitajući Džulijana Barnza“, piše Josipovići, navodeći takođe autore poput Kingslija Ejmisa, ili Ijana Makjuana, „na kraju imam utisak da smo i ja i svet postali manji i podliji“ ( Josipovići 2010: 174).

Utisak je prepoznatljiv; ipak, čini mi se da književni pejzaž danas nije pustinja kakvom je predstavlja Josipovići, odnosno da ima, srećom, stvaralaca, čak i među engleskim romanopiscima, čija dela i životne izbore, poput ostvarenja velikih modernista, doživljavamo kao dosledno nemirenje sa besmislom i nepravdom. Za potrebe ovog rada, to je engleski pisac Džon Berdžer, a potom i induska spisateljica i aktivistkinja Arundati Roj, i Amerikanka irskog porekla Helena Šihan, autor više studija iz oblasti filozofije, istorije i kritike kulture.

Ovim se, naravno, podrazumeva da za moju definiciju (post) modernizma u književnosti nisu presudne formalne odlike, niti inovativne narativne strategije, već pre pogled na svet koji artikulišu – ono što je Lukač, pišući o razlici između realizma i modernizma, nazvao „fokalnom tačkom“ svakog sadržaja, pa prema tome i svake forme, a to je pitanje „Šta je čovek?“ (Lukač 1972: 476). Lukač nije ostao usamljen u svom insistiranju da je od formalnih književnih odrednica daleko važnija funkcija koju vrše. Iako potiče iz vremena po nekim autorima već davno prevaziđenih rasprava o tradicionalnom i modernističkom realizmu, njegova distinkcija porediva je sa distinkcijom između poetike i tematike, koju je formulisao B. Mekhejl u svojoj već klasičnoj studiji *Postmoderni roman*, iz 1986. Smatrajući, kao i Lukač pre njega, tematiku, a ne poetiku, presudnim kriterijumom u analitičkom razmatranju bilo kog književnog perioda ili pravca, Mekhejl ukazuje na razliku između gnoseoloških i ontoloških tema kao na ono što suštinski odvaja modernistički od postmodernog romana.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Dok u modernističkom tekstu, piše Mekhejl, prevladavaju pitanja o mogućnostima, putevima i granicama spoznaje, dominantna koja oblikuje postmodernističku književnost pribegava strategijama koje u prvi plan ističu „post-kognitivna“, odnosno ontološka pitanja: „Koji je ovo svet? Šta se u njemu može učiniti? Koje od mojih jastava treba da to učini?“ Ishod tih pitanja je da postmoderni autori, i njihovi junaci, napuštaju, kako kaže Mekhejl, „nerešiv problem utvrđivanja pouzdanog znanja o našem svetu, da bi improvizovali mogućí svet; da bi stvarnost zamenili fikcijom“ (v. Mekhejl 1987: 7–10).



Mada su opšte Lukačeve i Mekhejllove teze vrlo upotrebljive, one će u daljem radu biti korišćene samo kao početne pretpostavke; zaključci do kojih će dovesti, međutim, a naročito oni koji se tiču vrednovanja modernizma i postmodernizma, sasvim su različiti od konačnih pozicija koje su u tom smislu zauzeli pomenuti autori. Tako se primat koji Lukač daje ideologiji nad formom, kao i Mekhejllova početna tvrdnja o gnoseološkoj dominantnosti modernizma, srećno uklapaju u niz drugih tumačenja modernizma, koji najveću vrednost ove književnosti s početka XX veka vide u njenoj beskompromisnoj posvećenosti istini. Pokretačka sila velike naturalističke drame, piše Rejmond Vilijams, nije bila želja za „scenskom reprodukcijom soba, odeće i razgovora, već strastvena potreba za istinom...u njenom striktno ljudskom, savremenom smislu“ (Vilijams 1976: 384): radilo se o istini, dakle, koja nije bila stvar neproblematičnog, pozitivističkog realizma, već o istini do koje se dopiralo kroz herojski jezički i etički eksperiment. Naime, pokušaj da se iskažu do tada neizrecive i od buržoaskog čitaoca netražene istine vodio je putem na kome će romanopisce poput Konrada pitanja poetike i formalna rešenja – „Realizam, Romantizam, Naturalizam ... sva ova božanstva morati, nakon kratkog druženja, da ostave – čak na samom pragu hrama – i prepuste ih mucanju sopstvene savesti i svesti o teškoćama preuzetog zadatka“ (Konrad 1984, XIII).

Opsednutost istinom Lajonel Triling takođe prepoznaje kao suštinsko određenje modernizma. U svojoj, za svrhu ovog rada vrlo upotrebljivoj, definiciji modernističkog duha, on težnju ka istini dovodi u vezu sa ogorčenim neprijateljstvom modernista prema (buržoaskoj) kulturi, i njihovom odlučnošću da umetnost shvate kao sferu unutar koje se ispituju strategije otpora osvećenim lažima i zadatoj neautentičnosti (Triling 1967: 23). Ovakva definicija modernizma korisna je, jer sadrži implicitni odgovor na moguću primedbu da su modernisti u većini slučajeva bili apolitični, te da bi se teško mogli sagledati kao tradicija kojoj pripadaju i politički angažovani pisci kao što su Tešić, odnosno Berdžer, Arundati Roj ili Helena Šihan. Tačno je da su modernisti poput Prusta i Kafke, Lorenza i Džojlsa prezirali, ili se bar klonili svih oblika društvenog istupanja, već, naprotiv, žudeli da se probude iz „košmara istorije“ i, birajući „izgnanstvo, lukavstvo i tišinu“, o istini progovore kao umetnici, revolucionarnim jezikom svo-

jih arhetipskih vizija – zbog čega su im, sasvim neosnovano, zamerali marksistički nastrojeni kritičari, među njima i Lukač.<sup>75</sup>

Bez obzira na različite strategije, međutim, njihov cilj podudara se sa ciljem koji je, nakon više od pola veka, sebi postavio Stiv Tešić, a to je bilo da, razotkrivajući istinu (Ibzenovu, o unakaženoj ljudskosti skrivenoj pod fasadom buržoaske respektabilnosti, Beketovu, o moralnom krahu evropskih religijskih i filozofskih tradicija koje su vekovima pristajale uz klasu tlačitelja i tako umesto da puke egzistencijalne datosti zaodenu ljudskim smislom, životu ljudski smisao sistematski oduzimale; ali i istinu o neusahlim, unutrašnjim izvorima vitalnosti, koje su autori kao što su bili Rembo, Man, Jejts, Lorens i Džojks dovodili u vezu sa prehršćanskim, paganskim tradicijama), podstaknu stvaralački „revolt“ i „odbacivanje“ – nasuprot „ravnodušnosti i pristanku“ koji su najčešće etički korelativ „post-kognitivne, ontološke tematike“ postmodernizma.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Lukač, naime, završava svoj esej o ideologiji modernizma osudom modernističke, hajdegerovske ontologije, koja je po njemu statična, lišena istorijske perspektive, odnosno vizije boljeg društva, i stoga nesposobna za validnu kritiku buržoaskog poretka. Lukač pri tome prenebregava mogućnost da sagledavanje kulture iz mitskih perspektiva, što je postupak svojstven većini modernističkih dela, nije negacija istorije, jer nudi znanje o tradicijama unutar našeg kulturnog nasleđa, među kojima je moguće identifikovati onu koja je završila „košmarom istorije“, kao i onu zapostavljenu ali sposobnu da živi i oblikuje „bolji svet“ u budućnosti. Čak i kod pisaca u čijim delima takve mitske alternative nisu prisutne, i gde junaci (Beketovi, recimo, ili Kafkini) mogu samo da žude da se neumitan ali stalno odlagan „kraj partije“ konačno odigra, Lukač ne uspeva da uoči ono što su drugi kritičari (Nortrop Fraj, i Herbert Markuze) okarakterisali kao najveći doprinos modernizma – a to je revolucionarna „energija odbacivanja“, koju čak i takvo naizgled pasivno očajanje ima potencijal da generiše.

<sup>76</sup> Ovaj sud direktno je suprotan Mekhejl ovom, koji bezrezervno podržava postmodernu ontološku tematiku, ali pri tome prenebregava način na koji ludička heterotopija, proizašla iz postmodernističke radikalne sumnje u ovaj naš svet, obezbeđuje politički opstanak upravo tom svetu, odnosno politički apsolutizuje (i time proizvodi pristanak na) upravo onu stvarnost (društvenih i istorijskih nepravdi) koju formalno hoće da relativizuje.

Izrazi „bunt i odbacivanje“ (*revolt and refusal*) odnosno „ravnodušnost i pristanak“ (*indifference and consent*) preuzeti su iz predgovora Kamijevim dramama (Cruikshank 1984: 7–32). Autor ih koristi da bi ukazao na ogromnu, a najčešće nedovoljno istaknutu, razliku, unutar tzv. Teatra apsurda, između Kamijevog egzistencijalizma, koji na apsurd reaguje buntom i odbacivanjem, i nalaže autoru da se pridruži Pokretu

U periodu koji nas deli od epohe velikih modernista, neke od njihovih strategija otpora izgubile su svoj subverzivni potencijal. Ako su iracionalna stanja (Remboova namerno proizvedena demencija svih čula, recimo) vodila dioniskom oslobađanju imaginacije i potisnutih nagona, erosa pre svega, taj je ishod u doba monopolističke vladavine razuma (pod kojim se podrazumeva funkcionalni razum odraslog evropskog muškarca), i autoritarnog puritanskog morala sa njegovim sentimentalnim sublimacijama, bio legitimni i delotvorni oblik pobune.<sup>77</sup> Danas, kada se razum našao pod razornim udarom radikalne skepse, a svako racionalno i zasnovano znanje diskreditovano kao totalitarno, kada je velikim pričama istorije sa radošću objavljen kraj, kada se subjektivna celovitost, te intelektualna i moralna doslednost odbacuju kao navodna prepreka slobodnom iskazivanju višestrukih, kontradiktornih subjektivnih pozicija koje su zauzele mesto zastarelog, romantičarskog identiteta – ukratko, kada se kroz idealizovanje heterogenosti i raspršenosti podstiče unutrašnji kaos koji ide na ruku planetarnim procesima nasilne homogenizacije života – u tim uslovima, dosledni iracionalizam u umetnosti može za sistem biti samo dobrodošli saveznik. Kao što u eri seksualne permisivnosti, preciznije, „represivne desublimacije“ (Markuze 1964: 72–78), kada teorijsko veličanje tela (a praktična zloupotreba, ponajviše kroz pornografiju, koja je još jedno od demokratski nam nametnutih ljudskih prava) takođe služi depolitizaciji života, temeljiti pobunu na lorensovskim mističnim porivima iz „tamnog abdomena“, bila bi zapravo negacija, antiteza, modernističkom projektu. (Ko bi se danas osećao uvređenim čitajući *Ljubavnika leđi Četerli*!?) Jedina prava unutrašnja logika modernističke tradicije, jedini kontinuitet kojim ona živi danas, dijalektičke je prirode: ona podrazumeva nadrastanje prvobitne egotistične

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otpora, i Pirandelove verzije apsurga, koja podrazumeva ravnodušnost i mirenje sa fašizmom.

<sup>77</sup> Revolucionarni smisao te strategije uočila je Marta Nusbaum, savremeni etički filozof, u svojoj studiji *The Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. Govoreći o Džemu Džojso, ova autorka insistira da je bilo neophodno, upravo zarad njenog značaja za očuvanje biološki date empatije, koja je osnov društvene pravde, konačno shvatiti eros ne kao platonski uspon u svet transcendentnih ideja, već kao silazak, kao „pad“ u materiju (Nusbaum 2001: 679–708). (Simptomatično je, međutim, da etičke analize Marte Nusbaum nikad ne prepoznaju potrebu ekonomskog i političkog preobražaja klasnog društva, već ostaju u domenu idealnog, diskuzivnog i ličnog.)

usredsređenosti na sopstveno izbavljenje kroz eros i stvaralaštvo (to je Orvel, u kontekstu svoje kritike totalitarnih režima, opisao kao privremeno povlačenje „u utrobu kita“ kako bi se u tom intimnom pribežištu od represivnih ideologija zaštitili i obnovili ostaci ljudskosti), pred spoznajom da je postalo neophodno, kako je to opet formulisao Salman Ruždi, „izaći iz utrobe kita“ i svoju humanost potvrditi u političkoj borbi protiv dehumanizacije drugih, ponajviše obespravljenih, klasa i rasa.<sup>78</sup>

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Roman *G Džona Berdžera*, čija fragmentarna naracija ponekad navodi komentatore da ga svrstaju u postmodernističku književnost, zapravo potvrđuje, svojom tematikom i strukturom, navedenu tezu o dijalektičkom kontinuitetu modernizma. Fragmentarna, brehtovska, forma romana grafički je uočljiva, jer Berdžer svoje vrlo kratke pasuse odvaja dvostrukim razmacima, stvarajući vizuelni utisak izolovanih ostrvca teksta koja izranjaju iz mora bele praznine, i time potenciraju utisak međusobne hronološke i kauzalne nepovezanosti. Epizodično

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<sup>78</sup> Razvojni put američke pesnikinje Adrijane Rič sadrži obe ove faze. Komentarišući 2001. svoje prozne tekstove i pesme objavljene sedamdesetih i osamdesetih godina prošlog veka, Rič zapaža kako 'neophodne strategije iz jednog perioda mogu da mutiraju u čudovišta nekog kasnijeg doba'. Reč je o ženskim ličnim ispovestima koje su dvadeset godina ranije postale efikasni idiolekt feminističkog izraza. Istovremeno u svim ostalim zonama javnog života lični i privatni sektor postajao je unosni artikal za korporacijski, na dobit usmereni sistem, dok su se kolektivna praksa i kolektivne realnosti izlagale pogrdi ili predstavljale kao istorijski jalove. Taj prikriveni paradoks kasnih devedesetih doživeo je neizbežni preokret: jedna feministička struja, kojoj je pripadala i A. Rič, shvatila je da lično nije nužno i političko i težila je da artikuliše način na koji žene mogu da pruže delotvoran otpor rasizmu i kolonijalizmu, dok je sistem sa svoje strane na sve načine nastojao da ovaj trend osujeti prodajući ideološkom tržištu model ženske – ili žensvene – zaokupljenosti privatnim životom i sopstvenim oslobađanjem, lišenim svakog političkog konteksta ili sadržaja. Shvativši takođe da je antikomunističko raspoloženje među samim feministkinjama izraz neispitanog straha, Ričova se vratila Marksu, da bi u njegovoj analizi degradirajućeg efekta kapitalističke ekonomije u devetnaestom veku pročitala istinu o sopstvenom vremenu, i u njegovoj ideji ljudske emancipacije dopunu sopstvenoj teoriji o neophodnom redefinisaju ženskog identiteta. Od tada u svojoj poeziji kao i javnom političkom angažmanu A. Rič se rukovodila ambicijom da formuliše jedinstvenu perspektivu i zajednički jezik kojim bi združila, i time uvećala revolucionarni potencijal, dve do tada neopravdano i nasilno odvojene ideje i prakse (Rich, 2001). Oovim preusmerenjima i probražajimau životu i delu Adrijane Rič (vid. Petrović 2007: 131–145).

pripovedanje primenjeno je podjednako u dva osnovna toka romana, od kojih jedan beleži istorijske fragmente, a drugi takođe hronološki međusobno udaljene momente u životu glavnog junaka, koji se prepliću ne dodirujući se, i tek na kraju priče dramatično ukrštaju i sažimaju. Pored dokumentarnog materijala i književnih citata, ovi kolaži sadrže i intruzivne autorske refleksije o sopstvenim likovima, temi i tehnici, pa između ostalog i o svrsi ovog narativnog diskontinuiteta: u jednom od tih samorefleksivnih komentara saznajemo da je nelinearna, epizodična struktura način da autor odoli fatalnoj želji da opiše (istorijski događaj), da ispriča (priču) do kraja, na taj način ih zatvori za aktivno promišljanje u sadašnjosti. Tako, primera radi, odluku da stavi tačku na opis masakra pobunjenih radnika u Milanu 6. maja 1898, pripovedač obrazlaže dajući nam jedan značajan podatak:

Zaustaviti se ovde, uprkos svemu što nisam ispričao, znači ostaviti prostor za više istine nego što bi bilo moguće ako bih priču ispričao do kraja. Piščeva želja da završi fatalna je po istinu. Kraj ujedinjuje. Jedinstvo se mora uspostaviti na drugi način (Berdžer 1991: 77).

Odbacivanje pripovedačkog jedinstva nije prema tome odbacivanje smisaonog jedinstva, svrha diskontinuiteta nije relativizacija istorijske istine, već naprotiv dublji uvid u ono što bi Valter Benjamin nazvao filozofija istorije. U svojim *Tezama o filozofiji istorije*, Benjamin napada historicističko shvatanje da je istorija kontinuirani sled zaokruženih perioda, i da svaki od tih perioda čini kontekst koji je neophodno u potpunosti rekonstruisati da bi se istina o pojedinim činjenicama ili zbivanjima ustanovila. Ovakav pristup Benjamin odbacuje smatrajući da on podrazumeva koncepciju istorije kao znanju o zatvorenim, završenim prošlostima, zasnovanom, štaviše, na empatiji sa pobednicima (jer od njih potiču zapisi na osnovu kojih se određeni kontekst rekonstruiše), i stoga kao o linearnom civilizacijskom napretku (Benjamin 1968: 253–64). Benjamin (nemački Jevrejin koji je svoje teze napisao 1940, neposredno pre nego što se tokom neuspelog bekstva od nacista ubio) nije verovao u progres, a za validan istorijski uvid smatrao nužnim da se fragment, jednom sagledan u svom kontekstu, istrgne iz prošlosti i njegov smisao otkrije iz perspektive svih naknadnih zbivanja. Kao Eliot u svom eseju o tradiciji, Benjamin takođe insistira da je istina o prošlosti leži u njenoj relevantnosti za

razumevanje sadašnjosti, iz čega proizlazi i dijalektički princip „retroaktivnosti istorijskog značenja“, odnosno onog što je Eliot podrazumevao pod svojom paradoksalnom formulom da „sadašnjost ima sposobnost da promeni prošlost isto onoliko koliko i prošlost ima moć da promeni sadašnjost“.

Bez obzira da li je Berdžer čitao Benjaminove teze o istoriji (a pretpostavlja se da mu je, kao sledbeniku i prevodiocu marksističkih teoretičara književnosti Lukača, Benjamina i Brehta, i ovaj tekst bio poznat), njegov postupak u romanu ostvaruje efekat o kome govori Benjamin, i na svoj način Eliot, otkrivajući kroz jukstapoziciju dobro izabranih fragmenata kontinuitet evropske istorije unutar kojeg se sadašnjost i prošlost uzajamno osvetljavaju. Vremenski period obuhvaćen pričom proteže se od kraja devetnaestog veka do 1915. godine, mada povremene retrospektive, kroz istorijsku reminiscenciju naratora ili flešbekove samih likova, sežu u dublju prošlost. Krizni istorijski momenti u fokusu romana, zbog kojih se radnja premešta iz Italije do Engleske i Južne Afrike, potom opet do Italije i konačno do Trsta, jesu već pomenuti štrajk milanskih radnika iz 1898. godine, burski rat, avijatičarski podvig Gea Čaveza, koji je prvi preleteo Alpe, i konačno početak Prvog svetskog rata. Sa izuzetkom epizode o Čavezu, čija je funkcija u romanu dvosmislena, ovaj istorijski kolaž ocrtava, poput dubinskog rendgenskog snimka, fašističku suštinu evropske istorije. Ona se pretežno manifestuje kao kulturna tradicija vladajućih klasa, kojoj junak romana rođenjem pripada, iz koje je kao vanbračno dete dato na čuvanje dalekim rođacima otuđen, i čijim se zavodničkim pokušajima da ga vrati u svoje okrilje, po ličnom opredeljenju, do kraja romana opire.

Porobljivačke, robovlasničke i rasističke pretpostavke evropske civilizacije, koje je i umetnost na svoj način odražavala, ocrtane su već na početku romana letimičnim dokumentarističkim detaljem – na Pjaci San Mikele u Livornu nalazi se bronzana figura nadvojvode Ferdinanda I, izvajana 1617; za svaki od četiri ugla postolja na kome stoji privezana je lancem figura afričkog roba. Natpis na postolju, iz kojeg saznajemo da je „divne robove“, za koje su mu pozirali osuđenici iz lokalnog zatvora, dodao je Pietro Tuka 1623, kao i očev odgovor na moralnu pometnju petogodišnjaka pri pogledu na okovane ljudske figure – da su oni tu zato što su lepi – sažeta je osuda koncepcije umet-

nosti u kojoj je prioritet estetskog nad etičkom kriterijumom činio nevidljivim njeno saučesništvo u civilizacijskom zločinu (55).

Sinegdoha zarobljenog i zloupotrebjenog tela javlja se još jednom, u poglavljima posvećenim genocidu u Južnoj Africi, odnosno korelacijama između rasnog i nasilja nad ženama. Pri pogledu na ritmično stezanje i opuštanje nožnih mišića afričkog crnca uprengnutog u rikšu, bela žena koja koristi taj oblik transporta (Beatrisa, tek pristigla u posetu mužu, engleskom kapetanu prekomandovanom iz Engleske u Kejptaun) prvi put doživljava iluziju da su celokupan prostor i svi predmeti u njemu neprirodno iskošeni, ili nagnuti. Beatrisin poremećaj percepcije tematski je uvod u istorijski autentični događaj iz 1847. godine – poznat pod imenom Velika iluzija plemena Amaksoza. Pošto su Buri opustošili južnoafričku starosedelačku kulturu u korist Britanaca, ovima je jedino preostalo da ratoborne Amaksoze, koji se nisu mirili sa britanskom kolonijalnom vlašću, grubom silom primoraju na konačnu poslušnost. Na do tada obično uspešnu britansku taktiku, kojom se željena teritorija proglašavala svojinom Kraljice, za guvernera postavljao britanski administrativni službenik, a dotadašnji crnački poglavica hapsio i ubijao, Amaksoze su reagovala blagovremenim kontranapadom: novoproducenog guvernera i šefa policije, dok su hitali da poglavicu smene i likvidiraju, usput sa ushićenjem čestitajući jedan drugom na maestralno obavljenoj misiji, sačekali su u zasedi i poubijali zajedno sa celokupnom pratnjom. Ono što nisu uspeli silom, Britanci su postigli obmanom. Indukovanjem kolektivne iluzije da će se izgladnelo pleme spasiti ako svoje preostale zalihe hrane i stoku uništi, kolonijalna vlast slomila je otpor Amaksoza, i iskorenila čitavo pleme. Inscenirana obmana, međutim, poput drugih neupokojenih aveti istorije, živi i dalje i na čudne načine opседа žene belih gospodara Afrike. Beatrisin poremećaj percepcije, njen utisak iskrivljenosti i zakošenosti fizičkog sveta, zapravo je simboličan odraz neprirodnih odnosa unutar opsenarske tradicije čiji je zatočenik, između ostalog i kao nemoćna žrtva muževljevih sadističkih seksualnih rituala, i ona sama.

Istorijski fragment na kraju romana radnju premešta u Trst: „ovaj grad bez duše, ovaj grad sa nemačkim umom i italijanskim stomakom“ (227), gde se 1915. godine italijanska reč sa značenjem Sloveni (*Schiavi*) izgovora redovno kao *Sci'avi* (robovi), i gde će 1920.

godine fašistička zabrana javne upotrebe slovenačkog jezika dati povoda rasističkoj šali o lekaru koji na pitanje kako će znati na šta se žali Slovenka koja ne zna talijanski, dobija odgovor da krava ne mora da opisuje svoje simptome veterinaru. Kada su, godinu dana ranije, zaverenici iz pokreta Mlada Bosna ubili nadvojvodu Ferdinanda, namera im je bila, kaže nam narator, da tim neopozivim činom privuku pažnju na neospornu stvarnost: na bedu Južnih Slovena pod Habzburzima. Dvostruka svrha tog političkog atentata bila je, u daljem tumačenju pripovedača, da „reafirmiše prirodni zakon pravde“, koji je „zahtevao da se nebrojene žrtve zločina iz prošlosti iskupe“, i takođe da „podstakne žive da shvate kako moć imperije nije apsolutna, kako smrt, koja se jednom konačno dešava zarad pravde, a ne iz ravnodušnosti prema pravdi, može tu moć da dovede u pitanje“ (115). Godinu dana kasnije, na Zapadnom frontu u jednom danu 11000 vojnika umire u mukama, manjim jedino od agonije beznađa u koju su ih tog dana bacali oficiri besmislenim naređenjima za samoubilački napad, prosleđenim duž komandnog lanca na čijem je početku stajala diplomatija velikih evropskih sila; tog istog dana, u provali patriotskog oduševljenja koje je ta ista diplomatija indukovala fantazmagorijskim tumačenjem sarajevskog atentata i nacionalnih interesa, masa Italijana u Trstu zahteva neodložan ulazak Italije u rat.

Kao svaka istinski tragična priča, Bedžerov se roman ne završava porazom. Suprotstavljena kontrapunkatalno sposobnosti imperije da se posle svakog izazova, svakog poremećaja svog „monstruoznog kontinuiteta“, obnovi, konsoliduje i uzvarti udarac, pobuna u romanu ne gubi smisao, već naprotiv postaje utoliko superiorniji način življenja – i umiranja. To je ono što Berdžerov junak, u ovom trenutku možda samo delimično, poima kada, ponesen paroksizom mržnje prema posedničkoj klasi, nalazi utehu u ideji sopstvene smrti:

Mrzim vas...Imate moć ne zato što ste bogati već zato što vam se ljudi pokoravaju. Zavist vodi poslušnosti. Žele da budu kao vi. Zato žive po istim zakonima i na kraju biraju poslušnost kao svoje najveće dobro.

A gde vi živite?...Živite u škiljavom, bezvazdušnom prostoru između vaše pokojne kože i odeće. Živite u sopstvenom pokretnom mezaninu. Strasti su vam kao osip.

Ne možete da me ugrozite. Vaše postojanje miri me sa idejom sopstvene smrti. Ne želim da živim neograničeno u svetu gde vi vladate; život



u takvom svetu treba da bude kratak. Život treba da izabere smrt, pre nego vaše društvo. Čak se i smrt libi da vas uzme. Živećete dugo (180).

Kažem „delimično“, zato što smrt, koja se u ovom trenutku ukazuje kao izbavljenje od svemoći kulture, još uvek nema smisao one buntovne i tragične potvrde života koji će dobiti na kraju – što ne znači da do tog trenutka G nije pružao nikakav otpor ideologiji svoje klase. Naprotiv, njegove sklonosti i odluke, od samog početka, otelovljuju ključnu ideju književnog modernizma o „izvesnoj britkoj, ubojitoj sposobnosti u nama, izvesnoj oštini poput skalpela spremnog za hiruški zahvat, koji, ako imamo hrabrosti da ga upotrebimo, postaje sečivo što nas odseca od sveta koji se pravi da je deo nas, sveta za koji kažemo, onom poznatom lažnom i mlitavom frazom, da mu pripadamo“ (115).

Svet od kojeg je G naučio još kao dečak da se sa gađenjem kloni bio je prvenstveno muški svet, a tek potom svet njegove klase. Njegova najranija iskustva sa ženama otvorila su mu put u stvarnost naspram koje fantomski deluju rituali – lov, konjičke trke i regate – kojima ujak hoće da ga inicira u svet muškaraca, a koji su smišljeni da engleskim sitnim zemljoposjednicima, toj klasi na umoru, pozajme privid života; kao što su i rituali smišljeni da još uvek sirovim biznismenima u usponu, potajno preplašenim od pritajene moći pokorenih i poniženih, daju privid kulturne superiornosti, reda i racionalnosti – poput balova i prijema, gde se razgovara o „humanijoj“ kolonijalnoj politici u Belgiji, a muševci sa galantnom trpeljivošću slušaju svoje žene dok čitaju Malarmea – jedan za drugim gubili svu moć da ga zavedu. Zavodnik, naprotiv postaje G, da bi oštricom svoje erotske želje za trenutak presecao čitave mreže obaveza i zabrana kojim muški zakon sprečava žene da budu ono što potencijalno jesu. Znanje koje na taj način G ženama otkriva ono je koje su njemu samom otkrile njegova prva ljubav, guvernanta u koju se zaljubio sa pet godina, a potom Beatrisa koja ga je seksualno inicirala (u njegovoj mašti sjeđinjene u mitsku figuru žene kao alternative svemu čega se gnuša): „da eros vodi u sferu koja je negacija posedovanja, gde jedino pravo na koje ljubavnik može da računa jeste pravo da ponudi celog sebe na dar, i da predvidi ono što drugi želi da mu pokloni; i takođe, da eros, u svojoj arhetipskoj predstavi potpunog stranca koji je istovremeno intimno poznat, daje onima koji mu se odazovu, u ovom slučaju ženama, jedinstvenu moć da se sretnu sa strancem u samima sebi“. Ovi

uvidi postaju naročito subverzivni kada se njegovi donžuanski prepadni usmere na bračne postelje uglednih i bogatih. Svojina u posedu svojih očeva, a potom svojih muževa, pažljivo osmotrene i birane da bi svojom pojavom odražavale muževljevi ekonomski status, ugled, i ukus, žene toga doba naučile su da proces kojim je njihova vrednost procenjena internalizuju, i uspostave unutrašnju nadzornu instancu koja će njihovo *biće za sebe* trajno odvojiti od buduće verenice, žene, majke *njegove* dece. Raspolučene iznutra između nadzornika i nadziranog, one su izgubile svaku sposobnost za čin potpunog ličnog integriteta, jer je svaki njihov gest bio prožet dvosmislenošću koja je odgovarala unutrašnjoj dvostrukosti – što, uzgred, samo znači, kako zaključuje Berdžerov narator, da je „notorna ženska dvoiličnost posledica monolitne premoći muškaraca“ (150).

Podstičući udate žene poput Kamile Haneke da se u njega zaljube, G ih je dovodio u stanje radikalne usamljenosti – slobode od unutrašnjeg nadzora, a time i od nadzora svojih bogatih muževa. Ekstatično prepoznavanje sebe kao celovitog, samosvojnog, slobodnog bića koje ljubav obećava kao mogućnost otvorenu za svakog, u romanu se nagoveštava kroz sugestivni opis preobražaja o kome svedoče ozarena lica ljudi na ringišpilu, dok visoko u vazduhu prkose silama gravitacije. Upućena gospođi Haneke, pred muškim zvanicama, od kojih bi svaki ponaosob na pretnju slobode i preobražaja reagovao nasiljem, ova junakova slikovita insinucija anticipira stvaran, ali neuspešan pokušaj muža, ponesenog pravednim gnevom pokradenog sopstvenika, da ga ubije hicem iz pištolja.

’Prkos gravitaciji’, odnosno stremljenje ka iskustvenim vrhuncima i spremnost da zarad njih rizikuje život dovodi junaka u vezu sa istorijskim Geom Čavezom. Čavez je u vrlo nepovoljnim vremenskim uslovima u Švajcarskoj, odakle je krenuo, uspešno preleteo Alpe da bi zbog greške pri sletanju u Italiji, koja nikada nije razjašnjena, zadobio povrede i nakon dve nedelje, uprkos uveravanju lekara da će se oporaviti, isto tako misteriozno umro. Kao Geo, G. (možda je i sličnost u imenima simbolična) takođe je strastveni poklonik letenja, ali samo zato što je ono metafora za uspone druge vrste. Svest da i jedni i drugi traže život kao zalog, i slutnja da je i sam izabrao put koji vodi u smrt – a ne demonska okorelost srca pukog hedoniste, kako se to čini njegovim poznanicima – objašnjavaju možda G-ovo čudno odsustvo

uzbuđenja tokom Čavezovog rizičnog leta, kao i olako prihvatanje vesti o njegovom padu i povredama. Čavezov krah i smrt, međutim, motiv su koji će se uporno ponavljati u preostalim poglavljima romana, uspostavljaajući paralele koje potvrđuju da je avijatičar junakov alterego. Tako Čavezovo poslednje sećanje, pre nego što je nastupila trajna amnezija, na neumoljivi stenoviti zid Gonda koji će ga, iako savladan, do same smrti opsedati poput neke misteriozne nemeze, postaje na kraju romana metafora za G-ov tragični trijumf nad monolitnim zidom istorije.

Paradoksalno, ali takođe duboko istinito, put od erotske do političke pobune, G je pronašao opet zahvaljujući ženama – ne suprugama bogatih posednika, već ćerkama i sestrama onih koji nemaju ništa osim hrabrosti da pobunom prekinu kontinuitet istorijske nepravde (onih, uzgred, koje su zagovornici tolerancije na TV Kopernikus nazvali „fukarom“, a tršćanska društvena elita robovima i čankolizima). Kada neposredno pred ulazak Italije u rat G. odluči da jednu od njih, Nušu, slovenačku seljanku i sestru pripadnika ilegalnog pokreta Mlada Bosna, dovode na bal Crvenog Krsta, to je stoga što zna da je taj gest mnogo subverzivniji od afera sa ženama bogatih bankara, koji su uostalom u međuvremenu naučili da su od brutalnosti i otvorene represije mnogo bolje strogo kontrolisane, povremene doze simbolične slobode, odmerene tako da unapred spreče radikalnu pobunu svojih žena, kao što su naučili da povremenim malim ustupcima otklone opasnost radničke revoluciju, te trajno zadrže i jedne i druge u stanju potlačenosti. Pojava slovenačke seljanke na balu nečuveno je kršenje protokola i neoprostiva uvreda za Crveni Krst Njegovog Carskog Veličanstva, pa se protiv počinitelja udružuju svi prisutni austrijski i talijanski bankari i industrijalci, demonstrirajući time klasnu solidarnost dublju od trenutnih međusobnih sukoba nacionalnih interesa.

Nasuprot njihovom jedinstvu stoji drugi kontinuitet, druga tradicija, koje G. postaje svestan dok gleda Nušino lice, i u njemu vidi lik male ružnjikave Rimljanke, sestre jednog od pobunjenih radnika u Milanu 1898, koja ga je tokom policijske akcije na štrajkače izvukla ispod policijskog konja i spasila mu život:

Njihova lica bila su savim različita. Misteriozni kontinuitet počivao je u izrazima na tim licima. ...Ono što je prvi put bilo važno, i do tada neizrecivo, potvrđivao je izraz njenog lica: važno je bilo ne umreti .

Ono što je sada, drugi put, bilo važno, i do sada neizrecivo, potvrđivao je izraz njenog lica: zašto ne umreti (297).

Ovo više nije regresivna frojdovska žudnja da u smrti nađe spas od tenzije na koju ga osuđuje život u kulturi, već potreba za progresivnim iskorakom iz proteklog života, koji mu se sada ukazuje kao zaustavljeni, besmisleno umnoženi odraz istovetne slike zarobljene u holu obloženom ogledalima (inače, česta metafora u savremenoj književnosti za ono što postmoderna ontologija smatra bezizlazom u svetu beskrajno reprodukovanih odraza). Od časa kada je shvatio da njegov otpor mora da bude „uporan, lukav i kumulativan“ pa do samog kraja, za G-a, kao za „avijatičara usred leta, usredsređenog na neposrednu situaciju, svaki trenutak postaje trenutak tenzije i trijumfa“ (291).

Ako je ovo još jedna analogija koja G-a spaja sa istorijskim Čavezom, metafora letenja takođe evocira fiktivnog heroja modernizma, Džojsovog Stivena Dedalusa, i samog nazvanog po čuvenom paganskom letaču Dedalu. Stivenov imperativ bio je *'On and on and on and on'* – što dalje od zamki istorije i politike, i napred ka stvaralačkoj samoći i slobodi, pravcem koji mu je pokazala devojka na obali. Za junaka Berdžerovog romana, imperativ, više puta izrečen, takođe glasi: 'Dalje!' Smisao te reči, međutim, ne ostvaruje se, kao kod Stivena, odlaskom – već ostankom. Odlučivši da ne pobegne, već da ostane u Trstu, zatečen ratom i bez odstupnice, G shvata da jedini pravac u kome može da ode „dalje“ jeste onaj koji mu je već pokazala Nuša, a u kome sada dopušta da ga povede raznolika i raznorodna gomila odrpanih ljudi, poreklom iz istarskih i slovenačkih sela, Srbije i Galicije, Grčke i Turske, Rusije, pa čak i Afrike, ljudi „koji nisu imala ništa zajedničko izuzev svog siromaštva i svog cilja“ (307). Poređenje koje se Berdžerovom junaku nameće između ove sirotinje (ove „fukare“ – podsetimo se još jednom sistema vrednosti koji smo usvojili zajedno sa demokratijom!) i mase koju je video prvog dana rata pred brojem 10 u Dauning Stritu i pred zgradama Parlamenta u Londonu, još jedan je primer autorovog prodornog i beskompromisnog istorijskog uvida. Masu u Dauning Stritu činili su „muškarci i žene koji nisu znali šta hoće, već su čekali da budu primljeni i otposlani, nestrpljivi da im se uruči sopstvena budućnost, a kada se to desilo, razišli su se, nesvesni onog što su započeli, ali ushićeni, ponosni i spokojni. Gomila u Trstu, nije bila ni ponosna ni ushićena, već je ličila na pijanca, koji zna gde

hoće da stigne ali ne zna kojim putem da krene“. Ako su, usmjereni na spomenike i karijatidama okružene rezidencije sagrađene da posvedoče o kulturi onih koji žive iza njihovih vrata i prozora, ciljali samo na odmazdu za delić onoga što su prepatili otkako ih je nemaština nagnala da napuste svoja sela i nasele se na periferiji tuđeg grada, to je bilo stoga što je

malo njih imalo političku teoriju, ali su svi znali ono što profesori i učenici gimnazije nisu znali: znali su da je ono što im se nekada dešavalo u njihovim selima bilo deo iste stvari koja im se desila kada su došli u Trst i koja se od tada dešava svakog dana njihovog života. Radi se o neprekinutom istorijskom jedinstvu. Teorije mogu da obuhvate i definišu to jedinstvo. Ali za svakog od njih, ono je bilo određeno neprekinutim jedinstvom patnje u sopstvenom životu (311).

Konačna odluka da svoju sudbinu nepovratno veže za istorijsku tradiciju ovaploćenu u ovoj gomili obespravljenih, da lično gnušanje prema posednicima prevede u čin zajednikog kolektivnog otpora, označava u romanu ključni trenutak sartrovskog izbora autentične egzistencije, koji može voditi, i junaka vodi, u smrt, ali čiji smisao smrt ne može da dovede u pitanje. Utoliko pre što je jednim prethodnim radikalnim izborom G već otišao „dalje“, ne samo od svog dotadašnjeg života, već i od svoje smrti: odrekao se sopstvenog pasoša da bi ga poslao Nušinom bratu, i time omogućio da se preživeli članovi Mlade Bosne sastanu i svoju teoriju slobode, ono što je nedostajalo gnevnoj tršćanskoj sirotinji, usavrše i prokrče joj put do posleratne budućnosti.

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Za roman *G* Berdžer je 1972. godine dobio prestižnu Bukerovu nagradu. Veran svojim principima da pisanje i politika ne smeju biti odvojene aktivnosti, on je u govoru povodom primanja nagrade naglasio da će polovinu novca dati londonskim Crnim panterima, objašnjavajući pritom da je aktuelno siromaštvo stanovnika Kariba, i onih koji odatle potiču, neposredna posledica trgovačkih interesa i eksploatacije ostrva od strane firme Buker MekKonel. Tom prilikom je takođe objasnio da „imajući u vidu trgovinu robljem kao glavni finansijski izvor industrijske revolucije i kulturnih dostignuća na zapadu, četiri okovana crna roba predstavljaju najvažniju sliku u romanu“ (Dajer 1986: 93).

Danas, četrdeset godina pošto je objavljen i nagrađen, kao najveće vrline ovoga romana navode se njegove formalne odlike i filozofija erosa, dok pomenutu političku, i za samog autora najvažniju, temu većina čitalaca doživljava kao zastarelu marksističku pridiku. Takvi komentari samo potvrđuju masovni gubitak istorijskog razumevanja, koje knjige poput Berdžerovog romana ne čini zastarelim, već potrebnijim nego ikada: nudeći retroaktivno znanje o prošlosti, one pomažu da se prozre sve perfidnije „lukavstvo istorije“, koja aktuelnom retorikom o ljudskih pravima prikriva ono što jedan kritičar i teolog smatra pritajenim virusom robovlasništva u krvotoku Evrope (Rubenštajn 1978: 36–47), a Eme Sezer „Hitlerom koji vreba na kraju svakog evropskog ćorsokaka“ (Sezer 2000: 37). Berdžerovo dosledno odbijanje da se prikloni postmodernim standardima i svoje marksistički fundirane ideje o pravdi odbaci kao prevaziđene zablude prošlosti prepoznaju se u svemu što je posle romana *G* napisao ili izjavio. Primera radi, u jednom skorijem intervjuu, na voditeljevu opreznu pretpostavku da je njegova orijentacija marksistička, Berdžer je spremno odgovorio da on *insistira* na tome da je marksista, smatrajući suvišnim da idejni kontinuitet u svom životu i umetnosti posebno opravdava.<sup>79</sup>

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Napori zvanične književne kritike da učini nevidljivim potencijalno subverzivna značenja, i knjige poput Berdžerovog *G* smesti u politički neproblematičnu rubriku formalnog književnog eksperimenta stvaraju lažan utisak da su modernističko „nepristajanje i revolt“, kao idejni projekat i kao senzibilitet, stvar prošlosti. Međutim, iako ne

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<sup>79</sup> U vezi sa tezom da je marksizam zastarela teorija vidi duhovito objašnjenje jednog drugog nepokajanoj marksiste, Terija Igltona. Odgovarajući na primedbu da Marksova teorija nije više primerena globalnom, postindustrijskom društvu, Iglton je rekao sledeće: „Svet se jeste promenio, ali to ne znači da je industrijska proizvodnja nestala samo zato što su se hale preselile u Indoneziju, niti je novi izgled tajkuna, sa licima osenčenim tek proniklom bradom i razdrljenim okovratnicima, koji su nasledili svoje glatko izbrijane, začesljane i u kravate utegnute oči, znak da su klasne podele nestale, već da je kapitalizam evoluirao do te mere da može sam sebe uspešnije da kamuflira“. A smatrati iz tog razloga teoriju o njegovom prevazilaženju zastarelom isto je što i raspustiti vatrogasne brigade zato što se požar isuviše razbuktao (Iglton 2001: 1–11).

mnogobrojni, autori koji teže onoj vrsti promene koja će, u izmenjenim okolnostima, najdoslednije sačuvati suštinu modernističke ideje, nisu retkost. Pošto obim ovoga rada ne dozvoljava više od kraćeg osvrtu,<sup>80</sup> ograničiću se na prikaz samo onih momenata u razvojnom putu dve savremene autorke – Helene Šihan, filozofa, istoričara i kritičara kulture, i Arundati Roj, spisateljice i aktivistkinje – koji najbolje ilustruju tezu o kontinuitetu modernizma.

Naslov autobiografskog teksta napisanog 1988. godine, „Portret marksiste kao mlade kaluđerice“, aluzija je na Džojsov *Portret umetnika u mladosti*, i već dovoljno rečito govori o autorkinom dugu modernizmu. Kao i za Berdžerovog junaka, i za njen razvojni put filozofa i istoričara nauke, Džojsov Stiven Dedalus predstavlja paradigmatični model. Pobuna protiv katoličke dogme i discipline ženskog konventa bio je za nju, kao i za Džojsovog Dedalusa, revolt protiv celokupnog etosa odricanja i smrti, i čitavog njegovog rečnika negacije koji je zahtevao od mlade iskušenice da u sebi porekne ono što je njeno nadublje biće htelo da potvrdi. Niz dualizama i dihotomija, kojim se veličaju vera i duh a degradiraju razum i telo, a iznad svega obaveza bespogovorne poslušnosti, bili su antiteza njenoj žudnji za celovitošću bića, i nasilje nad njenim moralnim i intelektualnim integritetom. Kada se u seizmičkom unutrašnjem potresu šezdesetih godina prošlog veka urušila njena vera u boga, a potom i građanska vera u američku demokratiju, ono što je preživelo bio je impuls koji ju je prvobitno i odveo pod okrilje katoličke crkve: strastvena želja za odgovorima na pitanja o poreklu i smislu, potreba za velikom, totalnom slikom. Ako sada sebe može da smatra filozofom, kaže nam Helena Šihan u jednom kasnijem tekstu, onda to nije zato što ima diplomu doktora filozofije, već zato što je ključni pokretački motiv u njenom životu bio, i (uprkos postmodernim tabuima protiv velikih priča i totalnih objašnjenja) ostao – da izgradi sveobuhvatni, koherentni pogled na svet (Šihan 1992: 21–25).

Od prvobitne, religijske vere do nove, sekularne sinteze nije se moglo ići prečicom: „Prometej koji prkosi bogovima i otima vatru, Sifif koji poriče bogove i diže stene, Zaratustra koji objavljuje smrt boga i transcendentnu moć čoveka, Atlas koji, ponosan i nepopustljiv, drži

<sup>80</sup> Zbog čega je Adrijana Rič, jedna od najznačajnijih stvaralaca koji na prelasku u novi vek rekreiraju tradiciju modernizma, mogla biti samo pomenuta.

na sebi svet koji je sam stvorio“ – bile su to slike ključne u njenom nastojanju da se prilagodi univerzumu lišenom gospodara, i prihvati ga, ne kao svet jalov i uzaludan već kao svet u kome će smoći snage da živi, voli i stvara (Šihan, 1993<sup>2</sup>: 153–170).

Ovo veliko, džojsovsko „da“ životu, bilo je samo početna orijentacija: za Helenu Šihan ona nije bila dovoljna – sve dok priču o sebi, pobunjenoj i izolovanoj, nije smestila u kontekst veće, istorijske priče o defektima kulture i njenim uzrocima. Njeno opredeljenje za marksizam nije bilo puka zamena jedne religije drugom, još manje odbacivanje duhovnosti, već, naprotiv, način da se ostvari fundamentalna duhovna težnja čovekova, koja nema mnogo zajedničkog sa institucionalnom religijom. Duhovnost, H. Šihan insistira, izvire iz samog jezgra ljudskosti, gde sebe spoznajemo kroz svoje najfundamentalnije pretpostavke i nadublje vrednosti, u aktivnom procesu koji zahteva neprekidnu sintezu iskustva, ne samo našeg ličnog, već kolektivnog iskustva sveta (Šihan, 1993<sup>2</sup>: 153–170).

Upravo ova duhovnost, shvaćena kao ljudska potreba za celovitošću misli i iskustva, očitava se u tekstovima Helene Šihan kroz međusobno prožimanje onog što se do sada u nauci smatralo nespojivim – ženskog i muškog diskursa. Za njen sasvim osoben stil teorijskog mišljenja i iskaza moglo bi se reći da ideal pesnika modernista sa početka veka – o ujedinjenom senzibilitetu, gde se ideja oseća a osećanje intelektualno poima – rekreira u jeziku filozofije i nauke, redefinišući na nov, politički delotvoran način, ove do sada „muške“ oblasti i žanrove. Ovakav pristup, eksplicitno iskazan i obrazložen u tekstu „Rod i žanr“, argument je ne samo protiv banalnih predrasuda o muškoj duhovnosti koje najčešće prate podjednako deplasiranu tezu o religiji kao jedinoj duhovnoj tradiciji. Pomenuti tekst sadrži korekciju i nudi alternativu manje naivnim a podjednako pogrešnim idejama prevashodno francuskih feministkinja o navodno spasonosnoj ženskoj iracionalnosti. Kao što je već istaknuto, prodor u podsvesno i transkripcija preverbalnog u modernističkoj književnoj praksi, revolucionarni pre sto godina, danas su dobrodošao saveznik u procesu depolitizacije mišljenja i govora. Tačno je, piše H. Šihan, da je racionalnost, oduvek u domenu muške diskurzivne hegemonije, deformisana u našoj kulturi, ali odbacujući je u potpunosti, feministi reprodukuju podele i rasepe koje sistemu utemeljenom na raznovrsnim podelama može samo da



odgovara. Kao što je to, u politički poredivom kontekstu, već uočila i Adrijana Rič, tako i Helena Šihan opominje da se ova vrsta feminizma zaustavila u

trenutku negacije, odbacivanja, separatizma. Njegova epistemologija je socijalni konstruktivizam, eskalirajući relativizam koji se pretvara u postmodernistički nihilizam. Oblikuje se svest koja je jednostrana, pristrasna, iracionalistička. Ironično, iako proističe iz impulsa da ih odbaci, ovaj pristup završava reafirmacijom seksualne podele rada i psihoseksualnog rascepa ličnosti (Šihan, 1992: 23).

Ono što nam je potrebno nije odbacivanje, već redefinicija razuma, reaproprijacija one racionalnosti koju Šihan, u ličnom iskustvu tragaoca za znanjem o svetu, nikada nije doživljavala „kao hladnu, analitičku, bezličnu aktivnost, već kao goruću, sveprožimajuću strast, ne kao nešto što je otuđeno od emocije, već kao najsnažniju emociju“ (Šihan 1992: 21).

Takva celovita, emotivno i racionalno utemeljena duhovnost razlog je što H. Šihan, nakon sloma revolucije iz šezdesetih, i nakon pada Berlinskog zida i poraza socijalizma osamdesetih godina, nije nikako mogla da prihvati postmodernističke alternative, smatrajući, kako je pisala 1988. godine, ciljeve za koje se progresivna levica borila još uvek spornom teritorijom, koju je moguće nanovo osvojiti. Nekoliko godina kasnije u tekstu koji će postati deo buduće studije pod naslovom *Evropski socijalizam: Čorsokak ili duga krivudava staza?* o padu Berlinskog zida i slomu evropskog socijalizma, između ostalog i o raspadu Jugoslavije, Helena Šihan govori o savremenom kapitalizmu kao endemskom postmodernom ludilu:

Kapitalizam proizvodi endemsko ludilo našega doba...Postmodernizam je krunski svedok disintegrišućeg moći kapitalizma. To je nešto u samoj srži naše aktuelnog društvenog poretka što strukturalno inhibira celovito mišljenje, i potkopava same temelje racionalnosti, normalnosti, i morala. To je nešto što u samom jezgru savremenog doživljava života brani pristup sveobuhvatnom razumevanju, što teoriju udaljava vrtoglavo od iskustva i iskustvo ostavlja da pipajući luta u mraku (Šihan, 1994).

Tačno je da ovi politički tekstovi ne odišu toliko strastvenom borbenašću koliko strastvenom tugom, i strastvenom zapitanošću.

Duži pasusi koji slede navedeni su da ilustruju vrstu neophodnih, a sa zvaničnog dnevnog reda odavno skinutih pitanja, ali i onu vrstu uma koji ostaje imun na zavodljive materijalne i moralne prednosti postmodernog *cogito interruptusa*:

Na proputovanjima kroz Istočnu Evropu ponekad prolazim kroz London, i vidim njihove monstruozne monarhe na konjima, izvajane u bronzi i neosporavane, kao da su napravljeni da doveka tu stoje, dok se svi simboli našeg pokreta ruše sa zburadim prezirom, razbijaju ili prljaju nepristojnim grafitima. Kako to da su pretci Vindzora prošli tako olako, dok su Lenjin i i Tito tako teško kažnjeni?

Ponekad izgleda kao da istorija ide unazad. Lenjingrad je sada Sankt Petersburg, Karlmarksštat je opet Čemnic. U Moskvi sa čežnjom govorim o Romanovima, u Budimpešti o Habzburzima. Na ulicama Bukurešta prizivaju Kralja Mihaela, Aleksandra u Beogradu, u Sofiji Simeona. Ustaška zastava vijori se nad Zagrebom i Dubrovnikom...U Berlinu, na *Palast der Reublik*, praznina se otvorila tamo gde su bili srp i čekić. Junker aristokratija se vratila da potražuje svoje nekadašnje posede. Preduzeća na istoku, sa ponosom sagrađena zajedničkim trudom, prodaju se u besenjeje zapadnim investitorima, koji očekuju da im za eksploataciju i uvrede ljudi budu zahvalni (Šihan 1992: 23). Da li su radi ovoga, pitam se, muškarci i žene prolivali znoj, i suze i krv? [...] U zapadnoj Evropi prisustvujem debitantskom nastupu dizajnerskog socijalizma u pojedinim segmentima ove današnje leveice sa novim imidžom...Muški fizički radnik je jučerašnji muškarac, kaže današnji muškarac, dok zavrće rukave svog komotnog Majami Vajsa sakoa sa izrazom samozadovoljstva na dvodnevnom bradom osenčenom licu. Sastanci, dnevni red, rezolucije, zahtevi za većim nadnicama – sve je to tako dosadno, kaže današnja žena, odevena u najnoviji post-ovo ili post-ono pastiš. Zrače takvom znalčkom samouverenošću. Pa na kraju krajeva, zar nisu čitali Pinčonove romane i videli *Pariz Teksas*. Umeju da raspravljaju o Deridi i dekonstrukciji, o plutajućim označiteljima bez svojih označenih...U istočnoj Evropi vidim razmaženu decu socijalizma ...Osećam takođe silu duge crne borbe koja dopire sa Juga i pitanja koje ona postavlja Severu. Zagledam se u duboke tamne oči i pitam se da li je luča čiji su sjaj videli pred sobom, potamnela... (Šihan, 1994).

Ova pitanja ne označavaju samo bespomoćni, nostalglični lament. Ona su deo projektivnog preispitivanja smera i smisla naše istorije, radi kojeg moramo da se podsetimo na pravo značenje poj-

mova kao što su kapitalizam i socijalizam. Jer, kako u istom tekstu insistira ova sasvim izuzetna istoričarka i filozof, „samo... ako prodremo do samog izvora unutrašnjih tenzija ovoga društva, samo ako uspemo da dopremo do mehanizma koji proizvodi ovu fragmentaciju, samo ako uspemo da imenujemo sistem, moći ćemo da nazremo put kojim ćemo ga prevladati“ (Šihan, 1994).

\* \* \*

Potreba da se interveniše protiv ritualnog ubistva jezika i nadeni prava imena stvarima i pojavama takođe je tema mnogih tekstova Arundati Roj. Svoje negodovanje protiv „novogovora“ u službi neoliberalne ekonomske rekolonizacije sveta ona u jednom od eseja iz zbirke pod naslovom *Aritmetika beskrajne pravde (The Algebra of Infinite Justice)* slikovito izrazila kroz parabolu o Cvilidreti, zlom patuljku iz poznate dečije bajke, koji je umeo da od slame napravi zlato, a od devojke kojoj je na taj način spasio život za uzvrat tražio da se odrekne svog još nerođenog deteta, odnosno smisla života i budućnosti; njegova demonska moć sadržana je u njegovom imenu, i nestaje onog trenutka kada ga neko sazna i izgovori (Roj, 2002: 129–130). U predgovoru napisanom za pomenutu zbirku eseja, Džon Berdžer je kao najznačajniju njenu spisateljsku vrlinu istakao spremnost da „provede život putujući u srce jezika, da bu umanjila, ako je nemoguće eliminisati, rastojanje između misli i govora“, i na taj način suprotstavi svetu ljudi „čiji je životni cilj da maskiraju nameru“ i koji se „množe i napreduju u prostoru između onoga što kažu i onoga što prodaju“ (Berdžer 2001: XIX) Berdžer se u još nekoliko navrata osvrnuo na njenu beskompromisnu odanost istini, (na njenu „drskost“, kako se izrazio u jednom intervjuu), kao glavni razlog simpatija i poštovanja koje gaji prema ovoj indijskoj autorki i borcu za pravdu. Arundati Roj je, sa svoje strane, idejnu srodnost sa Berdžerom potvrdila citirajući rečenicu iz romana *G*: „Nikada više ni jedna priča neće biti ispričana kao da je jedina“, jer ne postoji jedna jedina priča, već samo „načini viđenja“, dodala je aludirajući još jednom na Berdžera i njegovu uticajnu, marksistički koncipiranu studiju o evropskom slikarstvu pod naslovom *Ways of Seeing*. Ove aluzije poslužile su autorki kao uvod u tekstu o njenom, nasuprot zvaničnom, viđenju terorističkog napada 11. septembra 2002: da bi se razumeo, podseća nas autorka, neophod-

no je imati istorijski sluh za tragičnu rezonancu koju taj datum ima za stanovnike Palestine i Čilea, a potom i za niz drugih datuma koji ispisuju kontinuiranu liniju kriminalnog, i najčešće genocidnog, američkog intervencionizma.

Arundati Roj je do svog današnjeg „načina viđenja“ istorije, te aktivnog političkog otpora koji neumorno pruža, došla postupno, demonstrirajući u svom intelektualnom razvoju, slično Berdžerovom junaku, i u nešto drugačijem smislu Heleni Šin, paternu koju sam u ovom radu nazvala dijalektički kontinuitet modernizma. Njen umetnički početak obeležio je roman *Bog malih stvari* (*The God of Small Things*), 1997. godine nagrađen Bukerovom nagradom. Svojom temom, kao i svojim jezičkim eksperimentima, i nelinearnom narativnom strukturom, *Bog malih stvari* naslednik je velikih modernističkih ostvarenja sa početka prošlog veka. To je tragična priča o pobuni dvoje ljubavnika protiv istorije koju, u ovom slučaju, definišu dve podjednako destruktivne, podjednako patrijarhalno utemeljene, tradicije – britanski kolonijalizam i kastinski sistem u Indiji. Međusobno vrlo različite, ali združene tabuima protiv ljubavi (iskonskim Zakonom o tome „ko se sme voleti, i koliko“), ove dve kulturne tradicije uspevaju da zaustave ljubavnike u njihovom iskoraku, ubivši Velutu, i prepustajući Amu i njeno dvoje dece, trajno osakaćene perfidnom ulogom koju su bili prinuđeni da odigraju u smrti čoveka koga su voleli, životu bolnih i bespomoćnih reminiscencija. Ovaj poraz nije potpun jer se, zahvaljujući smeloj narativnoj manipulaciji koja na kraju presudno odstupa od hronološkog sleda, tragična paterna zaokružuje spoznajom, da, iako ljubavnici stradaju, ljubav ipak predstavlja jedini spasonosni i neuništiv princip u svetu nepravde i mržnje. Roman se naime završava scenom koja hronološki pripada samom početku priče, kada Amu, odlučivši, poput Džojsovog Stivena pri pogledu na devojkicu na plaži, da je ono što je privlači kod Velute poziv samog života, anticipira u mašti njihov predstojeći, prvi ljubavni susret. Tako ova džojsovska reminiscencija kao da na kraju neutrališe ona značenja u romanu koja upućuju na politički angažovan modernizam pisaca poput Berdžera. Tačno je da je u liku „nedodirljivog“ Velute, čija se neokrnjena humanost podjednako iskazuje u njegovom erotskom „umeću ljubavi“ koliko i u njegovom revolucionarnom političkom humanizmu, transponovan uvid Arundati Roj o odnosu erosa i pravde koji predstavlja superiornu

sintezu u poređenju sa herojima ranog modernizma – apolitičnim egotistima, estetama i dobrovoljnim izopštenicima. Međutim, činjenica da je Velutinoj smrti presudno doprinela izdaja druga Pilaja, takođe komuniste, uz već prokomentarisanu završnu scenu romana, sugerise da su komunističke vizije pravednijeg društva, kao i sve ostale političke revolucije i programi, uvek na kraju nedelotvorni, zbog urođene nesavršenosti ljudske prirode uvek podložni unutrašnjim izdajama.

Međutim, ova politička skepsa nije pravac u kome je Arundati Roj nastavila da se kreće, a koji bi mogao da vodi nekoj verziji postmoderne „ravnodušnosti i pristanka“. Posle ovog romana, koji ostaje lament nad sudbinom „boga malih stvari“, ne samo ljubavnog samoostvarenja, već drugih i manjih ličnih zadovoljstava i privatnih radosti, čiji poklonici bivaju svi žrtvovani bogu „velikih stvari“ – neumitnom i nemilosrdnom mehanizmu istorije – Arundati Roj prestaje da piše romane i posvećuje se obnovljenom kritičkom promišljanju istorije, smeštajući tekuću situaciju u Indiji i Pakistanu u kontekst „velike priče“ o zapadnoevropskoj i američkoj kapitalističkoj i rasističkoj dominaciji nad ostalim delom planete. Podvrgnuta ponovnom razmatranju, pitanja moći, njene istorijske zloupotrebe i mogućnosti pravednijeg sveta, sada su predmet novog „načina viđenja“: pored eseja koji razotkrivaju pravo lice globalizacije, a prevashodno nemilosrdnu eksploataciju siromašnih od strane predatorskih korporacija, Arundati Roj se, kao očevidac i učesnik, oglašava sa kriznih područja u svetu, pre svega u Indiji, odakle po pravilu stižu namerno zamagljeni ili neistiniti zvanični izveštaji, da bi razjasnila kome i zašto treba pružiti otpor, a kome podršku. Jedna od indikacija njenog političkog stava jeste i njena javna podrška zvanično ozloglašanim ustanicima iz duboke, teško dostupne unutrašnjosti Indije. Njihova oružana pobuna, saznajemo od Arundati Roj, i celokupni program budućeg društvenog preobražaja, organizovani i izvedeni u saradnji sa pripadnicima indijskog maoističkog pokreta, odgovor su na dugogodišnju, a u javnosti praktično nevidljivu i nezamislivu, nemaštinu, kao i prisilna raseljavanja, koja se pod zaštitnim imenom demokratskih reformi i „progresivnih“ tehnoloških projekata, već godinama sprovode u interesu privatnih korporacija. Njen naziv za ove maoističke pobunjenike – „Gandijevci, ali sa puškama“ (Roj 2010) – jedan su primer „drskosti“ zbog koje se Džon Berdžer divi Arundati Roj, ali zbog koje joj je u sopstvenoj

zemlji, uz mnoge pogrde u medijima, sudski izrečena kazna javnog prezira i jednodnevni pritvor.

Govoreći o svom opredeljenju za dokumentarnu prozu koje je nakon romana *Bog malih stvari* gotovo sasvim preovladalo nad romanesknim impulsom, Arundati Roj ističe kako, nasuprot uobičajenom shvatanju da autori iz sveta ubiru svoje priče, zapravo priče biraju autore, zaposedaju ih, kolonizuju, insistiraju da budu ispričane. Ne samo priče, već i način na koji će biti ispričane: „Iz razloga koje ne razumem u potpunosti, roman, ili pripovetka, izviru iz mene poput plesa. Političku prozu iz mene čupa bolni, slomljeni svet u kome se budim svakog jutra“ (Roj 2004: 13).

Ovaj opis gotovo somatske nužnosti određenog stvaralačkog postupka podseća na komentar Gabrijela Josipovičija o duboko ukorenjenoj, reklo bi se, fiziološkoj uslovljenosti Kafkinog stvaralaštva, čija je najrečitija metafora pripovetka „Umetnik u gladovanju“. Kao njegov junak, koji je umro od gladi jer nije mogao da jede i vari uobičajenu hranu koju su mu nudili, tako i Kafka, čije je „samo telo odbijalo da sledi put kojim su išli Verfel i Brod“, njegovi daleko konvencionalniji i uspešniji savremenici, nije imao drugog izbora, već da sebe osudi na eksperimentalnu književnu dijetu, iako je ona, u tom trenutku, čak i za njega samog, bila sasvim „nehranljiva“ (Josipovići 2010: 138). Autoru studije *Šta se to desilo sa modernizmom* Kafka je poslužio da potkrepi definiciju modernizma (ali i modernosti) u umetnosti, preuzetu od Rolana Barta, naime da „biti moderan znači biti svestan onoga što više nije moguće“ (139). Navedeno određenje primenljivo je i na autore o kojima je do sada bilo reči, te ću, umesto zaključka, ukratko ukazati na način na koji se uklapa u tezu ovoga rada o tradiciji modernizma u delima savremene književnosti.

U poglavlju posvećenom Borhesu, Josipovići ilustruje duh modernističkog „nepristajanja i revolta“ osvrćući se na priču „Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius“. Borhesov narator postaje svestan da neki sasvim imaginarni svet prodiere i osvaja ovaj postojeći – svet tanan, čist i bez gustine, zasađujuće nalik svetu iz romana, ali isto tako i onom koji su nacisti hteli da nametnu u periodu od 1933. do 1944. godine. Josipovići piše dalje :

Reagujući vrlo *modernim gestom pasivnog otpora* ili *tihog heroizma* [moj kurziv], narator se upušta u sopstenu bitku protiv ovog stanja,

povlačeći se u hotel kraj mora gde se posvećuje, kao ovovremenski (stoički) Sveti Džerom, prevođenju baroknog remekdela Tomasa Brana, *Urne Burial*. Kažem stoički, zato što nije siguran, kao što je Sveti Džerom bio, da to što radi služi očuvanju tradicije. Izgubio je veru u vreme. Ono čemu se nada jeste da će ovaj tihi svakodnevni prevodilački posao sačuvati *njegovo* uporište u stvarnosti, sprečiti da *njega* usisa zavodljiv svet Tlona. To je sve čemu se možemo, u ovom našem modernom svetu, nadati (84).

Za autore poput Arundati Roj, Džona Berdžera ili Helene Šihan, ovakav pasivni otpor i tihi heroizam nisu više dovoljni, niti mogući. Politička angažovana, u obnovljenom dijalogu sa istorijom, njihova književnost, filozofija ili kritika jedini su, temperamentalno i objektivno nužan, način da u „bolnom“, „slomljenom“ postmodernom svetu budu modernisti. Njihov politički aktivizam, ponovimo to još jednom, nije apsolutna negacija velikih modernista iz prošlog veka, već kao i Borhesov, ili Džojsov, pasivni otpor, predstavlja istorijski specifično ispoljavanje onog endemskog modernizma, štaviše one šekspirovske tradicije koju Piter Selars ima na umu kada kritikuje postmodernu moralnu ravnodušnost, duhovnu stagnaciju i misaonu rasparčanost. Umesto zaključka navodim odlomak iz teksta „Kulturni aktivizam u novom stoleću“, gde se kaže da je „glavno pitanje danas kako vratiti u središte umetničke prakse ono što je činilo moć umetničke prakse kroz vekove, i što je upadljivo nedostajalo predhodnoj generaciji, a to je, jednostavno, društvena pravda. Bez društvene pravde nema Sofokla, nema Šekspira, nema Molijera – to su ljudi koji su pitanje društvene pravde stavljali u centar, ne na margine. Šekspir je sav o tome kako misliti celovito i globalno, i kako, na stvaralački način, naći svoje mesto u svetu“ (Selars 1999).

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**Summary:**

**‘WHATEVER HAPPENED TO MODERNISM?’  
MODERNIST TRADITION IN JOHN BERGER’S *G***

In the paper Eliot’s concepts of the ‘historical sense’ and the ‘living tradition’ are utilized to highlight the contrast between the current promotion of (historical, political, literary) amnesia and the impulse on the part of John Berger, A. Roy, and H. Sheehan to re-open a dialogue with history as an aspect of a renewed concern among artists and independent intellectuals with questions of truth, justice and freedom. The paper’s main argument is that it is in their commitment to historical truth, social justice and spiritual integrity – all outdated prejudices in fashionable academic theory and practise – rather than in any formal device(s), that the literary modernism finds its contemporary, living expression. The dialectical continuity of literary modernism – which, I argue, consists historically in the change from the initial passive resistance of the aesthetically-minded author/hero, a voluntary exile from the early 20th century bourgeois respectability, to the politically engaged works by mostly activist authors at the end of the century – is traced also in the fictional life pattern of G, the hero of John Berger’s eponymous novel. A brief account is given of as well of the comparable turning points in the intellectual careers of two contemporary women writers – Arundhati Roy and Helena Sheehan.

2013

## THE PERSISTENT TRADITION:HUMANIST HERITAGE IN THE WORK OF DARKO SUVIN

My theme is the significance of Darko Suvin's work, both as a critic and a poet, for current literary and cultural theory but I prefer to approach it obliquely, by a brief reference to a novel by a non-English writer, an Italian in fact, Alessandro Baricco, which came my way by chance, interrupting briefly my involvement with Suvin. I read it in Serbian translation and without much enthusiasm at first. The opening chapter seemed to introduce just another sample of the kind of postmodern fiction consisting in random images of mass culture and frivolous slang dialogue, interspersed with brilliant passages of postmodern pseudo-philosophy, and all steeped in self-complacent irony. I read it through though, and it turned out to be all these things; and yet it had a resonance, a relevance, it connected, it helped define, even if negatively, what I consider to be the significance of Darko Suvin. The book is about the post-Ford America (where paradoxically postmodern simulacrum, as has been observed by Baudrillard, is most genuine) and about three people seeking and, typically, not finding more hopeful alternatives. Mentally they are marginal figures, disillusioned outsiders, but instead of reaching out to 'encounter the reality of experience', they long, at least two of them, to return to their illusions. One, a girl, has seen through the images of happiness sold by Disney's industry of entertainment, yet remains emotionally addicted to this false utopia. As she confides to the twelve-year-old boy prodigy in her care,

...should anyone ask you what happiness is, even if you're in the end a bit sick, you must admit that this is - perhaps not what happiness is - but this is what it smells like, I mean, that's what it tastes like, like a strawberry, or a raspberry, and despite all the lies and fraud, and there's as much of that as you like, for it's not real happiness, not the genuine kind, the copy is wonderful, much better than the original... (Bariko 2004: 21)

The other, for my purposes an even more interesting character, is a university teacher of statistics, who prefers to do research in, as his colleagues politely comment, somewhat marginal topics, such as curved surfaces and rounded objects. They are, for him, ‘reality’s only passage of escape from its own fatefully strong structure, rectangularly organized and fatally limited’. (Bariko 2004: 69) Faced with his own failure to apply his philosophy in practice and escape the strong ideological structure underlying academic life, he develops slight melancholy at first, and is often found by his students sitting in empty lecture rooms and quietly weeping. Soon another, much more embarrassing symptom of Professor Killroy’s dis-ease occurs. He begins to vomit, and not in private, but publicly, especially on important academic occasions, such as conferences or official welcome ceremonies in honor of eminent visiting professors, and finally whenever he finds himself in the vicinity of scholars and academic intellectuals. The cause of this extreme somatic reaction is a sudden discovery that academic success involves a shameful intellectual and moral compromise, a betrayal of the idea. Initially a galaxy, a marvelously chaotic Blakean revelation, a momentary epiphany of the infinite, the idea inevitably begins to lose its original purity and richness as it is tidied up and organized in order to be communicated, justified, and defended. It is eventually utterly corrupted as it is turned into a weapon in the struggle for recognition, success, fame, profit, sexual satisfaction, or merely academic survival. Professor Killroy summarizes his discovery in an essay on intellectual dishonesty, the last and pithiest of whose six short theses reads: ‘academic honesty is an oxymoron’. Yet although he ultimately declares corruption inescapable, generalizing it into human, all too human condition, his nausea, a somatic revolt against what Sartre, the author of *La Nausée*, called inauthentic existence, persists, adequately reflecting what a commentator have referred to as the morally ambiguous position of most of the prominent American academics<sup>81</sup>. In all probability, as

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<sup>81</sup> (According to Darko Suvin, they belong to those 10 to 15% percent of population the rise in whose salaries is paid from the post-Ford capitalist extra profit, that is, from the material expropriation of the 80% wage workers (Suvin 1999: 30), and who repay their employers by inventing mystifyingly ambiguous theories about political and economic liberation, as for example, Stephen Greenblatt, an American New Historicist,

the few remaining ‘outsider’ countries are slowly but unresistingly sucked into the global capitalist economy, the tacit assumption that academic honesty is an oxymoron will increasingly define the spirit in their universities, too.

When I reflect on this development, this steady decline from the theory and practice of the critics such as Leavis, Wilson, and Trilling – ‘three honest men’ as Philip French called them in recognition of their intellectual integrity – I too am visited by a sensation very similar to Professor Killroy’s nausea. Having published a book in unqualified defense of the humanist, ethical approach to literature practiced by Trilling and Leavis, and against a variety of postmodern value-free or relativistic theories that superseded them, I have been subsequently beset by self-doubt or, at any rate, the pathetic feeling of being trapped in an obsolete, Quixotic, spiritual world. True, some encouragement seemed to be coming, since the eighties, from the critics who complained about ‘the absence, from literary theory, of the organizing questions of moral philosophy’ (Nussbaum 1989: 60); the ‘ethical turn’ in Anglo-American literary studies has been registered, involving Wayne C. Booth, Martha Nussbaum, Richard Rorty, and others; but, as stated in a recent, unintentionally condemning, commentary, ‘the habits of action for coping with reality’ recommended by these thinkers will be ‘tailored for the special circumstances of being at home in liberal Western societies at the beginning of a new millennium’. (Schemberg 2004: 12). The warning proved altogether justified<sup>82</sup>.

The kind of ethical purpose propounded by Nussbaum falls far too short of what Darko Suvin expects of contemporary intellectuals. Of Yugoslav origin, but having spent most of his life in America, now living in Italy, Darko Suvin has personally known all forms of displacement, from refugee to exile. He did not, however, choose to develop ‘habits of living’ that would turn the host countries into homes. He has remained sensitive instead to what Brecht called the estrangement effect, believing that spiritual exile, a constant sense of the *unheimlich*, of unhomeliness, in contemporary western society, is

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endorsing Foucault’s claim that Marxism’s relentless pursuit of emancipation is the most repressive hypothesis. Marx’s ‘greatest illusion’ was ‘that human emancipation could be achieved.’ (quoted in Wilson 2000: 12)

<sup>82</sup> See my criticism of Nussbaum in ‘Umetnost kompromisa’ above.

a necessary attribute of the intellectual. Or, more precisely, of critical intellectuals: they must be always distinguished, Suvin insists, from distributive, or reproductive intellectuals - the engineers of material and human resources; admen and design professionals; the new bishops and cardinals of the media clerisy; most lawyers - in other words, organic mercenaries, paid to reproduce the means of psychophysical repression, that is, to habituate citizens to a world in which 40 million men, women and children die of hunger each year (an equivalent, according to D. Suvin, of 300 jumbo jets crashing daily, and no survivors!), and needing no alibis in the cynical postmodern condition. (Suvin 2005, 1-2) Critical intellectuals, in order to produce new forms of consciousness, must feel detached and even alienated from such a world. That this requirement coincides with Lionel Trilling's description of the modernist writer, or intellectual, whose capacity to inhabit a vantage point beyond culture gives him the power to judge, resist, perhaps revise it, is one way in which Darko Suvin's fits the humanist tradition in criticism.

There are other reminders - key terms and issues in Suvin's writings - that recall Trilling and Leavis; and as I read Suvin's articles - 'Circumstances and stances', 'Displaced Persons', 'Politics: What the Twentieth Century May Amount To', 'On Cognitive Emotions and Topological Imagination' and 'Utopia: From Orientation to Practice' - I discovered in them a powerful re-endorsement and, in so far as Leavisite criticism did suffer from certain limitations, a creative development of the tradition in literary studies I had thought dead or forgotten.

Leavis's and Suvin's starting points are the same. Both Blakeans, they refer to their intellectual engagement as an unceasing mental fight against forces that desecrate the life of the body and the mind. Leavis wielded his sword against morally degrading, creatively numbing effects of the industrial technologico/Benthamite culture in England, warning at the same time his disoriented colleagues against the fatal mistake of looking up to America for guidance. Suvin is faced with Leavis's worst prediction coming true, the terrorism of corporate capital of the post-Ford era, radiating from its center in the US its triple blight - mass murders, mass prostitution, and mass drugging. All the three function literally and metaphorically, so that the drugging,

for example, refers to chemicals and also to Disneyfication, Suvin's apt term for the false utopia, in which the pursuit of happiness has been reduced to a rage for commodity consumption - and from which Baricco's unhappy characters in vain seek escape; beyond this, the term also includes all kinds of obfuscating language and imagery, from academic to political, which, like Disneyland, serves to hide the reality of poverty, hunger, violence and war. This language, Suvin observes, is either facelessly generalized or individually demonized - the enemy is either Muslims or Milošević. It is here, Suvin insists, 'that we can, and *therefore must*, begin to intervene.' (Suvin 2005: 97). *Here* means language, and Suvin's first requirement is for a linguistic decontamination, a restoration of accurate meanings to words and concepts, so that the truth can be told. Arundhati Roy's term for this preliminary work is 'the naming of Rumpelstiltskin'. It is an allusion to a well-known fairy tale character Rumpelstiltskin, a vicious and gold-hoarding gnome, who agrees to magically provide the gold the heroine is ordered, on the pain of death, to produce for her prospective royal husband. In return for his favor, the gnome threatens to snatch her first-born, unless she guesses his name, which only can deprive him of his demonic power<sup>83</sup>. Suvin quotes another, earlier activist, Rosa Luxemburg, who claimed that telling the truth is already a revolution. She may have been too optimistic, Suvin warns, but we must inherit her optimism concerning knowledge and say that a semantic, terminological hygiene is a precondition of any saving revolution. (Suvin 1999: 16)

Suvin's intervention so far has been manifold. He has resisted by word and deed, as an intellectual in the broadest sense, a citizen, a literary critic, one gesture supporting or reflecting another and displaying a wonderful integrity, a Blakean creative wholeness, praised by Leavis and an anathema to postmodernist thinkers. His

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<sup>83</sup> Roy makes use not only of the naming motif but of the whole pattern of relationships in the story as a fable of the current privatization of natural resources in India: the threat it poses to the future survival of Indian population, the role of western investors, emissaries who brought the notion ('gnotion') of privatization over from Rumpeldom's 'heart of whiteness', and are selling it masqueraded as a plan for the redemption of the wretched, and, finally the hope that once their 'vernacular' is unscrambled and one understands what really they are saying (selling), their Rumpel power will dwindle. (Roy 2002, 137).

living interests found their way into his poems: they are his intellectual and emotional biography, an intimate record of the motives urging his most important decisions, of his disappointments and anguish, his perseverance. Which is why I prefer, at this point, to let his poetry, rather than my secondhand comments, speak. In *Beginnings*, the opening section of his poem 'Autobiography 2004: De Darci Natura', we read:

When i was 11 i heard it on the radio  
the Germans were bombing Beograd  
When i was 69 i saw it on television  
the US were bombing Beograd  
Between the bombings my life was spared  
i owe it to the dead  
to speak up against fear.

As a Yugoslav expatriate in Canada, he spoke eloquently against fear when as a result of 'the illegal and immoral bombing of Serbia led by the US,' he refused Canadian citizenship, and faced the ordeal of another displacement. The new democratic mini-state of Croatia denied entrance to his Serbian born Orthodox wife: and thus, he reflects in the poem, his native city, which he had first left, in 1943, 'fleeing from the killers speaking my language', now, in 1991, was leaving him

Alone with my writings, Nena,  
A few friends, smoldering memories,  
Mourning, indignation.

Yet, he considers himself lucky. Remembering his two car crashes while still a young man, after which he left driving gladly, he concludes

I have survived the worst of capitalist realia, bombs and cars  
I have been lucky  
To escape...

It was his resilient personality, of course, rather than luck, his unmistakable instinct for what is life-enhancing and life-sustaining that enabled him to survive. He calls it some 'obscure, stubborn *daimon*', which decided, while he was still a boy, that he should learn



languages rather than music. It proved right when he, at the age of 11, found himself on a boat, ‘amid another language’, crossing ‘from occupation’

to liberation, into the city of Bari  
    marvelous to youthful eyes  
Where horse-drawn coaches had a plank  
    at the back between the wheels  
For daring schoolboys to jump on.

The saving-plank image reappears later, when at the age of 21, back in his native Zagreb, his *daimon* decides

To quit the repetitive certainties of engineering for the discoveries  
Of arts and letters, of the planks  
    that mean unforeseeable life  
People in student theatre  
    won out over things in the lab  
With my heart in my throat.

He looks back with sadness at the years that shaped him

Between the lines of Balzac  
    and Shakespeare, the Russians and Krleža  
Tito, and Hegel, Engels  
    and Lenin on the two souls  
All irretrievable now, the communist  
    youth, confident hopes...

and sums up:

the poems are the best of me  
And the best i can say for myself is  
    i kept the faith comrades  
In this sad and wondrous time.

And he did, in his fashion. Despite growing ‘discontents with the worsening times’, he has never been happy to be a nay-sayer; he preferred to creatively organize pessimism instead of succumbing to it. Another poem, ‘Cognitive estrangement’, quoting Blake’s ‘I shall not cease from mental fight’ for its motto, and identifying the moment of estrangement from his native ground with ‘Jerusalem shifting from here into then’, ends in a refusal to embrace nihilism, and forces an

affirmation of creativity out of the mind's very capacity to register the absurd:

Perhaps our species is the god's belly laugh  
in a cosmic offal-bin, & my writing about beauties  
& learned elders only wrenches my heart. Nichtsdestotrotz.  
& yet to worship the King of Emptiness is not enough:

Even as entropy breaks my bones and rainbows my veins  
To say, "this is absurd", quickens life.

And thus, to the question 'What did I want' that opens Retrospect, the last section of 'Autobiography', the answer is:

The pursuit of happiness when young, but more and more  
One thing: to live this brief life on beauteous Earth  
Not like an exploited tenant  
    buckling down to parasite bosses  
Nor like landlord, but like steward  
    handing on to those coming after  
Our family house preserved, cleansed from the worst vermin  
Maybe even repainted

In the poem's conclusion, the tense shifts from the past to the open conditional:

Surely other universes must be better made, surely  
We could make even this botched world better!  
More similar to Mozart  
    beauteous like Botticelli  
Stern and compassionate like all great teachers, a forgiving mother  
Infinite like the wine-colored sea.

It is in pursuit of this ambition that Suvin also discovered a cure for his uprootedness: the rebuilding of his lost Jerusalem was an enterprise oriented not to the soil but depending on a sense of continuity in time: new roots could be struck in the projected better future, new home could be found in the collaborate effort of intellectuals sharing the same vision. For Suvin, a university teacher and literary critic, this general orientation meant specializing in utopia, a genre and theme with subversive potential, considered politically incorrect and hence temporarily wiped from the postmodernist agenda. Within his field of

research, too, he responded to NATO bombing of Serbia: as a result of that crime, he felt he had to abandon a strictly formalist approach to literature, particularly to dystopia. Reading Russian dystopian classics, *1984* and *WE*, for example, in the same way as we read them before the end of the Cold War, is misleading, and politically disabling. To produce valid knowledge, that which produces political action, ‘correct reading’ must be supplemented by ‘good reading’, and the latter requires historical contextualization. Instead of balancing one against the other in a historically neutral manner in literary interpretation, it is upon the contemporary western, rather than classical Russian, dystopian literature that the good reading focuses at present: that is, good reading takes into account the all important circumstance of the defeat of Stalinism, and the currently unchallenged terror of that other Leviathan, western totalitarianism. (Suvin 2004: 534-5) Disneyfied into a false utopia, it requires a dystopian deconstruction, to allow for a clear vision of a truly utopian future.

Yet, (and this has been more than hinted in the poetry I quoted) this future will never happen, according to Suvin, if we rely on good reading only. It is here that he moves away, or beyond, Leavis. Leavis considered the psychological and moral benefits of passionate and honest engagement in literary studies in themselves an effective strategy of social transformation. While sharing Leavis’s high regard for it, Suvin knows that self-enclosed art is not enough. Even if it is true (and I read sentences like this with deep gratitude) that ‘the only exception from utter betrayals and warmest comfort to be shored against our interplanetary cold ruins – has been the best of art’ (Suvin 2002: 86), we must once for all face the fact that, politically, art, even the best of it, ‘makes nothing happen’. But it is the way Suvin surpasses Leavis, completing the gaps in his thought without discrediting his key humanist premises – in contrast to the treatment Leavis received from most eminent critics, among them Marxists, too - this, I think, may well be Suvin’s most significant contribution to contemporary criticism.

The Marxists’ denunciation of Leavisite literary criticism is founded on two well-known, and intentionally extreme, statements by Marx.

1. The Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.
2. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.

Although Marx himself qualified these formulations later, they remained the point of departure for the most crudely mechanistic interpretations of the relationship between literature and ideology. If we leave aside the absurdities of Socialist realism, the rest may be reduced to two kinds of distortions: first, that literature as part of the superstructure, can only reproduce ideological consciousness and never criticize or change it, and is hence irrelevant, or even a hindrance to revolution; second, that literature may indeed expand and ennoble individual consciousness, but cannot change society – on the contrary, by offering a temporary relief of isolated imaginary transcendence, a brief excursion from harsh and vulgar realities of everyday life, it renews the strength to endure them. Instead of disrupting it, literature actually protects the status quo. The sophisticated versions of these positions are recognizable in the theories of (Neo)Marxist such as Althusser, and his followers the New Historicists who hold that literature is one of the Ideological State Apparatuses, but also, temporarily at least, in the works of Terry Eagleton, whose first major contribution to literary study therefore was to exorcise from it the spirit of F. R. Leavis, and of his pupil and follower, R. Williams, (Selden 1989: 42).

Darko Suvin, by contrast, modeled his Marxism primarily on the work of Raymond Williams, Leavis's disciple, and, among artists, on the example of Berthold Brecht, whose independent politics – he declared he belonged to 'a party of one person, closely allied to communism' - in convergence with his poetic persona represents 'the most fertile stance articulated in our century.' (Suvin 2002: 88) As for the rest, he observed that the 'unbelievable obtuseness of all shades of Marxist politics towards art...raise serious doubts about their liberatory interests, as opposed to mere change of ruling class-blocks' (Suvin 2002: 95). Contrary to most dichotomizing quasi-revolutionary Marxist literary theory, Suvin insists that art and politics do not exclude, but on the contrary, require each other as necessary

complements in an authentic struggle for human emancipation. If poetic sensibility and artistic experience are not sufficient, they are indispensable to any revolution, as a guarantee that the aims will never be compromised by the means, and the revolution never turn against itself. In Suvin's own words, 'no politician should be trusted unless he has learned literary understanding'; nor should any 'cultural critic ... be trusted unless he engages in empirical politics'. And finally, all artistic experience that refuses to (if not walk hand in hand with, then) expose itself, face and understand the deepest liberatory currents of its age, joins the tacit assistants of murderers. (Suvin 2002: 96)

The identification of these liberatory currents, now as we are entering this extremely confused and dangerous XXI century, is all important: For Suvin, who professes the radical 'rainbow' politics, they include all those movements and groups whose common horizon is a desire to consecrate life. Or, to put in a slightly different way: all those movements which uphold, in the widest sense, the principle of use value against the capitalist principle of unequal exchange. Ancient designations for these use values were compassion, indignation, love. Today, for Suvin, they are poetry and communism. A communism, Suvin reiterates, which has nothing to do with the caricature that results when we sunder it from poetry. That there is no poetry without communism and no communism without poetry is something all poets know, and often in fantastic metaphors. Few communists so far have allowed their suspicion to flower. For Suvin, the major responsibility of intellectuals, today, is to clear up this misunderstanding.

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### Rezime:

## HUMANISTIČKO NASLEĐE U DELU DARKA SUVINA

Svrha rada je da ukaže na aktuelnost humanističke misli u kritici i poeziji Darka Suvina. Pod humanističkim nasleđem podrazumevaju se romantičarska i marksistička tradicija, čije su neumirene aveti, po rečima Žaka Deride, pohodile Evropu čak i na vrhucu postmoderne antihumanističke egzaltacije. Navodno preživeli projekti i vizije ljudske emancipacije – ekonomske, političke i duhovne – prepoznaju se u vitalno značajnim, savremenim temama Suvinovih tekstova, kao

sto su izgnanstvo kao politički i duhovni fenomen, kognitivne emocije, uloga književnosti, naročito distopije, kao opozicione društvene sile, sposobnost za kritičko inervenisanje u procesima globalizacije kao kriterijum validnog znanja i tumačenja i, iznad svega, odgovornost intelektualaca i smisao društvene angažovanosti u postfordovskoj eri. Suvinov možda najveći doprinos sastoji se u razrešenju notorne dihotomije između estetskog i etičkog, odnosno, između umetničkog doživljaja i političkog delanja, razrešenju utoliko vrednijem što nije samo teoretsko, već je i imanentno načelo u njegovom ličnom životu.

2007.





# **III**

## **'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH**

A false idea kills more than plagues and famines...

E. Bond

When the theatre is true, there is an actual moment of truth...  
And when that happens, there is a change of perception and  
what is received is for life. In the theatre there is a special  
possibility, for a short time, of seeing life more clearly.

Peter Brook



## PLATO'S LEGACY OR, THEORY AGAINST DRAMA

Of many philosophers of ancient Greece, some of them very wonderful thinkers, the influence of Plato and Aristotle in subsequent philosophy and in literary theory has proved, for better or worse, the most enduring. I say for better or worse on purpose, for although philosophy is not my province, nor have I read more extensively from what the 'two giants' have left us than was required for the preparation of a postgraduate survey course in literary theory I have taught one term, I do not believe that their influence has been for the best. On the contrary, I find that J. C. Ransom's description of the Platonic impulse as 'predatory', and a modern Platonist as 'a habitual killer', a very exact summary of Plato's legacy<sup>1</sup>. Ransom's anti-Platonism, very convincingly argued, is not widely shared though. On the other hand, the acceptance of the Platonic tradition in western thought as wholly beneficial seldom rests on arguments other than piety owed to the long established opinion<sup>2</sup>. As Bertrand Russell observed in his *History of*

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<sup>1</sup> See J. C. Ransom, 'Poetry: A Note on Ontology' (1934), in L. Petrovic (ed), *Literature, Culture, Identity: Introducing XX Century Literary Theory*, Nis: Prosveta, 2004, 100. The origin of the Platonic impulse Ransom detected in an anxiety before the inexhaustible diversity of life and a desire to arrest and master it through a simplifying formula, or the Platonic idea. Its murdering aspect refers both to the way a certain kind of exclusively rational, abstracting observation impoverishes the world observed (stripping the 'world's body' of its flesh and reducing it to a skeleton) and destroys the observer's sensibilities.

<sup>2</sup> The high esteem in which Plato is still held is certainly part of the traditional reverence for the Classical Greece and its philosophy, as the cradle of western civilization and a source of its proud intellectual and artistic traditions. There have been dissenting voices, though, from Nietzsche's daring reversals of the Classical studies' established orthodoxies, to more recent challenges of the nature of Greek legacy, particularly Plato's. Not all of them are equally valuable to those seeking political, or ethical options other than those deriving from Plato's philosophy. Thus, spectacular as it is, Derrida's deconstruction (in his text 'Plato's Pharmacy', and elsewhere) of the

*the Western Philosophy*, it has been always correct to admire Plato, but never to understand him properly. Thus, for example, I detect a less than adequate understanding of Plato's influence in the brief introduction to a selection from classical literary theory in *From Plato to Alexander Pope: Backgrounds of Modern Criticism*. The editors single out those of Plato's ideas that are most relevant to the subsequent literary theory and practice, pointing to their affinity with the Romantic and Symbolist poetics and with the XX century archetypal criticism. Thus Plato's understanding of inspiration as divine madness is the supporting background of the Romantic and Symbolist theory of imagination; his metaphysics, particularly his notion of transcendental ideas and the related theory of knowledge as anamnesis, underlie the Romantic transcendental idealism (Wordsworth's newly born, coming to this world 'trailing the clouds of glory') as well as the archetypal criticism of Maud Bodkin and C. G. Jung (collective unconscious as a pool of memory containing forgotten but still potent patterns of racial experiences that can be reanimated by archetypes in rituals and art). There is a qualification, to the effect that Plato's influence is mostly indirect, and often a matter of borrowed terminology rather than substantial agreement as to the meaning and interpretation of the terms, but this difference is not elaborated in any greater detail<sup>3</sup>.

My intention is to demonstrate that differences are much more important than similarities, that they are crucial. For one thing, Plato uses the doctrines mentioned above as arguments against poetry: they are combined together to support his ultimate condemnation of poets as a threat to truth, virtue, and order, and to justify their banishment from his ideal republic. The Romantics and Symbolists, like the

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system of multiple exclusions on which Plato's and subsequent western metaphysics depends for its privileging of logos ( speech, being, reason, idea, law) ends up in a contention that for language to function such exclusions are inevitable, in other words, that the logocentrism is inescapable. Less dazzling, but more promising, because they suggest alternatives, are critical re-examinations of the Greek, i.e., Platonic, traditions launched from certain pro-feminist perspectives (not necessarily by card-carrying feminists, or exclusively by women authors). Such is, for example, the anthropological work of E. Fromm, R. Graves and Ted Hughes, as well as the critical analyses of Plato's legacy offered by the feminist author L. Irigaray, or the ecofeminist Val Plumwood.

<sup>3</sup> See Walter and Vivian Sutton (eds), *From Plato to Alexander Pope: Backgrounds of Modern Criticism*, New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1966, pp. 1-3.

archetypal critics after them, and the Florentine neo-Platonists before them, are great defenders of poetry, which for them was a medium of finer awareness, of more discriminate understanding of truth, justice and moral purpose of life. In fact, I believe that what is usually called Plato's legacy, in Romanticism, Symbolism, and archetypal criticism, together with what is best in the Renaissance neo-Platonism, does not originate in Plato at all. It belongs to earlier mythic and philosophical traditions which Plato reinterpreted and, in doing so, distorted. To understand Plato properly is to see that he is not a founder but a falsifier, a corruptor of a more original, and more complete conception of being. As Bela Hamvash writes, Plato does not want to originate anything, he only wants to rescue, and not mankind, but the state<sup>4</sup>.

Hence it would be best to start from *The Republic*: Plato's concern in this dialogue is to define justice, and since the just is better described in what is big than in what is small, he proposes to define a just or ideal state. Now justice is a very old notion among the Greeks, and to demonstrate its distortion in Plato's *Republic*, it is necessary to evoke its original meaning. It was probably conceived in much earlier, pre-Hellenic times, when archaic agricultural communities modeled themselves on what they perceived as laws of nature. These people of various origin are nevertheless commonly called Pelasgians, the name which in fact includes a mixture of the indigenous population and the assimilated early Hellenes<sup>5</sup>. Those inhabiting Crete are believed to have come to the mainland of Greece around 1600 BC, bringing with them the feeling about the universe and about the human world that marked the Minoan Bronze culture, and that was deeply religious and ethical. It may well have been a local instance of that primordial holistic conception of being of which Bela Hamvash speaks as the common core of all authentic spiritual traditions in the world: an awareness that there is only one unified system of rules, or one order, which, however strict, never harms life, because it is not a matter of compulsion, but of freedom<sup>6</sup>. This self-regulating system is perceived

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<sup>4</sup> Bela Hamvaš, 'Orfej', *Patam*, Beograd: Centar za Geopoetiku, 1994, p. 244.

<sup>5</sup> See Robert Grevs, *Grčki mitovi*, Beograd: 'Familet', 2002, pp. 6 and 26.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

as underlying all natural processes, which unfold through the creative tension of opposing principles, where neither extreme is allowed to prevail, because it would be the end of life. It is embodied in social relationships such as by all evidence were cultivated in the Minoan Crete, and which, though modified, survived in the early Mycenaean period in Greece: this culture was democratic in the true sense, egalitarian, peaceful and cheerful: there is no evidence of hereditary kingship, social hierarchy, private property, discrimination of women; nor, as their unwallied cities and the absence of aggressive scenes or weapons on the pottery testify, was there any real fear of or desire for war or conquest.<sup>7</sup> Those laws were felt to be also embedded in man's soul and manifested themselves as a spontaneous, intuitive knowledge of what was right and what was wrong, what fostered and enriched life, and what corrupted and denied it. This unified, archaic 'theory' (theory in its original, Orphic sense, as Bertrand Russell reminds us, meant a way of seeing – 'a passionate, sympathetic contemplation'

<sup>7</sup> See Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy*, London: G. Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1946, 1975, 27-28.

According to Harry Levin, this earliest, egalitarian and nonaggressive *modus vivendi*, characterized by the absence of words *mine* and *thine*, survived in mythical memory as the Golden Age, and is associated in the Hellenic mythology with the pre-Olympian times and the reign of Chronos and the Titans. It was Hesiod, in his *Works and Days*, that almanach of the early Hellas, who first linked the age with the golden metaphor, and its end with the overthrow of the Titans by Zeus. The coup in Heaven corresponded to the destruction of the golden and silver generations of men on earth and the creation of the third, brazen race, stronger and more warlike, which ended up by destroying itself. The fourth, worst of all, is the iron race, and it is still going strong - that is where Hesiod's own and subsequent generations come in. He ends his pessimistic narration by professing that evil will prevail, and that Aidos and Nemesis, personifications of shame and indignation, will forsake the earth. In a later poem, by the stoic poet Aratus, Hesiod's abstract deities are replaced by the maiden goddess of justice, Dike, who is said to have dwelt among men during the first two, golden and silver, generations, but was so appalled by the bloodshed of the third that she fled to heaven. (See Harry Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1969, pp. 14-15. )

Levin's conjecture that mythology's Golden Age may well have been humanity's Neolithic age is plausibly argued in Adelle Getty, *Goddess: Mother of Living Nature*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1990. In fact, she refers to the early Bronze Age cultures, such as Minoan Crete and pre-Hellenic Greece, as possessing the non-aggressive characteristics attributed to the denizens of the mythic Golden Age.

of life inseparable from the actual material practices<sup>8</sup>) passed into the later Greek thought and was preserved in its religion, that is to say, in the archaic cults dedicated to Dionysus, that had existed at least since 1300 BC in Thrace, and arrived in Greece in 600 BC to become a challenge and an alternative to the lifestyle sanctioned by the Olympian deities<sup>9</sup>. But it also affected the early philosophical, proto-scientific, rational Greek thought, which, although an antithesis to the mystical and ecstatic Dionysian tradition, shares with it this sense of the continuity and reciprocity at the heart of all being. I want to begin with the scientists.

Common to the pre-Socratics was the belief that the world, or the cosmos, including man, is one - either consisting of one single substance - *prima materia*, or ultimately reducible to it. Whether this primal substance is identified as water, as in the sixth century philosopher Thales of Miletus, or whether, as in the later, much less naïve, teaching of Democritus and other atomists, the world and men were reducible to atoms, these unitary explanations of the *physis* are the foundation of social egalitarianism, suggesting or stating explicitly, that human beings, consisting as they did of the same substance, were all equal. This unity was not static, but dynamic, (for atoms, or whatever constitutes the *prima materia*, move unceasingly), and this dynamism was a crucial feature of the pervasively ethical nature

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<sup>8</sup> Russell, op cit. , 52

<sup>9</sup> His origin in Thrace has been contested recently by archeologists, who have discovered evidence that the worship of Dionysus in Greece goes back to the days of Mycenaean civilization (c. 1200 B. C.) This means, as some commentators argue, that his foreignness was not cultural, but a matter of psychological difficulty in accepting him: 'that is, the conflict was not between a foreign culture and a Greek one, but between the established values of Greek society and the values which the worship of Dionysus represented'. (See E. M. Thury and M. K. Devinney, *Introduction to Mythology: Contemporary Approaches to Classical and World Myths*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 476.)

The comment is only partially valid: even if Dionysian worship did exist in Greece since the days of the Mycenaean civilization, this civilization, a fusion of the native and Ionian Greek cultures, surviving in the more primitive rural areas after the arrival of second and third waves of Greek invasions, was foreign to the social and religious order these new settlers established, mainly in the cities. Whatever the case, the fact remains that Dionysian celebrations caused discomfort and were in other ways subversive of the civilized city life of Classical Greece.

of all being, which was called, at an earlier stage, by Anaximander, cosmic justice.

For Anaximander, the primal substance was ultimately unknowable, but its chief attribute, infinity (*apeiron*), meant that it was both indestructible and ubiquitous, inhering in what is big as well as what is small. It transforms itself into various other substances with which we are familiar - fire, water, air and earth, which further transform themselves into each other - and persists through those eternal transformations, ageless, infinite, eternal. Its eternity is guaranteed by a certain self-regulating natural mechanism, some necessity or law, that preserves the right proportion between water, fire, air and earth, so that whenever one of them encroaches upon the other, which is an instance of injustice, the balance is quickly redressed, injustice repaired, order and proportion restored (where there has been fire, there are ashes, which are earth, and so on.). A more sophisticated and more widely known version of this conception of the world is to be found in Heraclitus' (c. 500 BC) famous theory of perpetual flux, of endless cycles of ceasing and becoming, which unfold through the conflict of opposites, themselves nothing but the transformations of a single primary substance – fire. It should be noted though that the ethical conclusions he draws from this conception are not unequivocal. His ethics seems to be dominated, like Anaximander's, by a sense of cosmic justice, which prevents the strife of opposites from ever issuing in the complete victory of either. Yet when he uses the word *war* to describe the natural and just cause of both cosmic becoming *and* of the unequal social condition ('War is the father of all, and the king of all; and some he has made gods, and some men, some bond, and some free.'), we may wonder whether he is saying, albeit carelessly, that 'without contraries there is no progression', or whether he is not the first instance in Greek philosophy, as some of the Sophists unmistakably are, of the deliberate warping of this originally deeply moral theory of the world into an excuse for an unjust and immoral political practice characterizing the century when he lived. For the former, Blakean and Nietzschean, vision of war as necessary and perpetual resistance to, and rebellion against everything that stifles freedom and growth, is the very opposite of war as conquest, subjugation and enslavement. War in this latter sense would be the violation of that



immanent equilibrium of which Anaximander and other early natural philosophers spoke as cosmic justice. This, in fact, was probably the original meaning of *hubris* (that is, before Aristotle seized the term and, associating it with *hamartia*, entangled it in hopelessly confusing qualifications and hair-splitting discriminations<sup>10</sup>): an arrogant willful act of transgression against natural law, punished, when it turned against a blood relation, by the Erinyes, the personifications of guilty conscience, and handmaids of justice embodied in the goddess Dike before she become interchangeable with *dike*, a new concept whose meaning was reversed to serve the new legal system of the polis<sup>11</sup>.

For, of course, the rise of the Greek culture, the very foundation and political and economic success of the city-states, were due

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<sup>10</sup> By the time of the great tragedies of the fifth century, it had acquired another meaning, that of the transgression against social boundaries or the law of the polis. To distinguish the sense in which the word is used in each particular instance (which Aristotle fails to do) is essential to the proper understanding of Greek tragedy. Of the (often deliberately) careless use of this word, and the corruption of language in general, on the part not only of Aristotle's but in the subsequent ideological practices in the western world, Edward Bond says the following: 'The words used in morals, ethics, theology, aesthetics, are corrupt. To give one example, Aristotle's *hubris* is said to be pride which causes the tragic protagonist's downfall. This is taken as a cliché so irrefutable it would be believed even by the dead. In fact, *hubris* is insubordination against authority, either divine or state. It asserts the Promethean imperative to be human – and that is why Aristotle, the owner of slaves, needs to destroy it.' See Edward Bond, 'Freedom and drama,' *Plays*: 8, London: Methuen, 2006, p. 219.

<sup>11</sup> See Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, New York: Zone Books, 1990, p. 40. Writing of the violently contrasting religious and moral orders of the Chthonic deities and the new Olympians in the period of the Hellenic invasions and the transition from matriarchal to patriarchal culture in ancient Greece, Vernant points to the confusing phenomenon of the opposing values sometimes existing at the heart of a single divine figure. Thus Zeus was often portrayed in classical tragedy as possessing this duality, i. e., appearing as the celestial Olympian God of the Hellenic conquerors, yet sometimes in his original guise of the 'Zeus From Below', to whom Euripides's Danaids (in *The Suppliant Women*) appeal for protection against the forced marriage to the usurping foreigners. The same was true of Dike. Thus, in Sophocles *Antigone*, the *dike* of the dead is opposed to the celestial *dike*: Antigone, who wants to return the body of her dead brother to the earth, against the order of the patriarchal father and tyrant Creon, recognizes only the former and comes into violent conflict with the throne of the latter. The clash of the protagonists can also be seen as a dramatization of the two opposing kinds of *hubris* referred to in the note above.

to precisely such a hubristic act of violent transgression: to war, conquest, and enslavement. Thus Sparta was founded in the third, Doric wave of the colonization of the Greek peninsula. Instead of the native tribal organization, the invaders established hereditary kingship, and, later on, an aristocratic government. They reduced the population they found there, hitherto free and unaccustomed to exploitation, to serfs, the so-called helots. The land which had been held in common was allotted to the Spartans, and helots worked it for them, because the aristocratic conquerors considered the tilling of the soil degrading, and were by law forbidden to do it. Because the helots were prone to rebellion, the Spartans established secret police to deal with the problem, and, in addition, declared a preventive war once a year against the helots, in which any of them that seemed insubordinate could be killed with impunity. War, in fact, was the sole occupation of the Spartan male adults, and their education, both for males and females, served to develop civic and soldierly virtues: insensitivity to pain, submission to discipline, and repression of any emotion unprofitable to the state. Women were encouraged to show contempt for cowards and were praised if it was their own son. Conversely, they were forbidden to display grief if their newborn child was condemned to death as a weakling, and were castigated if on those occasions they succumbed to emotion. Natural affection and love were suppressed, twisted or instrumentalized in other ways too. Marriage, for example, was not a matter of spontaneous decision, but was compulsory. A means of supplying the state with more obedient citizens, it was subject to strict rules as to who, at what age, and whom, was allowed to marry; the children born outside the prescribed limits were put to death. The cult of pederasty had little or nothing to do with love and affection either: the older lover was responsible for the education of his young protégé manly in toughness and military courage.

The aristocratic Sparta was a prototype of all later fascist states, but the democratic Athens, contrary to the long-established view, was not radically different. Its material prosperity, intellectual and artistic achievement, even its famous serenity of spirit, were confined to a minority, and were made possible in the first place by the institution of private property, imperialist conquest and slavery. Its democracy gave most power to aristocrats, and excluded two thirds of the population -

### III 'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH

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women, who were isolated from public life, and slaves obtained in wars with the neighboring barbarous population. Yet this complete reversal of the archaic moral values which accompanied the temporary success of the Greek polis was still called justice. It was then, in fact, that a long-standing confusion (exemplified by the ambiguities of *dike*) set in, whereby the law, invented to protect the privilege of the rulers, was identified with justice. In short, politics and morality split, and the Athenian citizens were educated not to see the difference.

It was occasionally made visible though, in various ways. One among the challenges to the ideology of the City came from Socrates. The doctrine underwriting official education was that the highest moral good was loyalty to the state, the highest duty a contribution to its welfare; Socrates, an unofficial teacher, told those willing to listen that the greatest good was the welfare of one's own soul, and the worst evil the harm man did to it by his own wrong actions. The moral integrity Socrates undertook to restore to his fellow Greeks had its source in the ethical law inherent in the soul, but, as he was well aware, the spontaneous knowledge of this inborn law had been repressed or forgotten. Socrates did not pretend to know what exactly it was - or rather he pretended not to know - but, in any case, in claiming his own ignorance and exposing that of his listeners', he forced them to make the first step towards freedom from indoctrination. Thus, although he never openly rebelled against the Athenian democratic government, or defied its laws<sup>12</sup> (taking part, for example, in its war campaigns without any protest), indirectly, by subjecting any socially or religiously sanctioned norm, any established opinion or piety, to the ordeal of his specially developed educational method - an argumentative, dialectical debate - he undermined the habit of obedience and reawakened individual consciences. The absolute necessity to constantly re-examine all ready made definitions and criteria in the light of one's own conscience (*daimonion*) as a prerequisite of good life, was the argument Socrates, faithful to the end to his own principles, offered in his defense when he was accused and brought to trial for disbelief in traditional gods and the corruption of the Athenian youth. In fact, his uncompromising defense

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<sup>12</sup> Under the anti-democratic Tyrants, after the war with Sparta, he risked his death by refusing to take part in the arrest of an innocent man. See Anthony Gottlieb, *Socrates: Philosophy's Martyr*, New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 53.

speech merely sealed his death sentence, which is why Socrates is said to have virtually argued himself to death<sup>13</sup>.

It was the democrats who, on coming back to power shortly after the war with Sparta, sentenced Socrates to death, which may be one good reason why Plato, Socrates' disciple and admirer, hated Athenian democracy. The others were not so good. Plato himself was an aristocrat. Socrates was a poor man, completely unconcerned about material possessions and comfort, and thoroughly egalitarian in his educational approach, happy to question and argue with anybody, because everybody, and not merely the chosen few, had the right to examine and thus make their lives worthwhile. Plato, on the contrary, was used to wealth and luxury, and was highly elitist in his political and educational theory.<sup>14</sup> He also blamed democracy for the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian war, rather than the imperialist principle underlying the politics of both parties. Hence, in his *Republic*, he could think of no better model for a just state than the aristocratic Sparta, philosophically idealized. He took over practically all, from the eugenics (including the exposure of children not born within the prescribed period for parents to have children), the cult of pederasty as a higher form of love, to the strict class hierarchy.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 12

<sup>14</sup> The differences between Plato and Socrates can be reliably established by comparing Plato's dialogues with other sources about Socrates, chiefly those provided by Aristotle. On the basis of evidence thus obtained, Anthony Gottlieb has proved that the early dialogues transcribe accurately Socrates' conversations, while in his later work, Plato uses the name of Socrates as a convenient device for expounding views of his own. The instances of Plato's departure from his teacher's views are not confined to those stated above. Among them are also Plato's attitude to knowledge and, related to it, his metaphysics. While Socrates' approach to knowledge was practical, and his search for definitions of virtue a means to an end, i.e., a precondition to virtuous life, Plato saw this search as an end in itself. Philosophy for Plato soon became a theoretical project, concerned with the otherworldly realm of unchanging forms (to be contemplated only by the few initiates) rather than a matter of practical moral obligation that Socrates felt it to be, to the here and the now. Unlike Socrates, who was never obsessed with an afterlife, and did not, as a matter of fact, believe in the immortality of the soul, Plato always had one eye on the beyond, which made his intellectual motives less pure, and which, as in official Christianity already anticipated by his dichotomies, was certainly linked to his increasing dogmatism. (See Gottlieb, pp. 20-26) Admirable as his book is, I do not find all the explanations offered by Gottlieb entirely plausible. One is that Plato owes his metaphysics to Pythagoras, a claim I intend to question in what follows.

The chief difference is that Plato's ruling class is not the aristocracy of wealth but the aristocracy of wisdom. They are the famous philosopher-kings, or guardians, who pass through a long period of training and education before they can devote themselves wholly to the business of governing the state. It seems that a certain democratic and even feminist element enters here, because Plato concedes that the guardians may be recruited initially from the whole population, regardless of sex and class, and if they do well in the course of education, may qualify for the rulers. Besides, among the Guardians everything was to be held in common. However, the abolition of private property, a revolutionary idea in itself, was dangerously misunderstood by Plato, who extended it to cover all personal attachment: it was not merely greed for material possession, but also marital love and maternal care that were treated as selfish impulses. The guardians were therefore to be also deprived of marriage and family life, and were in general expected, by the end of their training, to have subdued their emotions. This, in fact, disqualifies any argument in favor of Plato's alleged pro-feminist orientation: for what it makes clear is that Plato may not have been a hater of women so much as of femininity – the behavior, characteristics and areas of life associated with women. A certain female 'elite' were allowable into the guardian class only in so far as they renounced what actually made them women and what lead Plato to place the whole sex into a 'lower' order of being, – procreation, love, uncontrollable passion, lack of discipline – and became indistinguishable from men in their unquestionable commitment to the state<sup>15</sup>.

But the most serious flaw of Plato's utopian project was the fact that, once established through at least some merit, the social hierarchy was to become hereditary. This obviously was not what the underprivileged castes, particularly the laborers, whose sole task was to feed the soldiers and the guardians, might gladly accept. To make men acquiesce in what is historical, i.e., in what has been created, and can therefore be de-created, it is best to give it the appearance of the given, natural and eternal.<sup>16</sup> So Plato

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<sup>15</sup> For an interesting development of this argument, see Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, London and New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 76-80.

<sup>16</sup> For the way modern bourgeois myth protects the social *status quo* by emptying the world of memory that it once was made, see Roland Barthes, 'Myth Today' in *Mythologies*, London: Paladin Grafton Books, 1987, pp. 142-145.

supplies the alibi of nature, inventing a pseudo-scientific fiction, the first in a series of such myths that falsify both nature and science in order to justify repressive institutions (from the monarchy-supporting myth of blue blood to ‘scientific proofs’ that Jews, blacks, or working class are intellectually deficient). Plato never pretended that the fiction he invented - that God made three kinds of men, one of gold, the other of silver, and the last, third kind of brass - was anything but a sheer lie. But for him (who thought that all books by Democritus should be burnt!), it was a good, legitimate lie - ‘a royal fiction’, as he called it, which it was the prerogative of the ruling class to elaborate and spread to justify and ensure the stability of a rigorously stratified society. There was another lie, though, which Plato did consider wicked: that of the poet.

That the poetic illusion is a lie proceeds from Plato’s metaphysics. He belonged to that later kind of philosophers, like Parmenides, who were profoundly disturbed by the Heraclitean image of the world as perpetual flux, and sought instead the kind of permanence that existed entirely outside the temporal domain of change. Parmenides argued change out of existence, Plato denied it the status of the real. Reality, or true being, he ascribed to unchanging essences, or pure forms inhabiting the transcendental, heavenly order, while the world of eternal becoming he relegated to the lower sphere in his metaphysical scheme. This ontological separation, like the rest of his dualisms, proceeded from the more primary polarization, that between reason and nature. It is as if this founding opposition created a fault-line, running through virtually every topic discussed. Hence, in Plato, there are two sorts of everything: of being, of love, of causation, of knowledge, and even of music, in each case the lower side, as Plumwood amply demonstrates, being associated with nature in almost all of its meanings – the body, the senses, passions, the feminine, the slave/ barbarian, non-human life, matter, change, chaos – and the higher with reason.<sup>17</sup> Thus transcendental forms constitute true being not only

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<sup>17</sup> See Plumwood, pp. 80-81. There have been suggestions, based on *Timaeus*, that Plato later revised his sharply dualistic position, and replaced it with a pantheistic concept of the world-soul. Plumwood’s disqualification of such readings of *Timaeus* (which, in fact, are attempts to reconcile Plato with Wordsworth and with Romantic nature mysticism, and are responsible for the misinterpretations of Plato’s legacy I quoted at the opening of this essay), turns on what, in *Timaeus*, is identified as nature. She contends that *Timaeus* does not depart from Plato’s earlier position in any fundamental way: the spiritualized nature Plato glorifies in this late dialogue is the rational cosmos, purged of all the lower attributes he elsewhere

### III 'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH

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because they are changeless, but because they belong to what is intelligible, conceivable by the intellect only. Conversely, they confer to intellectual knowledge, particularly mathematics, the status of the only reliable

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ascribes to nature - the sphere of 'the indeterminate, the inconstant, the anomalous, that which can neither be understood nor predicted'. Produced by the imposition of (masculine, paternal) logos on the passive formless (female) chaos, it does represent a marriage, but a patriarchal one, whereby the husband/cosmos's primordial underside -chaos/wife - comes to share in her partner's goodness only in so far as she registers the completeness of his conquest. In environmental or political terms, it also represents a colonization model, celebrating not nature, but the structuring of the world to the needs and the intentions of the mastering mind/race: 'the eradication or rationalization of superfluous qualities, kinds, tribes, which are seen from the perspective of the master as disorderly, unnecessary, useless, outside of control'. (Plumwood, pp. 83-86)

This logic informs Plato's conception of love too, described most memorably in the *Symposium*: as opposed to (hetero)sexual love, trapped in the lower sphere of the feminine and of the bodily, the object of higher love is not the flesh-and-blood person, but the idea embodied in the beloved. Taken over by some of the Renaissance neo-Platonists poets, e.g. Edmund Spenser in England, as a philosophy and practice of heterosexual love, it did a very dubious service to women. Extolling the beloved to the status of divine principle, they actually translated the unique, unpredictable, and hence disturbing living woman into a reassuring changeless abstraction, to which she was expected to conform and thus reflect back to the lover the image of his own desire. Spenser's own Platonism in love is quite in line with the cruel measures he undertook, as a Governor in Ireland, to eradicate what he considered the revolting excesses in the native population's pagan customs and habits of life. But against such a puritanical and colonizing model, rightly called neo-Platonic, the Florentine humanists such as Ficino, or Bruno, along with a number of major Renaissance poets they inspired (including Sidney, Shakespeare, Donne in England) were mystics, striving to recapture in their lives, religion, philosophy and in their love poetry (though not always with equal success), the ideal condition of oneness. Their philosophical project was a reconciliation of heterogeneous ideas, of spiritual traditions or social orders hitherto considered mutually exclusive, such as Christianity and paganism, the lay and the clergy, science and myth, spirit and matter. In pursuit of this ambition, they did refer to Plato, but, more importantly, they also drew on alchemy and magic, and looked back to the Cabala and a certain kind of pantheistic Gnosis, all of which traditions were ultimately Pythagorean, and not Platonic. As to love, if the Renaissance courtly love poets did often regard the beloved as a heavenly, star-like ideal they were satisfied to adore from a distance, it was partly fashion but also partly because the women, caught in courtly games of manly competition, were as a rule inaccessible to those with less power, and not because of any intrinsic need to idealize Platonic relationships. Donne's mystical love poems, on the other hand, with their punning fusion of the sexual and the spiritual, the profane and the sacred, are a strong evidence that the most important and enduring Renaissance poetry was Platonic only in name. (On the Renaissance uses of the Occult texts and the latter's mythic and philosophical sources, see Francis Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, The University of Chicago Press, 1964.)

knowledge. ('No one ignorant of geometry is admitted here' is said to have been the inscription at the entrance of Plato's Academy.) In fact, the purest of all ideas are geometrical figures, solids, and numbers. In the contingent, empirical world, which we experience with our senses, there is no ideally straight line, or perfect circle, but we can deduce them rationally without any reference to that world. By the same token, the sensual perception of objects in the empirical world, which are but imperfect earthly reflection, the fleeting shadows of the ideal forms, cannot render truth, but merely opinion. There follows the notorious conclusion regarding poetry: the poet, who merely reproduces images of these shadows, is an imitator of an imitation, twice removed from reality - therefore doubly an illusionist, or a liar.

The reason I dwell on these well known aspects of Plato's metaphysics and epistemology is that they are usually attributed to the influence of Orphism and particularly of Pythagoras, which I believe once again to be a misrepresentation: if his metaphysics is Pythagorean, it is, like the Platonized Socrates, a Pythagoras processed to serve Plato's own ends.

Pythagoras was the last of the Greek thinkers to preserve the unified vision of the world. In fact, he kept together, within a single system, the two Greek traditions - of religious mysticism and of proto-science - which, as I hinted already, had a common origin and purpose but, by the time of Pythagoras, had long been using different methods. The Orphic mysticism grew out of the Dionysian tradition, the ecstatic worship of a primitive archaic deity of all life, which, in fact, constituted the second and, in comparison to the rational Socrates' patient dialectical inquiry, much more direct and often violent challenge to the social hierarchies and ethical priorities of the Greek city state.

Dionysus, whether he originated in the primitive Thrace, or is of the Greek origin, is one of the most archaic of deities worshipped by the Greeks. Represented in one of the later versions of his myth as the son of the mortal woman Semele and Zeus, the solar God of Thunderbolt (by whom she, six month pregnant, was burnt to death when he appeared to her in his divine fiery aspect), brought up by nymphs later to become Hyades (the stars that brought rain), represented with a goat's horns, Dionysus encompassed all the chief contradictions that make up the dynamic totality of being: he was a



mixture of the natural, human and the divine, blending in himself fire and water, the sun and the rain - the elements that combine to ripen the grapes and keep the plant alive. A god of wine and intoxication, he was also synonymous with freedom from all artificially imposed constraints. Once, the story says, he was seized by pirates, brought aboard their ship, but when they fetched rude bonds to fetter him, they were unable to bind him: the ropes would not hold together, but fell apart as soon as they touched his hands and feet. The helmsmen alone understood that this must be a god and should be set free at once or deadly harm would befall them all. The captain mocked him, but then, wonder upon wonder happened. Fragrant wine ran in streams down the deck, a vine with many clusters spread over the sail; and the mast flowered like a garland with fruits. Terrified, the pirates tried to kill him but he turned into a lion, whereupon they all, in a fit of madness, leaped overboard and were instantly changed into dolphins<sup>18</sup>.

Beginning with VI century BC, the cult of Dionysus swept through the civilized Greece and was joined by all who suffered in the grip of its laws, primarily women. In addition to Maenads, his regular companions, he drew to himself, as he passed through various cities, bands of wild women, called Bacchae, who followed him, in the state of ecstatic joy, out of the dusty streets back to the purity of untrodden hills where they danced to the music of his primitive pipe. He was strongly opposed by the authorities, but those that tried to hinder him were punished by destructive madness that caused them to savage their own children, or were dismembered themselves by the wild Bacchae. As a child, Dionysus was himself torn to pieces by Titans and brought back to life by his grandmother, the goddess Rea. The brutal physical dismemberment associated with Dionysian worship, like intoxication or madness, had a psychological meaning: it was the breakup, joyful or painful, of the mental shell, the pseudo-identity confining the souls of the civilized Greeks. To be dismembered meant to be out of one's right mind, forget oneself, discover another in oneself, as Rimbaud was to do centuries later, when by systematic derangement of all the senses, he would recover his lost soul, and find, to the utter shock of the Christian teachers and masters of the

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<sup>18</sup> See Edith Hamilton, *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*, New York: The New American Library, 1969, pp. 55-62.

racist, imperialist Europe, that it was not what separated but what identified him with 'the nigger' and 'the beast'<sup>19</sup>.

If the enthusiasm (the term means etymologically to become one with the god, to have the god enter the worshipper<sup>20</sup>) produced by Dionysian worship was sometimes marked with savagery, it was because the resistances, internal inhibitions as much as external prohibitions, were too strong and could only be overcome violently – as in Euripides' *Bacchae*, where Pentheus' attempt to enslave the god ends in his own dismemberment and death at the hands of his own mother possessed by Dionysian madness. But the primary purpose of Dionysian worship was always beneficial: for it should be remembered that in the story of Dionysus, love and compassion figure prominently. On his way through Greece, he met Ariadne, originally the Cretan Moon Goddess, callously abandoned by Theseus, the new patriarchal monster-slaying hero, whose life she had just saved. Dionysus took pity on her, married her at once, had six children by her, and remained loyal always. When eventually his cult was officially recognized, he did not forget his dead mother, but descended into the lower world to seek her, snatched her away from death and sent her – a mortal, a woman, and a mother – to heaven to dwell with the immortals. In this, as in the rest of his deeds, he sought to restore sacredness to what had been long desecrated in the civilized Greece.

Like Dionysus, Orpheus, originally from Crete, was a musician. In fact, he is believed to have been a priest in Dionysian rituals, before he came to serve the new god of music and poetry, Apollo. Like Dionysus, again, he descended into the underworld to rescue his wife Eurydice, but, unlike his predecessor, he failed, his failure registering, in all probability, the fatal swerve away, in Greek culture, from the Dionysian to the Apollonian principle: from the Muse-inspired, ecstatic worship of all life, to civic and manly virtues.<sup>21</sup> It was with this major

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<sup>19</sup> See Edmund Wilson, 'Axel and Rimbaud', *Axel's Castle*, Glasgow, Collins: Fontana, 1931, 1979, p. 219.

<sup>20</sup> Russell, p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> As Robert Graves observed, once Apollo prevailed, official poetry ceased to be the invocation of the Muse, and became a hymn in praise of kings and military leaders. See Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*, London: Faber and Faber, 1961, p. 442.

transition in human history that philosophy was first purged of feeling and reduced to rational abstract thought, while in religion the split opened between the body and the soul, and the contempt and fear of natural life engendered a desire to escape from the wheel of birth and ascend in spirit to some timeless static upper realm. That, as a matter of fact, is what B. Russell says the Orphics, a movement inspired by Orpheus, believed and attempted in their religious practice to achieve. But if he is right, then it must have been a later development, for it is emphatically not true of the Pythagoras that emerges from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Ovid's Pythagoras had not been yet affected by binary hierarchies, a foundation of all subsequent modes of repression. On the contrary, he honored life's continuities, one proof of which is his belief in the transmigration of the soul, which, upon a person's death, moves into other bodies, whether animal or human. That is one reason why he was a vegetarian. But his motives were not merely self-regarding: he also held it a sin to kill an animal and eat it, when nature offered such an abundance of fruit and vegetable. In love with all living things, he is said to have preached to wild beasts.

Most importantly, for the purposes of the reevaluation of Plato's legacy, Pythagoras, as evoked by Bela Hamvash, still conceived of theory in its original sense: as a single unified system, ethical, poetic and scientific at once, inspired by a sympathetic imaginative contemplation of life. Approaching music scientifically, he nevertheless remained faithful to the Dionysian and original Orphic understanding of music as expressing and rejoicing at the creative reciprocities of the multi-faceted yet single world. As a mathematician, he discovered that number was the foundation, the essence of music, and of all other phenomena: but, in a crucial contrast to Plato, Pythagoras never attempted to abstract number - nor any other essence, for that matter - from things. Number for him did not exist as a pure concept, in some heavenly beyond. It was always *embodied*, in music and dance as rhythm, in sculpture as proportion, in geometry as ratio. It was inherent even in ethics, in the sense of the inner proportion within the soul, whose harmony, if undisturbed, was perfectly attuned to the singing cosmos. It is this all-encompassing, non-hierarchical paradigm, this unified and unifying knowledge, practically forgotten by the times of

Pythagoras, that he insisted the soul of man can and must remember<sup>22</sup>.

His theory of knowledge as recollection becomes something very different in Plato. Plato falsified it, as he did most of the ideas he took over from Pythagoras. According to Plato, the soul's previous existence was not earthly but heavenly, and what it remembered was not, as Pythagoras had understood it, the primordial wholeness of being, but abstract ideas. Once again, this prioritizing of the unchanging abstraction is yet another instance of Plato's general dogmatism, inseparable from his authoritarian politics. Hence music, one of those living, rapturous embodiments of number in Pythagoras, and a debased reflection of a transcendental numeric essence, according to Plato, should be, in the latter's opinion, rigorously censored. Only certain kinds are permissible, those that stimulate soldierly courage. Ionian and Lydian harmonies are forbidden, the first because they express sorrow, the other because they are relaxed and relaxing. The manly spasm, that which fights off the surge of emotion, the 'other life', as Howard Barker once called the ideologically non-annexed soul, must be maintained at all costs.

The same censorship is applied to literature. I already mentioned Plato's first argument against poetry: as an imitation of an imitation, it cannot impart true knowledge, and is therefore a lie. But, rather than sheer illusion, Plato also refers to poetry as a divinely inspired madness, which seems at times to be an acknowledgement of its privileged status. Yet, although it may sound inconsistent, it is, in the last instance, precisely its origin in divine possession that makes poetry the most harmful and wicked of lies. Thus, in *Ion*, Socrates seems to be offering this explanation of the rhapsod's success in interpreting Homer as a compliment. But in the *Republic*, we see that what he calls divine inspiration is, in fact, another word for Dionysian rapture, and from the standpoint of Plato's patriarchal, rationalist ethics and totalitarian politics, Dionysus is the wrong god to be possessed by. For this kind of inspiration is contagious and having turned upside down the psychological hierarchy within the poet to begin with, but then in the rhapsod, it spreads further to his listeners, threatening to undermine the social caste system itself.

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<sup>22</sup> See Hamvaš, pp. 247-249.

This latter argument becomes of particular importance when Plato turns it against dramatic poetry. To appreciate the full force of his final condemnation, a reminder is necessary of what the great plays he condemned were all about. Performed in the V century, they were not mere imitations of the visible - no art is: like mystical religious cults before them, and like their contemporary, Socrates, the tragedians revealed what in the politically and economically most successful period of Athens tended to be obscured. Conducting crucial moral questioning through mythological representations rather than merely logical arguments as Socrates did, yet more complex and refined than the Dionysian rites out of which it had evolved, this drama was another, probably most powerful critical examination of an age that referred to itself as Golden, but had, in fact, betrayed all the primordial values that constituted the original Golden Age mourned by Hesiod.

This is by no means a universally held view. On the contrary: the question, for example, whether Aeschylus wrote 'religious propaganda' in the service of the new patriarchal order, as Robert Graves casually observed<sup>23</sup>, or whether his purpose was to expose and condemn its injustice, as a far smaller number of critics (from Erich Fromm to some important contemporary authors, such as Edward Bond) maintain - has not been decisively settled. Most Greek drama, including the *Oresteia*, withholds direct, unequivocal answers (in that respect, to be sure, it is unlike propaganda!), but so do Shakespeare's plays, and all great art, for that matter. Like Shakespeare's, Greek drama performed its subversive function by juxtaposing conflicting values. As Jean-Pierre Vernant claims, in line with my own argument so far, 'The Greek tragedy is born when myth starts to be considered from the point of view of the citizen', when 'the legendary past embodied in mythical traditions' clashes with 'the new forms of legal and political thought'. The debate with the past, he goes on to say, unfolds on several levels, one being the external tension between chorus, the collective and anonymous presence, expressing collective anxieties, desires and judgments, often of the citizens, and the individualized protagonist, a hero from an age gone by, always more

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<sup>23</sup> Grevs, *Grčki mitovi*, 337.

or less estranged from the condition of the citizen. The conflict is also projected in the language they speak, in the ambiguous use of legal terminology, where a word referring to an old system of values is high-jacked to denote the new one, while retaining its original meaning too, as in the case of *dike*<sup>24</sup>. Corresponding to the objective external clash, both linguistic and interpersonal, there is, as a rule, the inner dilemma of the protagonist, torn between what Vernant understands by *ethos* – a socially conditioned character, and the archaic religious power operating through him - his *daimon*, or inner voice<sup>25</sup>. The moral choice demanded of the protagonist is, in fact, what constitutes the crisis in Greek drama (the word crisis derives from *krisis*, the Greek word for choice or decision<sup>26</sup>), expressed in the question resounding through the great tragedies: ‘What shall I do?’ Whatever his ultimate decision, however the ensuing debate is resolved, it is not, as Vernant notes, ‘only the world of myth that loses its consistency...; the world of the city is called into question and its fundamental values are challenged’<sup>27</sup>.

This is true of the Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, of Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, and of Euripides’ *Ion*, although in all of them the patriarchal and/or military ethos of the polis is formally restored in the end. Yet, as a number of critics have argued plausibly, a close reading of these plays or, even better, seeing them performed, provided that the translation and the performance follow the original text faithfully, would demonstrate that, while they seem to end in the final apotheosis of the city, these tragedies are more than merely open, equivocal, or undecidable<sup>28</sup>. By

<sup>24</sup> See note 11.

<sup>25</sup> Vernant, p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> Rush Rehm, *Radical Theatre: Greek Tragedy and the Modern World*, London: Duckworth, 2003, p. 87.

<sup>27</sup> Vernant, p. 33. Although Vernant himself, like the overwhelming majority of classicist scholars, believes that Aeschylus, was ‘the most optimistic of the tragic writers,...exalting the civic ideal and affirming its victory over all forces of the past,’ he feels nevertheless that the *Oresteia* ‘is not making a positive declaration with tranquil conviction, but rather posing questions to which ‘the tragic consciousness can find no fully satisfactory answers and so they remain open.’

<sup>28</sup> See Sallie Goetsch, ‘Playing Against the Text’, *The Drama Review* 38, 3 (T 143), Fall 1994, pp. 88-92. Goetsch argues that the disproportionate number of the distorting

### III 'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH

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exposing the flaw as having its roots in the oppression of women (the *Oresteia*) and the suppression of individual conscience (*Philoctetes*), or rather both (*Ion*), these plays must have created in their audience a profound sense of discomfort at the very least, puncturing, in the words of Sallie Goetsch 'the comfortable illusion that Athens is the city of the just', and 'subverting the enormous Athenian ego boosted by the public celebratory orations (that usually preceded the performance of the plays) and other political practices.'<sup>29</sup>

Thus Euripides' *Ion* ends in the Athenian patron goddess's prophecy of the city's glorious imperialist future, to be achieved by the three descendants of the legendary Athenian king Erechtheus, each bearing the name of one of the chief invading Hellenic tribes – Ion, Doros Achaïos. Invented by the goddess both to establish Athenians as the founding nation, and to crown the process of the protagonist's 'rebirth' from a quiet parentless servant at the Delphic temple to the adopted son and heir to the Athenian king Xuthus, this *ad hoc* myth also functions as the playwright's ironic comment of the way identities are ideologically manipulated in the Greek polis. For Ion's transformation from a foreign slave to the Athenian citizen and future King involves a rejection of the moral vision and independent judgment, which drove him initially to refuse the offer of citizenship in the class-divided state so steeped in xenophobia (reinforced by the myth of autochthony), envy and violence that it ruined one's life whether one accepted or

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readings of the *Oresteia*, particularly of the *Eumenides*, which make of the Erinyes the vile goddesses, and deny us the sympathy with the female characters, is due to the absence of adequate translations of the Greek original, which in turn is a result of the fact that the 'early authorities approached Greek texts with an enormous blind spot and a patriarchal agenda which may have been so familiar a part of their lives as to be invisible to them'. (89) Once misread and mistranslated, the chain reaction set in responsible for the misinterpretation of Aeschylus' trilogy on the contemporary stage, even by eminent feminist directors. It is symptomatic, however, that Goetsch should overlook one of the very first, groundbreaking, challenges to the accepted patriarchal interpretation of the *Oresteia* formulated in Erich Fromm's *The Forgotten Language* (1951). The absence of Marx inspired humanist thinkers associated with the 'Frankfurt School' from the mainstream contemporary cultural and literary theory and criticism is obviously another ideological blind spot, to which Goetsch's own omission, whether deliberate or not, unfortunately contributes.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 89

refused active political participation. In reply to his (step) father's persuasion, he says:

They say that Athenians are famous as earth's  
Children, all native and no outsiders.  
I'd come in with two afflictions –  
As a bastard, and a son of a foreign-born king...

If I avoided power, I'd be nothing, a nobody,  
But if I joined the political fray  
And tried to be someone, the powerless  
Would hate me. Achievement brings grief.  
On the other hand, capable men who wisely  
Avoid political life  
Would take me for a fool for speaking out  
In a city filled with fear<sup>30</sup>.

His eventual successful indoctrination into the Athenian *ethos* is signaled by his assumption of a new personality, that of a blood-thirsty avenger, seeking to throw his mother Creusa off the cliff, in a replica of his ancestors Kekrops' and Erechtheus' sacrifice of their daughters to save Athens – the incidents mentioned at several points in the play. Thus the apparent happy ending, including his reconciliation with the mother, is ironically undercut by the play's refusal to forget these incidents, indeed its indirect allusion to all the raped or murdered daughters, their sacrifices built, as it were, into the very foundations of the Greek polis<sup>31</sup>.

It is precisely its refusal to ignore the suffering, or indeed the thwarting of any emotion, involved in the military and political success that Plato targets in his final verdict against drama at the end of Book X of the *Republic*. Dramatic poetry, he argues, invoking once again his gendered binary hierarchies, appeals to the inferior part of the soul, that is to say, to feelings and passions. Instead of having our passions dried up, he remonstrates, we have them watered down by

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<sup>30</sup> Euripides, *Ion* 594-606, quoted in Rehm, 111-112.

<sup>31</sup> According to R. Graves, the stories of Erechtheus's daughters as well as the daughters of Coecrops originate in the time of transition from pre-patriarchal to patriarchal order, and refer specifically to the sacrifices of the priestesses of the Pelasgian Triple Goddess to the new patriarchal gods. See *Grčki mitovi*, p. 138.



dramatic representations of suffering. In our own lives, we are taught to suppress sorrow, endure pain, tolerate unhappiness, restrain pity. Yet, as we watch a play in which people weep and suffer, we are stirred to sympathy: we empathize with the characters on stage, sharing their pain. This may infect even the best of us, Plato warns in the end, and turn the men that we are into women. Or worse still, the injustice that tragedy depicts may stir us to anger, another undesirable emotion in Plato's Commonwealth. The same holds for laughter, which is indecorous, and should be always controlled by reason.<sup>32</sup> Compassion, anger, laughter: Plato is right, all those are subversive, rebellious impulses, so having crowned the poets with laurels, he dispatches them from his ideal republic<sup>33</sup>.

Hostile as it is, Plato's response to Greek drama – and Aristotle's, for that matter despite the differences between the two - nevertheless deserves its prominent position in the history of literary judgments, for at least two reasons. First, it is very edifying: formulated more than two thousand years ago, it tells us that the proper business of (most) literary theory is to hinder or obscure, rather than elucidate and help release

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<sup>32</sup> Extract from Book X of the *Republic*, reprinted in V. and W. Sutton, pp. 30-32.

<sup>33</sup> For the sake of the contrast separating Plato from Pythagoras and his followers, we might imagine what response these tragedies might have elicited in, say, Empedocles, the last Pythagorean mystic. Very different, to be sure, for their message is comparable to his own – both remind us that justice in its original sense was synonymous with love. Empedocles believed that love and strife combine to produce change, but that in the Golden Age, when men worshipped Aphrodite alone (a Greek version of the Cretan mistress of animals, and of primitive mother goddess) love was all inside, and strife all outside. In time strife entered and began to oust love, preparing the worst moment still to come, when strife would be wholly within and love wholly outside. His theory of history being cyclical, however, he predicted a new reversal, where love once again would become primary. Empedocles was a politician in a Sicilian city around 440 BC, a time when for such views men were either executed or exiled. Socrates, his younger contemporary in Athens, had to drink poison. Empedocles, like Ovid after him, (and for the similar offence of failing to praise the Augustan Rome, and choosing instead to lament the passage of the erstwhile Golden Age of the primeval Saturn) was exiled: he abandoned politics, became a prophet, and, the legend says, committed suicide by throwing himself into a live volcano, without explaining how the renewal he had predicted might come about. But the tragedies, if properly approached, suggest an answer: through empathy with the sufferers and anger at what causes the suffering. (See Russell, p. 71-73)

the transformative potential of literature. But its second effect has been, paradoxically, most beneficial both to poetry and our understanding of it. For when Plato dismissed the poets from his republic, he did not let things rest at that: he promised to readmit them should anyone offer convincing proof of poetry's usefulness. Whether he did it out of regret, being a lover of poetry and in a sense himself a poet, or whether it was sheer defiant irony, his final remark articulated a challenge that has produced a number of defenses of poetry, which, from the Renaissance to our own day, have referred to Plato only in order to refute or reverse his propositions.

The poets and critics listed by V. and W. Sutton as sharing in Plato's legacy are indebted to him only in this negative sense. A few simple facts in support of this conclusion: To begin with, it is terribly misleading to point to transcendentalism as Plato's bequest to Romanticism, Symbolism and archetypal criticism, as V. and W. Sutton do, because for the term *transcendence* - reaching beyond - to mean anything at all, it must be specified what it is that must be transcended, and what it is that must be reached. For the Romantics, Symbolists, and the archetypal critics, too, transcendence was the very opposite of what it was for Plato: it meant going beyond the repressive (patriarchal, racist, capitalist, bourgeois, puritanical, rationalist), culture and culturally prescribed identity, and reaching back for a more organic, more complete mode of being. Blake's revolutionary prophecies and mystical visions, all bent on the overthrow of the combined forces of social oppression and the Urizenic mind, so that the fallen man could be restored to his original freedom and wholeness; Wordsworth's enamored pantheistic contemplation of nature; Rimbaud's embrace of 'a nigger', and 'a beast' in his soul - an anticipation of the Jungian *participation mystique*- these are all repudiations of Plato's unnatural hierarchies, particularly his contempt for, and exclusion from the polis of whatever he deemed lower forms of life. And finally, if, again contrary to Plato, the Romantic or Symbolist literary theory strove to replace the ideological lie with the truths inherent in the fictions of imagination, it was because the theoreticians in this case were primarily great poets, and also great lovers, poetry and love being, as J. C. Ransom remarked, the best antidote to Platonic arrogance<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> Ransom, 2004, 101.

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### Rezime:

## PLATONOVO ZAVEŠTANJE: JEDNO NEORTODOKSNO VIĐENJE

Rad predstavlja pokušaj da se problematizuje ortodoksno shvatanje o Platonovom značaju za potonju evropsku književnu teoriju i praksu. Nasuprot bezrezervnom strahopoštovanju za 'utemeljivača' evropske filozofije, ili problematičnim argumentima u prilog platonističkih premisa romantičarske i simbolističke poetike, kao i arhetipske kritike, u radu se podržava tvrdnja Bele Hamvaša da Platonova suštinska ambicija nije bila da osniva vać da spasava, i ne čovečanstvo već državu, te da je sledeći taj cilj falsifikovao i degradirao prvobitnu duhovnu

baštinu, na čijim principima zapravo počivaju romantizam, simbolizam, kao i ono što je najbolje u renesansnim pesničkim i filozofskim pravcima pogrešno nazvanim neoplatonističkim. Daleko od toga da su nadahnule značajna poetska dostignuća ili uvide u prirodu umetnosti, u radu se ističe da Platonove ideje zavređuju pažljivo proučavanje utoliko više što predstavljaju prvi primer ideološke zloupotrebe laži: s jedne strane, Platon promovise političke, 'kraljevske' laži, opravdane, jer služe 'višem' cilju maskiranja kastinske nepravde, a s druge strane svrstava poetske fikcije u nelegitimne laži, utoliko što dovode u pitanje novi imperijalni poredak, i patrijarhalni identitet. Subverzivnost grčke tragedije, koja ukazuje na raskol između (prepatrijarhalnog pojma) pravde i novog zakona, a zbog čega Platon uskraćuje dramskom pesništvu mesto u svojoj idealnoj republici, ilustruje se u zaključnom delu rada kratkim osvrtom na Euripidovog *Ijona*.

2009.

## UTOPIJSKI MOTIVI U DRAMAMA M. DRŽIĆA I M. RAVENHILA

*Dundo Maroje* i *Shopping and Fucking* (*Šoping i ševa*, u mom prevodu) savremenog engleskog autora Marka Ravenhila (Mark Ravenhill), dve po mestu i vremenu nastanka međusobno veoma udaljene drame, ipak su povezane činjenicom da omeđuju jedan isti period<sup>35</sup>: Držićeva renesansna komedija beleži kraj feudalno-aristokratskog i rađanje novog, kapitalističko-demokratskog društva, prema kome iskazuje diskretan, usred opšteg utiska životne energije što iznenada navire iz pukotina preživelih ideoloških struktura, gotovo neupadljivo kritički stav. Ravenhilova drama pripada kasnoj, potrošačkoj, postmodernoj, ili, kako bi rekao E. Bond, predsmrtnoj fazi toga društva<sup>36</sup> i u brutalnim scenskim slikama karakterističnim za dramaturgiju *In-your-face* teatra, razotkriva njegov konačni i nedvosmisleni moralni poraz. Ako im je zajednička kritika fetišizma novca, ove dve drame takođe su poredive po svojim utopijskim elementima, motivu kome sam u radu prvobitno nameravala da posvetim isključivu pažnju. Međutim,

<sup>35</sup> Stav da je gotovo petsto godina dug period modernog društva, uza sve društvene i ekonomske promene, u suštini zasnovan na istom principu globalne kapitalističke eksploatacije, može se naći i u radu 'Pedagogija i Globalizacija', autora Andreja Grubačića i Jelene Kranjec, koji već u uvodnom delu rada ističu da je 'za najveći deo svetskog stanovništva globalna ekonomija počela već 1492' (*Kontrapunkt*, 2. juni, 2002).

<sup>36</sup> U predgovoru zbirci svojih eseja *The Hidden Plot*, ističući svrhu dramske umetnosti u postmodernom društvu, Bond piše: 'Postmodernizam je faza kroz koju svaka vrsta mora da prođe pre nego što izumre... Zapadna demokratija postala je prikrivena kultura smrti. Postmodernizam je prekretnica, ali još uvek ne i kraj. Čini se kao da je ljudski život poslednji san što svetluca u svesti mrtvih. Uskoro oni će zauvek zaspati. Neko vreme još uvek možemo da čujemo odjek ljudskog jezika ...ne u našim sudovima, zakonodavstvu, ili fabrikama, retko u školama i pozorištu. Ali još uvek mu čujemo odjek na zidovima zatvora, u ludnicama, na dečjim igralištima, u zapuštenim getoima naših gradova... Naš je zadatak da naučimo mrtve da slušaju' (*The Hidden Plot: Notes on the Theatre and the State*, London, Methuen, 2000, 8-9).

kada sam, kao anglista i gost u oblasti hrvatsko-srpske renesansne književnosti, potražila u seminarskoj biblioteci literaturu o Držiću, našla sam, pored mnoštva konvencionalnih i neproblematičkih prikaza, a u okviru interpretacije koja je pretendovala na šire kontekstualizovani, problemski fundirani, moglo bi se reći, novoistoricistički pristup (u knjizi relativno novog datuma, obilno podvučenoj, dakle jednoj od najčešće preporučivanih i korišćenih studentskih štiva), tezu da je Marin Držić bio makijavelista. Tumačenje Frana Čala, izloženo u vrlo obimnom predgovoru Držićevim *Djelima* i potkrepljeno brojnim komentarima samih drama, može se svesti na tri ključna momenta:

- Pomet, zagovornik makijavelističkih principa, takođe je autobiografski lik i nosilac autorovih ideja;
- Makijavelijeva *virtu*, koja se u uspešnoj paktičnoj primeni virtuozu Pometa iskazuje kao snalažljivost, ili instrumentalna racionalnost, oportunističnost, i veština sticanja vlasti nad fortunom i ljudima (a to su, po mišljenju Frana Čala, osobine identične sa mudročću, strpljenjem i revolucionarnim duhom) poklapa se u celosti sa univerzalnim renesansnim konceptom vrline;
- ovakva makijavelistički shvaćena renesansna vrлина svojstvo je pravih ljudi, 'ljudi nazbilj', o kojima, suprostavljajući ih lažnim ili 'ljudima nahvao', govori negromant u utopijskom prologu drame, inače idejno vrlo srodnom, kako Čale, ovaj put ispravno, zapaža, sa *Utopijom* Tomasa Mora.

Pošto moram da reagujem na ovakvo, po mom mišljenju vrlo problematično – mada možda, s obzirom na doslednu upotrebu makijavelističke strategije kojom novi globalni poredak krči sebi put, politički korektno i poželjno – tumačenje Držićeve drame i renesanse uopšte, bojim se da će u saopštenju koje sledi polemika sa njegovim glavnim momentima nameravanu komparativnu analizu dve drame srazmerno skratiti, svodeći je na tek ovlaššan osvrt. Predloženoj polemici dajem prednost upravo stoga što smatram da je ideološko poistovećenje najvećeg narodnog pisca dubrovačke renesanse, urotnika protiv aristokratskog senata, političkog prognanika, i utopijskog vizionara, sa Makijavelijem – paradigmatična pojava. Ono je reprezentativni primer jedne veće kampanje protiv one vrste koherentnog, do kraja izvedenog kritičkog promišljanja književnosti

i istorije zapadne civilizacije koje bi urodilo vizijama društvenih i etičkih alternativa tekućoj ideologiji globalizacije, a kojoj kampanji akademski ustoličene postmoderne teorije i metodologije daju svoj revnosni prilog. (Pritom, mislim najpre na u poststrukturalizmu i dekonstrukciji utemeljene književne i kulturološke analize, čija su prepoznatljiva opšta mesta principijelno poricanje objektivne istine, referentne funkcije (književnog) jezika, interpretativne odlučivosti, i, što je za temu ovog rada najrelevantnije, mogućnosti ideološkog iskoraka. Nastala, paradoksalno, kao otpor diskursu moći, dekonstrukcija je, insistirajući dogmatski na navedenim pretpostavkama, i sama uskoro postala jedan diskurs moći, sve vičniji dekonstruisanju svih drugosti, za koje se inače deklarativno zalaže, jedino nespreman da dekonstruiše samog sebe. Počev od onog najneposrednijeg *drugog* svake hermeneutike – književnog teksta – koji dekonstrukcija izlaže već poslovičnom teroru, pretvarajući, ironično, neiscrpnu raznolikost žive književne reči u većito isti, predvidivi ludički iskaz, 'bez istine, bez greške... bez početka i svrhe', razaraju se i sva radikalno drugačija, pre svega, humanistička tumačenja identiteta, kulture, istorije. U tu svrhu, dekonstrukcijom nadahnuti kritičari uspostavljaju, svesno ali nekad i nesvesno, odnosno epigonski, potpuno neodržive istorijske analogije ili proizvode nepotrebne dvosmislenosti, dosledni jedino u naporu da ono što bi Umberto Eko nazvao *cogitus interruptus* promovišu u vrhunsko dostignuće interpretativnog čina.)<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> O bliskom uzajamno korisnom odnosu institucionalizovane postmoderne teorije i politike postindustrijskog kapitalizma neposredno i slikovito svedoči primer američkog profesora Marka Tejlora, čiji predlog za reorganizaciju univerziteta, objavljen u listu *New York Times* pod naslovom 'Kraj univerziteta kakav poznajemo', verno odslikava silazni put koji je obrazovni sistem demokratskog zapada prešao od vremena L. Trilinga i F. R. Livisa, i njihove ideje univerziteta kao moralnog jezgra i uporišta nepotrošačkih vrednosti. U svom kritičkom osvrtu na članak Marka Tejlora, Emanuel Sakareli (Emanuele Saccarelli) uočava potpunu podudarnost konkretnih mera koje autor preporučuje za prevazilaženje krize u visokom obrazovanju sa programom Baraka Obame za sprečavanje opšteg kolapsa kapitalizma: one se sve svode na opštu smernicu da 'univerzitet mora potpunije da se uskladi sa logikom i potrebama tržišta', i prihvati profit kao jedini kriterijum pri donošenju odluka, koje inače treba prepustiti vladajućoj političkoj eliti. Sakareli dalje ističe da je 'autor eminentna figura u postmodernističkim akademskim krugovima... jedan od vodećih pobornika dekonstrukcije.' Nastala iz ekstremne političke demoralizacije, piše dalje Sakareli, ova filozofska tendencija obično je sasvim otuđena od interesa većine ljudi i nesposobna da funkcioniše u političkoj raspravi koja se tiče širokih masa. Tome doprinosi i notorno nečitljiva proza, dodaje Sakareli, navodeći kao uzorak



Predgovor Držićevim *Djelima* Frana Čala pisan je sa pozicija novoistoričara (o čijim će ustupcima navedenim poststrukturalističkim aksiomima uskoro biti nesto više reči), pre nego sa pozicija

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jednu Tejlorovu rečenicu, neprevodivu na srpski: "...*deconstructive criticism constantly errs along the / of the neither/nor. Forever wavering and wondering, deconstruction is (re)inscribed betwixt 'n' between the opposites it inverts, perverts, and subverts.*" No čak i oni koji ne govore engleski, prepoznaće u citatu značenje reči 'perverts' i 'subverts', ključno za razumevanje poetiranog zaključka Emanuela Sakarelija, koji glasi: 'Kada god su postmoderni filozofi primorani da progovore prepoznatljivim ljudskim jezikom o aktuelnim političkim pitanjima...dešava se zanimljiv fenomen. Umesto da 'kvare' i 'potkopavaju', ovi elementi redovno ponavljaju reakcionarne banalnosti' (vid. Emanuele Saccarelli, 'Prominent Academic Offers Modest Proposal for Reorganizing Universities', 9 juni, 2009, World Socialist Website, wsws.org.).

Treba, međutim, zapaziti da su, uprkos Marku Tejloru, poststrukturalizam i dekonstrukcija u svetu inteligentno kritički sagledavani još u sedamdesetim (primer je čuvena polemika M. H. Abramsa sa Hilisom Milerom iz 1976), a da su u devedesetim odbačeni od strane nekih od eminentnih evropskih teoretičara i kritičara koji su se, nakon izvesnog perioda flertovanja sa dekonstrukcijom, vratili svojim ranijim humanističkim pretpostavkama ('došli k sebi', kako kaže Valentin Kaningam u svojoj studiji *Reading After Theory*, 2002), kao i od strane one struje u marksističkoj kritici koja nije podlegla uticaju poststrukturalističke dogme, i koja postaje sve uticajnije. Kod nas, međutim, pristigla sa zakašnjenjem ona i dalje predstavlja strahopoštovanja dostojnu novinu: na univerzitetima koji sebe smatraju 'najnaprednijim' (čitaj: najdalje odmaklim na putu ka Evropi) poststrukturalistički diskurs (terminologija i model koji je u nju upisan) suvereno vlada. Tu se proizvode i, u odsustvu ozbiljnijeg kritičkog otpora, u širu kulturnu zajednicu vrlo efikasno recikliraju etički relativizujuća, 'neodlučiva' i nad- ili ne-istorijska tumačenja književnosti i kulture, koja su, u uslovima nametnute tranzicije (čiju konačnu realizaciju potencijalno ugrožava svako autentično istorijsko sećanje i svaka istinski emancipatorska teleologija), za naš, kao i sve ostale proglobalističke režime, bez sumnje, izuzetno korisna.

Takode, uporedo sa dekonstrukcijom, na našim 'naprednim' univerzitetima neguje se isto tako nekritički preuzeti multikulturalizam. Multikulturalne i interkulturalne studije, ističu Kranjec i Grubačić, na većini američkih univerziteta prihvaćene kao efikasna zamena dekonstrukciji, najčešće su još jedan 'deceptivni mit', koji svojim poigravanjima sa pitanjem identiteta drugog stvara privid univerzalne nacionalne i etničke tolerancije, dok zapravo sprečava svaku radikalnu intervenciju protiv klasne i neokolonijalne eksploatacije Trećeg sveta: 'Mulikulturalizam je', pišu oni, '...deo američkog akademskog diskursa koji...ima opskurnu ulogu zamračivanja ozbiljne i racionalne materijalističke analize, koja se povlači pred beskonačno beskorisnim igrama 'prepoznavanja identiteta'. Dok se postmoderni *homo ludens* zabavlja problemima multikulturalizma, desetine hiljada dece marginalizovanih klasa i etniciteta ostaje lišeno univerzitetskog obrazovanja. Ništa manje nije zanimljiva ni američka 'partikularna predispozicija' izbegavanja problema klase... Neoliberalna pedagogija psihologizuje, patologizuje i demonizuje siromašne, sistematski ih svrstavajući u kriminalce, narkomane, maloletne delinkvente ili 'hronično nezaposlene'.

dekonstrukcije. Ipak njegova identifikacija Držićeve humanističke, utopijske misli sa Makijavelijevim autoritarnim i proimperijalističkim političkim idealima, iako možda bez autorove svesne namere da to bude, predstavlja, s obzirom na potrebu da se u cilju opravdanja aktuelne neokolonijalne politike rehabilituju i istorija zapadnog kolonijalizma i njeni apologeti, jedan poželjan *cogito interruptus*.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> To bi se moglo reći i za čitav niz studija o Makijaveliju nastalih u drugoj polovini prošlog veka. Tako se u Altuzerovoj knjizi *Machiavelli and Us (Makijaveli i mi)*, insistira (opravdano) na originalnosti Makijavelijeve političke ideje o nacionalnoj državi, ali se pritom čitke prelazi preko njene antietičke dimenzije, ili se pak svaki dosadašnji pokušaj kritike Makijavelijevog cinizma svodi na puko 'humanističko moralisanje' (vid. Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, London, New York: Verso, 1999, 7–8). Za tekst Isaije Berlina, pod naslovom 'The Question of Machiavelli' ('Pitanje Makijavelija'), ne može se reći da bilo šta prećutkuje. Naprotiv, autor namerno navodi 'najskandaloznije' (navodnici su Berlinovi!) delove iz *Vladaoca*, koji, u revizionističkom tumačenju, samo ukazuju na Makijavelijevu hrabrost, ne da odbaci etiku zarad politike, kako većina komentatora misli, već da odbaci *jednu* etiku – stoičku, hrišćansku, ili kantovsku, čiji su izvori i kriterijumi Bog, razum ili spontana, urođena, intuitivna sposobnost razlikovanja dobra i zla – u korist druge, podjednako dokazane i uzvišene etike – pagnske, čiji je jedini i neprikosnoveni kriterijum 'sjajna, slavna, snažna i bogata *patria*'. Za razliku od onog prvog, hrišćanskog ili ateističkog, altruističkog humanizma, o kome Berlin govori kao o pukom 'konvencionalnom' moralu, koji štaviše neminovno vodi društvom rasulu, pa čak i moralnoj degeneraciji (!), klasična Sparta, Periklova Atina, Rimska republika (sve robovlasničke, militarističke, i imperijalističke, a u slučaju Sparte i fašističke državne tvorevine) ideali su onog klasičnog, muževnog, zdravog i vitalnog humanizma, za koje je, neophodno, legitimno i moralno žrtvovati svoj, pa i, poput Romula ili Bruta, život svoga brata ili sinova. Vrhunac slavospjeva Makijaveliju i ujedno vrhunac Berlinove demagogije nalazi se u zaključku, u tvrdnji da je, dajući svom *realpolitik* principu status posebnog, samosvojnog etičkog sistema, nekompatibilnog sa tradicionalnim moralom 'dobrog čoveka', Makijaveli zadao odsudan i revolucionarni udarac svim monističkim, pa prema tome i totalitarističkim, filozofijama i etičkim i političkim teorijama. Drugim rečima, Makijavelijev beskompromisni princip državnog interesa (koji Berlin naziva i 'opštim dobrom!'), dostižan i održiv samo pomoću 'konstantne ekonomije nasilja', ono je što ozloglašenog renesansnog 'Makijavela', zapravo čini, u očima Isaije Berlina, rodonačelnikom (post)moderne ideje nesamerljivosti, pluralizma i tolerancije. Nema, u stvari, ničeg paradoksalnog u ovom tumačenju: napisan 1971, Berlinov tekst već ukazuje na potrebu da se ideološko srodstvo neoliberalnog globalističkog kapitalizma i *Mein Kampf*-a kamuflira teorijama o etičkoj neodlučivosti, pluralizmu i toleranciji – kao i na spremnost ogromne većine intelektualaca izbeglih iz Sovjetske Rusije da svojoj novoj domovini tom vrstom političkih usluga uzvrate gostoprimstvo.

Ova identifikacija proizilazi iz pretpostavke, implicitne u tri navedena ključna momenta Čalovog tumačenja *Dunda Maroja*, da je renesansa jednoznačan, idejno homogen, bez ostatka revolucionaran period i da taj revolucionarni duh podjednako otelovljuju svi renesansni mislioci. Moja prva primedba odnosi se upravo na tu, sasvim neodrživu, početnu premisu. Naime, svako bolje poznavanje ključnih renesansnih dela ukazuje na kontradiktornu prirodu tog razdoblja, čiji zajednički imentelj jeste bila svest o *slobodi od* tradicionalnih ideoloških stega i ekonomskih hijerarhija (mada ponekad, kao što ću ubrzo pokazati, ni oko toga šta treba odbaciti, a šta od prošlosti zadržati, nije bilo saglasnosti), ali takođe i razdoblja dubokih razmimoilaženja i sporova oko pitanja *sloboda za šta?*: pored autentično humanističkih koncepcija čoveka, reformulišu se i pod prividom novog brane one najreakcionarnije. Primera radi, sasvim suprotno Čalovoj tezi o univerzalnoj renesansnoj *virtu*, vrlina dobija različite, nepomirljive definicije, pa se Makijavelijevoj i Bekonovoj snalažljivosti i naučnoj inventivnosti (dedalovska *sagacitas*) suprotstavlja orfička kontemplativna, neutilitarna mudrost (*sapienzia*), opisana u hermetičkim filozofskim tekstovima italijanskih humanista poput Fičina i Bruna.<sup>39</sup> Oprečnim koncepcijama ljudske prirode odgovaraju takođe suprotstavljene teleologije: stvarno revolucionarna, utopistička, stremljenja sukobljavaju se sa lažnim programima napretka. Drugim rečima, već u renesansi možemo videti na delu ono što savremeni politički filozof Miguel Abensur u svom tekstu 'Istrajna utopija' naziva dijalektikom emancipacije, po analogiji sa sintagmom 'dijalektika prosvetećenosti', iz istoimene knjige T. Adorna i M. Horkhajmera.<sup>40</sup> Ova je knjiga bila

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<sup>39</sup> Vidi Tony Davis, *Humanism*, Routledge, 1997, 107.

<sup>40</sup> Činjenica da se Abensur, eminentni profesor političke filozofije na Pariskom univerzitetu, poziva na pripadnike do nedavno odbačene ili 'prevaziđene' Frankfurtske škole, vrlo je značajna. Ona ne samo da potvrđuje već rečeno – da je vladavina francuskog poststrukturalizma na svetskoj akademskoj sceni ozbiljno uzdrmana – već ukazuje i na to da na nekim univerzitetima onaj multikulturalizam koji podjednako uspešno zamenjuje dekonstrukciju u vršenju politički konzervativne funkcije, ima svoju progresivnu alternativu. Vraćanje 'frankfurtovcima', koje su sedamdesetih godina prošlog veka francuski intelektualci u nekoj vrsti akademskog puča istisnuli sa vodećih pozicija na američkim univerzitetima i njihov kritički model analize zamenili prosedeom koji je, iako deklarativno subverzivan, zapravo završavao veličanjem kulture koju je preduzeo da analizira, signalizira radikalnu promenu paradigme. Kao

pokušaj da se odgovori na pitanje, formulirano između 1942. i 1944., zašto čovečanstvo, koje teži oslobađanju, pada uvek u novo varvarstvo umesto da se posveti stvaranju istinski humanih uslova života? Objasnjenje su autori našli u prosvetiteljskoj koncepciji razuma: primarna funkcija razuma u XVIII veku bila je da ljude oslobodi mitskog straha (od bogova, od smrti) ali istovremeno i da im posluži kao instrument novih oblika vladavine nad svetom prirode i predmeta. Ovo samo znači da strah nije stvarno prevladan već internalizovan, potisnut i transformisan u *libido dominandi*, volju za moć, koja se vremenom proširila sa prirode i predmeta na ljudska bića. Ovakav dijalektička negacija prvobitno oslobađajuće svrhe razuma dovela je, po mišljenju Adorna i Horkhajmera, do ratnih katastrofa dvadesetog veka. Na sličan način, piše Miguel Abensur, dijalektika emancipacije označava paradoksalni efekat, ili paradoksalni zaokret, kojim se moderna emancipacija pretvara u svoju suprotnost. Zadatak je savremene utopijske misli da, koristeći kao model Adornovu i Horkhajmerovu kritiku prosvetiteljstva, locira unutar prvobitno utopijskog impulsa – a to je uvek impuls ka radikalno drugom i novom koje leži izvan realnosti nepravde i tlačenja – onaj momenat ili tačku gde se taj pravac menja i ciklus ponavljanja već postojećeg i starog iznova začinje.

Mislim da je ovaj model neophodno primeniti i u analizi renesansne misli i književnosti: jer samo ako im pristupimo u tom kritičko-utopijskom duhu, pre nego li u duhu nediskriminativnog veličanja kojim je prožeta knjiga Frana Čala, možemo da uspostavimo plauzibilnu vezu između renesansnih ideja i Držićevog *Dunda Maroja*, te kažemo nešto o načinu na koji je drama relevantna za nas danas.

Moja druga primedba odnosi se na konkretnu nepodudarnost Makijavelijevog i Morovog poimanja ljudske prirode i otuda proiziš-

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što je već napomenuto, ogroman prestiž postmoderne teorije umnogome je bila stvar njenog potajnog saglasja sa zapadnim političkim establišmentom, i njenog indirektnog doprinosa strategijama smišljenim da spreče da se šezdeset osma ikada ponovi. S druge strane, reafirmišući utopijsku kritiku Adorna i Horkhajmera, Ernsta Bloha i Benjamina, te francuskih utopista, Abensur se pridružuje sve brojnijim savremenim misliocima i stvaralocima koji teže da koncepte razuma, istine, i emancipacije, sa ushićenjem odbačene od strane većine postmodernih intelektualaca, stvaralački preispitaju, vrata im teorijski legitimitet, i tako podstaknu svest o mogućem, i nužnom, otporu neoliberalnom globalnom poretku (vid. Miguel Abensour, 'The Persistent Utopia', *Constellations*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2008, 415–416).

lih, sasvim suprotnih koncepcija idealnog društva – bitnih suprotnosti koje se u tumačenju Frana Čala sažimaju u istovetnost. Tačno je da je Makijaveli učinio prvi korak u filozofiji politike u pravcu objektivnog znanja, pretpostavljajući stvarnu istinu – o istoriji, vladarima, i veštini vladanja – imaginarnim, subjektivnim predodžbama, odnosno ideološkim predstavama (*representations*). Altuzer se opravdano divi Makijavelijevom geslu da je 'veliko zlo ne reći za zlo da je zlo'. On pritom kao da ne registruje činjenicu da Makijaveli svoju ideju nije domislio, odnosno razvio u pitanje o pravom poreklu zla, i tako, po već opisanom principu *cogito interruptus*-a, odnosno Adornove 'dijalektike emancipacije', potencijalno revolucionarnu misao pretvorio u sopstvenu suprotnost. Makijaveli se, naime, uopšte nije bavio razlikom, koju nalazimo i u Morovoj *Utopiji* i u *Dundu Maroju*, između prvobitne, autentične ljudskosti i njenih potonjih surogata. Makijavelijeva koncepcija ljudske prirode izvedena je iz posmatranja stvarnog ljudskog ponašanja kroz čitavu istoriju i ono ga je uverilo da je čovek, stvarni čovek, nepromenljivo sebičan, lakom i i zao. Iz ove sekularne verzije augustinovske vizije čoveka, neizlečivo zaraženog praroditeljskim grehom i za spasenje zavisnog od Crkve, izvodi Makijaveli svoju podjednako reakcionarnu teoriju idealnog vršenja vlasti: vrline idealnog vladaoca – manipulativna moć, beskrupuloznost, oportunističnost, svirepost, od kojih većinu Čale identifikuje i hvali kod Pometa – sve do jedne pretpostavljaju odbacivanje unutrašnjeg moralnog imperativa. Makijavelijeva *realpolitik* je tako, od samog početka, primer lažne emancipacije, jer čoveka oslobođenog od tradicionalnih represivnih institucija i tabua takođe oslobađa i sopstvene savesti, posle koje se moralne lobotomije novostečena sloboda može bez prepreke koristiti za nova klasna i kolonijalna porobljavanja, a fizički i kulturni genocidi vršiti iz raznih 'uzvišenih' civilizacijskih pobuda.

Ideja o *pravom*, nasuprot *stvarnom*, čoveku, kao što je već pomenuto, Morova je ideja. Stvarni čovek, za Tomasa Mora, predstavlja aberaciju pravog čoveka, nastalu u uslovima društvenih nejednakosti i ugnjetavanja. Okrutnim merama, drakonskim kaznama, za koje se u ime opšte sigurnosti zalaže Makijaveli, ništa se, po Morovom mišljenju, ne postiže, jer one mogu da samo prividno uklone pojedinačne simptome, ali ne i uzroke antisocijalnog ponašanja. Tek kada

se ukine privatna svojina i njena metastaza, obožavanje novca, kaže Morov filozof-putnik, Rafael Hitlodej, donosilac dobrih vesti iz Utopije, stvoriće se uslovi da se čovek vrati svojoj izvornoj ljudskosti, samo će tada pravi čovek i stvarni čovek postati jedno. Prema tome, kao što zaključuje Bogdan Suhodolski – jedan od retkih komentatora koji su do kraja izveli komparativnu analizu ova dva mislioca – sasvim suprotno od Makijavelijevog shvatanja vrline, koja se sastoji od umešnog i beskrupuloznog iskorišćavanja postojećih uslova radi lične koristi, Morova filozofija čoveka otvara mogućnosti za izmenu tih uslova, odnosno za principijelnu društvenu promenu.<sup>41</sup>

Kritički odraz renesansnih kontradikcija, poput ove što je opisuju Makijavelijeva i Morova shvatanja, pre nego li uopšteni renesansni optimizam – to je, čini mi se, ono što nalazimo u *Dundu Maroju*, to je ideološki značajan sadržaj ovog komada. Renesansni polet, bujna životnost, nesputana igra duha, sve ono što standardni prikazi ovog komada redovno pominju, jesu, naravno, tu, upisani u slikovitom, živom dubrovačkom jeziku, pre svega idiomu Pometa i Petrunjele, a zatim i svih ostalih slugu i 'našijenaca' neotuđenih od narodnih tradicija. Pored neiscrpane verbalne inventivnosti, ono što takođe razdvaja slugu od gospodara (dekadentne vlastele i bogatih trgovačkih sinova, zelenaša i kurtizana) takođe je ogromna, neutoljiva glad; ovaj složeni motiv, odraz konkretne klasne nepravde, naročito u jadikovkama nikad sitog Bokčila, takođe asocira, u Pometovim gurmanskim rapsodijama, na rableovsku pohvalu trbuhu, onosno na težnju da se ljudska telesnost oslobodi stigme grešnosti i izbavi vekovne askeze; na metafizičkom planu, ova glad može da ima i smisao ontološke lišenosti, nedovršenosti samog bića, koja od svekolikog života zahteva uvek novi oblik samoprevazilaženja<sup>42</sup>. U svakom od ovih značenja, etičkom, fizičkom, ontološkom, glad Držićevih slugu ukazuje na to da su obespravljani, po pravilu, nosioci utopijskih težnji.

Pa ipak, u Držićevom komadu slugu ostaju samo potencijalni agensi suštinske promene: zajedno sa gospodarima oni do kraja ostaju zatočnici jednog palog sveta, u kome su ljudi roba, novac mera svih vrednosti, a glavni motiv lična korist. Pomet, za F. Čala i većinu tu-

<sup>41</sup> Vidi Bogdan Suhodolski, *Moderna filozofija čoveka*, Beograd, Nolit, 1972, 363.

<sup>42</sup> Vidi Abensour, 409.

mača, revolucionarna pučanska alternativa preživeloj aristokratskoj i novoobogaćenoj trgovačkoj klasi, zapravo ne uspeva da sasvim iskoraci iz njihove ideologije, već, po principu dijalektike emancipacije, neupadljivo, i možda bez svesne namere, preuzima i ponavlja njihova pravila igre. Pomet, koji drži da 'trjeba s brijemenom akomodovat', i ume da ugađa zlu vremenu, klanjajući se Maru, kada mu ovaj baretom pripreti, vesela lica mada teška srca s trpeze se dižući kada mu to naredi njegov Ugo Tudešak; Pomet, koji pravog neprijatelja ne vidi u svom gospodaru već u tuđem sluzi, prevodeći sukob Uga Tudeška i Mara u lični rat protiv Popive; Pomet koji se, za 'imat viktoriju od neprijatelja', ne uzda samo u svoju nadmoćnu pamet, već još više u Ugovo veće bogatstvo, jer 's duktma kraljevi idu'; Pomet koji na kraju oblači haljine poraženog Mara, i njegovu kolajnu, simbol društvenog statusa, stavlja sebi o vrat – taj Pomet, u najboljem slučaju nije bitku za svoju privatnu 'revoluciju'. U tom ironiziranju Pometove revolucionarne uloge sadrži se Držićev vrlo precizan, takoreći proročki uvid u dinamiku nastupajućih demokratskih procesa. Ako je Pomet otelovljenje demokratskih težnji, on takođe nagoveštava pravac u kome će se one u praksi realizovati: ne u prevazilaženju istorijskih deformacija ljudskosti, već u novim oblicima dehumanizacije, ne u zadobijanju celovitije humanosti, kako slugu tako i gospodara, već u zameni uloga, pri kojoj će 'potlačeni postati novi tlačitelji', kako je u svojoj verziji kritike prividnih emancipacija, knjizi pod naslovom *Pedagogija potlačenih*, isticao i Paulo Frer<sup>43</sup>.

Da je Držić ovaj svoj uvid iskazao samo kroz ironijski podtekst, pitanje celovitog smisla drame ostalo bi otvoreno. Možda bi čak auto-

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<sup>43</sup> Sledeći pasus zaslužuje da bude naveden u celini: 'Ali gotovo uvek, u početnoj fazi borbe, potlačeni umesto da streme ka oslobađanju, teže da i sami postanu tlačitelji, ili 'sub-tlačitelji'. Sama struktura njihove misli uslovljena je konkretnom egzistencijalnom situacijom koja je oblikovala njihov život. Njihov ideal je da budu ljudi; ali biti čovek, za njih je isto što i biti tlačitelj. To je njihov model čovečnosti. Ova pojava potiče od činjenice da potlačeni, u jednoj tački svog egzistencijalnog iskustva, usvajaju 'adhezivni' odnos prema tlačitelju. U ovim okolnostima oni ne mogu da ga 'vide' dovoljno jasno da bi ga objektivizirali – da bi ga otkrili 'izvan' sebe....Na tom nivou njihova predstava o sebi kao o suprotnosti tlačitelju još uvek ne označava spremnost na borbu za prevazilaženje te protivrečnosti; jedna strana teži, ne oslobađanju, već identifikaciji sa suprotnom stranom' (Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin Books, 1970, 1993, 26–27).

rov stav bilo moguće protumačiti kao (makijavelistički) cinizam, onaj cinizam o kome Paul Frer govori kad kaže da bi (iako je to fenomen koji se u istoriji ponavlja) 'svako konačno prihvatanje dehumanizacije kao istorijske sudbine vodilo ili u cinizam ili u potpuno očajanje'.<sup>44</sup> Možda bi u tom slučaju bilo moguće i legitimno *Dunda Maroja* čitati iz perspektive novoistoričara, grupe anglo-američkih kritičara čije je područje renesansa, a ključna pretpostavka (većine njih) da je između renesansne drame i vladajućeg poretka postojala neizbežna ideološka podudarnost.<sup>45</sup> Drugim rečima, teza A. Sinfielda – da svaki individualni iskorak iz konvencionalne paradigme, uključujući i umetničko delo, kakvo je, recimo Šekspirov *Otelo*, predstavlja već unapred predviđen i doziran bunt, koji, paradoksalno služi samo reafirmaciji sistema vlasti – našla bi potvrdu u Držićevoj drami: mladi bludni sin vraćen u porodično okrilje, prizvan zakonu oca i bračnim obavezama, a potencijalno subverzivni sluga nagrađen, i neutralisan, simboličnim zadobijanjem jednog dela gospodarevog bogatstva i moći – bila bi to samo privremena i prividna pobuna, povod da se nasuprot vlaste-

<sup>44</sup> U tom slučaju, piše Frer, 'borba za veću čovečnost, za oslobođenje rada, za prevazilaženje otuđenja, za afirmaciju muškaraca i žena kao ličnosti, ne bi imala smisla. Ova borba je moguća samo zato što dehumanizacija, iako konkretna istorijska činjenica, nije unapred data sudbina, već proizvod nepravednog poretka koji podstiče nasilje u tlačiteljima, koji sa svoje strane dehumanizuju potlačene' (Ibid., 26).

<sup>45</sup> Vid.: Alan Sinfield, 'Cultural Materialism, Othello, and the Politics of Plausibility', u J. Rivkin and M. Ryan, eds, *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Blackwell, 1998. Novom istoricizmu treba zahvaliti za značajne pozitivne promene koje je osamdesetih godina prošlog veka uveo u proučavanje književnosti i kulture. Trezven kritički stav prema renesansi kao periodu novih oblika konstituisanja i kontrole identiteta, saglasnih kapitalističkoj ekonomiji, potrebama imperijalističke ekspanzije i još uvek jakog rojalističkog autoriteta, poziv da se vratimo pažljivom čitanju književnog teksta (imperativ angloameričke *nove kritike* koji su strukturalisti u međuvremenu neopravdano odbacili), ali da ga, za razliku od novokritičara iščitamo u kontekstu materijalnih uslova i čitavog spleta kulturne proizvodnje značenja – sve su to bili dobrodošli korektivi u odnosu na jednostranost teorijsko-kritičkih škola koje su prethodile *novom istoricizmu*. Međutim, kao što pokazuje Sinfieldova analiza *Otela*, novoistoričari plaćaju danak poststrukturalizmu, utoliko što svoje marksističke pretpostavke 'čiste' od prvobitnog humanizma, odbacujući makar i relativnu autonomnost i emancipatorsku ulogu umetnosti. Naprotiv, kada insistiraju, s pravom, da treba pročitati sve tekstove koji svedoče o jednom periodu, to nije zato da bi u umetničkoj fikciji otkrili *kritički* odraz ideologije, već da bi je sveli na ideološki zapis.



linskom rasipništvu afirmiše dublja, buržoaska mudrost štedljivosti, rada, konvencionalnog braka i dužnosti; trgovačka mudrost koja će u narednim vekovima postvarivanju – posedovanju, kupovini i prodaji – ljudi davati nove, možda manje vidljive, ali podjednako dehumanizujuće oblike.

Držić, međutim, nije ostao na ironiji. Jer palom svetu dramati-zovanom u zapletu suprotstavljen je, kao njegova radikalna drugost, utopijski svet opisan u prologu. Za priču o tom prvobitnom, zlatnom dobu, kada pojmovi 'moje' i 'tvoje' nisu postojali i kada su svi ljudi bili 'ljudi nazbilj' – negromant kaže da je važnija od svega što se u komediji dešava. To naročito važi za tajnu njihovog pada, tu alegorijsku priču koja anticipira Morove distinkcije između stvarnog i pravog čoveka: kraj zlatnog doba, kaže nam negromant u prologu, zbilo se kada su čarobnjaci, iz lakomosti, pristali da ožive neke čovekolike figure, lutke i glumačke maske, od kojih su nastali 'ljudi nahvao', odnosno lažni, ništavni i zli ljudi. Ovaj soj ljudskih surogata vremenom se toliko namnožio da su potisnuli one prvobitne, prave ljude.

Način na koji Držić opisuje pad, vezujući ga za duhovno stanje Dubrovačke republike, (ljudi nahvao aluzija su na dubrovačke senatore), kao i činjenica da je protiv aristokratskog senata kovao zaveru, govori o tome da mit o zlatnom dobu kod Držića nije konzervativna, eskapistička fantazija,<sup>46</sup> ili ono što se često i podsmešljivo naziva 'večnom' utopijom. Veoma je važno odvojiti utopiju od tog atributa, koji joj kulturni menadžeri širom zapadnog sveta pridodaju da bi je diskreditovali. Za njene neprijatelje, branitelje tzv. 'stvarnosti', piše Miguel Abensur, utopija je večno isti, statičan, nepromenljiv i nedostižan vanistorijski ideal, pojam koji sama njegova etimologija – prefiks *u*, koji na grčkom znači *ne* – određuje kao nemesto. Od ovakve, uvek iste, nepostojeće i neostvarive fantazije, treba razgraničiti ono što Abensur naziva persistentnom, ili istrajnom utopijom: to je dinamični istorijski proces, ili impuls koji ima moć da pogled uperen u prošlost preusmeri u budućnost, da retrospektivnost svakog mita o

<sup>46</sup> Mit o zlatnom dobu, piše Hari Levin, nikako nije puka čežnja za nepovratno izgubljenom prošlošću, već inspiracija za utopijsku misao: 'U zelenim gajevima Zlatnog doba otkrivamo korene hrišćanskog socijalizma i ...komunizma' (vid. Harry Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1969, 8–28).

zlatnom dobu preinači u proroštvo; da smisao prefiksa *u*, preinači od *ne* u *ne još*, i, sugerišući takođe grčku reč *eu* (dobro), pojmu nemesta doda i smisao dobrog mesta, onog koje bi trebalo da postoji umesto postojećeg. Istrajna utopija, drugim rečima, nije nemoćna retrogradna čežnja za nekim vanistorijskim izgubljenim rajem, već impuls ka slobodi i pravdi, koji se, nakon svih grešaka i poraza, uporno obnavlja, ali, kako pokazuje istorija, svaki put u nekom drugačijem, stečenim i neposrednim iskustvom preinačenom obliku.

Istrajnu utopiju treba, po Abensurovom mišljenju, razlikovati od demokratije. Iako ima zajedničke tačke sa demokratijom (pritom mislim na demokratiju u njenom prvobitnom smislu, ne na savremene travestije tog pojma) utopija se ipak ne može sa njom poistovetiti. Demokratija je politički proces, ona, u svom izvornom smislu, označava borbu za institucionalne promene koje bi obezbedile veći udeo naroda u vršenju vlasti i podeli dobara. Utopija je, u Abensurovom tumačenju, nepolitički, čak antipolitički pojam, i predstavlja viziju harmonične ljudske zajednice, povezane asocijativno, a ne hijerarhijski. Njen je ideal društvo pomireno do stepena kada politika postaje suvišna. Istrajna utopija je u odnosu na demokratiju, i svaki drugi politički program emancipacije, nužni korektiv, ona je, kako kaže Abensur, 'aktivna sila koja omogućuje demokratiji da se odupre neprekidnoj pretnji korupcije'<sup>47</sup>.

Vrlo je važno imati ove distinkcije na umu pri donošenju konačnog suda o Marinu Držiću i smislu njegove drame. Držić koji kuje zaveru protiv aristokratske dubrovačke republike, demokrata je koji se bori za podelu vlasti između aristokratije i puka. Držić, autor Prologa iz *Dunda Maroja*, beskompromisni je vizionar, svestan imanentnih manjkavosti kapitalističke demokratije, pa možda i sopstvenih prevratničkih planova. On stoga demokratiju utopizuje, koristeći motiv zlatnog doba kao utopijski korektiv, ne dozvoljavajući da se zaboravi da je pravi, prvobitni, i još nigde potpuno ostvareni cilj svekolikih slobodarskih težnji ljudska zajednica gde pojmovi 'moj' i 'tvoj' gube smisao.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Abensour, 417.

<sup>48</sup> Držić ovde anticipira utopiste 18. i 19. veka, kao i kritičare liberalnog društva, recimo Džona Djuija. Djui je, podseća komentator Tom Eli, u doba recesije tridesetih godina prošlog veka, u seriji predavanja ukazao (mada ih nije praktično razrešio) na

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Ove distinkcije sve je teže predočiti današnjoj publici, jer prosečnog čitaoca, ili gledaoca, aktuelni kulturni menadžeri, zaduženi za kreiranje javnog mnjenja, vrlo uspešno ubeđuju da je savremeno globalno društvo utopija konačno ostvarena. Stoga Mark Ravenhil u svojoj drami *Šoping i Ševa* nemilosrdno raskrinkava sve dokse o navodnim slobodama u savremenom, permisivnom periodu 'demokratskog' društva, pribegavajući šokantnim, ekstremno nasilnim prizorima ne bi li pobudio gnev zbog načina na koji su zakoni globalnog tržišta kolonizovali najintimnije unutrašnje duhovne prostore. U drami *Šoping i Ševa* ne trguje se samo seksom – sve je postalo roba koja ima svoju cenu: prodaju se ljudi, otkupljuje se život, kupuje se, u krajnjem očajanju, čak i sopstvena smrt. Kao i Držićeve sluge, tako i obespravljeni u Ravenhilovoj drami, grupa mladih, egzistencijalno ugroženih, emotivno osakaćenih ljudi, pristaje, čak i vesno, na pravila velike igre. Pošto im je uskraćeno zadovoljenje osnovne ljudske potrebe za brigom i ljubavlju, oni moraju da prihvate ponuđene ili dostupne surogate: da nauče da kupuju i prodaju, umesto da daju i dele. Za taj nauk brine se čitava ideološka državna aparatūra, od socijalnih i zdravstvenih ustanova, do medija.

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fatalne kontradikcije moderne demokratije, locirajući onaj imanentni nedostak koji je liberalnu tradiciju osudio na neuspeh. On je naime ukazao na to da je liberalna demokratija, utoliko ukoliko se odnosi istovremeno i na ljudska prava i slobode, i na slobodno ispoljavanje tržišnih zakona, *contradictio in adjecto*: liberalizam, kao doktrina društvene slobode, označava borbu za pravo pojedinca da slobodno razvija svoje kreativne potencijale; s druge strane, liberalizam kao ekonomska *laissez faire* doktrina, koja se odnosi na slobodno, neregulisano funkcionisanje tržišnih zakona, uskraćuje pojedincu prava koja mu liberalna doktrina deklarativno obezbeđuje. S obzirom na dosadašnju liberalnu politiku kompromisa, gotovo uvek na štetu ljudskih sloboda a u korist slobodnog tržišta, samo one neupućene može da začudi aktuelni moralni bankrot liberalizma, nesposobnog da ponudi pravu alternativu pogubnim ekonomskim merama kojima države nastoje da odlože kolaps svetskog tržišta (vid. Tom Eley, 'Why is American liberalism bankrupt? A history lesson for *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert', 19 September, 2008 ( [www.wsws.org/category/media-us.shtml](http://www.wsws.org/category/media-us.shtml))).

Upravo zbog opisanih imanentnih kontradikcija liberalne demokratije, Abensour hvatali Pjera Lerua, francuskog utopistu i tvorca termina 'socijalizam', koji je već na njenom početku razlikovao 'umerenu demokratiju' od 'radikalne demokratije', one 'koju *vis utopia* odvaja od tržišta, ustavne države i oblika autoritarne degeneracije koji je vrebaju' (vid. Abensour, 417).

Tako Majkla, heroinskog zavisnika, otpuštaju prevremeno iz bolnice pošto se oglušio o najvažnije pravilo, zabranu ličnih odnosa, uz upozorenje da je emotivno vezivanje još gora vrsta zavisnosti od narkomanije, te da, ako želi da stekne identitet, mora naučiti da suzbije svaku emotivnu potrebu za drugim bićem. Sledeći savet psihologa, Majk odbija svaku bliskost sa Robijem i Lulu, dvema osobama kojima je potreban, vodeći računa da svoj seksualni život svede na što bezličnije, novčane transakcije. Robi i Lulu su svoj dotadašnji emotivni odnos sa Majklom poistovećivali sa posedovanjem (omiljena priča, koja im pruža osećanje zaštićenosti i utehe, jeste priča o tome kako ih je Majkl kupio od njihovog prethodnog, ugojenog, užeglog i vulgarnog, vlasnika u jednoj samousluzi za samo 20 dolara), jer sebe vide kao ljudski otpad, *pure trash*. Ostavljeni bez Majklove potpore, jedini način koji znaju da prežive je da prodaju telefonski seks. Četrnaestogodišnji Geri se požalio socijalnom radniku da ga očuh siluje već dve godine; umesto bilo kakvog znaka saučešća, ili zgražanja nad moralnom izopačenošću, još manje impulsa da dete zaštiti od dalje zlopupotrebe, naišao je na birokratski bezlično, higijensko pitanje: 'Da li koristi kondom?' Nakon toga, Geri je zamenu za roditeljsku brigu i ljubav potražio u sadomazohističkim fantazijama o ocu-ljubavniku-mučitelju, čiji će rob i dobrovoljna žrtva na kraju postati.

Ali urođena ljudska priroda, pokazuje Ravenhil, podsećajući nas na Šekspirovo 'mleko ljudske dobrote', ipak se teško iskorenjuje: kada Robi, u nastupu hemijski indukovano otkrovenja da se lepota sastoji u davanju, učini jedini neoprostiv greh, tj. besplatno podeli 3000 ekstazi tableta umesto da ih, po nalogu mafijaša Brajana, proda, cela grupa se podvrgava dodatnoj edukaciji. U ovom spoznajno i afektivno vrhunskom delu drame, u centru je Brajan: urednik TV reklamnih programa i narko-diler, ljubitelj sapunica i (na šund svedenog) Čehova, samozvani mesija i okrutni mučitelj, mafijaš i prorok globalističke neoliberalne (anti)utopije, Brajan već svojim imenom podseća na Orvelovog O'Brajena, dok njegov složeni lik simbolično pokriva čitav spektar 'demokratskih' metoda ubeđivanja – od podmićivanja i ucene, do mučenja i pretnje smrću.

Cilj poslednje monstruozne lekcije koju je potajno pripremio za Majkla, Robi i Lulu – da u sadomazohističkoj orgiji ubiju Gerija i

novcem koji je dečak, shvativši da nikada neće naći očinskog ljubavnika iz svoje fantazije, uštedeo da bi kupio svoju ritualnu smrt, otkupe sopstveni život od Brajena – jeste promena vere, odnosno konačno korenito brisanje sećanja na čovečnost. Ono što treba da nauče, svečano izjavljuje Brajan, terajući ih da za njim ponavljaju tu ključnu formulu, jeste da je 'civilizacija novac, a novac civilizacija' i da su prve reči Biblije 'Prvo. Napravi. Novac'. 'Slobodan protok novca' (dobijenog između ostalog od smrtonosne trgovine drogom, i po potrebi ubistvima), priče na kraju Brajan, diskretno brišući sentimentalnu suzu, tragikomično nesvestan apsurdna koje izriče (u tome sasvim liči na aktuelne NATO državnike i proroke novog svetskog poretka), spasiće decu (privilegovanu poput njegovog sina) od nečistih narkotika i uvesti ih u raj 'Televizije i šopinga'.

U Držićevom komadu priča o utopiji bila je odvojena od samog dramskog sveta, kao njegova suštinska drugost. Ravenhil utopijski motiv u svojoj drami takođe smešta u priču koja nije deo dramske stvarnosti, u priču o nekoj postnuklearnoj budućnosti, gde će u nekim od preživelih mutanata progovoriti zaboravljena ljudskost. To je još jedna Majklova priča o šopingu, ali u ovoj novoj verziji kupac kupljenom dečaku vraća slobodu. Činjenica da je pripovedač Majkl, jedan od počinioca Garijevog ubistva, tj. neoprostivo kriv za greh protiv ljubavi, može se protumačiti kao Ravenhilovo uverenje, slično ubeđenju Paula Frera, da su oni potlačeni, bez obzira koliko emotivno i moralno oštećeni, ipak ti koji imaju sposobnost i utopijsku odgovornost za obnavljanje humanosti, svoje sopstvene i svojih tlačitelja. Tako se, iako potresna i zastrašujuća u poređenju sa *Dundom Marojem*, koji svoju implicitnu kritiku novca iskazuje u komičnom, bujnim životom zasićenom idiomu, ni Ravenhilova drama, ipak ne završava u ideološkom bezizlazu: nakon Majklove utopijske priče, Lulu i Robi, koji do tada nisu nikako hteli da učine, počinju da svoj kupljeni, i u makro pećnici skuvani paket-obrok, izričito predviđen samo za jednu osobu, dele sa Majklom.

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**Summary:**

**UTOPIAN MOTIFS IN *DUNDO MAROJE*  
AND *SHOPPING AND FUCKING***

In its first part the text is a polemical response to the interpretations of *Dundo Maroje* as an endorsement of Machivelli's ethical and political theory, and to the related assumption that the Machiavellian *virtu* sums up the entire spirit of the Renaissance. It is argued, on the contrary, that a crucial difference, deriving from the contrary conceptions the two Renaissance thinkers had of man's nature, separates Machiaveli's ideal government from the utopian concept of Thomas More. In the remaining sections of the text, the persistence of utopia, as defined by a contemporary political scientist M. Abensour, is demonstrated in a comparative analysis of *Dundo Maroje* and *Shopping and Fucking*. These two plays, though culturally and chronologically distant, have in common a critical representation of capitalist fetishism of money, but also utopian motifs, which is why they can be used as an argument in a dispute against the New Historicists' contention about the inevitable ideological function of art. The answer to the question raised in this paper – Is every individual transgression beyond a conventional paradigm, including art, an already prescribed measure of rebellion, which paradoxically serves to re-endorse the system of power, as the New Historicist argue, or is the potential emancipation still the great justification of the work of imagination? – is sought in the complex structure of these two plays, whose ironic subtexts and utopian allusions subvert the apparently closed dramatic form and the sense of ideological impasse.

2009

## HAROLD PINTER AND THE POLITICS OF THE ABSURD

On October 17, 2005, responding to the news of the Nobel Prize for Literature being awarded to Harold Pinter, the Culture and Arts section of the Serbian daily *Politika* provided a brief account of the playwright's work, concluding with the following statement: 'Pinter's drama reveals an abyss hidden beneath the surface of everyday communication and *forces us to seek refuge in the depression behind the closed doors of our rooms*' (Italics mine) Uninformed, and badly styled as it is, the remark nevertheless is a distant echo of a certain long established tendency in Pinter criticism to depoliticize his plays, which, though contested in the interpretations based on Pinter's recent work (whose overt political message, as indeed his lifelong political activism, are incommensurate with any alleged defeatism of his dramatic vision), still persists and against which I am going to argue in this paper<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Of course, to argue meaningfully for or against the political nature of Pinter's, or any other art, a preliminary agreement is necessary about the definition of the political. This is hardly the case in the ongoing controversy. For one thing, the recent deconstruction of the personal/political opposition is disabling rather than helpful. It does not help us decide in what sense Pinter's plays can be said to be political, except for the simple reason that *everything* is political. My own understanding of the term political is not the result of such radical relativism, but it does not necessarily involve direct reference to any political events or programs either. Political theatre is better understood, I think, in Pinter's own words, as exploring relations of power, that is, as dealing 'with the real world', and not with 'the manufactured or fantasy world'. By the political, I understand also a certain attitude to that reality, which assumes it to be, to a considerable extent, historical in origin and hence knowable and resistible. Lukacs' name for this worldview is 'developmental' as opposed to the 'static', or a-historical view: in the latter, Heideggerian ideology, reality is not the product of social processes, but is raised to the status of the eternal human condition, inexplicable in its origin and goal, and incapable of improvement. While I find this general definition of the (a)political correct and useful, I would contest Lukacs' wholesale description of the literature of modernism as static, and therefore hopeless. (See Georg Lukacs, 'The



### III 'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH

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This apolitical view originated in Martin Esslin's pioneering study *The Theatre of the Absurd*, the name he gave to the revolution in European drama performed in the 40's and 50's. The term, borrowed from Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*, has stuck although it soon turned out to have been less than accurate, demanding repeated clarifications and re-definitions. For one thing, in Esslin's use it misleadingly evokes some deep despair on the part of the author suddenly confronting the meaninglessness of life, while leaving in doubt whether this meaninglessness is a social and historical phenomenon or a timeless and immanent feature of human existence. Esslin seemed to lean to the latter explanation, claiming, in a chapter on Harold Pinter, that even if social reforms eliminated all the social ills, the absurdity of human condition would still persist, resulting from 'loneliness, the impenetrable mystery of the universe, death'.<sup>50</sup>

A decade later Esslin modified his view, but his kind of absurdist reading of Pinter survived in the new philosophical and linguistic interpretations of his early plays stemming from critical attempts to separate the literature of postmodernism from its modernist predecessors. Indeed, the literary paradigm shift called postmodernism is sometimes represented as including, or overlapping with, the Theatre of the Absurd, and is discussed in similar defining terms. Thus certain philosophical assumptions are seen to underlie both the drama of the absurd and postmodern literature. Though associated with different moods (postmodern celebration as opposed to absurdist indifference or despair), postmodernism is seen to be rooted in the radical epistemological skepticism made from the same ingredients as the drama of the absurd: the inaccessibility of objective truth, the collapse of meaning and the breakdown of identity, which in both cases have the same effect of alienating the individual from his life, of separating language from reality.

Thus Esslin, pointing to similarities and differences between the existentialist theatre and the theatre of the absurd, states that 'the sense of the metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human

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Ideology of Modernism' (1957), David Lodge, ed., *20th Century Literary Criticism: A Reader*, London, New York, Longman, 1972, 474-489.)

<sup>50</sup> Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Third Edition, Peregrine Books, 1987, 263.

condition, ...of the senselessness of life', common to both, is no longer rendered in the form of highly lucid and logically constructed reasoning by the absurdist playwrights: instead of arguing about the absurd, as Sartre or Camus did, they enact it in radically new stage conventions, suggesting, through the logical divorce of the words, the setting and the action, '*the larger sense of the separation between reality and its representations, between the thought and the world*'. (Italics mine.)

In a comparable manner, postmodernist literature has been defined as a radicalization of doubt first voiced by the modernist writers. Thus, elaborating on Brian McHale's distinction, stated in his *Postmodern Fiction* (1987), that while modernism was dominated by epistemological, postmodernism is concerned with ontological questions, another critic, Randal Stevenson, explains: if modernism's questioning and experiments reflected uncertainty about how reality can be known or assimilated by the mind or the text, postmodernism assumes reality - if it exists at all - to be unknowable, or inaccessible through a language grown detached from it. In postmodernism, the breach between the word and the world is no longer a matter of doubt but of assumption. Having lost contact with the recognizable world, and surrendered to the competing reality of language, the postmodern writer investigates its capacities for creating ontologically separate, autonomous worlds. In Stevenson's view, Beckett was naturally the first to respond to this autonomy of language, a quotation from *The Unnamable* serving as an illustration: 'it all boils down a question of words...all words, there is nothing else.'<sup>51</sup>

Likewise in the critical literature on Pinter's early drama interpretations used to prevail which focused on the alienation from the real, the elusiveness of truth, and the consequent obsession with tragicomic inadequacies of language as its essential themes. Pinter was consigned to the tradition of the English dramatists of the sixties that Kenneth Tynan, writing in the Tom Stoppard Profile in 1977, wittily called 'smooth,' - that is, 'cool, apolitical stylists' - who, in contrast to the 'hairy' camp of 'embattled' and 'socially committed' writers, contented themselves with endless wordplay, words being all

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<sup>51</sup> Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction: An Introduction*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1992, 196.

that they had left<sup>52</sup>.

This sums up the position of such Pinter scholars as Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson. They introduce their otherwise brilliant analysis of the verbal games in Pinter's early plays by warning in advance that no interpretation – political, psychological, psychoanalytical, or moral – offers a key to their enigma: 'The words of his plays are intransigent and intransitive: they cannot be transferred to other levels of meaning, be they philosophical, ideological, or allegorical'<sup>53</sup>. They are only analyzable in terms of verbal strategies the characters resort to in order to satisfy the two primitive timeless urges – fight and flight – that have replaced the desire for truth, authenticity or identity. The irony of this view, even if it were thoroughly accurate, is that it affirms what it explicitly denies: the plays' strong concern with power relations and hence with questions of politics. Yet Almansi and Henderson consistently ignore these implications preferring (which is my second objection to this valuable study of the use of language in Pinter's drama) to treat the abandonment of truth, authenticity or identity as the attitude the author shares with his characters.

Recently, as a result of the new focus on Pinter's political views and their subsequent impact on his art, there have been some revisions of the orthodox view. The speculations revolve round the question whether his late, ostensibly political plays and sketches - such as *One for the Road* (1984), *Mountain Language* (1988), *Party Time* (1991), *The New World Order* (1991), *Ashes to Ashes* (1996) or *Press Conference* (2002) - embody a fresh departure as opposed to his earlier, more metaphorical explorations of human condition, or whether, on the contrary, his entire dramatic oeuvre has been political through and through from the very start. While among the latter are John Pilger, Michael Billington, and Charles Grimes, on whose views I shall be dwelling in a moment, the traditional absurdist interpretation is restated, (though with tacit disapproval) by such an eminent authority on drama and spokesman for its social and political function as Rush Rehm. In a recent paper on Pinter, Rehm distinguishes sharply

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<sup>52</sup> Kenneth Tynan, *Profiles*, edited by Ernie Eban and Kathleen Tynan, Nick Hern Books, New York, 1989, 296.

<sup>53</sup> Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson, *Harold Pinter*, Methuen. London, New York, 1983, 12.

between Pinter's plays written before and since the early eighties. The former are examples of 'depoliticized speech': inhabited by characters incapable of giving any verifiable or plausible account of their past, these plays, in his opinion, project the author's own repudiation of history and truth, on whose assumption Rehm correctly insists any political worldview necessarily depends. Rehm writes:

The pauses and silences that characterize Pinter's dialogue suggest psychological rather than political, manipulation. Indeed, each character puts forth a different (even self-contradictory) version of what happened before, revealing the past as unstable and memory as unreliable. If history is mere assertion, a matter of convenience, an idiosyncratic story, based on the vagaries of personal memory, then there is no reliable check on the past. However, if the theater is to do the political work of telling the truth, exposing hypocrisy, and breaking through propaganda, then it depends on history having determined facts and at least some objective truths. For this reason alone, the plays that made Pinter a household name offer little firm ground for political insight or protest.<sup>54</sup>

It is, among other questionable assumptions, this tendency, already detected in Almansi's and Henderson's study, to attribute the meaninglessness dramatized on the stage to the intellectual and ethical nihilism of the writer, that makes the standard accounts not only of Pinter's early plays but also of the best product of what is confusingly called Theatre of the Absurd less than satisfactory. It is true that in the work of Camus and Beckett there are elements that seem to support the hopeless alienation attributed to them, as any but the very last passages from the *Myth of Sisyphus* would prove decisively; as would numerous Beckett quotations, steeped in the despair of a secularized Calvinist, who, having faced a world stripped of reassuring certainties is compelled to project, in incessant wordplay, tragic or ludicrous or both at once, his own desperate attempt and failure to make sense of things. Moreover, Pinter's own early statements of artistic principles did involve an explicit repudiation of ideological, political and moral definitions or solutions. Yet, even if it stems from the author's personally experienced crisis,

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<sup>54</sup> Rush Rehm, 'Pinter and Politics', *Nasledje: Journal of Language, Literature, Art, and Culture*, Thematic Issue: *Harold Pinter*, Year VI, Vol. 12, 2009, Faculty of Philology and Art, Kragujevac, 81-82. (81-84).

as in Camus and Beckett it undeniably does, the denial of meaning or certitude is not necessarily defeatist or hopeless for the first and simple reason that the act of writing a major play, however meaningless and despairing it may sound, is in itself a negation of meaninglessness and despair. And secondly, the problematization of truth on the stage may be seen as a means to an end, a dramatic technique employed to reveal a deeper truth, a less visible reality than that yielded by traditional realistic conventions; so that the separation between language and reality that figures in so many ontological definitions of postmodern literature or absurdist drama, need not refer to any inherent incapacity of language to capture the real, but may be a grotesque reflection of the way speech is deliberately used, both on social and political level, to mask or falsify facts<sup>55</sup>; just as the undermining of moral and intellectual certitudes may spring from the perception of the way they are connected with oppression. These are strategies, in other words, whose purpose can only be understood within the playwright's entire oeuvre, itself more broadly contextualized within the twentieth century drama as a continually modified response to the changing cultural and social background<sup>56</sup>.

An example of such broad and flexible understanding is to be found in the introduction to the Penguin edition of Camus' plays,

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. Pinter's own formulation of, and implicit answer, to the dilemma in his 1990 Channel Four talk:

Does reality essentially remain outside language, separate, obdurate, alien, not susceptible to description? Is an accurate and vital correspondence between what *is* and our perception of it impossible? Or is it that we are obliged to use language only in order to obscure and distort reality – to distort what *is* – to distort what *happens* – because we fear it? We can't face the dead. But we must face the dead, because they die in our name. (Quoted in Billington, 323)

<sup>56</sup> This coincides with Raymond Williams' view of the twentieth century successive theatrical revolutions - from naturalism to subjective expressionism (his own, much more precise, term for the Theatre of the Absurd), to social expressionism, to a new wave of naturalism - as a search for ever new sets of dramatic conventions to embody a changing structure of feeling: the latter, in all its major dramatic modes, Williams identifies with a single-minded, passionate demand for truth. See especially the Introduction and Conclusion in Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, Second revised edition, Penguin Books in association with Chatto and Windus, 1968, pp. 1-14, and 381-401.

whose few pages offer a sharper insight into the ethical and political implications of Camus' philosophy of the absurd (and thus indirectly a more useful perspective on Pinter) than Esslin's massive book. Quoting, like Esslin, the crucial passages from *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the author, John Cruickshank, immediately notes that the discovery of the absurd - of a life rendered suddenly meaningless, 'through experiences that defy rational explanations or seem to confound and controvert our sense of fair play, or desire for happiness, our need for pattern and purpose in human existence'<sup>57</sup> - is merely a starting point, an initial insight facing the discoverer with moral dilemmas and practical choices which must be considered in any valid account of his particular kind of 'absurdism'. It was a challenge for Camus, too, and while his own immediate response was tragic stoicism, the first literary embodiment of the absurd were *Caligula* and *The Outsider*: the cruelty and instinctual hedonism of the two respective protagonists being both versions of one, more or less negative, attitude: they are both 'forms of consent, or that form of consent called indifference'. But Camus soon moved beyond consent and indifference, his own deep instinctive humanity inspiring his lifelong efforts to replace them with rebellion and refusal. This involved a shift of focus in his understanding of the absurd, the significant absurd no longer residing in the unalterable human condition, 'with its inexorable, mathematical certainty of death', or 'arbitrary suffering caused by flood or earthquake', but resulting from a socially engineered, deliberate waste of human potential. 'Do you know', Cruickshank quotes Camus' dismayed question in *Actuelle II*, 'that over a period of twenty-five years, between 1922 and 1947, 70 million Europeans – men, women and children – have been uprooted, deported and killed?'<sup>58</sup> It was, in fact, in the concrete reality of the Nazi rise to power that Camus realized 'that to establish the absurdity of life cannot be an end in itself, but only a beginning' - the first recognition that human beings are victims of an existential dilemma. He perceived too, in the particular context of the Nazi Occupation, that nihilism

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<sup>57</sup> John Cruickshank, Introduction to Albert Camus, *Caligula, Cross Purpose, The Just, The Possessed*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1984, 14.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 15.

### III 'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH

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might be the common philosophical premise for him *and* the Nazi ideology. But while he shared, in an abstract way, certain German thinkers' skepticism to moral absolutes, he found 'their resolve to escape the apparent senselessness of life by means of force, hardness, cunning, national aggrandizement' to be emotionally untenable. If the nihilistic logic led the Nazis to the Final Solution, for Camus the dilemma required the very opposite – to join the French Resistance Movement.

Thus what John Cruickshank's introduction to Camus plays demonstrates is that even a fundamentally non-political, metaphysical and trans-historical understanding of the absurd need not preclude moral choice, or political action, it may actually make it indispensable. 'We have not risen above our human condition', Cruickshank quotes from one of Camus' essays 'but... we must refuse to accept it and do what is necessary to eradicate it. Our task as men, is to find some formulas to pacify the great anguish of human kind...make justice a possibility in an obviously unjust world, render happiness meaningful to peoples poisoned by the sufferings of our age.'<sup>59</sup>

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Pinter's life and work are another magnificent example of refusal and rebellion, not, as I will argue, against the inherent absurdity of human condition, but against the historical and social forces that degrade life and render it meaningless: his use of the 'absurd' demonstrates not so much the absence of absolute truths, as the way traditional sacred 'truths' of the West have become interwoven in the tapestries of lies to cover injustice, crime, cruelty, and hence require to be deconstructed and rejected.<sup>60</sup> The exhaustive list of Pinter's public denunciations of

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>60</sup> In this sense Pinter continues the tradition of such uncompromising critics of European colonialism as Aimé Césaire. His *Discourse on Colonialism* is an eloquent, explicit and passionate exposure of the way European Christian priests, philosophers of pseudo-Humanism and Enlightenment and art historians managed to represent racial exploitation, slavery and genocide as fulfilling their highest philanthropic principles. With its 'very distinguished, very humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century, that without being aware of it, has a Hitler inside him', and only rails against him because at bottom 'what he cannot forgive Hitler is not the crime in itself, but the crime against white man' – Europe at present time [1972, when the book

the leading western powers - for their arrogance, brutality and above all their hypocrisy in appealing to democratic and/or Christian principles for an alibi - would be too long to reproduce here. But a reminder seems to be necessary that his political dissent did not, as is often believed, start in his mid-career, but was from the very beginning of his adult life the very mode of his being. From his first act of resistance, in 1949, when at the age of 18, as part of his opposition to the Cold War, he declined to comply with National Service, through the following decades, when he raised his voice against the murder of the democratically elected President Allende and 20 000 other innocent Chileans, and continued, in the eighties, to support liberation movements such as the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, to his very last years when he raised his voice against the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, the US War in Afghanistan and the Invasion of Iraq, blaming, at the same time, in a 2003 public reading, ‘millions of totally deluded American people for not staging a mass revolt,’<sup>61</sup> and repeatedly exhorting his European audiences to ‘resist the power of the United States’<sup>62</sup> – all this time, Pinter, according to John Pilger, was not only one of the very few among the literati to have spoken out, but was also exceptional in his accurate understanding of the real motives underlying contemporary political realities and of the false rhetoric used to misrepresent them.

Almost single-handedly, [Pilger writes] he restored ‘imperialism’ to the political lexicon. Remember that no commentator used this word any more; to utter it in a public place was like shouting ‘fuck’ in a convent. Now you can shout it everywhere and people will nod their agreement; ...He described correctly the crushing of Nicaragua, the

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was written] ‘has reached an incredibly high level of barbarism, surpassed only by the barbarism of the United States.’ See Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1972, pp. 36-47.

<sup>61</sup> Chrisafis, Angelique, and Imogen, Tilden. ‘Pinter Blasts “Nazi America” and “deluded idiot” Blair.’ *Guardian*. Guardian Media Group, 11 June 2003. WEB. 2 Oct. 2007.

<sup>62</sup> In the Europe Theatre Prize Acceptance Speech in Turin, in 2006. He said on that occasion that he would ‘like to see Europe echo the example of Latin America in withstanding the economic and political intimidation of the United States. This is a serious responsibility for Europe and all its citizens.’ Quoted in Michael Billinton, *Harold Pinter*, New and updated edition, Faber and Faber, 2007, 428.



### III 'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH

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blockage against Cuba, the wholesale killing of Iraqi and Yugoslav civilians as imperialist atrocities.<sup>63</sup>

It is, above all, this understanding that the wider responsibilities of writers are identical with those of ordinary citizens, and include an obligation to apply critical scrutiny to the language used in political propaganda, that lead Pilger to sum up Pinter's merits in a single phrase - 'truth-teller'.

Now it would be very strange if such a committed truth-teller, political dissenter and moral rebel should make the demonstration of the absence of truth or the impossibility of verification an ultimate purpose of his drama, unless we assumed a schizoid inner division, his art cultivating philosophical and moral versions of consent and indifference so eloquently disparaged in his public pronouncements and activities. John Pilger refuses to draw this dividing line. When in the text already quoted above he refers to Pinter's play *Ashes to Ashes*, it is not to point to the unverifiable status (the primary concern of the commentators of postmodernist orientation) of Rebecca's confession to Devlin, of a love affair with a sexual sadist whose work as a 'guide' involved walking down a platform and tearing all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers – a personal memory, a confabulation, something that happened to a friend? – but as an example of Pinter's use of images of Nazism and the Holocaust', to warn against similar 'repressive, cynical and indifferent acts of murder by the clients of arms-dealing imperialist states such as the United States and Britain.'<sup>64</sup>

The reluctance, which I share with Pilger, to separate Pinter the citizen's and Pinter the dramatist's views of truth or reality may sound like a perverse disregard of the author's own explicit insistence on such a separation in his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech. I am referring to his important qualification of his former views, stated in the Letter to the Editor of *The Play's the Thing* in October 1958<sup>65</sup>, concerning the underlying principles of his drama. This is how Pinter opened his 2005 Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech:

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<sup>63</sup> John Pilger 'The Silence of Writers', John Pilger's ZSpace Page, October 16, 2005.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Reproduced under the title 'On The Birthday Party II', in *Various Voices: Prose, Politics 1948-1998*, London, Faber and Faber, 1999, 15-18.

In 1958 I wrote the following:

There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false.

I believe that these assertions still make sense and do still apply to the exploration of reality through art. So as a writer I stand by them but as a citizen I cannot. As a citizen I must ask: What is true? What is false?

This correction should be understood primarily as a welcome warning against the misuse, by the reactionary political right, of the postmodern intellectuals' radical doubt, and an urge perhaps, to detach himself from their increasingly evident alliance. Yet, laconic as it is, the statement is in danger of being misunderstood as confirming the gap dividing the artistic from political commitments, the artist's from the citizen's kinds of truth. I believe though that rather than positing two completely different goals, Pinter is merely insisting on different means used in pursuit of the same end – which is the accurate perception of reality. For if, as he immediately proceeds to point out, 'truth in drama is elusive', but 'the search for it is... compulsive', truth is 'clearly what drives the endeavor' - then his drama may very well be said, in a paraphrase of J. C. Ransom's definition of poetry,<sup>66</sup> to initiate an intense, as yet inarticulate experience which may conclude in an articulation of a truth leading to political action. This, in fact, is very close to the comment Michael Billington offers of his own selection from Pinter's 1958 letter, much longer than the two sentences Pinter quoted and left only partially explained in his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech. It is a condensed passage, containing in a nutshell Pinter's early dramatic credo; to appreciate fully the acuteness of Billington's response to it, analogous to Cruickshank's interpretation of Camus' philosophy of the absurd, I reproduce it in its entirety:

There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false. The assumption that to verify

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<sup>66</sup> The relation I suggest between dramatic experience and (political) truth in Pinter's plays may be said to parallel the relation Ransom establishes between poetic perception and the statement of (scientific) idea: 'For scientific predication concludes an act of attention but miraculism [metaphor] initiates one.' J. C. Ransom, 'Poetry: A Note on Ontology', in Lena Petrovic, ed., *Literature, Culture, Identity: Introducing Twentieth Century Literary Theory*, Filozofski fakultet, Nis, Prosveta-Nis, 2004, 107.

what has happened or what is happening presents few problems I take to be inaccurate. A character on the stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, his present behavior or his aspirations nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives is as legitimate and worthy of attention as one who can alarmingly do all these things. The more acute the experience, the less articulate the expression... To supply an explicit moral tag to an evolving and compulsive dramatic image seems to me facile, impertinent and dishonest. When this takes place it is not theatre but a crossword puzzle. The audience holds the paper. The play fills in the blanks. Everyone's happy. There has been no conflict between audience and play, no participation, nothing has been exposed. We walk out as we went in<sup>67</sup>.

There are two major themes in the passage, and Billington addresses both. The first, and less significant in his view, regarding the relativity of experience, Billington immediately relates to the philosophy underlying the absurdist drama, but only to notice how Pirandello derived from it a defeatist metaphysics that eventually lead him towards the nostalgia of Fascism, in stark contrast to Pinter's use of the impossibility of verification '...to assert the need for active resistance of social orthodoxy.'<sup>68</sup>

This is an extremely helpful insight, yet it is the latter part of Pinter's statement about the conflict *between* the audience and the play, that Billington finds most revealing. To unsettle and disturb the audience has been the job of all great dramatists, from Ibsen to Brecht, he notes, but Pinter, 'is radically different in his belief that the meaning of the play should evolve from an image, and that the dramatist should leave some of the clues in the crossword puzzle open.' This does not preclude the dramatist having strong political convictions, though. Rather than signifying Pinter's own radical skepticism, the banishment of the omniscient author, along with biographical specifics, consequential speech and fixed conclusions – are all, according to Billington, new, revolutionary strategies for transferring the moral responsibility to the audience.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Michael Billington, *Harold Pinter*, 94.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

It would be possible to find in Pinter's subsequent commentaries and interviews a much more unequivocal confirmation than in the passage examined by Billington of the political aspects of his early plays, particularly *The Birthday Party*. But before I reach for the author's own statement of intention – not always a reliable witness, as we all know well – I would like to produce intrinsic evidence, by examining some of the clues from the play itself.

*The Birthday Party* has by now earned the status of a Pinter classic, sharing with most of his early plays the obsessive exploration of what has become known as a Pinteresque situation, constituting, as he claimed in the fifties, the archetypal origin of all drama – that of two people in a room and a knock on the door.<sup>70</sup> It introduces emissaries of some mysterious, menacing force, who wreak havoc upon the life of the protagonists, but remain undefined to the end of the play. Thus the two sinister strangers from *The Birthday Party*, Goldberg and McCann, possess no past, no identity or clearly stated motives, nor does their victim, the shabby, sordid, indolent recluse Stanley, whose one virtue may have been his stubborn refusal to give up his seedy privacy, and enter the larger world. The pair subject him to a grotesquely nonsensical interrogation, and possibly torture in the course of the birthday party they insist they organize for him despite his claims that it is not his birthday, until in Act III he emerges reduced to an uncomprehending, speechless, catatonic wreck and is taken to an unspecified institution to be remodeled into what Althusser would call a 'good subject'.

Who Goldberg and McCann are is not really such an insoluble enigma as it appeared to its first audiences, either brought up to expect Shavian explanations, or anxious to detach themselves from the disturbing experience Pinter asked them to live through – which is precisely the reason he gave, in the already quoted letter, for choosing to ignore their appeals for clarification.<sup>71</sup> Critics kept guessing, most of them missing the point. For Martin Esslin, writing in 1981, the play was 'a metaphor for the inexplicable uncertainties and mysteries of the

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<sup>70</sup> In, for example, 'On *The Birthday Party* II', *Various Voices*, 16.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 17. Pinter writes: 'When a character cannot be comfortably defined or understood in terms of the familiar the tendency is to perch him on a symbolic shelf, out of harm's way. Once there, he can be talked about, but need not be lived with.'

human condition itself, with its transitions from one stage of existence to another, youth to age, life to death.<sup>72</sup> The agents of this remorseless abstract doom, Goldberg and McCann, are never associated, despite their strikingly similar methods of interrogation, with the Gestapo hearings, in 1958 still not far back in the past. Instead, Esslin describes them quite implausibly as 'the archetypal Jewish swindler' and the 'equally archetypal Irish terrorist.' It seems though that in reducing them to timeless archetypes, or rather stereotypes, it is Esslin himself who is being guilty of reactionary political stereotyping. For Goldberg and McCann are clearly the new dramatic incarnation of Ben and Gus, two paid killers from *The Dumb Waiter*, and along with them should more plausibly be seen as a powerful dramatic example of the divide-and-rule tactics whereby the dispossessed or exploited marginal groups are pacified by being offered a chance to exercise power on a victim even more helpless than themselves. Thus Gus, the less completely adjusted to the agreed system, ends as the target his partner finds himself aiming at in the final tableau before the curtain falls. McCann also displays himself enough traces of nonconformity to be unable to perform the job of curing Stanley from the same flaw with unruffled conscience. Hence the senior partner's exhortation to 'Play up, play up, and play the game' is addressed to him though, of course, it extends to the chief spoilsport Stanley.

The nature of the game is clear enough, even if we miss the clue and fail to recognize the quotation from a jingoist poem *Vita Lampada*, by Sir Henry Newbolt, a distinguished English lawyer, poet and prose writer, and a champion of the British Imperialism.<sup>73</sup> Not only the purpose but the continuity of the game is traced with acute, uncompromising historical sense in Pinter's drama from the early *Dumb Waiter*, *The Birthday Party* and *The Hothouse* (if *The Hothouse* had been performed at the time, with its scenes of shocking abuse at a psychiatric institution, particularly the use of electrodes in curing dissent, it would have made the politics of *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Birthday Party* more readily recognizable), to *The New World Order*

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<sup>72</sup> 'Note by Martin Esslin, editor of the *Kenyon Review*', in Harold Pinter, *Various Voices*, p. 13.

<sup>73</sup> See above 'Play up, Play up, and Play the Game': On Globalization, Multiculturalism, and University', pp. 149-171.

and *Party Time*. For in *The New World Order* the pairs of hired killers from the early plays reappear as Des and Lionel, two contemporary torturers, this blending of characters suggesting the continuity of methods from Auschwitz to Guantanamo. No more than a brief sketch, the play shows them savoring the gruesome job they are preparing to perform on a mute, hooded victim, until, in its climax, one of them bursts into obscene tears at the purity of his mission, which is 'to keep the world clean for democracy'. *Party Time* in its turn ushers us into the world of their hitherto invisible employers, the smug, incredibly rich bourgeoisie, their frivolous talk of exclusive new health clubs and sexual gossip drowning the signs that something sinister is taking place in the streets - the round-ups which a high-ranking government official and his thug and admirer, Tracy, are organizing in the interest of the 'cast iron' peace they pledge, their fists closed, teeth clenched, to give to the world. The game, consisting again in keeping safely indifferent to, or at least silent about, the atrocities taking place just round the corner, is nearly spoiled by one person, Tracy's wife; but her insistent questions about her missing brother remain without an answer, and she is soon bullied into silence.<sup>74</sup>

So who are Goldberg and McCann? I think we can now legitimately look back to Pinter's own explanation in a letter he sent to the director of the first production of *The Birthday Party*, but agreed to have published only a quarter of a century later: 'Goldberg and McCann? Dying, rotting, scabrous, decayed spiders, the flower of our society. They know their way around. Our mentors. Our ancestry. Them. Fuck 'em.'<sup>75</sup> While making clear at last that they are

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<sup>74</sup> Responding to the general complaint that the play was 'so glumly and glibly predictable that you felt like screaming,' Michael Billington noted aptly: 'What was depressing was how few critics stopped to ask whether there might be some truth in Pinter's central point that bourgeois privilege increasingly coexists with greater investment of power in the state and that our lives are more and more governed by a narcissistic materialism in which it is uncool to get het up about injustice and corruption'. The growth, he goes on to warn, of this 'myopic, and self-preoccupied wealthy elite', which is 'becoming dangerously apparent in Britain' is 'one of the preconditions of Fascism', Billington, *Harold Pinter*, 330-331.

<sup>75</sup> Harold Pinter, 'On *The Birthday Party* I': Letter to Peter Wood, director of the *Birthday Party*, written just before rehearsals started for the first production of the play in April 1958, *Various Voices: Prose, Poetry, Politics 1948-1998*, Faber, 1999, p. 10.

not to be understood as avatars of some metaphysical absurd, Pinter's impatient, colloquial dismissal of Goldberg and McCann suggests also that his plays are not so much about the oppressors as, more importantly, about the need for resistance and the need to understand why, as a rule in his plays, it fails.<sup>76</sup> One learns a lot by focusing on Stanley's blunders in a fight with 'socio-religious monsters', as Pinter also dubbed his torturers in the same letter: among other things, that in refusing to follow the romantic pattern of the idealized hero of resistance confronting the villain society, but portraying Stanley as a 'quagmire of delusion', lacking 'any adult comprehension', using 'pretense and bluff against his persecutors' and so collapsing soon despite the non-conformist fiber he also possesses - Pinter was not writing an apolitical play, as some commentators have claimed<sup>77</sup>, but realistically assessing and condemning the moral condition of the majority of contemporary citizens. For it is through unflinching self-examination and repudiation of comfortable falsehoods that the larger-scale assaults suggested by the two thugs' irruption into Stanley's petty world have a chance of being ultimately withstood. If Stanley, as Pinter goes on to remark, 'had only cottoned on to the fact that he need only admit to himself what he actually is and is not - then Goldberg and McCann would not have paid their visit, or if they had, the same course of events would have by no means been assured.'<sup>78</sup>

This, on the other hand, should not be interpreted as Pinter's naiveté concerning the unprecedented political and military power of

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<sup>76</sup> The exceptions are his women - like Ruth from *The Homecoming*, Flora from *A Slight Ache*, or Rebecca from *Ashes to Ashes* - who in the end prevail over, or at least learn to withstand, their macho husbands' and lovers' power.

<sup>77</sup> Michael Karwowski, for example. In his 'Pinter - A political playwright?' he uses Pinter's refusal to cast Stanley in the heroic mold as a counter-argument against Billington's political interpretation of the play:

Thus, with *The Birthday Party* (1958), for instance, Mr. Billington tells us that 'the power of the play resides precisely in the way Pinter takes stock ingredients of popular drama and invests them with political resonance'. ... This is in spite of the fact that Pinter is...also quoted from a 1960 interview: 'In contemporary drama so often we have a villain society and the hero the individual. And a lot of people have said that about *The Birthday Party*. Well, it isn't like that ... there's no question of hero and villain.' (*Contemporary Review*, November 2003, p. 291).

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 10

the conspiring rich. As a proof to the contrary, one need only read an episode reported by Pilger in ‘The Silence of the Writers’:

In March 2006, when he was presented with the European Theatre Prize in Turin, Pinter said he intended to spend the rest of his life railing against the United States. Surely, asked chair Ramona Koval (...) he was doomed to fail? ‘O yes – me against the United States!’ he said, laughing along with the audience at the absurdity, before adding: ‘But I can’t stop reacting to what is done in our name and what is being done in the name of freedom and democracy is disgusting.’

Pinter’s self-deprecating exclamation concerning his chances of success against the vast ‘combine’ of the US various powers, in conjunction with his absolute conviction that resistance is imperative, also reflects the peculiar moral stance of his political drama, whether early or late. Its affinity with the kind of humanism forged out of the nihilistic premise by the great ‘absurdist’ authors has been noted in the first single monograph to deal with the politics of Pinter’s plays, Charles Grimes’ *A Silence Beyond Echo*. While observing how ultimately pessimistic Pinter’s political theatre is - ‘the revolutionaries are all silenced’, whereas their opponents are ‘articulate, ruthless, and impregnable’<sup>79</sup> - Grimes argues that the absence of optimistic outcomes does not prevent his plays from serving as an example for political action. He also references Beckett’s famous ‘I can’t go on. I must go on’, to claim, in an echo of John Cruickshank’s interpretation of Camus’ existentialist ethics, that *even though* political resistance may make no change, the alternative - to do nothing - is immoral. For, as he contends in a succinct summary of Pinter’s vision, “ethics must exist without any assumption of efficacy.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Charles Grimes, *Harold Pinter’s Politics: A Silence Beyond Echo*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005, 32.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.



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**Rezime:**

**HAROLD PINTER I POLITIČKA  
UPOTREBA APSURDA**

Tekst predstavlja prilog raspravi o političkom značenju i tumačenju Pinterovih drama. Podstaknuta političkim aktivizmom Harolada Pinetra i nedvosmisleno političkim sadržajima njegovih dela nastalih u periodu od kasnih osamdesetih, ova kontroverza usmerena je pre svega na pitanje da li ove pozne drame i skečevi predstavljaju suštinski zaokret u odnosu na Pinterove rane, metaforične dramatizacije ljudske egzistencije, ili je, naprotiv, njegov celokupni opus od samog početka prožet politikom. Autor ovog rada zastupa potonji stav, nastojeći da dokaže da bez obzira da li mu je uzrok metafizički ili istorijski, besmisao prikazan u Pozorištu apsurdna, kojem po mišljenju Martina Eslina pripadaju i Pinterove rane drame, ne podrazumeva nužno prihvatanje apsurdna od strane samog pisca, već predstavlja početnu spoznaju koja nalaže otpor i pobunu, te prema tome ne isključuje političko tumačenje. Takvo tumačenje Pinterovih drama nameće se utoliko pre što se u prividno misterioznoj situaciji, naizgled neprepoznatljivim likovima, i jezičkom besmislu, istinitije i delotvornije nego li u tradicionalno realističkoj drami, ukazuje represivni scenario po kome se odigravaju istorijske i lične drame našega veka, kao i licemerna retorika koja ga maskira.

## A DEEPENING VISION: STEVE TESICH'S POST-HOLLIWOOD PLAYS

Writing for the *Guardian* in 2000, the British playwright Mark Ravenhill complained of the pressure to catch up with the increasing cultural overload, which caused him to feel stressed out and guilty. The trouble with culture, he said, was that there was too much of it. The title of his article – ‘Help! I am having an art attack’ - and the half-joking solution - that starting from January 1, 2001, nothing should be produced for a year: ‘no experiences, no performances, nothing that could be considered, even by the most dogged commentator, as art or culture’ - hardly seem to corroborate my contention about the marginalization of art in contemporary society. But what I mean by marginalization has little to do with quantity, and much with the kinds of art produced and kinds of approaches applied. Ravenhill does come closer to what I think the real problem is when he mentions the business aspect of cultural overload, the merciless assault of art marketeers with their indiscriminate advertising of ‘a gold standard of largely American culture’ and of the richer and more diverse work that continues to be produced around and between the global edifices of American film and television, but does not pursue this critical observation about two competing and, in my view, mutually exclusive kinds of art any further. On the contrary, he maintains that there is something intrinsically worrying in the multiplicity of choices suggested by the proliferation of images, narratives, voices, performances through which, since the Renaissance cultural Big Bang, we have made sense of our lives. Ultimately, however, he decides that diversity is better than a return to any kind of mono-myth, and concludes with a qualified proposal that instead on art, a one year-long moratorium be placed on art news in the media: ‘No reviews, no cultural commentators on radio or television, no profiles of artists in magazines. Stop the presses at Time Out. Pull the plug on Front Row. Ban the Guardian listings. Just a simple sign up outside each gallery

or cinema or opera house saying what's on. And let gossip and rumor do the rest.' (Ravenhill 2000)

Incurably optimistic as he describes himself, Ravenhill fails to gauge accurately the pernicious effect of the cultural overload he describes. Cultural advertising is certainly part of it, but once silenced, he seems to be saying, 'richer and diverse work' will take care of itself, happily coexisting with the 'golden standard of American culture'. It does not occur to him that the steady outpour of entertainment and other kinds of pseudo art is in itself an indirect perception management, one of the strategies for rendering genuinely artistic work unrecognizable or ineffective: that if self-expression finally seems to have become available to diverse social groups of producers as well as consumers, as Ravenhill states approvingly, it has done so only because the overwhelming quantity of profit-oriented, popular kitsch along with the more sophisticated abstract stuff currently produced and advertised, has its negative qualitative correlative, which is the marginalization of 'the total approach' to art, in the absence of which, potentially vision-expanding, revolutionary drama, painting or music, for most people, are rendered experientially meaningless.

'Total approach' is a phrase taken from John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, a study of the ways in which the perception of visual arts has been controlled since the Renaissance, including the age of mechanical reproduction, when paintings and sculpture, once confined to sacred cultural space reserved for it, became freely circulating images for mass consumption. I will return to his arguments in connection with the motif of commodification of artworks in Tesich's play *On the Open Road*, but for the moment I want to observe that Berger's insights about the cultural misuse and betrayal of visual arts are equally valid when applied to literature and particularly drama. In fact, there is no better example of this practice than the manner in which in March 2012, in an episode of RTS 2 talk show serial 'Our People in Hollywood', the work of Steve Telic was introduced to the TV audiences in Serbia. The presentation was largely a misrepresentation: much was made of his early films, and the Oscar he won for it, but of his late, most subversive plays one was not mentioned, while another, about Vietnam, was distorted out of all recognition to fit the standard of current political correctness. Thus ironically the tribute ostensibly

### III 'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH

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paid to Tesich consisted in implicitly endorsing attitudes to art, truth and politics whose tragic consequences for the global humanity this important playwright, novelist and activist of Serbian origin spent the last years of his life in exposing and denouncing. They can be summarily described as postmodern attitudes, by which I do not have in mind any defining formalist criterion, but a certain ideological position: as opposed to the tradition of modernist refusal and revolt, postmodern spirit in general I consider to be marked by indifference and consent to the world shaped by the powers that be<sup>81</sup>.

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Tesich's revolt did not happen at once. When as a teenager he left his native Užice to settle in the United States and after a few struggling years won a reputation as a successful screenplay writer for Hollywood movies, Tesich did so with a conviction that the American dream was a synonym for freedom and justice not to be found in the countries of Eastern Europe. His awakening from this delusion came years later, when he was already well into his forties. One of the reasons for this delayed recognition was perhaps his need, as an immigrant, to continue to feel connected to the moral center of his new country, which, in the sixties, still seemed to be there. Not that the American international politics was less dishonest than now, but greater care was taken to mask the real profit- and power-based objectives with the rhetoric about democracy, peace, and freedom. Nor was Tesich quite taken in by this demagoguery, but what sustained his faith in America was the will to resistance and change that he saw around: there was 'a certain irruption of emotions, of intellectual ideas – people deciding to cut loose from things they were doing and try new things' - which made the sixties the decade that stayed with him and shaped his life permanently. Looking back at it from the perspective of the nineties, he saw 'the pre-Vietnam era

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<sup>81</sup> The distinction was drawn by John Cruickshank to describe two possible trends in the philosophy underlying the so-called Theatre of the Absurd, one represented by Camus' resistance against fascism, the other embodied in Pirandello's ultimate consent to it. (Cruickshank 1984: 7-32). I use the distinction as a starting point of a more fully developed argument concerning the ideologies of modernism/postmodernism in the essay '*Šta se to desilo sa modernizmom*' ('Whatever Happened to Modernism') printed in Section II.

as the last time the American citizens actively engaged in establishing the goals of the nation' (Cohen 1982: 42-54). It was the new policies of the eighties, openly more reactionary, both in ruthlessly violating civil and human rights with the view of preventing such massive movements of organized resistance as was the anti-Vietnam protest, and also in being shamelessly outspoken about the crass economy and politics of self-seeking that two decades earlier decision makers felt better masked.

This cynicism also involved lying, but it was lying with a difference. Thus the US military interventions after Vietnam, from its scandalous involvement in Nicaragua, to the Gulf War, to the attack and dismantling of Yugoslavia, all crucial in Tesich's change of attitude, were accompanied by excuses so outrageous, invented with such disregard for ascertainable factual truth, that he could only interpret them as signals confirming the prediction of Hannah Arendt, who had warned that an era might be coming when not only philosophical but factual truths could be ignored with impunity. He called it 'a post-truth era' (Jeremić 2008: 124-127). It is a time when sufficient number of people have been deprived of their critical faculties and prepared to believe anything for the decision makers not to bother about those conscious enough to see through their lies. But in addition to its practical effectiveness, the moral implications of lying changed with the coming of the new era. Far from being a degrading practice to be concealed, lying has become open and self-complaisant, a performance steeped in arrogant pride. While in certain trends in postmodern theory and abstract art it took subtler, more sophisticated forms, such as new theoretical postulates about the inability of signs to capture truth, reality, or meaning<sup>82</sup>, and hence

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<sup>82</sup> In his study *Whatever Happened to Modernism*, Gabriel Josipovici points to the idea of the free circulation of signs no longer attached to any referent as the crossroads in the history of modern art, at which it moves in two very different directions. One, exemplified by Duchamp and his followers, abandons representation and embraces abstraction, introducing a way of seeing that is diminished and diminishing, indifferent to the world and ultimately boring to the viewer. The other, that of Picasso's follower Francis Bacon, remains responsible to the world: like Rembrandt's self-portrait (Josipovici quotes Bacon as saying), it uses the non-representational details in order to record a fact. This kind of art never abandons its crucial purpose to report or record, but preserves the modernist tension between figuration and abstraction, and,

about the impossibility of representation, in politics the much more obvious cynicism concerning truth and falsehood was supported by new, frankly amoral, 'scientific' explanations of human nature, culture and history.<sup>83</sup> A random example, combining political practice and theory, of the new honorable status assigned to duplicity is to be found in the essay 'The Postmodern State' by Robert F. Cooper. What the world and particularly the Balkans need, he argues in his essay, is a new kind of imperialism, in accordance with human rights and cosmopolitan values, in that it would not impose any rules, but will be realized as a movement of voluntary self-imposition – i.e., of voluntary acceptance of the conditions which provide the weak with the protection of the strong, without whose intervention law and order would forever remain inaccessible to the weak. Cooper's name for this new postmodern kind of state is 'cooperative empire'. For this political plan to materialize, however, it is necessary to respond positively to the 'greatest moral challenge of the postmodern world', which is 'to get used to the idea of double standards.'<sup>84</sup>

When Tesich's mounting doubts about the US as a model of freedom and democracy lead to the final bitter disillusionment at the time of the NATO bombing of Serbia, justified as it was by shameless falsifications in the media, Tesic's response to the postmodern

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compared to the one-dimensional, merely aesthetic abstract painting, is much more exciting and profound. (Josipovici 2010: 119-121)

<sup>83</sup> Such as game theory, or selfish gene theory, described in Adam Curtis' documentary *The Trap: What happened to Our Dream of Freedom?* or Scott Noble's documentary *The Power Principle*. Their assumptions about human conduct as consisting in strategies endlessly reinvented to satisfy the basic biological need, which is preservation and perpetuation of one's own genes, in tune with the capitalist economic and military ideal of aggressive self-interest, are shown in Noble's film to be scientifically unfounded. .

<sup>84</sup> Cooper was one of Tony Blair's chief advisors, helping to shape his neoliberal 'cosmopolitan' politics. Its criminal agenda is also made apparent in the passage about voluntary imperialism and double standards: 'The challenge to the postmodern world is to get used to the idea of double standards. Among ourselves, we operate on the basis of laws and open cooperative security. But when dealing with more old-fashioned kinds of states outside the postmodern continent of Europe, we need to revert to the rougher methods of an earlier era - force, pre-emptive attack, deception, whatever is necessary to deal with those who still live in the nineteenth century world of every state for itself. Among ourselves, we keep the law but when we are operating in the jungle, we must also use the laws of the jungle' (Cooper, 2002)

challenge of double standards was to remain a modernist, recreating a tradition in which he, a spiritual heir to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, already had his roots. Which is to say that both as a citizen and a playwright he stood up in defense of truth, convinced that in an era openly committed to falsehood and violence, telling the truth becomes a primary moral requirement, and morality the only authentic form of rebellion.<sup>85</sup>

The interviews Tesich gave, and essays and letters he sent to the press at the time exposed the methods used by the U.S. and world mainstream media to disseminate the fabricated version of the Balkans conflict. The intended effect, all too soon achieved, was what he termed the 'niggerization' of Serbs, who now joined the Indian, African, Mexican, Iraqi 'niggers' on a long open list of the weak peoples deprived by the strong nations of the world of their right to fight back in defense of their lives, freedom or dignity (see Jeremić 2008: 128). These letters were all composed in the hope that the truth about the totalitarian atmosphere in nominally non totalitarian societies – a development not even Hannah Arendt, a specialist for totalitarian regimes, could predict - would reach and alarm enough people to stir some action. They were not published in Tesich's lifetime, the indifference of the press aggravating the anger and despair that, in his sister's words, in the end killed him.

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<sup>85</sup> In an interview given to the *American Theatre* in 1992, Tesich said: 'The only remaining form of rebellion is a moral person.' The same year his text 'A Government of Lies' appeared in *Nation*, exposing, among other kinds of lying, the duplicity in American education – one kind of values being paid official lip service in schools and universities, and its opposite being taught by example:

We have forgotten the central premise that you educate by example. The practise and tolerance of racism is education. The system of justice in which the crimes of the wealthy and the crimes of the poor are not the same in the eyes of the law is education. The Reagan–Bush decade of corruption and greed has been a decade of education. That our President had the chance to preside over the first generation in this century to mature without a war, and that he chose to teach them a lesson that war is good, is education. .. It is not that our education has failed. It is that it has succeeded beyond our wildest expectations. [We have] taught our children to tuck in their wings, to narrow their range of vision and concerns, to jettison moral encumbrances and seek self-fulfillment in some narrow sphere of interest..'



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The artistic transposition of Tesich's deepening vision required a radical change in both his medium and his message. A successful Hollywood scriptwriter, a recipient of prestigious awards including Oscar, for movies reflecting his still strong faith in his adopted country, Tesich was never the person to be seduced by success, as his later wry comment about the award for his first film, makes clear: 'What is an award? It makes for a fabulous week-end. It does not transform the world!' (Rothstein, 1991); or his observation that 'We are born with the congenital need to win an Oscar. Our inborn need is of love...' (Jeremić 2008: 119) Now as the year 1990, the time of the decisive turning point, drew near, and Tesich, having just adopted an eight days old baby girl, increasingly felt that the world in which she was to grow up was loveless and in need of transformation, he decided to return to his former medium, the theatre. Big ideas, he felt, were best articulated in the theatre, because the theatre allows for the expression the (American) film would never tolerate.

In 1989, he wrote *The Speed of Darkness* in the conviction that America would never heal until it faced the Vietnam trauma with complete honesty. The life of one of its two heroes, Joe, a Vietnam veteran, is based on a lie. He has suppressed his pain and anger in exchange for family happiness and social reputation, but his memories and his conscience are stirred back to life by the sudden emergence of his former mate, the deliberately unadjusted, homeless loser, Lou. When Lou commits suicide in a self-sacrificial gesture reminiscent of Christ, Joe turns a communal gathering celebrating his triumph as the city's Man of the Year into an occasion for public confession. The disclosure of the secrets – among them of the atrocities committed in Vietnam, and their effects on the American soldiers (Joe's permanent sterility is the consequence of radioactive exposure), of the toxic waste he and Lou, ignored and unemployed on their return from Vietnam, were secretly and illegally hired to dump in a nearby mesa, currently scheduled for the new water supply system – reveals how the past, buried and unrecognized, threatens, literally and symbolically, to poison the future of the town. Yet the opportunity Joe's confession offers to the community to confront the truth is ultimately refused, the public, at first enthusiastic, soon finding his presence too embarrassing

a reminder of what is easier to forget, and quietly forcing him to leave.

There followed three more plays – *Square One*, (1990), *On the Open Road* (1992) and *Arts and Leisure* (1996), which together with the *Speed of Darkness* comprise a thematic whole, aptly called 'the moral tetralogy'. Having depicted the failure to confront and learn from the past, Telic now turned his gaze to the bleak future he felt was bound to result from this failure, to conjure which he developed new dramatic conventions, such as futuristic allegory instead of the former realism. The angle of his vision changed in another respect too, for in the three subsequent plays the falsification of political and historical truth is assimilated, more or less completely, into another theme, that of the corruption of art.

*On the Open Road*, reflecting as it does the recent global political upheavals, is not altogether an exception, for the use and misuse of art is its pervasive theme too. It blends in with the motif of Christ's Second Coming and provides the play, inspired as it was by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the author's premonition of the civil wars to come, with a certain distancing allegorical perspective that takes the play's themes beyond the immediate historical circumstances that gave rise to it. Its two protagonists, Al and Angel are among the survivors of an unspecified civil war, groping from a devastated part of the world towards a country vaguely named 'Land of the Free.' To be allowed to enter it, Al and Angel, very much like the deluded victims of the real transition that befell the former socialist countries in Europe, are eager to submit to any conditions. Among the requirements is the proof that they qualify culturally. To show that they are not miserable dregs fleeing for their lives, and prove their worthiness Angel is pulling a cart cluttered with paintings and sculptures plundered from bombed-out museums, while Al is helping him memorize titles and dates of famous artists and musicians, along with the key ideas of major European philosophers. This misconception of knowledge as a bureaucratic ability to parrot the external facts is the first of the pedagogic strategies directed against total experience of art that Tesich attacks in his play. The museum motif opens an important theme: that of time honored practice of confining art works within a special space, from a temple or a church, to the houses of the rich, to public museums,

### III 'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH

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which all act as dividing lines, barring the experience that happens within from ever surviving, or affecting the life, beyond its walls.

Visual arts [writes John Berger], have always existed within a certain preserve...The experience of art, which at first was the experience of ritual, was set apart from the rest of life – precisely to be able to exercise power over it. Later the preserve of art became a social one. It entered the culture of the ruling classes, whilst physically it was set apart and isolated in their places and houses. (Berger 1972: 25).

The age of pictorial reproduction has not brought about essential change, according to Berger, except that art has lost its former authority. Entering the mainstream of life, the reproduced images of art have become ubiquitous, free, available, but also ephemeral, insubstantial, valueless. At the same time the original paintings acquired the aura of holy relics, their authenticity identified with some mysterious spiritual quality and invoked to justify their market value, while at the same time – as this kind of circular reasoning implied - their exorbitant price on the market was a guarantee of their spiritual value. Thus whether in gilt frames in the living-rooms of the rich or as public museum exhibits, their function has remained basically the same : they are made to justify 'the mystery of unaccountable wealth' from which the majority feel excluded (Berger 1972: 17).

Now that they have come into the possession of these precious art objects, Angel and Al face a crucial choice, comparable to the one that, in Berger's words, opened when the camera made art theoretically available to everybody. It is a choice

between a total approach to art, which relates it to every aspect of experience, and the esoteric approach of a few specialized experts who are the clerks of the nostalgia of a ruling class in decline. ...The real question is: to who does the meaning of the art of the past properly belong? To those who can apply it to their own lives, or to a cultural hierarchy of relic specialist? (Berger 1972: 24)<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> In his book Berger acknowledged his debt to Walter Benjamin's essay, but in fact, the choice suggested above is an advance in comparison to Benjamin's unqualified optimism about the modern reproductive technology's power to alter the cultural landscape in socially progressive ways, particularly through the changed conditions of viewing offered by film. Viewed collectively and cheaply, Benjamin argues, movies withered the artwork's aura, and instead of the awed worshipper, turned the viewer into the critic.

In Act I, beneath their apparent agreement to use the looted art objects as commodities, Al and Angel in fact exemplify the two opposing approaches mentioned above. Al is a connoisseur of visual art, a lover of music, treating paintings and musical instruments with the affection the neglected Angel compares to a mother's for her baby. Yet Al never extends this love to another human being, not even to a terrified little girl Angel saves before an approaching train runs her over. He soon abandons her though, persuaded by Al's rational argument that in the circumstances the love needed to go on saving her from day to day would be self-destructive. Thus Al's understanding of art - as that which 'defines, when we are fumbling in confusion and chaos, the darkness we are in, or elevates us to a promontory from where we can see the way; which defines, if we truly want to be human, what that is and how far we have to go to reach it, or how far off course we have strayed' - is theoretically correct, yet remains on a strictly conceptual level, and is never translated into a gesture of intimacy that his emotionally starved disciple longs for.

As opposed to Al's highbrow aestheticism, which keeps aesthetics strictly separated from ethics, Angel, coming as he does from the most marginalized social group, displays, despite his mentor's instructions to the contrary, a spontaneous and ever stronger inclination to respond to art with his whole being. The response is paradoxical, and consists in displaced rage: provoked by the double standards imposed on art, his rage is directed against art itself. At

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In a famous debate that the essay engendered, Adorno, agreeing with Benjamin about the counter-revolutionary effect of art as a cult object, pointed nevertheless that the destruction of the magical auratic element in high art also constituted a loss. This is so because the contemplation required by the original painting compounded an element of freedom that has disappeared since, replaced by the distraction - and obedience - as a mental condition in which mass audiences now absorb (consume) popular art. (See Leppert 2002: 240-245) Berger's view is superior to both these positions, for he sees how both the original artwork in its preserve and the language of reproduced images into which it has been translated are turned into commodities, but also insists on the need for a revolutionary re-appropriation of the art of the past. It depends, however on who uses the language of images, and for what purpose. Thus the entire art of the past has become a political question: its proper interpretation is momentous not only in terms of personal but also historical experience, for it would give a greater chance to a class or a people to situate themselves in the history from which they have been cut off, and become its free agents at last. (Berger 1972: 26)

### III 'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH

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first overwhelmed by Al's worldly wisdom and scholarly authority, he obediently and mechanically rehearses the opening notes of world famous classical tunes, such as the Grail motif from Wagner's *Parsifal* or Beethoven's Ode to Joy, apparently heedless of their powerful appeal to the humanity to heal the world suffering from the disease of lovelessness. The hidden effect of the music, however, keeps building up in Angel's soul, until, pierced by every single tone of a little classical phrase Al plinks on a piano in a deserted church, he explodes into a fit of violence, smashing the piano keys and then attacking Al with a knife for ignoring stubbornly his unfulfilled need for friendship. From Angel's reminiscence in a previous scene, we find out that his first and only visit to a museum, organized by a social agency for the uplift of the poor and homeless, also ended in violence. The group of three hundred 'scum of the earth', as Angel refers to himself and his class of outcasts, were shocked and then amused to see nothing more uplifting than their own suffering reflected in every single exhibit. Snickering at what appeared to them as an absurdity, they became outraged to hear the regular visitors in chic lightweight summer clothes, who would not spare a single compassionate glance at the real beggars round the corner, admire aloud the beauty of the painted injustice and anguish<sup>87</sup>. Realizing intuitively how, once displayed in museums, art's purpose is reversed, how looking is not allowed to become seeing, but is used instead, in Berger's words, to bolster the illusion that inequality is noble, and hierarchies are thrilling (Berger 1972: 22), the visiting poor merge, ant-like, into a single collective will to demolish the exhibition and set fire to the building. This was how the civil war started, Angel remembers, and concludes his reminiscence observing how pleasant it was to realize that 'you didn't really have to be highly qualified to make history,' how nice to feel 'that being stupid was not a handicap for a change.' This empowering thought did not endure in its clarity though, a new confusion having replaced it, due to the reversal in his

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<sup>87</sup> His protest against the separation of aesthetics from ethics in the European history and theory of art John Berger also recorded in his novel *G.*, whose major image, in the author's own words, is that of four figures of African slaves chained to the platform of King Ferdinand's statue in Livorno. When the sight of chained human figures causes pity and moral confusion in a five-year-old protagonist of the novel, the father's serene explanation is that they are there because they are beautiful. (Berger 1972: 55)

situation: now that he is under Al's supervision, he is struggling to salvage the very thing he formerly set out to destroy: 'I thought it was the culture that was oppressing me. Wrong. It's the culture that's gonna liberate me.' (19)

Wrong, again, but neither Angel, nor Al is aware at this point of where they are mistaken. In fact, their confused and until the very last scene unsuccessful attempts to define the meaning of freedom constitute the second major motif in the play. This and other cathartic insights happen only after they pass the crucial test in the episode of Christ's Second Coming. Having reached the border (so close that they make out the flag with stripes and stars – a clear indication of one of the meanings Tesich ascribed to the Land of the Free), already 'relishing the air of freedom', they are informed, by a Christian monk, that the last condition before they cross it is to kill Christ, who has once again come down to men and is spreading his message no longer by words, but music, playing the cello. Tesich's comment about this detail - 'everything Jesus said is already known, and if you use those familiar words, people tend to instantly shut the door on them. With music...they can have a more personal experience.' (Weiss 1991: 5) recalls Pinter's comments about his characters' frequent resort to silence as well as his own authorial reticence when it comes to additional explanations of his plays: to articulate is to avoid the experience.<sup>88</sup> There is more to it though. Music has already been established as an important motif within the play through Angel's exceptional emotional responsiveness to it, and is also a recurrent motif in Tesich's other plays. In this respect Tesich joins numerous philosophers who intuitively knew what recent neurologists have confirmed scientifically, namely that music is supreme among arts in that it can bypass conceptual understanding and appeal directly to the more primitive, pre-verbal, affective regions in the subcortical and right brain – the zone which, contrary to the traditional, orthodox conception of the primacy of analytical consciousness in defining human species, is what makes us fully and

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<sup>88</sup> 'When a character [or an image], cannot be comfortably explained in terms of what is already familiar, the [reader's or viewer's] tendency is to perch him on a symbolic shelf, out of harm's way. Once there, he can be talked about but need not be lived with'. And also 'the more acute the experience, the less articulate the expression.' (Pinter 2009: 27-8)

truly human. Thus in his book about the uses of musicotherapy in treatment of severe amnesia, Alzheimer's disease, autism, and various psychosis, a neuro-psychiatrist Oliver Sax describes numerous examples of music's power to stir back into life the numbed affects, lost associations and forgotten memories crucial to a sense of identity. Along with restoration of the seemingly extinguished self that music can, if only temporarily, accomplish, there is also the awakening of empathy, so that autistic patients, suffering from what appears irretrievable loss of emotional contact with their environment, suddenly begin to recognize and share the collective mood created by music, particularly its rhythm. The cases described can all be considered clinical evidence justifying Sax's initial quotation from Schopenhauer about the 'ineffable depth of music, which is so easy to respond to yet impossible to explain, because music reproduces all the emotions of our deepest being...[and] expresses the very quintessence of life'; it also provides proof for Nietzsche's theory of drama as originating in the spirit of music and music itself as deriving from and inspiring Dionysian rapture, when culturally acquired sense of boundaries collapses and one returns to the archaic experience of ecstatic reunion with all life. Sax does not refer to this aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy, but he does come close to it when he writes that love of music, or 'musicophilia' 'probably reaches back into the past to the very beginning of our species', and can be considered as inborn as 'biophilia', indeed as one form of biophilia. (Sax 2007: 9/11)

This inborn musico/biophilia can be associated with the ethics of love that Tesich's silent, cello playing Jesus conveys with his music, and that cultural institutions, the Church included, have systematically disregarded or suppressed. As a reminder of this high moral standard that Christ sets for humanity, his music is unbearable to the monk. Instead of Jesus, a true Nietzschean - or Blakean - artist, ignoring compromisers, gazing at his distant, inspired vision of man, the monk, like Ivan Karamazov's Great Inquisitor, would prefer a morally less elitist Messiah, a Messiah for the Masses, who would never burden the fallible weak man with freedom of choice and unconditional love as one of the options, but would mercifully bring along a sword and provide a motive. But while it arouses the worst fears in the monk, listening to Jesus playing the cello brings out the best in Angel.

Possessing somewhere deep down a still undivided sensibility already manifested in his sensitivity to music, he finds he can't resist it now: on the contrary, unable to stop listening, he draws from it the moral strength to eventually resist Al's justifications for killing Jesus.

It is not difficult to recognize in Al's arguments, which are a black-humor version of the monk's own reasons, the perverted logic and scandalous hypocrisy of post-truth era ideologues, who have, as Tesich writes elsewhere, emptied words such as freedom, democracy and morality of all meaning: killing Jesus would set us free, Al argues, and to Angel's objection that he feels bad having to commit another crime so he can be free, he replies, 'freedom doesn't come cheap.' (Cf., Madeleine Albright's condoning comment – 'Democracy doesn't come cheap!' - after Jeltsin's military action against the Russian Parliament resulting in 2000 dead, when the People's Deputies and the masses in the street refused to be liberated at a similarly high cost? Or 500 000 dead children as a price worth paying for Iraq's 'liberation'?) But then, in addition to personal interest, Al remembers there is a greater social good to consider. To kill Jesus with his criterion fixed so high would be a most democratic thing to do: it would promote social reforms, for it would introduce 'floating moral standards' which would 'make moral integrity accessible to everybody' and thus 'contribute to social equality'. (Sounding like a rationale behind the new anti-elitist ethics of multiplicity?) Finally, Al plays his moral trump card: What about the cruelty of letting the tortured Jesus suffer on when killing him would put an end to his misery? It would be immoral not to kill Him, he remonstrates. In fact, to kill Christ would be the most merciful, indeed the most Christian thing to do! (And some of us may remember that the bombing of Serbia was an operation called The Angel of Mercy!)

In the end though, these false arguments are silenced by the unarguable truth of Jesus's music. To stop it, the monk himself kills Jesus, while Al and Angel end up in the Land of the Free, crucified and exhibited in a museum, the visitors in chic summer clothes glancing at them in passing without much interest. For them obviously freedom represents a condition quite different from that Al and Angel eventually come to recognize as freedom. Meditating on the meaning of the word Al observes that there are only two kinds of freedom: 'freedom from,' and 'freedom for.' The former (negative) is achieved



### III 'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH

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when external restraints are removed; the latter is realized through a positive purpose which it serves. The problem, in Al's view, is that freedom has a purpose only in a dream cherished by a man in chains: once tyranny is overthrown and former slaves set free, freedom loses all meaning for them, because they can no longer remember or find a purpose for it.<sup>89</sup> Like the freedom - purposeless or rather trivialized into the freedom to consume - brought about by 'revolutionary' social changes in Eastern European countries that Tesich's play alludes to, the freedom of the visitors in his museum, registering intellectually but unmoved by the suffering of the two crucified men, is negative: the purpose that would make it meaningful has been lost with

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89 The terms negative and positive freedom are associated with Isaiah Berlin's famous essay "Two Concepts of Liberty" (1958), where he defined the former as freedom from external restraint or interference, and the latter as the possession of power and resources to fulfill one's potential. In reinterpreting these concepts, however, Tesich departs from Berlin's own preference for negative freedom. For Berlin, positive freedom, which is fulfilled through a purpose shared by a collectivity and requires conditions that can only be provided by the state, is in danger of being misused in totalitarian regimes. Al's reference to tyrants must be a reflection of this aspect of Berlin's theory. But as Al finally recognizes, and Tesich demonstrates in numerous ways, the notion of freedom prevailing in liberal democracies, which has forgotten its original spiritual purpose, and replaced it with random superficial buyable gratification, is in subtler ways more dehumanizing and more totalitarian than any of the socialist models of collectively exercised purposeful freedom rejected by Berlin. The difference in their attitudes is significant: while Berlin (like Vaclav Havel) belongs to the kind of political immigrant who will repay the country that adopted them with unquestioning loyalty, Steve Tesich possessed the superior integrity that would never allow him to tolerate lies once he saw the truth. In this he is like E. Fromm, who had fled from Hitler's Germany to America, but became its unsparing critic as soon as he recognized in it the symptoms of an 'insane' society. Incidentally, Fromm's *Fear of Freedom* (1941), predating Berlin's essay by more than a decade, contains the first formulation of two concepts of liberty, but Berlin was typically acknowledged as the first to draw the distinction explicitly.

(See 'Positive and Negative Liberty', *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, 2012)

For a more recent version of Berlin's position see Foucault's views on the matter in his famous 1971 debate with Chomsky. Starting with the perennial question of whether there is such a thing as an "innate" human nature, it develops into a controversy on a range of issues, such as power, justice, revolution, freedom and the shape of the ideal human society?

ROAR May 2013. <https://roarmag.org/essays/chomsky-foucault-debate-full-video-subtitles/>

the loss of humanity with which they paid to be set free. Having spontaneously refused to kill Christ, Al and Angel are now, on the contrary, discovering the true purpose of freedom, together with the meaning of art and the definition of humanity, which converge on the same 'divine' principle in human nature: 'To love without a motive is Art. That's the free for what of freedom. To love without a motive That's what defines a human being.'

The words are Al's. They testify to the radical change he underwent once he realised with mounting horror that unless the split in himself is healed which hitherto separated rational knowledge from sympathy and compassion, his mind, quick to get 'the gist of the matter' and then remorselessly move on, would finally get *him*. Nailed on his cross, his exchanges with Angel, though minimal, suggesting for the first time genuine human concern, he sees now that the shadow he casts – not of a man bound fast to anything but spreading his arms to embrace the world – speaks more truly of his condition than the reality of his crucifixion: he sees himself as a 'Masterpiece. Free'. With 'the starry night above and a moral law within' - a quotation from Kant, formerly a mere form of words, now an utterance 'so lovely that it hurts to say it' - Al claims the right to say that even though they may not be saved, they are not lost either.

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Even this partial redemption remains beyond the reach of the protagonists of Tesich's other two late plays, *Square One* and *Arts and Leisure*. The same can be said of the hero of *Karoo*, his posthumously published novel. Sharing the same theme as *On the Open Road*, these plays and the novel are the bleaker projections of Tesich's ultimate fear that the post-truth era is also a post-art era. Adam, a certified third class state performance artist making it to the second class by the end of the play, as a reward for his unquestioning propaganda services on behalf of the Reconstruction, a process of cleansing a heavily bureaucratized dystopian society of the remaining traces of humanity; Alex, a syndicated drama critic, using his regular appearance on the mainstream TV show to advertise the conventions of commercial entertainment as also moral guidelines in life, and quoting Shakespeare ('All the world is a stage'!) as his great precedent; and also Doc Karoo,

a successful Hollywood script writer, whose specialty is doctoring other people's movies to suit the tastes of producers, film stars, and masses of film consumers and thus make them more marketable – all these characters embody the author's growing sense that the artist has become a clown, or an entertainer, and that this is so because man himself has been diminished, turned into something else than man. (Jeremić, 125). They all suffer from Al's inner dissociation and are unable to return love, but unlike Al, they remain incurable, doing irreparable harm to art, to their families (incapable of giving affection and care they need, and even plead for, they all cause their children's deaths ) and to themselves.

Instead of exhaustive analysis of these texts, I will merely point out to two particular scenes where the tragic shrinkage of man is evoked through the reiteration of images and concepts crucial to Tesich's vision and to the argument of this paper. One appears at the end of *Arts and Leisure*. It is the most pessimistic of the four late plays, the only one in which none of the characters manages to recover from the destructive effect of the protagonist's attitude to life, succinctly described by Tesich as no less threatening than Adolf Hitler's, which is why he initially intended to call the play *Mein Kampf*. Alex Chaney's fascist outlook emerges both in his politics and the treatment of the four women closest to him. Nipping or tailoring the expression of every single one of their emotions to suit the popular stage conception of the dramatic (thus he explains to his pity crazed mother that his own callous indifference to his father's suffering is merely natural, since the sound of a man screaming in agony can hold one's attention for a few seconds, but the moment the hearer gets the 'gist of the matter,' the screams stop being dramatic – just as the suffering of whole nations, say, of the persecuted Kurds, could be dramatic only for so long, i. e., until a 'rational' explanation undramatized it. ), Alex Chaney drove his mother to death, reduced his wife, initially a talented actress, to an alcoholic verging on insanity, hurt his daughter into suicide and finally forced his maid Maria, the only remaining friend, to leave in disgust. She has been his conscience throughout the play and it is to her that he makes his only true confession: namely, that 'some access to his interior is gone' and that in his capacity as a drama critic he speaks for anybody and everybody but himself. This loss of self he

depicts - recalling symbolic uses of the same motif in Tesich's earlier plays - as music having died in him:

There was this ... I don't know what to call it...this tuning fork in me... Or maybe a set of chimes...I don't know. And day to day events of everyday life would tap the tuning fork or brush the chimes and cause ripples of consequence to spread in concentric circles throughout my whole being...I would resonate to the music simply because I would suddenly see my mother's eyes. There she is, there she is, I thought, it's her, it's my mother, and she's looking at me. My father's brown shoes. His footprints in the snow. His hands resting on the table like fallen sycamore leaves. There they are, there they are, my father's hands. The tuning fork. The chimes. The music. (Tesich 1997, 47).

Maria's correct paraphrase – 'what you miss is simply the drama of being alive' – anticipates the final insight he experiences after his daughter's suicide and Maria's departure – of himself as one of the many passengers on a fabulous train, moving through various landscapes, observing wars and famines, watching survivors of massacres pleading for help, dutifully scandalized that no one ever gets off the train to land a hand, on and off between spectacular sunrises and sunsets, viewing more and more tragedies. Somewhere along the way he feels the need to jump off the train, not so much in order to help others, but to find his real life he begins to feel is somewhere out there, and live it, but keeps postponing it in a sort of lazy inexorability, until he realizes that the train is about to plunge into a tunnel, and that the drama is over.

\* \* \*

Like Chaney, Saul Karoo is a fallen man who sees in the end what has befallen him. Riveted to a toilet bowl by copious anal bleeding, his life-blood literally oozing out of him and going down the drain, he spends his last minutes composing in his mind the imaginary novel he always wanted but never got down to writing, about a modern Odyssey as an intergalactic space journey in quest of God. The journey now projects his own wasted life, with the age-bent Ulysses discovering that God is the cosmic love force plowing into nothingness and causing ever new worlds to be born in a process that seems to be endless. What has undone Ulysses/Karoo is a reverse force

### III 'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH

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of destruction, personified in the preceding episode in the figure of the film producer Cromwell. A man whose supreme power of annihilation Karoo always resented but never resisted, Cromwell now appears to him in all his diabolical evil. With his new obscenely enthusiastic project for a commercial film about Karoo's own last-ditched and tragically unsuccessful attempt to atone for his sins against love, Cromwell emerges 'no longer as a man but a process':

It was like watching counter creation in the process of turning events, lives, stories, language itself, into Nothingness. It was like witnessing the Big Bang in reverse.

No, it was not death that Saul saw in Cromwell, for even death was an event. This was the beginning of the death of events themselves. This was process that nullified both life and death and the distinction between the two.

The Nothingness smiled at Saul like an old friend.

The Hollywood hack in Saul recognized in the Nothingness before him the ultimate rewriter, the Doc of docs. (388)

Contributing to the Nothingness Cromwell embodies are his lies. When Karoo, himself incapable of telling the truth until the very last moment of his life, recognizes in Cromwell an ultimate liar, the recognition completes his own process of self-confrontation, but also sums up Tesich's unabated horror at the unreality and pseudo humanity in which the identity of post-modern man seems irretrievably to have dissolved.

He's not just lying to Saul. He wants Saul to know that he's lying to him. (...) He's lying through his teeth, with his teeth, with his eyes, his gestures.

All become lies. (...)

In its own way it's a spectacular show.

A constant Darwinian devouring of deeds by counter deeds that are themselves devoured.

This perpetual nullification provides the endless supply of energy for his dynamic personality.

So Saul thinks, looking at Cromwell.

From Modern Man to Postmodern Man.

From Postmodern Man to this.

The Millennium Man.

The last man you'll ever need to know. (Tesich 380)

I quote this last passage to add support to my initial claim that in Tesich's post-Hollywood drama and fiction the modernist refusal and revolt against the culture of lies still persists amidst the prevailing postmodern spirit of indifference and consent. But of course, the modernist tradition in literature and art is itself part of a longer heritage of revolutionary subversion, dissent and heresy. Thus the use Tesich makes of the Second Coming motif in *On the Open Road*, wrenching Christ from the Church and institutionalized religion, and translating him into a complex symbol of what is inherently divine in man, bonds Tesich not only to the early modernists Dostoevsky and Tolstoy (excommunicated for writing a heretical book about *The God Within You*). It makes him also a spiritual descendent of Blake, with his notion about all deities residing in the human breast, and his vision of Resurrection as an Eternal Gospel of Imagination perpetually at war with abstract thought - to mention but two of his revolutionary 'heresies'.

As a way of concluding this paper, I would like to substantiate this last analogy and the larger claim about the perennial clash between the truth-possessed poet and his antipode, the sold-out artist, with an example. Adrian Mitchel's play *Tyger Two* is conveniently about Blake, it is poetic and condensed, telescoping traditions centuries long into a short fantastic sequence of symbolic events in contemporary London, song and music are its important ingredients, and, unlike Tesich's plays, it treats its serious matter in a delightfully, but not at all superficially, comic manner.

The play is called *Tyger Two* because it is a 1996 remake of the 1971 play *Tyger*, written to catch up with the new tactics invented in the meantime by the cultural establishment to deal with original artists. As Mitchel points out in his preface to *Tyger Two*, while 'Blake seems less out of date than he was before - he is still thousand years ahead of his time - the enemies of art and humanity have altered their tactics.' The updated enemies in the play are embodied first in the figure of famous brutalist installation artist in spectacular clothes, called Beelzebub Gloat, and advertised as a spiritual descendent of Andy Warhol. As in so many commercial movies and so much of what goes for serious art nowadays, Beelzebub's chief inspiration, theme

and personal need from early childhood, are cruelty and violence.<sup>90</sup> His latest project is an installation consisting of a thousand dogs with cats' heads, and a thousand cats with dog's heads, (all to be decapitated in the moat at the Tower of London), called *The Pain in the Brain Goes Swirling Down the Drain*. Advertised as 'a fearless confrontation with mortality, a cool examination of speciesism, and a conceptual deconstruction of English petophilia', it wins the enthusiastic approval and a prompt two-thousand-pound bursary from the British Cultural Committee. It consists of three members, hierarchically positioned: Lord Nobodaddy, Lady Hortense Blotting, and Dame Ratchett de Rachett at the top position. Ratchet shares with Gloat his sadism, his love of money, and his belief in advertising as the divine vision of the twentieth century, and has, with the profits gained by advertising their most important client, the White Race, bought St Paul's Cathedral and turned it into a gallery called the *Art of Death*. When William Blake, long thought to have been successfully ignored to death, appears suddenly and applies for the same grant, his uncompromisingly honest arguments immediately disqualify him, and he is refused. His claims, most of them Blake's original quotes, that art is the pursuit of truth, and advertising the pursuit of money, and that there can be no marriage of the two for they hate each other; that in England, not Talent and Genius, but Obedience, Politeness and Passivity are appreciated and fostered; finally his invitation to the Young Men to rise up against the Ignorant Hirelings that have usurped the Camp, the Court and the University, and would, if they could, forever prolong the Corporeal and depress the Mental War - all accurately describing the present day corruption of educational and cultural institutions - are summed up in a single general statement about two contending beliefs shaping the history of western society and art: 'You believe', says Blake simply, 'that the world is made of pain, and power and money and death. But I know the world is made of love.' (Mitchell, 1996, 23)

First treated with condescending indifference couched in current critical jargon (Well, isn't this just an opinion of a Dead White

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<sup>90</sup> Incidentally, the intensification, in art and culture, of the tendency to represent violence, particularly against women, such as we are witnessing at present, predicts, according to Eisler, periods of large scale military destruction. (See Eisler 1995: 142-147)

Europe Male?), then with scornful anger (But hasn't this Blake bloke been long deconstructed?), Blake's revolutionary utterances finally unite Gloat, with chief guardians of the nation's spiritual health: the Committee, the Soul Control Chief Officer and Poetry Police, in a common action to eliminate what they diagnose as a hundred per cent subvert. Yet neither a resort to old fashioned, adverse literary criticism of Blake as a lunatic, whose excesses must be stopped at all costs, nor the more sophisticated pornographic temptation, based on the Freudian psychoanalytic interpretation of art as a result of sexual trauma and enacted by the female officers of Psycho-Sexual Squad, nor yet the starvation blackmail, nor finally the grotesque conspiracy to turn Blake, who has just resisted the seductions of ownership, first into a commodity to be sold at an auction, and then into a pickled preserve in a huge jar - none of these can stop him from what he is and does: a man in love with his wife, a slavery-hating humanist, a revolutionary and prophetic poet illustrating his verses and visions with illuminations that freak out the judge presiding over his trial into pronouncing him free and convert another adversary, Crab, from an enemy and a spy into a friend and disciple. Crab joins the guests at Blake's birthday party, the poets from Chaucer, Shakespeare and the Romantics, to the rock musicians Dylan, Lennon and Bob Morley, in songs celebrating poetry's power to heal the soul, inspire revolt, initiate an unsparing self-examination and judgment, and, finally when all dreams fail, mourn the failure.

Poetry glues your soul together,  
Poetry wears dynamite shoes  
Poetry is the spittle on the mirror,  
Poetry wears nothing but the blues.

In all its capacities, including the last two (as a reminder of a compromise or a loss) the kind of poetry associated with the names of Blake's visitors is always constructive. Hence when the poets, joined by the rest of the crew - (representing Ordinary People who, Blake explains to Crab, are all very extraordinary, and The Wretched of the Earth), begin to build the New Jerusalem, working to the rhythm of their ecstatic song, we imagine the ghost of Tesich, the anguished witness of human lives emptied of love and music, as doing also his bit of work.



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## Rezime

### UMETNOST, SLOBODA, MORAL; POSTHOLIVUDSKE DRAME STIVA TEŠIĆA

U radu se prati motiv zloupotrebe umetnosti u poznim, postholivudskim dramama Stiva Tešića. U fokusu analize su najpre različite strategije, posebno upečatljivo opisane u drami *Na otvorenom drumu*, čiji je cilj da obezbede emotivnu distancu od dela klasične umetnosti čak i onda kada su ona fizički dostupna, a potom razlike u recepciji uslovljene klasnom pripadnošću – tj. mnogo neposrednija iskustvena vrednost koju umetnost potencijalno ima za ekonomski/društveno/kulturno marginalizovane grupe, nasuprot onima na centralnim/privilegovanim pozicijama. U drugom delu rada, problemi i pitanja karakteristična za Tešićeve postholivudske drame – degradacija umetnosti, falsifikovanje istine, trivijalizacija pojma slobode, i gubitak bića u postmodernoj eri –

kontekstualizuju se unutar opštije uporedne analize dve antagonističke tradicije u istoriji evropske umetnosti. Njihov arhetipski sukob tema je ukratko prikazane drame *Tigar dva* Adrijana Mičela, koja govori o Blejkovom iznenadnom povratku i pobedonosnom opstanku, usred poplave pop kulture i konceptualne umetnosti, i uprkos naporima državnih institucija kontrole da ga diskvalifikuju ili silom onemoguće.

2013.

**‘TELL ME LIES ...’: HOLOCAUST, HISTORY,  
IDENTITY IN THE WORKS OF J. M.  
COETZEE, A. DORFMAN AND P. BROOK**

The paper is a response to what has been recognized by the film maker Clay Claiborne, the author of the 2008 documentary *Vietnam: The American Holocaust*, as an urgent need to face the suppressed truth about the Vietnam War as the best vantage point from which to examine the mechanism of historical repetition. The continuity of war and violence, despite declarative promises of peace and stability, is the paradox that since the WWII has increasingly engaged the attention of historians, cultural critics and commentators, and artists. In the introductory section of the paper the views are represented of those among them who come from different fields yet, like Claiborne, use the benefit of the same, post-colonial, hindsight to reach the common conclusion about the holocaust, not as a unique aberration, but as historically recurrent and culturally conditioned phenomenon. The strategies used to justify and perpetuate it – the second major focus in this part of the paper – are not limited to deliberate falsification of historical facts though, for beyond what Harold Pinter called “the thick tapestry of lies” concealing the crimes of the past, there is the willingness, generated by western myths of racial supremacy, to believe the lies and/or condone the crimes. Within this (imperialist, patriarchal) mythic tradition, a particular kind of split identity is produced by, and reproduces in its turn, the kind of violent history we tend to take for granted: I argue, along with J. Habermas, L. Friedberg, C. Nord and H. Giroux, that the factual truth will stop short of the transformative effect, political or moral, we traditionally expect from it as long as the deep-seated affective alienation from whatever has been construed as the other that constitutes this identity remains unrecognized and unattended. Confronting such forms of radical inner dissociation, considered normal or desirable in patriarchal culture,

has been, at least since Shakespeare, art's ultimate *raison d'être*. In the rest of the paper I provide three examples of such literary deconstructions of western identity-forming traditions: Coetzee's 1977 novel *Dusklands* about the continuity of consciousness bringing together geographically and historically distant events: the colonial massacres of the African Hottentots and the genocidal assault on Vietnam; *US*, the 1966 collaborative dramatic experiment directed by Peter Brook, and its 1968 cinematic version *Tell Me Lies*, re-mastered and released in 2012, and *Death and the Maiden*, Ariel Dorfman's 1990 play about the failure of democracy in the post-Pinochet Chile. While Coetzee reveals the incurable 'sickness of the master's soul,' making Hegel's master/slave paradigm a constant ironic reference, the governing purpose of Brook's and Dorfman's plays, I will argue, is to examine the possibilities open to drama of conquering denial and releasing the kind of sympathetic imagination crucial to the non-hierarchical 'I/Thou' relationship that used to regulate social life in archaic communities, when, according to an increasing number of scientists, biologically scripted empathy and solidarity were the only conceivable strategy of survival.

**Key words:** Historical repetition, holocaust, myth, truth, identity, Coetzee, Brook, Dorfman.

## 1. AMERICANIZING THE HOLOCAUST: HISTORICAL REPETITION, LIES, AND SUPREMATIST MYTHS

"History may be servitude, history may be freedom"

T. S. Eliot

Produced in 2008, as the American war in Iraq entered its sixth year, Clay Claiborne's documentary *Vietnam: The American Holocaust* begins with the author's suggestion that the failure of the Americans to fully understand what happened in the Vietnam War condemned them to repeat it in Iraq. A reminder of various officially produced falsehoods surrounding the Vietnam War the film reveals the real sequence and political significance of the events leading to the

conflict and its escalation<sup>91</sup>, the methods employed by the American troops (from nonselective killings, rape, torture, mutilation of corpses required to establish the body count, extra paid in money and career enhancement), to the use of phosphorus, napalm, and Agent Orange (only one in the series of color-spectrum nick-named lethal chemicals known as “the rainbow of death”), and their long-term consequences (with a chilling record of the monstrous births resulting from genetic malformation). Among the staggering figures are more than 3,4 million dead Vietnamese (admitted by McNamara, but higher according to the Vietnamese sources), 3000 villages burnt to the ground, 19 million gallons of Agent Orange spread to permanently poison the Vietnamese soil. The film’s major significance though lies in the connection it establishes between Vietnam and the subsequent U.S. wars, and also with the preceding history of Western warfare. In fact, Claiborne is one of those authors who ‘dare to compare’ the effect of the American intervention in Vietnam to that of the Nazi Holocaust: implied in the title itself, a plea is repeated at the end of the film to reconsider the wider social and cultural context in which the Nazi Holocaust, once believed to have been unique and safely consigned to the history of tragic errors, its painful lesson remembered for ever, was allowed

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<sup>91</sup> Of special interest is the conclusive evidence, first presented in a documentary, that the Tonkin Gulf incident, which served as a justification for LBJ to launch the most massive air raids known in the history of warfare against North Vietnam, had never really happened. The Gulf of Tonkin incident is the name given to what were originally claimed to be two separate confrontations involving North Vietnam and the United States in the waters of the Gulf of Tonkin on 2–4 August 1964. The original American report blamed North Vietnam for both incidents, but this version eventually became very controversial with widespread claims that either one or both incidents were false, and possibly purposeful. After 40 years of controversy the final evidence that there had not been any Vietnamese attack against U.S. ships on the night of 4 August 1964 was provided by the release of a classified analysis by a National Security Agency historian, Robert J. Hanyok, “Skunks, Bogies, Silent Hounds, and the Flying Fish: The Gulf of Tonkin Mystery, 2–4 August 1964”, *Cryptologic Quarterly*, Winter 2000/Spring 2001 Edition (Vol. 19, No. 4 / Vol. 20, No. 1), pp. 1–55. It was not made fully public though until October 2005, when the *New York Times* reported Hanyok’s conclusion that NSA deliberately distorted intelligence reports passed to policy-makers regarding the Tonkin Gulf incident. The reason for this delay was, according to intelligence officials, the policy-makers’ concern that comparisons might be made to intelligence used to justify the Iraq War (Operation Iraqi Freedom) which commenced in 2003.

to happen again, in a scenario which except for the perpetrator and the victims, followed basically the same underlying principle of total annihilation.

To historicize the Vietnam War, in one or more senses of the term<sup>92</sup>, was however a project undertaken much earlier, in the closing years of the conflict, by, among others, the South African Nobel Prize recipient J.M. Coetzee and the film director Peter Brook in the works which, along with Ariel Dorman's *Death and the Maiden*, I propose to examine in the remaining three sections of the paper. In the two novellas that comprise Coetzee's first novel *Dusklands*, the conflict in Indo-China becomes a starting point of a larger exploration of the archetypal matrix underlying the genocides that mark the entire period of modernity. This 'philosophy of history', intentionally reminiscent of Hegel, is shown to be closely bound up with the way identity is constituted in western patriarchal culture. In this respect, Coetzee's novel fulfills the demand facing, according to Jürgen Habermas, not only legal successors to the German Reich, but all responsible individuals implicated in the crimes of history. Habermas formulates it in a rhetorical question: "Is there any way to bear the liability for the context in which such crimes originated, a context with which one's own existence is historically interwoven, other than through remembrance, practiced in solidarity, of what cannot be made good other than through a reflexive, scrutinizing attitude towards one's own identity-forming traditions?" (Habermas 2003: 66).

Directed by Peter Brook the play *US* and its cinematic adaptation, *Tell Me Lies About Vietnam* were staged and produced in London in 1967 and 1968 respectively, at the height of the Vietnam campaign, and were his response to the pressing need for immediate and effective protest. The issues raised in both are the factors that contributed to the escalation of the conflict in Vietnam, and beyond it to the ongoing tragedy of historical repetition. Despite a different

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<sup>92</sup> In their introductory comment to a section from *The Holocaust: Theoretical Writings*, the editors describe the term as referring to three kinds of investigation: the historization of the Holocaust can mean asking where and when historical accounts of the events should begin, considering to which other historical events the Holocaust can be related, and reflecting upon the limits that traditional modes of historical understanding face when addressing the Holocaust. (Levi & Rothberg 2003: 59)

setting, and later date, Dorfman's 1990 play *Death and the Maiden* may be said to share the same general concern. The chief question posed by Brook concerned the way the TV coverage of the war, with its misrepresentation or omissions of the historical events leading to it, and the emotionally distancing techniques of documentary presentations of the air raids and their victims, affected the English middle class viewers, who seemed to display proper sentiments while failing to be genuinely disturbed by what to them remained a distant event. Dorfman's play raised doubts about the chances of genuine healing in the Chile still poisoned by unconfessed crimes of the outgoing regime. Both are part of a larger experimental exploration of the possibilities open to drama of reaching beyond comfortable automatized responses to the zone of the psyche where, in words of Edward Bond, 'the recovery of our humanness' may begin.

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The crucial significance of re-examining the past in an attempt to understand the present and control the future became particularly clear in the years following the WWII. It is true that the monolithic, imperialist, approach to history had been challenged before, notably by Nietzsche, and then Eliot in England, but in these cases it was done from the romantic standpoint of a superman, a saint, or a poet, whose exceptional personal strength enabled them to resist our history's death drive<sup>93</sup>. If Eliot, like

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<sup>93</sup> In his text about the use and abuse of history (Nietzsche 2010), Nietzsche examines three possible approaches to the past. The first is celebratory: a national (imperialist) history is habitually monumentalized, that is to say, uncritically, unselectively celebrated, with the dire result of transforming its worst injustices and cruelties into patterns of false grandeur to be slavishly followed. The second, antiquarian approach, bent on preserving peacetime cultural values of the past, produces less direct constraint, but provides no impetus to the renewal of life. Only the third, critical approach, whose criterion is the serviceableness of a past to the future growth and unfolding of man's creative potential, is according to Nietzsche, legitimate. It is enacted by individuals familiar with the examples in the past of heroic rejection of the whole burden of inherited false reverence and possessing sufficient moral confidence in their own will to power to repeat the revolutionary gesture.

Nietzsche's threefold interpretation of historical understanding is comparable to the distinctions Eliot was to make between history as a living tradition, history as a dead form, and to the historical sense, which enables critical judgment and choice between the two. Formulated first in his "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in 1920, these



### III 'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH

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Nietzsche before him, celebrated the individual's heroic choice of freedom, William Golding's essay "Fable" explores the more frequent and tragic instances of collective consent to servitude and violence. Published in 1974, but written some years earlier, the essay includes an account of the author's dismay at the horrors revealed upon the opening of the Nazi death camps. Still appalled by what 'civilized' people were capable of doing to their fellow men, Golding developed a (temporary) theory of man as a latently sick animal, the fact, he claims, rational political and philosophical systems serve to effectively conceal. This was a modern version of the pessimistic, medieval doctrine of 'fallen' human nature, but Golding apparently had outgrown this view by the time he published the essay, for in its second part his focus is no longer on human nature but on culture as a source of evil. The international mess into which XX century man got himself is not so much due to man's morally diseased condition as to the historically produced and perpetuated pernicious habits of belief and feeling. History, Golding asserts echoing Eliot, has two meanings, one referring to the "objective yet devoted stare with which humanity observes its past" (Golding 1974: 90), to acquire the knowledge necessary to avoid its errors in the future. The other is subjective history, felt in "the blood and bones" and consisting of prejudices, failure of human sympathy, ignorance of facts, all wrapped in a cloak of national prestige which "the uneducated pull round their shoulders to keep off the wind of self-knowledge". This other history is "frozen", it is a dead thing; but "dead though it is, it won't lie down"; it is handed on, "a monstrous creature, descending to us from our ancestors, producing nothing but disunity and chaos" (94).

These are valuable insights, and relevant in the analysis of the problems Claiborne's film and Coetzee's novel address – except for the colossally naïve mistake Golding makes when he attributes the

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notions were later elaborated within broader, not exclusively literary contexts: initially defined in terms of the individual poet's ability to reject empty traditional forms and bond himself to the living poetic tradition (a product of unified sensibility as opposed to traditions of poetry stemming from and perpetuating the pervasive dissociation of thought from feeling) – Eliot's historical sense acquired a wider cultural relevance by the time he wrote the last section of *The Four Quartets*. Inspired by the English refusal to give in under the German air raids through 1940/1 "Little Gidding" develops into a philosophical meditation about the choice, facing individuals and nations alike, of which between the two meanings of history – "history may be servitude, history may be freedom" – they prefer to live by and at what cost.

beneficial knowledge of the past to “campus” history, while blaming uneducated parents for transmitting bloodthirsty ignorance and chauvinistic prejudices. Numerous historians and cultural critics have since pointed out that while sheer ignorance of facts must lie behind the tragic irony of so many wars waged “to end all wars”, it is not, as Golding believed, due to the lack of institutional education, but precisely to the “campus” history learnt in elite schools and universities. From G. Vidal, to Craig Wilder, John Osborne to H. Pinter and J. Pilger, non-orthodox historians, cultural analysts and artists have helped unravel “the thick tapestry of lies” spun within universities and media to wrap the still unconfessed genocidal past of the “democratic” west.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> In his recent publication *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*, Craig Stephen Wilder explains the role that prestigious Ivy League colleges played in supporting and normalizing slavery and slave trade. He asserts, in an interview, what sounds like a deliberate refutation of Golding: “It’s precisely on campus that the ideas that come to defend slavery in the 19th century get refined. They get their intellectual legitimacy on campus. They get their scientific sort of veneer on campus. And they get their moral credentialing on campus”. It is not only racist theory, Wilder explains, but racist practices reminiscent of Nazi experiments that compromise the elite American universities: “And the ugliest aspects of that is the use of marginalized people in the Americas, in the United States—its enslaved black people, often Native Americans, and sometimes the Irish—for experimentation, the bodies that were accessible as science rose. ... In fact, when the first medical colleges are established in North America in the 1760s—the first is at the College of Philadelphia, which is now the University of Pennsylvania, and the second is at King’s College, which is now Columbia—... what allows them to be established is access to corpses, access to people to experiment upon. And, in fact, it’s precisely the enslaved, the unfree and the marginalized who get forcibly volunteered for that role”. (Wilder 2013)

The same can be said of English universities. In his play *Look Back in Anger* John Osborne represented the function of the prestigious Oxbridge education with uncanny accuracy: it was to provide the English political cadre, whose chief qualifications were hazy knowledge of facts, the absence of conscience, and self-protective stupidity. For, as his angry young hero says, “The only thing to make things as much like they always have been is to make any alternative too much for your tiny poor brain to grasp” (Osborne 1957: 19-20). As if to confirm the continuing validity of this statement, in August 2010, Florian Bieber, a political scientist at the university of Kent, published his students’ test results which revealed their absurd misconceptions about the history of the Balkans, including the notion that the former Socialist Yugoslavia’s president Tito was an Ottoman vassal – and yet, as one of the apposite comments ran, they were future diplomats, entrusted to make fateful decisions about this and other regions under the control of European powers. (Bieber 2010)

The picture that emerges from their and other recent investigations has two focal points. First it explodes finally the persistent prejudice about the uniqueness of the Nazi Holocaust. It was first challenged by Aimé Césaire in 1950, but by 1980 the message of his *Discourse on Colonialism* – its location of the origins of fascism within colonialism, and hence within the very traditions of European humanism critics believed fascism threatened – had been largely forgotten, as was the revolutionary anti-colonial mood of the period, while the myth of the triumph of western democracy over fascism had survived unimpaired. When the German historians in the mid-eighties opened a debate to prove that Hitler had a historical precedent, and pointed to Stalin's purges as the model for Nazi extermination of the Jews, authors such as David Stannard, Charles Ward, Lilian Friedberg, G. Monbiott, Sven Lindquist and others supplied fresh, statistical, evidence that the long pre-dating annihilation of the American Indians, Australian Aborigines, and native African tribes in terms of magnitude, cruelty, and conscious intention to exterminate the entire indigenous population, were equal or exceeded Hitler's Final solution.<sup>95</sup> A good example of comparative, historicizing thinking is Lilian Friedberg's paper "Dare to Compare: Americanizing the Holocaust", her recent contribution to the debate on the side of those who defy the long-standing view of the Final Solution as an unparalleled event in history. Relying on the results of the latest research in the American history of settlement as a model for later genocides, she argues that the extermination of the Native Americans by the settlers conforms, in all crucial points, to the definition of genocide applied to Hitler's treatment of the Jews. Although stretching over centuries and taking place in the pre-industrial virgin forests of the New World, the murder of the Indians possessed the same "merciless, bio-centric intentionality", with the result of exterminating 98 % of the indigenous population as opposed to the 60 to 65 % of the Jews killed in the WWII.

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<sup>95</sup> For the genocide of the American-Indian peoples and its persistent denial see (Stannard 1992), and (Ward 1997). For the genocide of the indigenous peoples of Africa, notably the German extermination of the Herero people in 1904 (see Lindquist 1996). John Pilger's documentary films and public addresses, such as *War on Democracy* (2007) and *Breaking the Great Australian Silence* (2009), speak of the persistently denied crimes of (neo)colonial history in South America and Australia.

Her comparison also covers the analogous attempts by German and American historians to deny their genocidal pasts - the only difference lying in the failure of the former and the general success of the latter. Friedberg quotes from the reactionary historian James Axtell's 1992 study *Beyond 1492: Encounters in Colonial North America* - the following telling passage:

We make a hash of our historical judgments because we continue to feel guilty about the real or imagined sins of our fathers and forefathers... We can stop flogging ourselves with our 'imperialistic origins and tarring ourselves with the broad brush of 'genocide'. As a huge nation of law and order and increasingly refined sensibility, we are not guilty of murdering Indian women and babies, of branding slaves on the forehead, or of claiming any real estate in the world we happen to fancy. (Quoted in Friedberg 2003: 469)

Statements like this, Friedberg comments, when proffered in defense of Germany's genocidal history, elicit vehement opposition from the academic and intellectual community, yet with regard to the American past go virtually unchallenged and are integrated into the canon of acceptable discourse. In fact, such statements point to another reason behind the story of ongoing genocidal violence, one that goes beyond mere circumstantial lies and is a version of what Nietzsche called the monumentalizing approach to history. Challenging this underlying myth is the second focus of interest in recent endeavors to historicize the Holocaust. For the factual lies accompanying genocides would never have the power to persuade if it weren't for an a priori readiness to believe them, implanted by the seductive power of the larger myth. Just as the incoherent concoction of absurd assertions essentializing the Jew into a common enemy (simultaneously as Bolshevik conspirators, capitalists, war-mongers, degenerate defilers of German blood, and the international devil) was re-enforced with a promissory myth of the millennial rule of the superior Arian race, so too the representations of the Indians and Negroes (religious or quasi-scientific) as blood-thirsty devils or sexually depraved beasts, used to justify massacres and slavery, tuned in with the myth of America's leadership as divine election. If the analogy between the Nazi Germany and the post WWII USA is incomplete, Germans having admitted to the facts behind their ideological lies, it is because they were defeated

and forced to renounce (officially and temporarily at least) the Nazi dream of a millennial global rule, while the U.S., judging by their post- WW II history, have no intention of giving up on their Manifest Destiny or the colonial practice it validates.<sup>96</sup> Gore Vidal summed the situation up in a text “The greater the lie: Pearl Harbor, Hiroshima, and the origins of Cold War - three myths that America is ruled by”, whose very title alludes to a continuity from Goebbels’s to the U.S. practice of political deception: after his exposure of the governmental lies on which the US post WWII history is founded, he concludes laconically – “Good morning Vietnam”. (Vidal 2000)

More recently John Pilger pointed to this unrepentant mythologizing of the American history as a clue to the Vietnam War and the US subsequent international politics. His commentary, originally published in the 02/05/17 issue of *The New Statement* and reproduced on the InformationClearing House under the heading “John Pilger finds our children learning lies”, begins with a question, “How does thought control work in societies that call themselves free?” He draws attention to the seeming paradox that their chief disseminators are teachers, broadcasters and authors of history guides, that is to say, privileged communicators with unlimited access to the facts. (He refers specifically to the director of BBC News, who described the most cynical, unobserved, unverified, illegitimate elections, held in Iraq under the most brutal occupation, as “democratic, fair and free”) This is possible, Pilger points out, thanks to the pre-established worldview, or “the unerring assumption” that “we in the dominant west have moral standards superior to theirs”. It is this (monumentalizing) historical prejudice that gave the propaganda lies about the Vietnam War their insidious plausibility, seducing not only the deceived but the deceivers too : so that “...the longest war of the twentieth century waged against both communist and non-communist, north and south Vietnam”, and causing the death of at least five millions Vietnamese, came to be seen as a conflict of “good” Vietnamese against “bad” Vietnamese, in which Americans were involved in order to bring

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<sup>96</sup> “The question for the future concerning the genocidal treatment of native Americans is not ‘Can it happen again?’ Rather it is ‘Can it be stopped?’”, writes David Stannard a propos 40 000 disappeared in Guatemala, and another 100 000 openly murdered in the 15 years preceding the publication of his book. (Stannard 1992: xiii)

“democracy to the freedom-loving people of South Vietnam who were facing a ”communist threat”.

As an example, Pilger refers to a widely used revision guide for GCSE course in modern world history, Vietnam and Cold War. The falsehoods 14- to 16-year olds are asked to learn in the American schools, Pilger describes as shocking: starting with the false assertion that after the withdrawal of the French colonizers, Vietnam was partitioned into the communist north and democratic south, the authors go on to either falsify or omit the facts that would shed light on the true nature of the U.S. intervention. The fact is that the division of Vietnam, at the Geneva Conference, was not meant to be temporary and that its purpose was to prevent the democratic victory of the communist leader Ho Chi Minh, who had the support of the vast majority both in the north and the south – is conveniently elided. This was the reason why the free national elections, promised to be held on 26 July 1956, were hindered by the US, and in the meantime a fake pro-American government of the brutal expatriate mandarin, Ngo Dinh Diem, imported from New Jersey, was put in place in South Vietnam, while the CIA was entrusted with sustaining the illusion of its ”democratic” nature. Thereupon phony elections were arranged, hailed as “free and fair” by the west, with the desired results fabricated by the American officials, despite, as the report said, the “Vietcong terror”. That so called “terrorists” were also South Vietnamese, whose resistance to the American invasion was widely popular, is conveniently omitted. The guide is silent about these crucial facts, just as it fails to mention the greatest tonnage of bombs in the history of warfare subsequently dropped on Vietnam, or the nature of the chemicals used, that combined to ruin the once beautiful landscape, poison the soil and dramatically change the genetic order, with lasting human consequences so appallingly documented in Claiborne’s film. Its silences, parallel to the omissions in the official syllabuses on cold war from Oxford and Cambridge, reflect, as Pilger points out again, the general tone of the history recorded from the viewpoint of the morally superior ‘us’ as opposed to the unworthy ‘them’. The resulting amnesia had long swallowed the truth of its own origins, so that, Pilger concludes, it is now

### III 'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH

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as if the British Empire did not happen, there is nothing about the atrocious wars that were models for the successor power, America, in Indonesia, Vietnam, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, to name but a few along modern history's imperial trail of blood of which Iraq is the latest. And now Iran?...How many more innocent people have to die before those who filter the past and the present wake up to their moral responsibility to protect our memory and the lives of human beings? (Pilger 2002)

The answer is suggested in the final passages of Lilian Freiberg's "Dare to Compare", where she rounds off her analogy between the Nazi and American Holocaust. Like Pilger, and like Habermas too, she calls for a "fundamental alteration in the consciousness of this country". Yet instead of "denazification" - the term proposed by the Native American scholar C. Ward - she prefers "de-manifestation" as a "more apt designation for the paradigmatic shift requisite for decentering the hegemonic reign of the master narratives of Manifest Destiny..." This would allow us, she goes on to explain, "to place the postulates of Manifest Destiny in a proper chronological order": "denazification" clearly connotes "a thing in the past", de-manifestation implies a present, "manifest" reality, "a trail of rampant plundering, pillage and mass murder" predating "the *subsequent* emergence of theories of *Lebensraumpolitik*" but also outliving them (Friedberg 2003: 472).

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As Friedberg and Pilger indicate themselves, such a radical "alteration of consciousness" would involve more than acknowledging the facts. Certainly, shared knowledge about "other" histories, hitherto hidden or marginalized, is a huge step towards the de-centering of the American (or any other western) master-narrative, and may lead to the healing of some wounds, particularly those suffered by the oppressed, as Aurora Levins Morales argues in "Historian as Curandera" (Morales 1998). To cure the oppressor's soul though would require a kind of re-mythologizing that takes place on a deepest psychic level, the zone of our original core humanness which, buried under the layers of culturally acquired pseudo-identities, has become impenetrable to truth, with which, as sociologists and psychologists warn us, an increasing number of people, and not only those "who filter the past",

are out of touch. Indifference to the plight of another seems to be the contemporary form of the pathological relationship to the Other that constitutes the western patriarchal identity: whether distrust and fear, scorn or murderous hatred, these all take a tragic swerve away from the reciprocal *I/Thou* relationship that in original societies shaped human identity because empathy and solidarity were experienced as an embedded, biologically scripted, strategy of survival<sup>97</sup>. It is the self-centered *I/It* relationship, involving in modern bureaucratic and consumer societies the reification rather than demonization of the other, that has recently undermined the traditional belief about the liberating power of truth. “We always seem to believe that all you have to do is tell the truth”, the Canadian philosopher Henry Giroux observes in an interview with Bill Moyers, “but I’m sorry, it doesn’t work that way”. The reason it can no longer be taken for granted, he explains referring to his book *Zombi Politics and Culture in the Age of Casino Capitalism*, goes beyond the strategies of “organized

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<sup>97</sup> The relationship Martin Buber’s well-known phrase designates is also central to the philosophy of Emanuel Levinas. His critique, according to the editors of *Holocaust: Theoretical Readings*, of the European entire philosophical tradition is relevant to the theme of their book, even where it makes no direct reference to holocaust. As an alternative to the philosophy centering on questions of being and knowledge, essentially egocentric and complicit with violence against the ‘other’, Levinas developed an alternative philosophy of his own, one that begins with the ethical relation, “with the subject’s necessary response to and responsibility for the other, a relation predicated not on knowledge and active mastery but ignorance and open passivity” (Levi & Rothberg 2003: 230). As I have suggested, Levinas is by no means alone in his aim to reverse the western philosophical tradition’s privileging of ‘the same’ against the ‘other’, numerous such reversals having been proposed by poets and playwrights since the Greek tragedians, albeit in a language of their own – non-conceptual, metaphorically binding together what is different and other, and thus infinitely better suited to the purpose. What I want to add here, however, is that the anthropologists, such as Riane Eisler, who provided ample evidence that these alternative modes of relating to the other imagined by poets and philosophers such as Levinas, were once a social reality, have now been joined by neuroscientists, whose latest investigations into the way our brain functions, and particularly the discovery of mirror-neurons and their probable role in in the evolution of altruism, seem to confirm that humans are biologically conditioned for empathy, that, contrary to the “selfish gene” theory, we are “hard-wired to care and connect”. See Eisler 1987 and Korten 2008. For discussion on mirror neurons and empathy see Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2005.



forgetting of the pasts other than one's own national history", and involves what he calls "dis-imagination" – the more deadly practice of eliminating any but instrumental or pragmatist kind of rationality - which, administered systematically in American schools, has produced "a nation of zombies" (Giroux 2013).

## 2. THE DISEASE OF THE MASTER'S SOUL: COETZEE'S *DUSKLANDS*

On the horizon of any human science there is the project of bringing man's consciousness back into its real conditions, of restoring it to the contents and forms that brought it into being, and elude us within it...

Michel Foucault

Confronting such forms of radical dissociation, considered normal or desirable in patriarchal culture, has been, since the Greek tragedians, western art's ultimate *raison d'être*: Conrad called the condition the lucidity of intelligence and the madness of the soul, and diagnosed it in the eloquent, pathologically greedy and obscenely racist Mr. Kurtz, the best that Europe could offer. J. M. Coetzee referred to it as the incurable disease of the master's soul and analyzed it in terms of the moral impenetrability of the two power-obsessed but ultimately existentially defeated ideologues of empire in his *Dusklands*. As the protagonists of the two stories that comprise the novel, they are positioned at two crucial points in recent history, the Vietnam War and an earlier episode from the Boer settlement in South Africa. Their paranoid monologues offer a powerful psychoanalytic x-ray of the pathology inherent in western "identity-forming traditions", which, from the myth of Zeus-born patroness of *techne*, Athene, through the Judeo-Christian theology to the enlightenment trust in scientific power/knowledge, have been underlined by a single purpose of subjugating or annihilating the other: the mother by the father's law, the 'barbarian' peoples by the civilized Europeans, but also the 'savage' within by the taming force of reason. Rather than analyze subtle strategies Coetzee employs to weave together his various strands of meaning, I will focus

on the points in the novel where this underlying myth seems to bear most obvious resemblance to Hegel's philosophy. For as the phrase "the sickness of the master's soul", as well as the mottos introducing the two stories immediately signal, Hegel's master/slave paradigm and his *Philosophy of History* are a constantly implied reference in the novel.

The quotation used as a motto for the first story, The Vietnam Project, is the military and political expert Hermann Khan's comment justifying the "pragmatic rationality" of the American pilots bombing Vietnam:

Obviously it is difficult not to sympathize with those European and American audiences who, when shown films of fighter-bomber pilots visibly exhilarated by successful napalm bombing runs on Viet-Cong targets, react with horror and disgust. Yet, it is unreasonable to expect the U.S. Government to obtain pilots who are so appalled by the damage they may be doing that they cannot carry out their missions or become excessively depressed or guilt-ridden. (Coetzee, 1983)

The identical symptomatology of rational enlightenment and moral impenetrability affects the story's fictional hero, the American mythographer Eugene, engaged on the military project for a quick victory in the Vietnam "war to end all wars" as well as his predecessor and spiritual double from the second story, the 18<sup>th</sup> century Boer explorer and slave-owner Jacobus. Neither acquires the healing self-knowledge, suggesting on the contrary that the master's megalomania is incurable. The unsuspected and often grotesque incongruity their delirious monologues reveal - a sense of unreality in which the identity founded on infinite power over the other ultimately dissolves - is left to the readers who care for more than original narrative strategies and resonant language, to ponder and relate to the versions of history, myth and identity they have accepted as their own.<sup>98</sup>

The motto to the second novella - "What is important is the philosophy of history" - anticipates an approach that will fuse this kind of consciousness with the master narrative of western expansion.

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<sup>98</sup> Both stories offer a historical and anthropological perspective superior to most official views on the role the US and NATO played in the conflict that disintegrated former Yugoslavia - but very few academic intellectuals in Serbia have, to my knowledge, chosen to attend to this aspect of the novel.

In an analogy with Hegel's philosophy of history as the self-realization of the spirit, Coetzee's protagonists both feel to be serving a purpose of which the eradication of the Bushmen, or the devastation of Vietnam, are only local manifestations: they are heroes in a story, as the intellectual Eugene puts it, of "life itself, life in obedience to which even the simplest organism represses its entropic yearning for the mud and follows the road of evolutionary duty to the glory of consciousness." (Coetzee 1974: 27-8). They have in common a hypertrophied conscious mind, and the worship of the Goddess of *techne*, set off by the contempt, hatred and fear of all "lower" forms of life – whether the dark-skinned races of the world, the female, or their own bodies. Yet to successfully subdue or eradicate those "others," which they feel to be their duty to the "master-myth of history", they also need to suppress the enemy within, the natural wellspring of moral imagination that has become the most threatening "other", and that Eugene, the child of enlightenment, appropriately calls "the dark self". As opposed to the bright self, which strives towards obedience and order, and longs to kneel before a superior paternal authority, the dark self, nourished by the atavistic maternal emotion, strives towards humiliation and turmoil: it craves "to kneel before the slave, to wash the leper's sores. It is moved by courage"; and it "sickens the bright self with doubts and qualms". It is only after the eradication of the dark self's "archaic" virtues of courage, compassion and conscience that the Manifest Destiny Eugene feels cracking in his bones will be fulfilled, the rebellious Vietnamese bombed into obedience, and a new perfect world order permanently established. Successfully suppressed in the robust man of action Jacobus, who has no qualms about massacring a tribe of Hottentots as part of fulfilling his white man's mission, these "dark" vestiges of humanity resurface in Eugene to poison him with the sense of guilt he shares temporarily with millions of TV audiences as they watch an unnamed village after village disappear in napalm flames. Eugene soon reassures himself they are the necessary purgatorial fires before the coming of the future paradise. Yet having pressed back his atavistic guilt, Eugene breaks down mentally and ends in an asylum. His affliction never turns into a healing Shakespearean madness though: for the symbolic message of his dreams - in which he beckons to the dark Vietnamese shadows

as they retreat and are swallowed by flames, reaching towards them with a gesture of an orphan seeking readmission to the home he was exiled from - is never allowed to break through his paranoid delusion of racial grandeur. What his breakdown signifies remains for the reader's contemplation: it certainly suggests that the asymmetry in the white patriarchal identity paradigm makes the master as vulnerable as the mastered, and that the history that might get him out of the trap belongs to the other. This is also comparable to what Hegel observed in an unexpected turn in his parable about the master and the slave.

Hegel's argument, most completely formulated in the section 'Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage' of *The Phenomenology of Mind* (see Hegel, 1807), begins with an assertion that the constitution of the self as an autonomous and free being can only happen in relation to the other. At this initial point, and quite in the orthodox vein, Hegel defines selfhood as equivalent to the status of the master - of the man, that is, who had entered the struggle for recognition, got out of it victorious, and is recognized by the defeated and enslaved opponent as free and independent. Here however comes the surprising turn in the argument: for what the winner realizes after the struggle is won, is that he is not the man he had wanted to be when he entered it - a man recognized by another man. For the recognition, in order to be valid, must come from the other who is also recognized as autonomous and free. Without this reciprocity, this mutual acknowledgement of each other's human reality and dignity, all identity is illusory: as long as it depends on the testimony of the other that he has overpowered, and precisely in proportion to the degree of the submission inflicted, the western selfhood remains unreal, a ghost, a mirage in a desert the exercise of his power has produced.

There is another, crucial, point in Coetzee's second story, where the protagonist-narrator undergoes a crisis of identity also analyzable in terms of Hegel's parable. It occurs at the culminating point of the narrative, as Jacobus and his men swoop down on a village of the wild Namaqua, and massacre the entire tribe, along with the several of his own defected slaves, in revenge for what Jacobus, the archetypal Judeo-Christian father, calls the unpardonable "crimes against spirit" - irreverence and disobedience. However, the act of retribution -

### III 'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH

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long savored in advance as a redress of proper balance whereby the white master, humiliated, expropriated and exiled, roaming the desert as a “pallid symbol”, “an insubstantial phantom”, was to reclaim his reality – suddenly seems inadequate to its metaphysical purpose. For, as Jacobus realizes, whatever kind of torture he may choose to inflict upon them, the scared, imploring victims strike him as an unworthy guarantee of his existence:

But this abject treacherous rabble was telling me that here and everywhere else on this continent there would be no resistance to my power and no limit to its projection. My despair was despair at the undifferentiated plenum, which is after all nothing else but the void dressed up as being. ...The only sound was the cold whistling of images through my brain. All were inadequate. There was nothing that could be impressed on these bodies, nothing that could be torn from them or forced through their orifices, that would be commensurate with the desolate infinity of my power over them...I was undergoing nothing less than the failure of imagination before the void. I was sick at heart. (Coetzee 1974: 102)

Unlike Eugene who ends up clinically mad, Jacobus overcomes the moment of this existential self-doubt, finding the illusory cure in what may be understood as a horrible travesty of Hegel's master/slave dialectics: among the pitiful crowd of his former slaves, he comes across a Hottentot who demonstrates human dignity and freedom by refusing to beg for mercy and is hence worthy of his respect. In that sense, he qualifies for the kind of the identity-guaranteeing other Jacobus seeks. And yet, in a grotesque, but historically accurate, parody of Hegel's original meaning, the “admiration” Jacobus feels for the Hottentot does not preclude the latter's murder, it only makes it a more satisfying experience – albeit somewhat marred by the clumsiness of the execution. The choice of words leaves no doubt that beyond its uncanny psychological power, the whole scene has an additional purpose of ironic inter-textual allusion. Regarding his victim, stabbed in the throat after the bullet in his chest failed to produce the swift clean effect Jacobus had hoped for, he remembers the disgust and the pity he felt in the past, when in his favorite boy's pastime, instead of killing a bird outright, he only managed to wound it and had to snap its neck once again. He “cuddled the tiny creature expiring in his hands,

venting upon it tears of pity for all the tiny helpless, suffering things, until it passed away”. The racist evolutionary trope in the subtext of the flashback becomes then quite explicit:

Such was the emotion re-awoken in me by him whose passage from this world I have so unkindly botched but who was on his way on his way. He opened his lips and bubbled uncomfortably through the blood flowing inward to his lungs and outward in a red sheet over his chest and on to the ground. So prodigal, I thought, I who had been more miserly of blood than any other of my fluids. I knelt over him and stared into his eyes. He stared back confidently. He knew enough to know I was no longer a threat, that no one could threaten him any more. I did not want to lose his respect. I cuddled his head and shoulders and raised him a little. My arms were lapped in blood. His eyes were losing focus. He was dying fast. ‘Courage’, I said. ‘We admire you.’ (Coetzee 1974: 105)

This persistent denial of the other by Coetzee’s heroes is ultimately not a departure from Hegel, who changed his views with time. What Jacobus calls the disease of the master’s soul, Hegel referred to as the ‘tragedy of the master’s situation,’ and declared that the future belonged to the slave. Yet, as a recent critic phrased it, “his moment of lucidity passes” and Hegel’s subsequent lectures reflect increasingly his time’s racial prejudices about non-European, particularly African societies (Back-Morris, 2003: 373-4)<sup>99</sup>. Eventually his *Philosophy of History*, consisting of lectures he delivered through

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<sup>99</sup> Susan Buck-Morris attributes Hegel’s moment of lucidity to the historical upheaval caused by the Haitian revolution, whose leaders, armed slaves, forced the French Republic to acknowledge the abolition of slavery in Saint Domingue in 1794 and in other French colonies. The admiration for the heroic risks undertaken by the black Haitians must have qualified them, in Hegel’s eyes, for the status of free men, for his original, historically inaccurate and thoroughly racist, assumption was that slaves are themselves responsible for their condition, having failed to risk their lives in a struggle for freedom. For Buck-Morris, Hegel’s relapse into his original racism is less significant than the revolutionary content of his master/slave parable, and particularly its hitherto unsuspected connection to the historical reality of the Haitian revolution. For the purpose of the parallel I want to establish between Hegel’s changing views of history and identity and the way they are offered for understanding and judgment through Coetzee’s fictional characters, the eminent European philosopher’s *failure* to sustain his revolutionary insight is as significant as the fact that he for a moment saw the truth.

the period of 1822 to 1830, settles into a monumental justification for the two subsequent centuries of self-complaisant, murderous Eurocentrism<sup>100</sup>.

### 3. DEMOCRACY'S UNHEALED WOUNDS: DORFMAN'S *DEATH AND THE MAIDEN*

Democracy is possible only when we have all confessed our sins.'

W. H. Auden

Jacobus and Eugene never conquer their denial remaining locked in their solipsistic illusory existence. Yet if Coetzee's ironic exposures of the self-annihilating contradictions of white man's omnipotence force us ultimately to confront an impasse, revealing a nothingness at the heart of western identity, Peter Brook and Ariel Dorfman join those artists who, as Shakespeare before them, seek a path leading back to being. I use these existential concepts to refer to a drive that Arthur Miller, writing on the eve of the Vietnam war, identified as the secret thrust of all great art – to 'make life real by conquering denial' (Miller, 1987, p. 519).

The text was inspired by Miller's need to understand the Oppenheimer enigma. In his youth, Oppenheimer was a lover of John Donne: Was it the poet's intense moral self-searching, his passionate striving for creative self-transcendence and mystic unity with all life – 'No man is an island!' – that spoke to the young scientist's deepest being, which he subsequently denied or betrayed? Whatever it was, in

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<sup>100</sup> In fact, the section on the "African Character" from his *Philosophy of History*, published in 1830/31, more than twenty years after the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, contains views about the African – as lacking a sense of subjectivity, having no inkling of the existence of an Other, or Higher Power, and hence being incapable of having a history, or destiny; as being quite deprived of reverence, morality or justice and incapable of feeling; and there being "nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character" (Hegel 2006: 208-9) – that are reproduced almost verbatim in Jacobus' opening meditation on the wild Hottentots.

the middle-aged Oppenheimer, imprisoned in the contradictory, life-destroying consequences of his own awesome achievement, Miller detected a deliberately maintained protective discontinuity and saw it as paradigmatic of ‘a culture of denial’: of the America ‘preparing to fight a war in Vietnam and denying that it was a war,’ and of the masses of people for whom ‘the fabricated escape from the self’ had become a goal of life. Miller’s bomb play (*After the Fall*) embodied these insights: it described the dilemma of science, but failed, in Miller’s own view, to provide the answer to the question that obsessed him – about the possibility of true self-reconnection, a process demanding ‘a surgically painful investigation’ and resulting in a new active responsibility, as opposed to the passive guilt that weakens the need to change our lives.

This ‘surgically painful investigation’ was undertaken by Peter Brook and his team in his 1966 dramatic experiment called *US*, and in Ariel Dorfman’s 1990 *Death and the Maiden*. Set apart by date and place of their composition, the two plays nevertheless belong to the same global political era, and share a single ambition to understand the (trans-historical, trans-national) mechanism of denial and assess ‘the possibilities of true self-reconnection.’ They approach the theme differently though, Dorfman choosing to explore it within the traditional framework of realist drama until the very end of the play when he briefly steps beyond it, Brook deploying multiple experimental techniques associated with Brecht, Boal, and Grotowsky. I will therefore disregard the chronology principle and, leaving the earlier but formally more radical and analytically more demanding *US* for the concluding pages of my argument, first dwell briefly on Dorfman’s more readily accessible piece.

As the author explains his intention in the Afterword, *Death and the Maiden* was to reflect the dilemmas surrounding Chile’s ‘uneasy transition to democracy’, with Pinochet still in command of the armed forces and his supporters still occupying significant areas of power – a threatening force, particularly if attempts were made to punish the human rights violation of the outgoing regime. The play was to embody the author’s own doubts concerning the partial solution to which the new government resorted – the Rettig Commission, which would investigate the crimes that had ended in death or disappearance, but



would neither name the perpetrators nor judge them. The truth of the terror, up till then known only in a private, fragmented fashion, would receive public recognition, and be established as official history, but justice would not be done and the traumatic experiences of thousands of survivors would not be even addressed. While Dorfman claims in his comment that this was a step toward healing a sick country, the play itself demonstrates his belief that it is insufficient, and that it is not by hiding the damage that repetition is avoided. Among all the questions the play was to confront, the most pertinent – ‘how can those who tortured and those who were tortured coexist in the same land?’ – concerns not only justice and punishment, but the higher Shakespearean ethics of repentance, forgiveness and regeneration; beyond formal confession of the crime, the need to mourn it, before it can be consigned to the past without the risk of repeating it, and new life released.

The plot involves Gerardo Escobar, a member of the Investigating Commission, his wife Paulina, a victim of torture at the hands of Pinochet’s men, and Roberto Miranda, in whom Paulina recognizes one of her torturers. She cannot be sure though since she was blindfolded when subjected to the sadistic interrogations – including repeated rape combined with sexual experiments with electricity, devised by a Nietzsche-loving doctor to satisfy his scientific curiosity as well as his perverted misogynist fantasies of domination, all enacted to the accompanying sound of his favorite piece, Schubert’s *Death and the Maiden*. When, after a chance meeting due to a road accident, Gerardo brings a certain doctor Miranda to their home, the sound of his voice, his body odor, his paraphrase of Nietzsche’s hateful remarks about women, a Schubert tape in his car – all convince Paulina that she is facing the chief cause of the pain she suffered in the past, reinforcing her desire, not so much for retribution, as for a redress of moral balance in the present. The only way to achieve this is the personal confession of guilt that which will be ‘tactfully’ omitted in the Commission’s solution, but on which Paulina insists as the sole condition of sparing Miranda’s life. Compromise, on the other hand, is her husband’s choice, not only in his official capacity as a Rettig Commissioner, but in this private crisis too. Anxious not so much about the possibility of Miranda’s innocence, on which the

latter keeps insisting, as that of the damage the departure from the official course might cause to his own promising political career, oblivious at the same time of the pain his wife endured in prison rather than betray him and the cause they both fought for, and equally of the principle of truth underlying her ultimatum, he decides to betray *her*, and the truth for which his Commission officially stands. To help her captive escape, he persuades Paulina to disclose the details of her time in prison she has always refused to share with him, so that he could dictate to doctor Miranda the confession that would save his life. Anticipating deception, however, Paulina has inserted inaccuracies in her story, which the doctor, seized with panic, unthinkingly corrects, thus proving beyond doubt his identity and his guilt. The pretense that the confession is false – which was his last hope should Paulina go back on her word and, overwhelmed with accumulated rage, seek outlet in revenge – is no longer possible. Yet the confession is not true either. It *is* false, after all, in so far as it has been written to be denied: it is itself a form of denial, a way for Molina to save his life while preserving a self-protective distance from his crime and its victim. This is what dooms him – nearly. Aiming a gun at the doctor, Paulina is careful to explain that she is not taking revenge for what he confessed he had done, but for what he withheld in his confession:

But I'm not going to kill you because you are guilty, Doctor, but because you haven't repented at all. I can only forgive someone who really repents, who stands up amongst those he has wronged and says, I did this, I did it, and I'll never do it again (Dorfman, 1991, 65).

As Paulina, gun in hand, starts to count down the ten seconds she has granted him to tell the truth, they freeze in a tableau recalling an image central to the argument of Jean Amery's text 'Resentments'. Taken from the 1980 publication *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplation by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*, 'Resentments' argues compellingly against what the author perceived as the world's too speedy and effortless reconciliation with Germany. Contrary to the general pressure to consign the memory of the Holocaust to the past, Amery stood by what his critics called 'his resentment.' Refusing to explain it away as a 'concentration camp syndrome', i.e., a result of

mental damage, he saw his alleged 'warped' state as 'a form of human condition that morally as well as historically was of a higher order than that of healthy straightness' (Amery, 2003, p. 40). To cheaply and lazily forgive and forget, he goes on to explain, is immoral: in doing so the individual submits himself to the social and biological time-sense – to the physiological process of wound-healing which has also become part of the social conception of reality. The moral person, on the contrary, revolts against biological healing that time brings, and instead of a 'what-happened-happened' attitude demands the annulment of time by nailing the criminal to his deed. The motive of this moral turning-back of the clock is not ultimately revenge, but the need to join the criminal to his victim as a fellow human being. This need springs from the very nature of the experience of the persecution, which, as Amery concluded after much mind searching, is, at the very bottom, that of extreme loneliness. The single moment when he experienced a temporary release from the feeling of abandonment that had persisted for years after the war was when his former torturer faced the firing squad – for in that short moment, Amery claims, the SS man Weis was swept into the truth of his atrocity: his crimes, hitherto rendered unreal by the conscience-obliterating norm system of the Fuhrer and his Reich, became for him a moral reality: 'The anti-man had once again become a fellow man.'<sup>101</sup>(p. 42)

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<sup>101</sup> That this particular instance of justice did not suffice, Amery points out, is not due to any perversity on his part. What he pleads for is the collective externalization and actualization of the past that the overpowered and those who overpowered them have in common. This certainly does not mean a revenge that would be proportionate to what was suffered. The 'settlement in the field of historical practice', would be achieved if resentment would be permitted to remain alive in the one camp, holding its finger raised, and, induced by it, self-mistrust in the other. Instead of speedily and enthusiastically affiliating with the new Europe, built largely on Hitler's own plan, and at the same time disowning Hitler's years as a past that was nothing but an operational mishap of German history in which broad masses of people had no part, Germany, Amery insists, must claim those twelve years as its negation of the world and its own self, as its own negative possession. To do so, it must remember that it was not the Germans who did away with the dominion of baseness. To admit it now, when in the current game of power it no longer appears to be a vital necessity, to join, now that they have been long rehabilitated by time, the former victims in a desire that time be turned back, and that history become moral, would be for Germans to finally eradicate the ignominy. (44)

In the filmed version of *Death and the Maiden*, Dorfman's 'anti-man' too becomes once again a 'fellow man': facing Paulina's gun, the Doctor collapses and convulsed with the truth he finally accepts, weeps cathartic tears of terror and pity.<sup>102</sup> In the original play however the outcome remains uncertain. At 'nine' Miranda has not yet yielded, and is pleading not merely for his life but, disingenuous to the end, for the final end of violence. As Paulina finds she has not it in herself to pull the trigger, and in a way of self-exhortation utters her last words in the play – 'Why does it always have to be people like me who have to make concessions when something has to be conceded... Well, not this time! What do we lose by killing one of them? What do we lose?' – the two freeze in their positions and the lights begin slowly to fade. As the last movement of Mozart's *Dissonant Quartet* is heard, Paulina and Miranda are covered with a giant mirror which descends abruptly to break the naturalist illusion of the 'fourth wall' and force the members of the audience to look at themselves. The ironies of the last scene, in a foyer during an interval of a Schubert concert, involve Gerardo commenting proudly on 'the process of healing' successfully initiated by his Commission, and Paulina's sudden glimpse of what in the phantasmagoric light could be the real Miranda or an illusion in her head, but has the effect of a sudden painful reminder of the wound left to fester unseen under a thick film of pretense. The sense of secret disease and corruption continues as the second part of the Schubert concert begins with *Death and the Maiden* and Paulina and Miranda face each other from a distance, while 'the music plays and plays and plays.'

The equally effective stage metaphor of the penultimate scene, where the focus shifts from the still unrepentant Miranda to the audience, adds further significance to the end of the play. Beyond the obvious point about the new 'democracies' in Chile and elsewhere, built on unrepented sins, under the instruction of old oppressors eager to conceal new forms of the continuing oppression, the device of the mirror facing the audience conveys the crucial insight that even if the torturers and executioners on this world's stage persist in their

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<sup>102</sup> The use of Aristotelian terms, appropriate here, does not imply an agreement with his conception of catharsis as a repose after the purging of unclean (socially subversive) impulses. For a critique of Aristotelian theatre see (Boal, 2008, p. 1–40).

denial and disconnection, it is the onlookers' inner condition that will ultimately matter. It is the comfortable passivity, the scene seems to be saying, the 'dis-imagination' preventing the spectators from becoming what A. Boal, following Brecht, called spect-actors (Boal, 2008: 108135) that must be addressed in new, compelling ways by the contemporary dramatist.

#### 4... BEYOND THE DOCUMENTARY: REKINDLING EMPATHETIC IMAGINATION IN *US*

The only hope, or else despair  
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre -  
To be redeemed from fire by fire.

T. S. Eliot

To devise the techniques that would achieve this transformation in the audience was the avowed purpose of Peter Brook's dramatic experiment in the 1966 RSC production of *US* at Aldwych. As the ambiguous title suggests, the play was not merely about the US involvement in Vietnam, but about *us* – that is, the English audiences' noninvolvement in what most of them knew was happening there, but what most of them, including those progressive left-wingers who said they cared, failed to be genuinely concerned about. The denial the play addresses is brought out too by the refrain in one of the songs that gave the film made a year later its name: 'Tell me lies about Vietnam' is not altogether an ironic comment targeted at the propagandist distortions of facts, but conveys a real desire on the part of the audiences to evade the kind of knowledge that might lead to painful restoration of numbed feelings. To convey this kind of knowledge, Brook felt he had to go beyond the documentary. As he explained in 1968, he and his troop were not interested in the Theatre of Fact, but in a theatre of confrontation. Among the contradictions to be confronted the chief was the following: how can anyone claim to care about Vietnam, when to hold together the horror of the war and the normal life he is leading through one single day would result in unbearable tension. This tragic

inner disconnection was to be attacked on various levels and by various techniques, until at the very end all pretenses and playacting were dropped, and actors and audiences together paused at ‘the moment of truth’, ‘when they and Vietnam were looking one another in the face’ (Brook, 1968a, pp. 9–10).

The play cannot be properly described even as semi-documentary: nor as simply consisting of two acts, one of which aims at the objective view of the What and How of Vietnam, while the other turns to the subjective WHY. It is true that Act I is based mostly on documents – media coverage of the progress of the war, interviews with world statesmen, journalists just back from Saigon, or the US troops on the front, letters to LBJ by American citizens, Vietnam history and legends, statistics, etc. – while in Act II the focus shifts inwards; yet both are part of a sustained collaborative effort to forge a dramatic language that would go beyond the deadened responses to the newsreels: it was to recover the truth lost in the wilderness of contradictory talk shows, false interpretations, and even documentary shots of napalm raids and churned bodies, which had their own way of neutralizing the horror they represented. Thus Brechtian techniques used particularly in Act I, had the ‘alienating’ effect only in so far as they distanced the viewers from the already distancing techniques of TV with their appeal to ‘the unspoken pleasure that most spectators have watching images of mass destruction’ (Mackenzie, 2009).<sup>103</sup> Offering a clear vision that Brecht

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<sup>103</sup> Writing further about the way Brook’s play and film address the question of voyeurism, complicity, political commitment and imagination, Mackenzie quotes Michael Ignatieff’s statement that ‘War affords the pleasure of the spectacle, with the added thrill that it is real for someone, but not happily for the spectator’, but immediately contests its apparent status of a general truth, pointing to TV techniques themselves which tend to create the kind of spectator the ideology they serve requires. In fact, he points to ‘Vietnam...as the beginning of this technological distancing, paradoxically taking place at the same time when television images of the war in South East Asia seemed their most ‘real.’ The growing callousness on the part of the western audiences is best exemplified in their failure to recognize in the Palestinians’ dancing celebration of the Twin Tower attack, an act they denounced as callous and barbarous, their own fascination with the bombing of Baghdad during Gulf War I, which, according to Mackenzie, amounted to the same kind of distanced spectatorship which disregarded death in a celebration of military power’. Whether the two reactions were exactly the same is questionable (I don’t think they were!), but he is certainly right to suggest in the end that ‘perhaps that is why the silence, and the

### III 'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH

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insisted on, they are not contradictory, but complementary to the use made in Act II, of the highly empathic mental-physical-emotional approach to acting of J. Grotowsky, who spent ten days with the actors subjecting them to a series of shocking confrontations of their own tricks and subterfuges, their own desire for cruelty, but also of their own vast and untapped resources (Kustow, 1968, p. 132). Brook himself commented on the false dichotomy of the two approaches and his own need for eclecticism in *The Shifting Point*:

The actor's task is infinitely more complex than that of the newsreader. The way opens when he sees that presence is not opposed to distance. Distance is a commitment to total meaning: presence is a total commitment to the living moment; the two go together. For this reason the most eclectic use of rehearsal exercises...is most valuable providing none of them is considered a method. What they can do is increase the actor's concern – in body and in spirit – for what the play is asking. If the actor truly feels this question to be his own he is unavoidably caught in a need to share it: in a need for an audience. Out of this need for a link with an audience comes an equally strong need for absolute clarity. (Brook, 1987:66)

The final result, (tentatively speaking, for there was nothing finished or final about the play!) was a performance lacking any conventional plot, characters or unambiguously verbalized solution or message. Instead it was a collage of self-contained Happening-based scenes, or tableaux, performed by actors in their everyday rehearsal clothes, and trained to shape shift among a variety of roles, styles and attitudes, all punctuated by songs on which the poet Adrian Mitchel and the composer Richard Peaslee had collaborated. In fact, in the language Brook's group had forged, Mitchell's lyrics, with their ironic exposures and revealing parodies of official hypocrisies, but above all their implicit Blakean faith in the restoring potential of imagination, were the most effective verbal means of communication: but its message was equally a matter of non-verbal visual images,

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imagination not of the filmmakers but of the audience, plays such an important role at the conclusion of both *Us* and *Tell me Lies...*' (Mackenzie, 2009). It is also of interest that Brook recorded in *The Shifting point* how alarmingly pleasurable to the actors were the improvisations of torture, brutality, and violence he had asked them to do in rehearsals (Brook, 1987).

whose flow, accentuated by the songs, Brook said was to work on the audience, 'like acupuncture, .... to find the precise spot on the tensed muscle that will cause it to relax' (quoted in Kustow, 1968, p. 135).

It would be impossible to paraphrase all the images, or comment on the telling ways they are juxtaposed to one another or to the songs, but tracing a few major motifs might indicate the total experience of the play. The central image was suggested to Brook by the video coverage of a Vietnamese Buddhist monk setting himself on fire in Saigon, in protest against the war. What, Brook asked, could drive a man to such an action? How could we begin to understand the totality of his commitment? To examine our own responses to Vietnam was, he felt, the greatest need of the times, and burning then became the central recurring metaphor against which they were defined and faced: it associated, and contrasted, napalm flames and charred bodies of Vietnamese victims, with the flames of self-immolation, and the inner burning of total involvement that Brook worked to ignite in his actors, the sparks hopefully catching the audience.

The play opens with a song about a caterpillar, Icarus Schmicarus, projecting in the cynical instruction against its potential transformation into a butterfly, the entire cultural conception of moral shrinkage, dis-imagination and non-involvement as the most desirable spiritual condition.

If you never spend your money  
You'll always have some cash,  
If you stay cool and never burn,  
You'll never turn to ash...  
If you crawl along the ground,  
At least you'll never crash.  
So why, why, why?  
What made you think you could fly, fly, fly? <sup>104</sup>

In sharp contrast to this recommended, cool non-commitment, Saigon is evoked as the only city in the world where they burn people. One of the actors explains that there have been so many assassinations, people are afraid to raise their voices, so 'when we burn ourselves, it is the only way we can speak'. He is then doused in petrol, a match is

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<sup>104</sup> All quotations from the play are from (Brook, 1968b, pp. 31-131; 154-184) .



### III 'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH

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struck and he burns, as others stare in silence. The opening lines of 'To Whom It May Concern' intone the play's theme:

I was run by truth one day  
Ever since the accident I've walked this way.  
So stick my legs in plaster  
Tell me lies about Vietnam.

Fragments of this song about lies will recur throughout the play, its irony embracing not only the protest against deception, but also the public's need to be deceived. At this critical point it may suggest the viewers' self-protective will to ignorance, momentarily asserted against the accusing sight of an ultimate self-sacrifice, but immediately contradicted by a long sequence representing the History of Vietnam.

It is visualized in a series of tableaux performed on a moving truck, each announced in Vietnamese and representing a phase in the country's past from its mythic origin through a great wheel of invasion, oppression, rebellion, renewed invasion and resistance. Following upon the mime of Ho-Shi Minh's August revolution of 1945, which united the people in a triumph against fascist, colonial and feudal oppression (and in scornful disregard of the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence in September 1945, worded to echo that of the USA in 1776, with phrases 'unalienable rights,' 'Life', 'Liberty', and 'pursuit of Happiness' meant to assert, for those not yet convinced, the universal application of these ideals), there is the shameful, British engineered re-instatement of the French power. The Second War of Liberation and the victory at Dienbienphu drive the French out once again, but bring the Americans in. The betrayal is staged in a scene, inspired by *Happening*, of an actor's naked body impersonating Vietnam being painted in two different colors. The image of a writhing tortured Vietnam, leaving his marks on a sheet of paper, which is then torn apart, is the most powerful visual statement of the injustice and savagery of the country's forced division. We hear the statistics about 12 000 people killed by mistake during the Land Reforms in North Vietnam, and also about 400 000 tortured and 100 000 killed under Dinh Diem's regime in South Vietnam; about the 'infiltration' there of the subversive elements from the north, and the American prompt action in defense of 'the Free World... from the

Communist aggression.’ From that point on to the escalation of the war in 1966 (justified, as subsequently documented in Claiborne’s film, by a falsification of the Tonkin Gulf incident), when the number of American troops increased from 65 000 to 300 000 in 18 months, and the indirect threat of nuclear devastation against China with which Act One closes, the official points of view are reworked by Brechtian alienating techniques to reveal, behind the glibness of diplomatic rhetoric, the underlying contradiction of using napalm to save democracy for South Vietnam even if that should require the sacrifice of its entire population. ‘Zapping the Cong’, a song based on a US officer’s talk to his men, and a pilot’s report of the ‘delights of zapping’, reveals the archetypal male and racial hatred as one of the ingredients of the mess called ‘Defense of the Free World,’

From coast to coast  
Got them crawling for shelter  
Got them burning like toast...  
Zapping the cong  
Back where they belong.  
Hide your yellow asses  
When you hear my song...  
Be spreading my jelly  
With a happy song  
Cause I’m screwing all Asia,  
When I’m zapping the cong.

while all pretense to charity is unmasked as cruel irony in a song ‘Make and Break’ about the aggressor’s Jekyll-and-Hide policy of crippling innocent peasants and then providing artificial limbs:

Fill all the area with whirling metal  
Five thousand razor blades are slashing like rain  
Mister Hyde has a buddy called Jekyll  
Picks up the pieces and puts them together again...  
We want to be humane, but we’re only human  
We maim by night  
We heal by day.

The Escalation song finally dismisses all doubletalk of good intentions, frankly referring all the hypocrisy and the cruelty it tries in vain to mask back to an overpowering myth of Manifest Destiny:

### III 'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH

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We know what we are doing it for  
We know what we are doing  
We ought to know for  
We've done it before  
Out of the way  
Or you know what we do  
Out of the way  
Or we'll do it to you.

The threat is meant for China, whose political and social alternative to this oppressive tradition is mirrored in the preceding passage based on a pamphlet by a Chinese leader Lin Piao, who prophesied the victory of the Third World War ('the country') against the industrialized rich white world ('the cities'). Thus the Chinese popular resistance is seen as part of a world-wide tradition of revolt against oppression so unflinchingly embodied in the Vietnam people's history, which is then voiced once again in a lyric sung against the Escalation song by the other half of the company. It is called the 'Leech' and was first used in the play to comment on the NLF's heroic resistance against the classes and nations (landlords, the French, and now the USA) that have sucked the country's life blood for centuries. The cacophony produced by the two songs sung together may be the auditory image of the bewilderment most of the misinformed would experience on facing for the first time the two conflicting visions, and is soon interrupted, first by the concluding stanza of 'To Whom It May Concern', with its ironic plea for the kind of perception management that would blur all understanding and prevent expression:

You put your bombers in, you put your conscience out.  
You take the human being and you twist it all about.  
So scrub my skin with women  
Chain my tongue with whisky,  
Stuff my nose with garlic,  
Coat my eyes with butter,  
Fill my ears with silver,  
Stick my legs with plaster,  
Tell me lies about Vietnam.

A fragment from 'Icarus Schmicarus' follows, with its warning against burning and its scornful conclusion 'What made you think you could fly? Fly? Fly?'

Yet the songs that opened the play are now repeated to the audience hopefully made more critical of themselves by what they have witnessed in the meantime, more prepared to make a fresh effort of facing their own need for ignorance and where it comes from. For instances of burning and ‘flying’ midway through Act I have been a powerful reminder that concern and revolt, though increasingly rare, are more original, or congenial to human nature, than indifference and consent. This oppositional tradition is evoked by the lyric called ‘Moon over Minnesota.’ It is based on a real story about a certain Barry Bondhus, found guilty and sentenced to 18 months’ imprisonment and fined \$2500 for obstructing the functioning of the local draft. His trouble with authorities began when he refused to comply with their exclusionary racist version of identity and on a form they gave him filled out his place of birth as ‘earth’ and his race as ‘human.’ The long, wonderful lyric gives due space to the background that nourished such creative independence: it tells of Barry’s sensible, loving father, Mr. Bondhus of Big Lake Minnesota, who didn’t buy his ten sons guns, because he ‘didn’t want them to die, or kill’ and who, when asked to ‘let the Army have a son/ Just one/For a start.../Downright/Forthright/Wouldn’t send his quota’. The game of tag ends when the son the Army demands wanders into the draft board office of his own accord and ‘Opens half a dozen files/Packed full/Stacked full/With miles and miles/Piles of government documents/About all the young men due to go far’ and

Dumps in...  
Two full buckets of human excrement,  
Stinking  
Bondhus thinking  
Excrement – Nothing personal  
Against the President –  
It sounds as wild  
As the action of a sewer-  
Realist child,  
But the draft board files  
Are all defiled.

The lyric ends placing Barry, the boy who could fly, amid the American tradition of Blakean mental fighters:

### III 'ROYAL' LIES AND DRAMA'S MOMENTS OF TRUTH

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Walt Whitman  
Charlie Parker  
Clarence Darrow  
Tom Pain  
Ben Shahn  
William Burrows  
Alan Ginsberg,  
Woody Guthrie  
James Baldwin  
Joseph Heller  
Dr. Benjamin Spock  
Mark Twain  
Yes, all the beautiful prophets of America  
Write across the Minnesota sky  
Look, look at Barry Bondhus –  
That boy can fly

In a contrary, tragic mood, this alternative conception of identity is evoked in the Memorial service scene dedicated to Norman Morrison. Morrison, a thirty-two-year old Quaker, happily married and a father of two children burned himself to death on the steps of the Pentagon building in solidarity with the burnt-up children of a Vietnamese village razed to the ground in a napalm raid. The event is staged in a way that distances the audience from the already distancing assumption of the madness of such an act. An actor first mimes pouring petrol on himself from an American jerry can, and then burning – his mouth staring open, hands clutching at his eyes, as the rest of the company surrounding him in a semi-circle watch in silence. Then a voice from a loudspeaker repeats part of the Memorial service transcript describing Morrison's as a radical, to whom love was an imperative, a force he wanted to see his society transformed by. Although it has become a trite concept that grown men are embarrassed to speak about, love, the voice asserts, 'is a radical idea, perhaps the most truly radical idea of the human race. For most of us a pinprick at the end of our finger is far more real than people being bombed in a nameless jungle. But Norman imagined, identified totally.' In the archaic societies investigated by the contemporary anthropologists, this total identification was synonymous with sanity; in a society

where it is normal to drop bombs on human targets, ...where it is normal to give war toys for Christmas, where it is normal to have twelve and half time overkill capacity, Norman Morrison was not normal. He said 'Let it stop. Let us personally witness against this kind of normality. Let us be abnormal, in the sense in which Jesus and Gandhi were abnormal!'

The Morrison episode looks back to the image of the Saigon Buddhist's self-immolation and provides transition to Act II, dominated by a controversy involving two British people (played by Glenda Jackson and Mark Jones), who define the two extremes containing a spectrum of those (few) who do feel deeply about Vietnam. Like Norman in Washington, the Londoner Mark finds the only proper expression of his revolt is to set himself on fire. He begins to mime his intention as if in counter point to the first full version of 'To Whom It May Concern' which opens Act II ('I was run over by truth one day/Ever since the accident I've walked this way./So stick my legs in plaster/Tell me lies about Vietnam, etc.), and to the lie served obligingly in 'A Rose Of Saigon', a song about the American love for South Vietnam in the name of which a photograph shows an NLF fighter executed while talking unquenchably into the barrels of the firing squad. As Mark screws off the lid of an English petrol can, a letter at his side, he is stopped by Glenda's counter argument, one in a series, about the unreasonableness of a suicide that would change nothing in a world indifferent to distant suffering: 'If we cared', she says, 'we could jam the runways, paralyze London. One ticket collector striking for an extra shilling can bring a whole terminus to a standstill, and for world peace we can't even block a minor road for one hour.' Except for some such smug, guilt-appeasing response as sending in another charity check, his act would be just another irrelevant horror. In Mark's reply to Glenda's corrosively realistic arguments, barely articulate as it is, a voice is heard again asking us to reimagine being different. He first asserts his unilateral faith in humanity – 'I have to believe we are not quite worthless. That there is someone...somewhere'; the belief is related to his refusal to 'be moved by reason.' For

the Pentagon is reason...This is a reasonable war. It is the first intellectuals' war. It is run by statisticians, physicists, economists, historians, psychiatrists, experts on anything, theorists from everywhere. The professors are advisors to the president. Even the atrocities can be justified by logic.

Hence the only truly oppositional act would be 'the one that goes beyond reason, and beyond words'.

Mark's position is in deep accord with the views of the authors referred to earlier, primarily Giroux's and Coetzee's, that any effective transformation would require a dismantling of the entire paradigm of pragmatic rationality that has usurped empathetic imagination in both western politics and daily life. That is why the dream sequence consisting of a number of salvation or escape fantasies that act as a backdrop to Mark/Glenda dialogue sound strange and implausible in comparison. Although most of them are irrational (Timothy Leary's rhapsody on the LSD mystical expansion of consciousness, an Andy Warhol-like pot-smoking character's flight from the non-world of consciousness into the broad, hedonistic sanctuary of ecstasy and hope, or even an invitation from the Buddha's Fire Sermon to 'live happily and free from ailing among the ailing, free from care among the anxious'), they all center egotistically on the self, and like those other, scientific dreams of the new 'brave new worlds' purged of emotion, lack the crucial element – concern for the other. The elimination of empathy is the reason why they all fall short of a meaningful alternative. Hence, imaginative as they are, these solipsistic fantasies of escape do not negate but reconfirm the condition of moral dis-imagination, as the avant-garde version of the conventional forms of unconcern. Glenda evokes the regressive process as it unfolds in a British middle-class environment: she describes it as the gradual loss of spontaneous need for justice, until poor and happy teenage lovers of *Brothers Karamazov*, Mahler's music and human beings end up fashionably leftist, bourgeois, dressed-up theatre-goers, afraid of words 'good' and 'bad' and using instead a non-committal 'interesting', and so easily embarrassed by any natural feeling that they put it in inverted comas or say it with a funny voice. Their comfortable, shrunken lives become a concrete image of that whole concept of 'orderly society' the apologist of the American point of view in the play says is being currently defended in Vietnam, but also in the entire 2000 years of killing innocent people, as part of power struggles that, he insists, are the essence of civilized history. There will be hence no end to war, as Glenda concludes in despair in her final passionate speech, for as long as there are these civilized, burnt-out people who secretly want it, there will be a Vietnam burning:

So you end the war in Vietnam. Where's the next one? Thailand Chile, Alabama? The things that will be needed are all-ready in some carefully camouflaged quartermaster's store. The wire, the rope, the gas, the cardboard boxes they use for coffins in emergencies... Every man whose spirit is dying wants it to go on, because that sort of dying is better when everyone else dies with you. Everyone longing for the Day of Judgment – wants it to go on. Everyone who wants it to be changed, and can't change – wants it to go on. It doesn't matter that the world will be ash – if your life is ash, you want it to go on. And why it will get worse.

In fact, getting worse she believes would be the only way to things getting any better. The difference between Mark's vision and hers is not absolute though. Mark sees this 'orderly society' as a make-believe world, rendered as tiny and unreal by its perverted logic as a children's toy, which one puts away without any sadness – but is convinced apparently that such a radical exit as setting himself on fire would restore it for 'someone...somewhere' to its real and alarming life proportions. Glenda's equally radical vision is of setting 'the orderly world' itself on fire: of seeing it 'happen here', of seeing in

an English house, among the floral chintzes and school blazers...a fugitive say hide me – and know...which of my nice, well-meaning acquaintances would collaborate, which would betray, which would talk first under torture – and which would become torturer ...'; of seeing 'an English dog playing on an English lawn with part of a burned hand...of a gas grenade go off in an English flower show, and nice English ladies crawling in each other's sick.

If it is revolution that Glenda is invoking, the 'bringing down of the whole house we live in, the whole of language', it will not happen unless the old consciousness collapse in a cleansing fire of collective terror, and 'pity, like a new born babe' emerge out of the ruins. Mark seeks to release pity too, but relying on the power of his personal example to mediate the inner transformation. Glenda is convinced, on the other hand, that nothing short of facing their own imminent death – like Dorfman's Miranda at Paulina's gun point in the film version of the play, or Amery's Weiss facing the firing squad – might stir back into life the sense of solidarity millions of years of evolution perfected for human survival, and a few thousand years of history



have obliterated, and turn British anti-men and anti-women back into fellow human beings.

Thus the complaint voiced after the first night performance by some critics and playwrights (Charles Marowitz and Arnold Wesker are examples) that *US* failed to offer a solution to the Vietnam War, or indeed a sustained viewpoint, is unfounded or beside the point Brook was trying to make. After a welter of contradictory and initially confusing viewpoints and images, the alternatives crystalize and are presented to the audience: an actor announces that they might well be living in a time, 'foretold many years ago,' of ultimate choice: 'I call Heaven and Earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.' In terms of the play's chief metaphor, the choice is between different kinds of burning, and is reminiscent of Eliot's *Four Quartets*:

The only hope, or else despair  
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre –  
To be redeemed from fire by fire.

It is conveyed in a concluding richly symbolic image, fusing all the meanings of burning (from fiery commitment to the burnt offering of self-immolation and the holocaust flames scorching Vietnam), but also of flying, that have been suggested so far in the play: a box is opened to release several white butterflies which fly towards the audience. An actor pulls out a lighter from his pocket, lights it, takes out another butterfly – Vietnam, but also Icarus Schmicarus, Barry Bondhus, and the spectators themselves – and holds it in the flame. As it stops burning, the actors freeze, and confront the audience in silence.

If by the end of the play the silence of concern had replaced the initial silence of indifference, Peter Brook explained in the rehearsals, it would have accomplished its purpose. But whether this happened, whether the spark caught and the spectators burnt with the degree of compassionate involvement Brook had hoped for, remains uncertain. As it happened, a lady did leap on the stage to prevent the burning of the butterfly (which nobody knew was made of paper), and cried out 'You see, you can do something!', but the silence with which the rest

of the audience regarded the actors was described later in a review as that of electrified hostility. Brook was not surprised, nor was he discouraged by the particularly strong animosity of the American public aroused by the film version of the play in 1968. The self-censorship there, Brook recorded later,

seemed to prevent people not so much from saying things as from hearing them. The great debate leads nowhere, persuasion does not persuade. Despite all the newspapers and the paperbacks one is struck by how little wish there is to be informed. The streets of Saigon arrive on television but their horrors do not penetrate. 'This is more indecent than concentration camps', said Murray Campton, 'Because this time everyone sees it, everyone knows'. Everyone. It seems to me he is not speaking only about Americans. (Brook, 1968c, 211)

By the time Pilger, in his 2002 comment, drew attention to the lies still taught in American schools about the Vietnam War, and Claiborne to its connection with the subsequent wars the U.S. has waged since with similar false excuses, Brook's play and film had been virtually forgotten,<sup>105</sup> while the obscene force of arms and the cynicism in the international politics, combined with the public's self-censorship he

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<sup>105</sup> Scott Mackenzie observes that *Tell Me Lies*, goes far beyond Brechtian strategies employed by other self-reflective films of the sixties, yet is largely forgotten today, (in 2009), never discussed within the cannon of British cinema, and rarely examined as an early Vietnam film. Moreover, it was also elided from the pantheon of celebrated Brechtian films, and precisely in the early seventies, when journals such as *Screen* and *New Left Review* were championing the radical possibilities of Brechtian aesthetics. The reason for the film's problems was its attacks on the United States. While other films emerging from the continent with similar aesthetic choices but without Brook's scathing indictment of the war were lauded, Brook's *Tell Me Lies* was savagely reviewed, as dishonest 'communist propaganda,' and 'bad taste amounting to obscenity.' In fact, as Mackenzie points out, one only needs to look at the 'War on Terror,' the US 'you are with us or against us' stance or the utter absurdity of Freedom Fries to see how 'this forgotten, neglected film clearly resonates with our present condition.' (Mackenzie, 2009: 54–62) Eventually however, the film was re-mastered and the restored version premièred in 2012 at the 69th Venice Film Festival, while the theatrical release in France took place on 10 October in the same year. The restoration of *Tell Me Lies* was carried out by the two foundations at the Technicolor laboratory in Los Angeles under the leadership of Tom Burton. Peter Brook supervised the entire project. The foundations chose to accompany the release of *Tell Me Lies*, with the publication of a book of interviews: "Peter Brook and Vietnam: Tell Me Lies" which became available from book-stores on 31 August 2012.

saw perfected in the late 1960's, have contaminated and subverted, as Dorfman's play about the post-Pinochet Chile exemplifies, the entire project of so-called 'democratic transition' in the greatest part of the Third World. What then has Brook's play accomplished?

If the question, addressed to Brook after the performance, and also during the rehearsals, implied that the play had done, or would do, nothing to put an end to the war, Brook was right to dismiss it as falsely pitched and doing everybody a disservice: to expect solutions from art which it cannot put in practice, is to seek an alibi for a relapse into impotence and indifference. Like utopia, art must not be discredited because its visions may never come true, or never remain immune to corruption if they do. Art, like utopia, is about renewing the process of life by maintaining its tensions even when, and especially when, the forces of denial seem overwhelming. If the Aldwych middle-class audiences leaving at the end were not crushed, Brook explained, they were still moved, angered or shocked out of the usual attitude of not caring and not worrying. To his actors, anxious about the absence in their performance of something more positive, Brook replied that 'that something was there all the time...in the life, the degree of burning that you brought to the play' (Quoted in Kustow, 1968, p.150). If it didn't start a revolution at the time, the probability that 'one person out of a thousand might act differently because of what they experienced in the theatre that night' makes all the difference. The fact that the re-mastered version of the film was premiered at the Venice 2012 Film Festival, receiving a special mention of the Jury and the Luis Bunuel prize, like the fact too that the American campaign in Vietnam had eventually to be terminated largely under the pressure of the protests the US government found increasingly difficult to contain, speak perhaps to that difference. It is hence no unrealistic Quixotry if, like Mark in the play, for whom there is no other choice but to persist against all odds in his compassionate faith in the humanity of 'someone ...somewhere,' Brook, as any genuinely concerned artist nowadays, feels he has no choice but to identify, clarify, or stir up the antagonisms and frictions which burn, through the accumulating layers of indifference, delusion and denial, the way back to the race's erstwhile humanness – for otherwise it might indeed be finally extinguished.

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### Rezime

## ISTORIJA, HOLOKAUST, IDENTITET U DELIMA DŽ. M. KUCIJA, A. DORFMANA I P. BRUKA

Rad predstavlja odziv na ono što su filmski reditelji poput Kleja Klejborna prepoznali kao nužno suočavanje sa potisnutim istinama o Vijetnamu, da bi se iz te perspektive sagledao tragični mehanizam istorijskog ponavljanja. Klejborn je samo jedan od sve brojnijih savremenih autora – istoričara, analitičara kulture, umetnika – koji se suočavaju sa kontinuitetom rata i nasilja uprkos deklarativnim opredeljenjima za mir i stabilnost, nastojeći da razotkriju uzrok ovom paradoksu. Prvi deo rada posvećen je autorima različitih provenijencija ali sličnih humanističkih uverenja, i zajedničke, postkolonijalne, tačke gledišta, iz koje rat, a posebno holokaust, sagledavaju ne kao istorijsku aberaciju uslovljenu manjkavošću ljudske prirode, već kao viševekovni, rekurentni fenomen svojstven zapadnoj (imperijalnoj patrijarhalnoj) kulturi. Među strategijama koje obezbeđuju neometanu upotrebu genocidnog nasilja svakako je sistematska, institucionalizovana proizvodnja neznanja, odnosno falsifikovanje istorije, o čemu rečito govore Goldingovi i Pinterovi eseji, Vidalovi, Pildžerovi ili Monbiotovi komentari, kao i historiografske studije Svena Lindkvista i Č. S. Vajldera. Međutim, pored guste tkanice laži koja prikriva zločine prošlosti, postoji i spremnost, koju generiše rasistički mit o beloj supremaciji, da se lažima poveruje, a zločini opravdaju. Proizvod tog mita je raspolučeno,

od 'drugog' otuđeno jastvo, koje sa svoje strane reprodukuje poznatu i naizgled neizbežnu istoriju nasilja: sve dok se rascep na kome počiva zapadni identitet kritički ne prepozna i eventualno isceli, kako sugerišu filozofi od E. Levinasa, J. Habernasa do H. Žirua, činjenična istina neće imati onaj transformativni učinak koji smo navikli od nje da očekujemo. Suočavanje sa takvim radikalnim unutrašnjim disocijacijama, normalnim i poželjnim u patrijarhalnoj kulturi, suštinska je uloga njene umetnosti, od grčkih dramatičara i Šekspira do danas: stoga se u naredna tri dela rada u okviru komparativne analize kojom su obuhvaćeni roman *Zemlje sumraka*, Dž. M. Kucija, drama *Smrt i Devojka*, Ariela Dorfmana, i *US/Pričaj mi laži o Vijetnamu*, pozorišni i filmski eksperiment Pitera Bruka, uspostavlja korelacija između procesa 'denacifikacije', ili dekonstrukcije 'sudbinskog' mita o zapadnoj, odnosno američkoj istoriji, i razgradnje patrijarhalnog identiteta. Dok Kuci otkriva neizlečivu bolest gospodareve duše, aludirajući pritom na Hegelovu paradigmu gospodar/rob, Dorfman i Bruk ispituju mogućnosti kojima raspolaže drama da bi se efikasno suprostavili ne samo pseudo-istinama o demokratskoj tranziciji u post-pinoćeosvom Čileu i Južnom Vijetnamu, već prevashodno pseudo-identitetima sa kojima su lažne verzije istorije u dubokom dosluhu, te doprli do onog što je Martin Buber nazvao JA/TI (Umesto JA/TO) odnosa prema drugome, koji je regulisao društveni život u arhaičnim zajednicama, kada su, kako sve veći broj naučnika smatra, biloški zapisane i kroz evoluciju usavršavane sposobnosti za empatiju i solidarnost bile jedine zamislive strategije ljudskog opstanka.

2015



## AFTERWORD:

### RE-VISITING THE LEAVIS/SNOW CONTROVERSY or, KNOWLEDGE FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY:

**Abstract:** The paper is a response to an important observation Professor Darko Suvin made in 1999 that stances must ultimately depend on circumstances, and in particular to his warning that the circumstances marking the turn of the century demand a revision of our assumptions of what the knowledge that truly matters is. Now, as the circumstances shaping our social and political existence deteriorate, the concern about the diminishing role of humanist education as opposed to scientific or specialized training is voiced with increasing urgency and apprehension. Part of the changing paradigm within the cultural and literary studies is the will to re-assess the position of F. R. Leavis. Thus Leavis's response to C.P. Snow's *Two Cultures*, for several decades merely the object lesson in bad academic manners, is now being revisited as an integral part of his life-long 'mental fight' for the conception of humanist studies as the irreplaceable source of criteria that would counter the general tendency of what he called technologico-Benthamite culture to misuse science in ways that cheapen, impoverish and dehumanize life. The Leavis/Snow controversy, as well as the contemporary debate concerning the humanities, I will argue in the concluding part of my paper, can be read as the latest version of the paradigm clash dramatically transposed in the stories of two archetypal knowers – Faust and Prospero.

Rather than an application of this or that newly hatched theory in an analysis of this or that particular literary or cultural phenomenon – the tacitly agreed upon academic convention concerning scholarly

essays or conference presentations – my intention here is to voice doubts and dilemmas that have accumulated in the years I have spent trying, not as successfully as I might have wished, to combine the widely undisputed rules governing academic profession and my own feeling about the kind of knowledge that the study of literature provides and that could or should be exchanged to the benefit of the students and wider reading public. I thought I knew, and I still think I know, the answer but the gulf separating my view of the matter from the one implied in the bulk of scholarly pursuits and their published results worldwide has so deepened, that I have felt for some time that this question – what do we, university teachers, live for, what ultimately do we live by? – might well be the only important issue still left to raise in a conference. It is, of course, a paraphrase of F. R. Leavis's "What for – what ultimately for? What, ultimately, do men live by?" (Leavis 1972, 56) – his central formulation concerning the teleological questions he believed literature has the power to initiate. A natural association, for as a student and teacher of English literature I was brought up on the principles of Leavis's criticism, introduced to the literary section of the English Department in Nis in 1976, and passionately upheld to the last by the late Professor Vida Marković. All Leavisites in those times, we were committed to the belief that the quality of the mind shaped by the intense personal engagement with the questions great literature inspires would ultimately make a difference in the moral condition of the wider community. (It may now sound as a naïve belief, but not if one assumes that the only meaningful way to pursue whatever happens to be one's vocation is to assign to it an absolute value.) That's how I watched with incomprehension as Leavis's chief principles were denounced and repudiated, rashly, maliciously, stupidly, as it seemed to me, by one new school of criticism after another, without however fundamentally changing my own, increasingly precarious, position. Now it is with considerable satisfaction that I hear, have heard for the last ten years, Leavis's name invoked with ever greater urgency, and see his long forgotten controversy with C. P. Snow brought back to general public's attention.

*The Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow*, F. R. Leavis's famous (or rather infamous) reply to Lord Snow's 1959 Rede Lecture published as *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, was

reprinted in 2013, with the introduction by Stephen Collini.<sup>1</sup> Shortly before this new edition of what for decades has been a byword for academic excess, in an anticipatory *Guardian* review of the book, Collini points out that in more than 50 years since its first appearance circumstances have changed, requiring a serious reconsideration of what once appeared as the pamphlet's flaws and a better appreciation of its merits. Collini is not alone in his urge to correct the adverse judgment of the part Leavis played in the controversy, nor, as I already noted, of his entire contribution to the English studies. Leavis's unflinching, combative commitment to the crucial social significance of literary and humanist disciplines is now, in the conditions that only can be described as a pervasive crisis of the university, emerging with a new relevance, while his ferocious reply to C. P. Snow, even for his former critics, has acquired the status of the classic of cultural criticism Leavis confidently predicted.

For the sake of those younger scholars who may not be familiar with the Snow/Leavis debate, I will very briefly restate the chief arguments of both sides. In his Rede Lecture, Lord Snow proposed that we live within two antagonistic cultures, one the result of scientific discovery and technological invention, the other, which he also called "traditional", the less palpable domain conjured by literary intellectuals. Having begun his career as a research scientist at Cambridge – a short-lived affair whose end seems to have been brought about by his less than outstanding abilities – he undertook to write novels (which incidentally his gentlest critics said were "almost completely unreadable") (see Kimball 1994), Snow felt qualified to pronounce authoritatively on both. His verdict was in favor of scientists, who, he claimed in a famous phrase, had the future in their bones. Capable as they were of raising the standards of material living, the scientists provided social hope. Thus, in Snow's opinion, they had an answer to the inherent tragedy of human condition: we live alone, or more poignantly, we die alone, but in the meantime there was to be more of everything – "more jam", as he confidently predicted –

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<sup>1</sup> Delivered at Downing College as Richmond Lecture and first published in 1962, Leavis's reply to Snow was re-printed in his 1972 *Nor Shall My Sword: Discourses on Pluralism, Compassion and Social Hope*. The whole book, in fact, is an eloquent elaboration of the argument presented in *The Two Cultures?*

to consume. Literary intellectuals on the other hand, were “natural Luddites”. Having nothing more substantial to contribute than railing and whining at the price of technological progress, they were merely an obstacle to this hopeful course.

Leavis was outraged – not so much by what C. P. Snow said, as by the fact that it earned him immediately the status of the sage and pundit. On the strength of his Rede Lecture, Snow, who had never before participated in the government, was offered a position in the Ministry of technology by Harold Wilson, and the published version of his talk found itself in students’ reading lists both sides of the Atlantic. Utterly insignificant intellectually, as Leavis mercilessly demonstrated in his reply, Snow, he claimed, deserved attention because he was a portent. “His significance lies precisely in what his unmerited elevation tells us about the society which accorded him such standing,” Stephen Collini explains, (Collini, 2013) and goes on to justify Leavis’s shock tactics: to effectively combat this lazy habit of automatically accepting only what is already familiar there was no other way but to transgress all the limits of academic politesse. Urged by the momentousness of his task, Leavis disregarded all academic good manners, and in his Richmond Lecture proceeded to demolish Lord Snow’s every single pretense to distinction: he exposed both the vulgarity of Snow’s style, and the portentous ignorance it conveyed – of history, of civilization, of the human significance of the Industrial Revolution, and, most of all, of art (“As a novelist”, Leavis charges relentlessly at the very opening of his lecture, “he does not exist, nor has a glimmer of what creative literature is, or why it matters“.) With equal vehemence he denounced Snow’s ignorance of science. (“Of qualities that one might set to the credit of a scientific training“, or indeed “of an intellectual discipline of any kind,” he proceeds mercilessly, “there is no evidence”, either in Snow’s fiction or his lecture.) (Leavis, 1972: 47). Leavis’s scorching ironies misfired though. The well-bred friends of Lord Charles joined together to defend their minion, and the literary community were practically unanimous in condemning the lecture – too personal, too destructive, too rude, too Leavis! (Collini 2013). In the following decades it became an object of fashionable derision along with what was called Leavisite literary criticism, which was subsequently ousted from the universities world-wide – with what I believe were dire consequences for literary criticism, the university and the world.

To understand Leavis's position it is necessary to see that it was not science itself that he attacked in his lecture, nor even the idea of economic prosperity. Rather than 'more jam tomorrow' (the phrase Snow liked well enough to repeat several times, and whose callous utilitarian connotation revolted Leavis), he turned against the moral blindness underlying the failure on the part of C. P. Snow and his admiring public to distinguish between wealth and well-being. Rather than economic prosperity in itself (surely one of the priorities in the world nowadays when half of the humanity go hungry!), he thundered against the axiomatic status accorded to the idea that economic prosperity - in the already prosperous western countries?! - was the exclusive and overriding goal of all social action and policy. For how else, one may wonder, was "jam" to be justly distributed, or indeed the impulse to use scientific discovery for unbridled destruction held in check, if not through an exercise of moral intelligence, the human faculty whose sole provenance in the university were the humanities, and literary studies in particular? It was this property of literature - at least the kind that constituted Leavis's Great Tradition - and of the arts to heighten awareness and expose false teleologies that constituted the great rationale of Leavis's contention that there can be only *one* culture, and that it depended for its moral coherence and sanity on the role the humanities were allowed to play within the university. Having their own center in literary studies, the humanities were to hold a central place in the university, which then might become an irreplaceable source of the criteria that would counter the tendency of the technologico-Benthamite culture to misuse science in ways that cheapen, impoverish, dehumanize and destroy life<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Compare the conclusion to a 1994 re-assessment of the Leavis/Snow controversy:

We live at a moment when "the results of science" confront us daily with the most extreme moral challenges, from ... prospects of genetic engineering to the more amorphous challenges generated by our society's assumption that *every* problem facing mankind is susceptible to technological intervention and control. In this situation, the temptation to reduce culture to a reservoir of titillating pastimes is all but irresistible...We are everywhere encouraged to think of ourselves as complicated machines for consuming sensations — the more, and more exotic, the better. Culture is no longer an invitation to confront our humanity but

Life indeed was the absolutely crucial term, the key criterion of value, aesthetic and ethical at once, in the critical vocabulary Leavis developed to analyse and evaluate both literature and culture. For Leavis, as for Blake, 'Life' was a necessary word, indicating in Blake's mythic universe the ability of the imaginative Los to welcome the novel and the unknown, and hence the necessary opposite to the limited Urizen's rational impulse to chart, classify, master and close the vital game. (Leavis, 1972: 14-15) Refusing theoretical abstraction, like Blake, Leavis too preferred to define his central critical term by example, pointing the way life declared itself in the language of the authors from Shakespeare and Blake, to George Eliot and Lawrence, as a verbal embodiment of a reverent, imaginative openness before untried experiential possibilities.

In the literary theories that came to replace Leavis's, his key concepts - including life, awareness, perception, responsibility, maturity - were denounced as vague, and his entire ethical approach dismissed as insufficiently theorized or worse, secretly reactionary. Science and technology which, unchecked by any humane consideration, had in the meantime come to dominate the realm of social decision and action, began to condition the structure of university studies, where the humanities soon acquired the status of poor relations compared to the massively favored exact sciences, and finally penetrated literary studies themselves, where the ideal of objective, value-free, neutral, 'scientific' analysis of texts, or the laws generating their meanings, became, and for some practitioners remained, the order of the day<sup>3</sup>. But if scientific analysis (such as narratology, for example) in its relentless Urizenic pursuit of abstractions saw its ultimate goal to be the

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a series of opportunities to impoverish it through diversion. We are, as Eliot put it in *Four Quartets*, "distracted from distraction by distraction." C. P. Snow represents the smiling, jovial face of this predicament. Critics like Arnold and Leavis offer us the beginnings of an alternative. Many people objected to the virulence of Leavis's attack on Snow. But given the din of competing voices, it is a wonder that he was heard at all. (Kimball 1994)

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, as I have had the opportunity to witness among my colleagues, often to the extent that any ethical perspective immediately signals a failure of methodology, an absence of scientific rigour, and is irritating.

reduction of complex human experiences embodied in literary fiction to algebraic formulae, its sequel, the anti-scientific, poststructuralist literary theory betrayed its initial promise by exhausting its whole purpose in the spectacular demonstrations of the impossibility of any meaning. For while this new Theory repudiated scientific objectivity, it was also eager to demolish any philosophical foundation indispensable to consistent interpretation — of literature, the self, or the world. If the structuralists before them merely ignored teleological questions, the 'why' and 'what for' of literature, the post-structural analysts subverted or discredited them, thus also refusing to envisage literature as a moral or social force. Promptly, as once Lord Snow's confident reflexion on prosperity as the exclusive goal of science and purpose of knowledge, now the new Pyrrhonist doubt about the legitimacy of any knowledge and meaningfulness of any goals was accepted by dazzled academic readership as a liberating insight. Yet the crucial effect of this deconstructive move, precluding as it did the articulation of alternatives, ethical, social, historical, was to (re)produce patterns of thought that for all their anarchy were in deep complicity with the post-Cold War globally oppressive political and economic processes. Thus whether rigorously scientific, or spectacularly playful, both these major trends of literary and cultural theory failed to generate an effective resistance to the enemy that besieged the academia from without, and the neoliberal, market-oriented conception of education has since penetrated the universities and turned the potential centers of opposing consciousness Leavis had hoped for into fund-raisers, spawning technically trained, docile profit-makers.

As the situation worsens, alarm signals are flashed, and those who remember F. R. Leavis deplore in particular the loss of the Leavisite language that could only effectively deal with the crisis. Thus describing our contemporary plight in apocalyptic terms, Fred Inglis, a cultural historian, notes in his 2011 re-evaluation of Leavis's work "Words As Weapons", that while the old order is breaking down, economically, environmentally, meaningfully, the language in which the disaster is addressed, in the political debate, media, and in university departments alike, is the quantifying managerialist language in which it is impossible to tell the truth. Leavis, he reminds us, forged his own idiosyncratic language of truth-telling: a special idiom inspired by the

exemplary writers, in which “responsibility is to be found in the poise of language – balanced between the rendered reality of the experience and the sincerity with which it is properly felt and judged“. No mere polemicist, Leavis deployed it to give solid life to his own solidly grasped moral and political allegiances, from which, like other great moral critics of British civilization and its awful failings – J. S. Mill, Ruskin, Morris, or Leavis’s admirer E. M. Thompson, he refused to depart despite his growing isolation: “Year after year, unafraid of repetitiveness, undaunted by the wholly English device on the part of the noble Lords, who stood in as figureheads for Benthamism – which was to murmur in pained, well bread incomprehension at Leavis’s vehemence – he kept up his solitary fusillade, until tired out, he died in deep depression.“ Now in the circumstances of social and spiritual death-in-life, Iglis concludes, it will prove the responsibility of teachers of the humanities and like-minded allies in social science, to rediscover a language capable of speaking of matters of life and death, whether in lectures, books, seminars and conferences: “The language to hand is Leavis’s, and we had better learn to speak it, before it is too late.“ (Inglis, 2011).

Stefan Collini brings up the question of language too: first, in the argument already mentioned justifying “The Two Culture’s infamous manner of address, but then also within a more general framework of viable cultural criticism. In both these senses, Leavis was up against the rhetoric of hackneyed abstractions. To have responded to Snow’s lecture in a cautious scholarly manner of partial disagreement instead of exposing it relentlessly as “a document for the study of clichés“ would not have received the necessary attention, and would have perhaps even confirmed Snow’s reputation of a sage. In such cases, Collini argues, it is the whole mechanism by which celebrity is transmuted into authority (Collini, 2013) that need to be exposed: not one or the other particular view, but the poverty of the mind, the systematic limitations of the perspective underlying such „habit of unawareness“ – and the astringent criticism required for the task is the mode that gives offence, which is the risk the cultural critic has to take if he is to alert his audience to their errors of judgment. The language required for the articulation of the critic’s positives is a greater problem. If the options sustaining the ideological status quo



are couched in clichés, abstract phrases repeated so many times that they have acquired the status of self-evident truth – what Leavis called currency values, like verbal coins rubbed smooth by being constantly circulated in a particular social world – one must not resort to still other abstractions in order to convey a sense of radically new possibilities, and yet to be recognized as saying something new at all, this is precisely what one is forced to do. The system seems to be closed, but as this renewed interest in Leavis demonstrates, not completely, or not permanently. For what has now, amidst the cliché saturated clamor of social discourse ( “democracy“, “human rights“, “tolerance“, “war on terrorism“, “threat to peace“, “nationalism“ “mondialization“ ) become clear, is that effective dissent is a matter less of abstract definitions of new aims and more of saving the public language from a ritual murder practiced upon it daily. This is the provenance of literary criticism, of the kind Leavis and his followers practiced before it was declared elitist and unscientific. Authentic cultural criticism depends primarily on the critic’s ability, cultivated in his intimate contact with literature, to attend scrupulously, patiently, with an alert sense of fine ethical discrimination, to the changing sense of words, as they are made to migrate promiscuously from one context, one frame of reference to another: by the very syntax, rhythm, pace of his own speech to compel the readers to do so and thus alert them, before they can quickly and effortlessly swallow their daily ration of numbing banalities or mystifications, to the radical alterity of his own vision.

This combination of literary understanding, linguistic competence, and cultural analysis, Collini proposes to call “slow criticism“. It is, he suggests, the only efficient cure for the impotence of present day public chatter, including prestigious critical literary and cultural discourse: to replace their fast, smooth, self-complacent but superficial idiom, we need “slow“ criticism, that which “by its indirection and arrest, causes readers to lose their habitually confident footing and stumble into more probing and effective thinking“. For what other weapon does a critic have at his disposal in a battle against “such formidable social forces, the fashion-driven chatter of so much journalism, over-abstraction of so many official documents, the meaningless hype of almost all advertising and marketing, the coercive tendentiousness of all that worldly wise, at-the-end-of-the-

day pronouncing“, but “a closer attentiveness to the ways words mean and mislead, express truth and obstruct communication, stir the imagination, and anaesthetize the mind“? Leavis, with his angry spoken tempo may not strike one as an obvious recruit for “slow criticism“ but in fact his syntax, abounding in pauses, imbedded afterthoughts, painstaking search for the accurate nuance of meaning, a straining against the limits of blandly self-contained propositions which soon congeal into clichés, is the language that can only disturb us into awareness. (Collini, 2013).

While it confirms the contemporary relevance of Leavis, Collini’s slow criticism, I feel, is an unlikely strategy to be embraced within the university. In fact, the hope that the crisis of the university is a reversible process, and that a larger social recovery might start within its precincts in some conceivable future, has lately become untenable to most serious analysts. Terry Eagleton, a Marxist literary critic, is an example. The additional reason why I choose to dwell briefly on his views, more radical and less optimistic than those of the previous authors, is that Eagleton used to be one of Leavis’s most eloquent (and, I believe, misguided) critics: his main objection derived from a fundamental, but, as I see it, rigidly understood, Marxist principle that the world must be changed and not only interpreted. As a bourgeois liberal, Leavis, according to Eagleton, never seriously entertained the possibility of a revolutionary change that would lead to a more equitable society than the capitalist, his ambition being limited to ensuring the spiritual survival of the educated elite. While supporting the bourgeois in his privilege, the English studies could be relied on, as once was religion, to check the potentially revolutionary impulses of the oppressed working classes: by throwing them a few patriotic novels, they were to be detained from throwing up barricades. (Eagleton, 1983: 22-30) Some years later, while visiting our English Department at the University in Niš, and in response to my question, Eagleton was pleased to inform me that the Leavis/Snow controversy was a long forgotten affair in the British academia, and dismissed the matter with a condescending shrug. I will not argue with this surprisingly unfair distortion of Leavis’s significance except to note that in 1998, browsing through the autumn issue of *the European English Messenger*, I came across Eagleton’s revaluation of Leavis’s

work, defending the latter's notions of universal moral values and essential human nature - a target of Eagleton's own former criticisms, and still an anathema to contemporary constructivists - as sound thinking, not at all incompatible with Marxist theory of eventual human emancipation. In two of his recent texts, "The Death of the Intellectual", (2008) and "Death of the University" (2010), although without mentioning Leavis's name, Eagleton responds to the contemporary condition of the British higher education and the general fate of knowledge in a language that is immediately identifiable as Leavisite:

What we have witnessed in our time is the death of universities as centers of critique. The humanities, introduced in the 18th century "to foster the kind of values for which a philistine world had precious little time", and "launch a critique of conventional wisdom", are now completely isolated from other disciplines, financially slashed, and disappearing. Since Margaret Thatcher, the role of academia has been to service the status quo, not challenge it in the name of justice, tradition, imagination, human welfare, the free play of the mind or alternative visions of the future. (Eagleton, 2010)

This is why there are remarkably few intellectuals hanging round universities. For, like Darko Suvin before him, Eagleton reminds the reader that the intellectual is not the same as the academic. Unless they are in the humanities, where they collaborate in the cults of postmodern incomprehensibility, "academics", Eagleton specifies, "spend their lives researching such momentous questions as the vaginal system of fleas". Intellectuals have the rather more arduous job of bringing ideas to bear on society as a whole: the intellectual is the one who understands the forces shaping the world (a world in which, according to WFP hunger statistics, 3.1 million children under five die every year of starvation) and wants to explain it to those who don't. In the university, which is now similar to transnational corporations, he cannot do so: there potential intellectuals become mere academics - "a largely disaffected labor force confronting finance-obsessed managerial elite." (Eagleton 2008) Or they leave to embrace the precarious existence of free-lance intellectual trouble-makers<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> For recent commentaries about the the neoliberal war on higher education see (Scwalbe 2015). A cogent analysis of conservatizing forces operating against universities as centers of critical thought, his "The Twilight of the Professors" also

To illustrate these options, I need to make a short digression. Aurora Morales, a writer and activist of the combined Puerto Rican and Jewish origin comes to mind immediately as one such independent, or rather “certified organic“ intellectual, as she refers to herself in the eponymous essay from her 1998 collection *Medicine Stories: History Culture and the Politics of Integrity*. The organic food metaphor she chose to convey her sense of what an intellectual as opposed to postmodern academic is derives from her rural background and the habit of eating home-produced food: unrefined, unpackaged, full of complex nutrients that get left out when the process of production is too tightly controlled. By analogy, she felt that the ideas she carried with her have been grown on the soil and by the methods familiar to her; unlike imported knowledge, in shiny packages, with empty calories and artificial, hers is open to life, the earth still clinging to it. To keep it meaningful and vital she refused to trim it to satisfy the requirements of academic presentability. To make it marketable she felt it had to be refined, abstracted beyond all recognition, all fiber taken out of it, boiled down until all vitality was oxidized away. The refusal did not happen at once though: although she had always felt awkward in conference halls, suspecting that the doors were too narrow and that vital parts of her would have to be left behind before she could enter the lecture room, she nevertheless lingered for a while. Repelled by the humiliating impenetrability of the language in which postmodern academic thinking came wrapped, she nevertheless thought for a time that it was the question of her own lack of training and that the slick new arrangement of words just needed to be acquired. But finally, instead of complying, and learning how to arrange the published opinions of other people in a logical sequence, restating one or another school of thought on the topic, she kept to her own homegrown wisdom. She found her validation outside the conference rooms, in the tradition growing out of shared experience: in real situations in everyday life of men and women suffering the same oppression, or poems that rose out of the same phenomenon of truth-telling from personal knowledge. (Morales 1988: 67-74) Relying entirely on that personal knowledge

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refers usefully to publications such as Russell’s Jacoby’s *The Last Intellectuals* (1997), and Frank Donoghue *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities* (2008).

– “lived experience“ Leavis would have called it – for a direction in her life and work, Morales has joined numerous resistance movements – in her own crusade against all kinds of political discrimination in a highly stratified, militarized, corporate world.

In a telling contrast to Morales’ intellectual and moral integrity, Martha Nussbaum, Professor of law and ethics in the University of Chicago’s philosophy department, and widely recognized authority on moral philosophy, exemplifies how academics prosper by compromising with the corporate world. Hypocrisy is in fact what most offends in her *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Published in 2010, it is a work of an academic posturing as an intellectual. The title itself, conjuring as it does the Leavis/Snow controversy, would make us expect Nussbaum to defend an updated version of the former’s position. Indeed in the first part of her book, Nussbaum seems to be doing just that: her concern is with education, specifically with the precarious state of the arts and the humanities worldwide. With the rush to economic profitability in the global market, the humanities and the arts are being cut away as useless frills; the values they promote, such as imagination, creativity, rigorous critical thought, compassion, sympathy, those that are crucial to preserving a healthy democratic society, are losing ground everywhere, as nations prefer to pursue short-term profit by the cultivation of the useful and highly applied skills suited to profit making (Nussbaum, 141-142). She even implies that the humanities are not merely neglected but positively *feared*: they foster the “freedom of the mind, [which] is dangerous, if what is wanted is a group of technically trained obedient workers to carry out the plans of elites who are aiming at foreign investment and technological development“ (Nussbaum 2010: 21). In short, for the greater part of her book, Nussbaum’s premise seems to be that democracy and economic growth are incompatible and require special kinds of education developing mutually exclusive sets of skills. What might raise certain doubts, however, is the way she exploits the term democracy for its “currency value“ – failing, that is, to make a necessary discrimination between its merely nominal use from its real meaning. Resorting to this cliché, instead of questioning it – is the democracy she is so anxious to preserve real to begin with? – Nussbaum can already be seen as a secret defender of the system she is

apparently criticizing. The sudden turn in her argument confirms these doubts. In a kind of abrupt *cogito interruptus*, Nussbaum begins to contradict herself, asserting that the humanist disciplines she hitherto represented as crucial to responsible citizenship, but antagonistic to growth-oriented economy, must be preserved precisely because they are essential to economic prosperity too: imagination, creativity and critical thinking (compassion and sympathy are conveniently omitted) are what makes for flexible, open minds, and these are indispensable not only to democracy but also to innovation in business. (112) this is true, but as Jane Newbury points out in the conclusion to her critical review of the book, it does not mean that the two can sit comfortably side by side. Indeed scientific innovation in the pursuit of economic growth has led to some of the most shocking atrocities, and these also demanded the setting aside some of the qualities cultivated through literature and the arts – qualities that Nussbaum herself as a moral philosopher regards highly – such as “the ability to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person“. Thus, Newbury sums up, “while education in the humanities may prepare the students for either democracy or growth, this book does not convincingly convey how it can prepare them *for both*“. (Newbury 2011). Newbury’s final judgment of Nussbaum’s argument is that it is flawed. Mine is harsher. In view of the fact she herself registered, namely that Nussbaum could have pursued her “education-for-democracy“ line of thinking – by suggesting more equitable economic possibilities, measures, approaches, those compatible with the genuinely democratic assumption that human beings are much more than means to profitable ends – but did not, I can only dismiss her whole argument as deliberately deceptive, of the kind one has learnt to expect from a liberal bourgeois academic, traditionally pleading for human rights and freedom of thought as long as it does not affect the capitalist profit-oriented economy. To this tradition Nussbaum has also contributed in her other published work<sup>5</sup>; it is the tradition to which C. P. Snow’s pronouncements, though far cruder, on utilitarian merits of scientific as opposed to humanist education, also belong, but to which F. R. Leavis – who subjected to his thoughtful, ‘slow’ critical scrutiny

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<sup>5</sup> For a reference to her specious argument in favor of cosmopolitanism see ‘*Umetnost kompromisa*’, printed above, p

the consequences not only of crassly profit-oriented education, but of the entire project of mass culture, rashly taken for a triumph of democracy – was an uncompromising enemy.

In the way of conclusion I would like to place the Leavis/Snow controversy in an even wider context, or rather to see it as having its analogy in the tradition of philosophical thought. For if it is a contention about the kind of knowledge that matters, I seem to re-discover a comparable dilemma in a reference, made in an interview by our eminent philosopher Mihajlo Marković, to two chief orientations in the history of modern philosophy. He admits that in terms of theoretical foundation of sciences, the greatest improvement has been the achievement of what summarily might be called positivism, the orientation that has its beginning in Russell's and Moor's neo-realism, goes through the phase of logical empiricism in the period from the 20's to the 30's when it thrives as the most influential school of thought, to become finally, under the name of "analytical philosophy," "the philosophical instrument of mature bourgeois society: neutral, uncritical, safe, focused exclusively on the acquisition of pure knowledge."

Incomparable more inspiring. in Mihajlović's opinion, but also more uncomfortable for any ruling system, and hence receiving meager material support, is critical philosophy: it had its origin in Marx, and developed through the work of his gifted followers, like Gramsci and Lukacs, the Frankfurt and Budapest Schools, Lucien Goldman and the philosophical community called *Praxis*. This orientation has re-endorsed critical thinking, the humanist tradition and the forgotten reflexion on virtues and values. It revived and renewed the ancient idea of "theory" which blends knowledge and morality, science and ethics. It is this school of philosophy that can only help humankind reach the necessary critical self-awareness and discover the way out of current contradictions.

Elaborating his point further, Mihajlović adds that

it would be fatal for the humankind if philosophy were to be reduced to "scientism" and deprived itself of critical thinking. Nowadays the dangers have become obvious of ethically neutral thinking, that which only recognizes the rationality of the means, ("instrumental rationality") and refuses to judge about the "rationality of the ends", because this is allegedly not the business of science or philosophy, but professional politics. (in Miletić 2002: 454-5)

Finally, I believe it correct to see the Leavis/Snow controversy, reflected as it is in the mutually opposing schools of contemporary philosophy, as a more recent episode in the much longer historical tension between two conceptions of knowledge originating at the very beginning of the modern era, when science first disentangled itself from the swaddling clothes of holistic magic practiced by Florentine humanists, and became the crass utilitarian power/knowledge of Bacon and Machiavelli. The first to respond critically were, as always, the artists: what kind of knowledge do men ultimately live by? The answers were dramatized in Faust and Prospero, two archetypal knowers. Both magicians, they practiced their magic for entirely different purposes: Marlowe's Faust, the prototype of hubristic Machiavellian scientist, lost his soul to the devil – not to demonstrate Marlowe's medieval superstition against *curiositas*, but to warn that the world in which knowledge is misused for illegitimate power is a soulless world, hell being a proper metaphor for its imminent fate. The contemporary connection has been made repeatedly, but the most pertinent in this context is John Adams' opera *Doctor Atomic*: Marlowe's Faust, gorging himself on the vision of infinite power and wealth he will obtain by constructing "even stranger machines of war," becomes in Adams' opera the historical Oppenheimer insisting on the use of the atom bomb as an ultimate uncontested demonstration of his country's power to destroy life. Prospero's skill is a means to a wholly beneficial end: like Bruno, and Ficino, who practiced their magic as a way of enhancing their creative potentials, mostly for poetic inspiration, Prospero too is an artist, claiming for his magic no other power in the world than that Shakespeare exercised at his *Globe* – which was, of course, 'to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure'. Its ultimate purpose is the self-knowledge that can restore to the erring individual and deluded nations alike their own estranged souls, and thus renew life: as it happens at the end of the *Tempest*, when, as Gonzalo sums it up, "all of us [found] ourselves/When no man was his own." (V. i.)

The consequences for the 21<sup>st</sup> century students of banishing this kind of knowledge from the university have been articulated recently by a Canadian postgraduate in a living, urgent idiom that tunes in remarkably with the voices of Leavis, Morales, Mihajlović,



Shakespeare which I have so far endeavored to recreate. His summary may serve as an apt conclusion of my own argument:

Once universities are sanitized of all pertinent issue of justice, the human heart begins to ossify. We become saturated with abstraction, aimlessly navigating through a sea of incoherent standardized test scores, and rigid curricula, curricula that does not conform to our innate yearnings for existential knowledge and relevance. And when this process takes root moral paralysis prevails (Shaw, 2013).

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## INDEX OF NAMES

### A

Abensour, Miguel 283–286, 289–291, 294–295  
Adams, John 400–401  
Adorno, Theodor 101, 283–285, 324, 337  
Aeshyllus 269–271  
Almansi, Guido 299–300, 313  
Althusser, Louis 244, 282, 285, 294, 308  
Amery, Jean 362–363  
Amis, Martin 143–145  
Arendt, Hannah 207, 231, 318, 320  
Aristotle 251, 257, 260, 273  
Arnold, Methew 138  
Artaud, Antonin 121–122  
Atwood, Margaret 64, 78  
Auden, W. H. 43, 359

### B

Bacon, Francis ( philosopher) 318, 400  
Back-Mors, Susan 358, 380  
Baricco, Alessandro 235–236, 239, 245  
Barthes, Roland 80–82, 90–95, 105, 125, 163, 170, 196, 261, 275  
Baudrillard, Jean 102, 113, 119–120, 181, 197, 235  
Baumann, Zygmunt 124–125  
Beckett, Samuel 298–301, 312  
Bejkon, Frensis ( painter) 207  
Benjamin, Walter 160, 213–214, 231, 284, 323–324

Berger, John 208–209, 212–223, 227–234, 316, 323–325, 337  
Berlin, Isaiah 104–105, 282, 294, 329  
Bettelheim, Bruno 109, 117, 125  
Bhabha, Homi 154–166, 170  
Billington, Michael 299–301, 306–313  
Blake, William 80, 85–86, 108, 125, 241, 274, 334–336, 390  
Boal, Augusto 360, 364–365, 380  
Bogoeva-Sedlar, Ljiljana 120–121, 125, 152, 170  
Bond, Edward 97, 110–111, 125, 140, 142, 146, 249, 257, 269, 275, 278, 294, 344  
Borhes, H. L. 230–231  
Brecht, Bertold 237, 244, 307, 360, 365–366  
Brook, Peter 249, 341–344, 359–360, 365–368, 377–382  
Bruno, Giordano 263, 400  
Buber, Martin 352, 384  
Bourdieu, Pierre 128–132, 139–140, 146

### C

Calvino, Italo 13, 128  
Campbell, Joseph 13  
Camus, Albert 232, 297–303, 306, 312–313, 317, 337  
Césaire, Aimé 150–151, 156, 170, 174, 177–178, 193–194, 197, 303–304, 313, 347, 380  
Chomsky, Noam 100–106, 117, 125, 163, 329

- Churchill, Winston 177  
 Claiborne, Clay 340–342, 345, 350, 370, 378  
 Clausmeier, R. G. 75, 78  
 Coetzee, J. M. 25, 64, 70, 73, 77–78, 99, 109, 113, 341–345, 353–359, 375, 380  
 Collini, Stephen 387–388, 392–394, 401  
 Conrad, Joseph 108–110, 125, 150, 172–176, 180–184, 191–197, 232, 353, 381  
 Cruickshank, John 210, 232, 302–303, 306, 312–313, 317, 337  
 Curtis, Adam 319  
 Čalo, Fran 283
- D
- Darwin, Charles 176  
 Derrida, Jacques 19, 33, 46, 62, 78, 93, 95, 99, 102, 121–122, 125, 157–158, 251, 275  
 Dewey, John 103–104  
 Donne, John 43, 263, 359  
 Dorfman, Ariel 341–344, 359–364, 376, 379–380, 384  
 Držić, Marin 278–294
- E
- Eagleton, Mary 35–36, 58–59, 147  
 Eagleton, Terry 38, 58, 80, 93, 95, 147, 232, 244, 394–395, 401  
 Earl, James W. 15  
 Eco, Umberto 100, 113, 126, 146, 202, 232, 280  
 Eissler, Riane 335, 337, 352  
 Eliade, Mircea 89, 95  
 Eliot, George 390  
 Eliot, T. S. 33, 114, 201, 213–214, 232–234, 341, 344–345, 365, 377, 380–381  
 Empedocles 273  
 Engels, Friedrich 94, 241  
 Esslin, Martin 297, 302, 308–309, 313  
 Euripides 257, 266, 270–272
- F
- Falck, Collin 16, 33  
 Fanon, Franz 154–155, 160–165, 170–171, 191–193, 196  
 Felman, Shoshana 108, 126  
 Ficino, Marsilio 263, 283, 400  
 Fiske, John 120, 126  
 Freire, Paulo 287–288, 293–294  
 French, Philip 237, 245, 401  
 Freud, Sigmund 38–39, 56, 108, 172, 181  
 Friedberg, Lilian 340, 347–348, 351, 381  
 Fromm, Erich 23, 45, 101, 104, 120, 125–126, 181, 252, 269–271, 275, 329  
 Frye, Northrop 33, 80–95, 109, 126  
 Foucault, Michael 102–103, 112–113, 119–120, 157–158, 237, 329, 353  
 Fukuyama, Francis 62, 78, 102, 111–113, 126
- G
- Galeano, Eduardo 94–95  
 Giroux, Henry 198, 340, 352–353, 375, 381  
 Golding, William 345–346, 381–383  
 Gottlieb, Anthony 259–260, 275  
 Graves, Robert 21, 33, 64–66, 73–74, 78, 252, 266, 269, 272, 275, 337

---

INDEX OF NAMES

---

Greenblatt, Stephen 236  
Green, T. H. 104–105  
Grimes, Charles 299, 312–313  
Grotowsky, Jerzy M. 360, 367  
Grubačić, Andrej 278, 281, 294

I

Ibsen, Henrik 123, 210, 307  
Iglton, Teri 143–145, 222, 232  
Irigaray, Luce 35, 59, 252

J

Jameson, Fredric 109, 126, 163–  
164, 170  
Jardine, Alice 36–38  
Jayaprakash, N. D. 151, 170  
Jeremić, Zoran 318–321, 331, 337  
Josipovichi, Gabriel 232, 318  
Josipovići, Gabrijel 318  
Joyce, James 209–211, 220, 223,  
228, 231  
Jung, C. G. 20, 40, 252  
Yeats, W. B. 135, 210

H

Haber, H. F. 102, 107, 126  
Habermas, Jurgen 340, 343, 351,  
381, 384  
Hampton, Christopher 141, 147  
Hamvash, Bela 253, 267, 275–276  
Hartsock, Nancy 106–107  
Heaney, Seamus 29, 34, 64, 69,  
77–78  
Hegel, G. W. H. 241, 341–343,  
354–359, 381, 384  
Heraclitus 256, 262  
Hesiod 254, 269  
Hitler, Adolf 177, 180, 222, 303,  
329, 331, 347, 363

Ho Chi Minh 350  
Hanyok, R. 342  
Hughes, Ted 21, 40, 58, 252  
Humbolt, Wilhelm van 104

K

Kingsolver, Barbara 174, 193,  
196–200  
Knox, John 177  
Korten, David 352, 381  
Kristeva, Julia 36–41, 53, 59  
Kuper, Robert 204–205, 232, 337  
Kuci, Dž. M. 24, 384

L

Lacan, Jacques 26, 38–39, 42, 52,  
56, 60 108  
Leavis, F. R. 63–64, 78, 104, 237–  
239, 243–244, 385–402  
Levi-Strauss, Claude 13, 19, 80–82,  
88–96  
Levin, Harry 254, 275, 289, 294  
Lawrence, D. H. 64, 108, 390  
Lawrence, Philip 156–159, 170  
Leavis, F. R. 63–64, 78, 104, 145,  
237–239, 243–244, 280,  
385–402  
Levinas, Emanuel 352, 384  
Lindquist, Sven 174–180, 198, 347,  
382–383  
Lukacs, Georg 208–210, 214, 232,  
296, 313, 399  
Lumumba, Patrice 193–196  
Luxemburg, Rosa 239  
Lyotard, Jean 100–102, 106

M

Macedo, Donaldo 100–103, 106  
Machiavelli, Niccolo 279, 282–286,  
295, 400

Marcuse, Herbert 64, 101, 104, 107,  
121–122, 126, 232  
Marlowe, Christopher 173–184, 191,  
400  
Marx, Carl 62, 80, 103, 112–114,  
167, 172, 237, 243–244, 271,  
399

McEwen, Ian 147, 246  
McHail, Brian 232, 298  
McLeod, Alastair 61–66, 69–79  
McLuhan, Marshall 22, 100  
Mekhejl, Brajan 208–210, 232  
Mihajlović, Marko 399–400  
Mill, J. S. 103, 392  
Miller, Alice 179–180, 198  
Miller, Arthur 359–360, 382  
Mioshi, Masao 163, 165, 167, 170  
Mitchell, Adrian 28, 34, 334–337,  
367  
Mobutu, Sese Seko 192–195  
Monbiot, Charles 150, 170, 347,  
382  
Morrison, Jim 118, 373–374  
Mor, Tomas 279, 284–286, 289,  
294–295  
Morales, A. L. 351, 382, 396–397,  
400–402  
Müller, Heiner 16, 99, 109, 126

N

Naipaul, V. S. 174, 182–185, 188,  
191–193, 196–199  
Newbolt, Henry 149–152, 309  
Nietzsche, Friedrich 85, 100, 119–  
121, 126–127, 172, 251, 327,  
344–345, 348, 361, 382  
Noble, Scott 319  
Nussbaum, Martha 147–148, 232,  
237, 245, 397–398, 402

O

Oppenheimer, Robert 359–360, 400  
Orwell, George 151, 174  
Osborne, John 153–154, 170, 346, 382  
Ovid 267, 273–275

P

Paglia, Camille 108, 121, 126  
Parmenides 119, 262  
Picasso, Pablo 318  
Pilger, John 150–152, 160, 169,  
171, 299, 304–305, 312–313,  
346–351, 378, 382  
Pinter, Harold 136, 149, 152, 160,  
168–171, 296–314, 326, 337,  
340, 346, 383  
Plato 119, 251–253, 260–264,  
267–277  
Plumwood, Val 252, 261–263, 275  
Propp, Vladimir 81, 92  
Pythagoras 260, 264, 267–268, 273

R

Raja, Masood 185, 199  
Ravenhill, Mark 113–114, 122–127,  
278, 291, 294, 315–316, 337  
Ransom, J.C. 251, 274–276, 306, 313  
Renan, Ernest 177–178  
Rhem, Rush 270, 276, 299–300, 314  
Rich, Adrienne 35–36, 41–59, 212, 233  
Rimbaud, Arthur 179–181, 199,  
265–266, 274  
Roy, Arundhati 233–234, 239, 246  
Rubenstein, R. L. 233, 382  
Rushdie, Salman 16–17, 34, 174,  
192–193, 199, 212  
Russell, Bertrand 103–104, 251,  
254–255, 266–267, 273, 396,  
399

---

INDEX OF NAMES

---

S

Saccarelli, Emanuele 280–281, 294  
Sahay, Amrohini 156–159, 171  
Sax, Oliver 327  
Sarup, Madan 100, 114, 126  
Said, Edward 173–174, 181–182,  
193–194, 197–200  
Sartre, Jean-Paul 236, 298  
Selden, Raman 108, 126, 244–246  
Sellars, Peter 231–233, 338, 401  
Sezer, Eme 200, 222, 233  
Shakespeare, William 41, 64, 69–70,  
108, 142, 167, 231, 241, 263,  
269, 288, 292, 330, 336, 341,  
355, 359, 384, 390, 400–402  
Sheehan, Helen 97, 208–209, 223–  
225, 228, 231–234  
Showalter, Elaine 36–38, 41–42,  
50, 59  
Sinfield, Alan 288, 295  
Skinner, Quentin 104–106, 121, 127  
Smith, Adam 103–104  
Snow, C. P. 385–394, 397–401  
Socrates 259–260, 264, 268–269,  
273  
Sophocles 231, 257, 270  
Spenser, Edmund 263  
Stannard, David 347–349, 382  
Steiner, George 89, 96  
Stevenson, Randall 298, 314  
Suhodolski, Bogdan 286, 295  
Suvin, Darko 235–239, 242–247,  
385, 395, 402

T

Tallis, Raymond 119–120, 127  
Tanner, Tony 22, 34  
Tesich, Steve 86, 96, 151, 316–322,  
326–338

Tešić, Stiv 205–210, 338  
Thompson, E. M. 338, 392  
Tito, J. B. 226, 241, 346  
Trilling, Lionel 92, 104, 107, 127,  
172, 179–181, 199, 233, 237–  
238, 401

V

Vendler, Helen 42, 46, 59  
Vernant, J. P. 257, 269–270, 276  
Vico, Gianbatista 81–83, 90  
Vidal, Gore 346, 349, 383

W

Wilder, C. S. 346, 383  
Williams, Raymond 233, 244, 301,  
314  
Wilson, Edmund 199, 266, 276, 401  
Wordsworth, William 64, 252, 262,  
274





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