

Penumbra

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CRITICAL AND CREATIVE INQUIRY

Penumbra: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Critical and Creative Inquiry

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Penumbra is the official, refereed, scholarly journal of Union Institute & University's Ph.D. Program in Interdisciplinary Studies. The journal is published at regular intervals and dedicated to challenging traditional academic and creative disciplinary boundaries in the context of social change.

Penumbra's purpose is to promote theoretically informed engagements with concrete issues and problems. The journal publishes socially engaged, innovative, creative and critical scholarship with a focus on ethical and political issues in the humanities, public policy, and leadership. *Penumbra* is a peer-edited and peer-reviewed journal committed to spanning the divide between scholarly and creative production, and to fostering work from graduate students, junior scholars and emerging artists, in addition to more established critical and creative voices.



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Editors' Note

ELIZABETH AIOSSA AND JON ROSS

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Penumbra*. It is with pleasure and pride that we roll out what we hope will be a significant contribution to scholarship in the twenty-first century.

In the instantaneousness of our world, the click of a mouse often can drive us apart, filtering the information we digest and personal contacts to only to those who fit within our own concept of a public sphere. Through this publication, we hope to move the arrow just a bit from these trends and practices. *Penumbra*, true to its mission, is interdisciplinary—not just across academic or scholarly silos but across a landscape of perspectives and backgrounds. That is true academic freedom—the pursuit and exchange of ideas and scholarship for their own sake.

As an example of the interdisciplinarity we embrace, please note our extensive interview with Myriam Chancy, a 2012 Scholar-in-Residence at Union Institute & University's Ph.D. Program in Interdisciplinary Studies, the journal's sponsor. Chancy embodies the interdisciplinary approach our journal and the Ph.D. program advance; more importantly, she walks the talk. In the interview, you will see how ably and comfortably she moves across the landscape of fiction, history, politics, creativity, criticism, and culture. Her perspectives set the tone for this issue and its additional contents, making for thoughtful and provocative reading.

Many thanks and much heartfelt appreciation go out to so many who helped create and launch this publication. First, to those who have served in editorial roles, Tiffany Taylor and John Giordano, whom we succeeded, and Jeanne Sutherland and Gariot Louima, associate editors. Also, to all the outstanding faculty and scholars who have served in advisory roles, starting with Christopher Voparil, the faculty advisor, who has been there since the beginning. He, several Ph.D. students who envisioned this journal, and the Program's Task Force have provided guidance and support of immeasurable value.

To all the faculty and students who have reviewed submissions, and those who submitted their work to the journal, thanks go out to you for your

commitment to the journal and what it represents. And we heartily thank the Ph.D. Program's administration that has supported this effort since its inception: Dean Arlene Sacks, Associate Dean Michael Raffanti, Vice President for Academic Affairs Nelson Soto, and Dean Larry Preston.

Our final thanks go out to Toni Gregory, the late associate dean of the Ph.D. program. She was a dogged supporter of our purpose, our mission, and most importantly our scholarly careers. We lost her earlier this year, far too soon; her spirit lives on in these virtual pages. She represented true scholarship from all sides: in her own work, in her teaching and research, and in her advocacy for all of us.

Enjoy this first issue. Please tell us what you think, and share your ideas and input for future issues. And please consider contributing to the journal.

Thank you.

“The Ruse of Analogy”¹: Blackness in Asian American and Disability Studies

HYO K. KIM

Min Hyoung Song recently highlighted a disavowed yet structurally inevitable entanglement between blackness and Asian Americans in U.S. civil society when he noted that Asian Americans are becoming “less of a model whose successes specifically berate blacks and other racial minorities for their lack of resolve and more a kind of, for lack of a better term, super-minority whose successes berate everyone [including the disabled] who fails somehow to succeed” (18). Song’s provocative take on the evolving status of the “model minority” maps what I see as a potentially productive dialogue between Disability studies and the contemporary critique of the concept of an Asian-American model minority.² Also, as Song makes explicit, we should also include in this dialogue the construction of blackness in any discussion of the “model minority” because the term insinuates that there is an antithesis of the “model” and it is safe to say within the Americas that people of African descent have historically and are now under the greatest scrutiny in that category. In this way, Asian Americans’ emergent status as “super-minority” also correlates with what Michelle Alexander has recently diagnosed as the “‘color blind’ public consensus that personal and cultural traits, not structural arrangements, are largely responsible for the fact that the majority of young black men in urban areas across the United States are currently under the control of the criminal justice system or branded as felons for life” (234-5). Broadly put, the aim of the present essay is to foreground how subfields such as Asian American and Disability studies can

¹ I borrow the title “The Ruse of Analogy” from Frank B. Wilderson’s work *Red, White &*

² I hasten to add here that my use of the term “Asian American” is akin to Martin F.

Manalansan’s recent usage, “not [as] a universal panethnic identification ... but rather a product of the creation of and engagement with ‘official’ categories. [It points to the way] people from different ethnic and national groups are constantly engaged with the discursive formation called Asian America” (180) and, I would add, its metonymic variants such as model minority and its other unofficial extensions.

participate, however unwittingly, in deflecting attention from what Alexander calls the “structural arrangements” that contour blackness within U.S. civil society. In doing so, I hope to intervene in the ongoing depoliticization of ethnic/minoritarian studies within higher learning.

The Zero Degree of Sociality of Blackness

To clarify this structural displacement I also draw upon Frank B. Wilderson’s recent intervention entitled *Red, White & Black* (2011). Wilderson’s provocative study maintains that in order for a politics or ethics to become legible within U.S. civil society, it must be based upon an assumptive logic which calibrates all citizens-subjects as *a priori* human, which effectively puts under erasure what Wilderson calls one of the “structural antagonisms” that has historically framed black bodies as potentially, or rather, always already non-human. It is, therefore, only by attending to such “structural antagonisms” (as opposed to a conflict which can be dialectically resolved) that anti-blackness (and in a different way, the antagonism toward the Native American) can be brought into sharp relief not as contingent but gratuitous (i.e. structural) to the formation of U.S. civil society.³ Thus when the concept of the human (or any of its metonymic variation such as personhood) is invoked as the *a priori* condition that subsumes all persons within civil society, it has the effect of displacing and putting under erasure what Wilderson calls the “blackness’s grammar of suffering”—which is structurally bound to the Middle Passage that effectively transformed the African into the fungible object status of the Slave. Therefore, as Wilderson reminds us:

For the Black, freedom is an ontological, rather than experiential, question. There is no philosophically credible way to attach an experiential, a contingent, rider onto the notion of freedom when one considers the Black—such as freedom from gender or economic oppression, the kind of contingent riders rightfully placed on the non-Black when thinking freedom. Rather, the riders that one could place on Black freedom would be hyperbolic—though no less true—and ultimately untenable: freedom from the world,

³ It should be noted that Wilderson includes Native Americans, what he calls the “Red,” as the other defining antagonism that structures U.S. civil society.

freedom from Humanity, freedom from everyone (including one's Black self). (24)

In this, there can be no analogue to "blackness's grammar of suffering," which exceeds the descriptive power of representative language, as it gestures toward the unrepresentable, the zero-degree of sociality which the Slave embodies. Drawing upon the interarticulations between Disability and Asian American studies to illuminate this structural displacement is not as arbitrary as it might seem, as both become legible and ultimately unstable in and around "blackness." This complex entanglement, says Wilderson via Ronald Judy's *(Dis)Forming the American Canon* (1994) that

... the mere presence of the Black and his or her project, albeit adjusted structurally, threatens the fabric of the 'stable' economy by threatening its structure of exchange. 'Not only are the conjunctive operations of discourse of knowledge and power that so define the way in which academic fields get authenticated implicated in the academic instituting of Afro-American studies, but so is the instability entailed in the nature of the academic work.' (40)

As previously mentioned, Wilderson's deployment of the term "antagonism" reflects his understanding that U.S. Civil Society continues to gratuitously position the Black as a being without humanity. According to Wilderson's extension of Judy's study, the disavowal of the "structural antagonism" toward the Black is thus a necessary function that is crucial to not only "instituting of Afro-American studies" but the manner in which such fields as Asian American and Disability studies "get authenticated" within academia. This insight is crucial to understanding how the convergence of Disability and Asian American studies on their assumptive logic of the human unwittingly works to displace "blackness's grammar of suffering" from the political and ethical terrain that contours U.S. civil society.

In other words, the more the Asian American is framed as a "super-minority," capable of transcending through individual effort all kinds of material, cultural, political barriers, the more the subject of liberal politics gains legitimacy. Crucial to this essay is how this liberal model of political and cultural citizenship is constituted as ideally unmarked by either gender or race, let alone disability. Yet as Linda Martín Alcoff reminds us in her timely intervention, not just any body of any race or gender can embody this privileged model of cultural and political citizenship in the U.S.—a fact that

needs reminding in our phantasmatic present that is prone to post-racial imaginings.⁴

Blackness in Disability and Asian American Studies

The prevalence of colorblindness within U.S. civil society is not unrelated to the recent backlash against politics based on identity *tout court*—complaints from liberals and conservatives alike that politics based on social identity is at best philosophically naïve and at worst pathological. Disability studies, however, insists that distancing social identity from the lived embodied experience denies the materiality of the social world. Indeed, one could argue that the critical insight that lived experience is embodied and thereby embedded in the materiality of the social is the *raison d'être* of Disability studies. As Tobin Siebers, one of its leading practitioners observes, “Disability exposes with great force the constraints imposed on bodies by social codes and norms” (174). To wit Disability studies accentuates how for certain bodies, the normative ideal of abstract citizenship is at best contradictory and at worst unethical. This is not to imply that the body is neglected altogether in critical theory. Rather, as Lennard J. Davis observes, the problem lies in the fact that when the body does come to matter theoretically,

[it] is seen as a site of *jouissance*, a native ground of pleasure, the scene of excess that defies reason, that takes dominant culture and its rigid, powerladen vision of the body to task. ... [while neglecting the] body ... that is deformed, maimed, mutilated, broken, diseased. ... [T]he critic [rather] turns to the fluids of sexuality, the gloss of lubrication, the glossary of the body as text, the heteroglossia of the intertext, the glossolalia of the schizophrenic. But almost never the body of the differently abled. (175)⁵

In this, the poststructuralist tendency to read the body as a site of “excess that defies reason”—as a site of epistemological “excess”—works to legitimate the liberal model of cultural and political citizenship, which the universal concept of the “human” subtends. Therefore a politics based on social

⁴ See, Alcoff

⁵ Lest there's room for misunderstanding, I am not suggesting that all work of feminist and African American studies is reducible to celebrating *jouissance* when talking about bodies.

identity or embodied differences such as gender and race is said to not merit serious attention, as it distracts attention from explicitly universal social problems. As such, the present hostility toward politics based on identity *tout court* reflects what is:

In classical liberal political theory, the initial state of the self ... [which is] conceptualized as an abstract individual without, or prior to, group allegiance. [...] As Kant developed this idea, a person who cannot gain critical distance from and thus objectify his or her cultural traditions cannot rationally assess them and thus cannot attain autonomy. In Kant's view, an abstract or disengaged self is for this reason necessary for full personhood. (Alcoff 21-1)

Contrary to this liberal political model of "full personhood" as an ideally disembodied rationality, free of material ties to individual, collective and structural Other, coupled with the tendency in poststructuralist theorizing of the body as a site of excess that defies signification, Disability studies foregrounds embodied reality as theoretically relevant to understanding the self in the world. Not surprisingly, however, such attention to how the self is embodied and embedded in material reality can work against Disability studies. For if the baseline of liberal and conservative critique of politics based on society identity hinges on the ideality of disembodied rationality, the disabled body, which illumines how self and body are ontologically and epistemologically imbricated becomes aligned with the absence of "full personhood." In other words, if the mature Kantian political subject is able to achieve autonomy by objectifying his/her material ties to culture, society and history, by foregrounding the nexus between self and body the disabled subjectivity can potentially serve as a metonym for a compromised form of transcendence. Siebers underscores precisely this attendant theoretical and political danger when Disability studies touches upon how the body matters to the self:

Rather than objectifying their body as the other, people with disabilities often work to identify with it, for only a knowledge of their body will decrease pain and permit them to function in society. Unfortunately, this notion of the body as self has been held against people with disabilities. It is represented in the psychological literature as a form of pathological

narcissism, with the result that they are represented as mentally unfit in addition to being physically unfit. (182)

Following this logic to its contradictory conclusion, the disabled subject can achieve “full,” that is equal status as person/citizen, only if he or she is able to objectify the very material (corporeal, visible or otherwise) condition that renders his or her disability socially meaningful.

It is through this tension that I read Davis’s call for an end to identity politics *tout court*. For example, in “The End of Identity Politics and the Beginning of Dismodernism: On Disability as an Unstable Category,” Davis supports a dismodernist politics based on what he calls a “new kind of universalism and cosmopolitanism that is reacting to the localization of identity” (239). As the title of his essay announces, Davis suggests “disability” as an identificatory “category” that cannot hold, and so rather than clinging to an outmoded modernist notion of the subject as complete and independent, he calls for a dismodernism which “[is] a new way of thinking [that] rests on the operative notion that postmodernism is still based on a humanistic model” (240). Though I agree with Davis that the essentialization of identity should be challenged, there is a strong sense in his reasoning that the historical-cultural (i.e. broad spectrum of material) specificity derived from the *localization* of social identity (serves as an obstacle to the achievement of his “new cosmopolitanism,” which unexpectedly intersects with Siebers’s description of how Disability studies is routinely accused of engaging in “pathological narcissism.” As Davis insists, “[t]he problem presented to us by identity politics is the emphasis on an exclusivity (i.e. “localization”) surrounding a specific so-called identity. [...] Disability studies can provide a critique of and a politics to discuss how all groups, based on physical traits or markings, are selected for disablement by a large system of regulation and signification” (240). Though Davis’s overarching goal of unsettling essentialist notions of identity is to be commended (as such dismantling is crucial to building broad coalitions across differing social identities), to theorize the body (and by extension “wounds”) in universal and cosmopolitan terms can lead to what Disability studies cannot afford. Notice below how his critique of politics based on identity *tout court* forces his argument to swerve toward the erasure of crucial material differences, the cultural and historical specificities that obtain in and around the body, and I would argue, suffering:

Politics have been directed toward making all identities equal under the model of rights of the dominant, often white, male, 'normal' subject. In a dismodernist mode, the ideal is not a hypostatization of the normal (that is, dominant) subject, but aims to create a new category based on the partial, incomplete subject whose realization is not autonomy and independence but dependence and interdependence. This is a very different notion from subjectivity organized around wounded identities; rather, all humans are seen as wounded. (240-1)

The problematic model of civil society as constituent of undifferentiated humans aside (a point to which I will return later), Davis's critique of identity works to consolidate the idea of liberal political subject that is ideally unmarked by embodied difference such as race and gender. According to Chris Bell, it is precisely such flattening of racial difference in Disability studies that helps to authorize uncritical analogies such as: "Being disabled is just like being black ... " (277). Bell's critique of Disability studies is far-reaching in its consequences not simply because it points to the structural and ontological differences between being "disabled" and being Black in the U.S., but because it undercuts the assumptive logic that universalizes the concept of the "human" itself, without which civil society would be bereft of its moral/ethical coherence.

For what Bell takes issue with is the tendency in Disability studies to displace race as a social factor that impinges in the materialization of identities in contemporary United States. Put otherwise, an effect made evident in and through Davis's call for a dismodernist/cosmopolitan ethics is the displacement, if not making light, of cultural (historical) particularity. Indeed, recognizing that race and by extension gender are mere fictions of social construction does not, for example, contradict Manalansan's insight that: "While race is established through numerous institutional, cultural, quotidian practices, in all of these arenas the racialized subject's body filters, absorbs, and deflects various interpolating forces and practices" (182). In this, the corporeality of the body (and not simply its metaphorical substitute) is imbricated in production of racialized meanings. Crucial here is how Bell's and Manalansan's attempts to illumine embodied realities do not necessarily result in the production of reified, transcendent forms of knowledge. Yet by attending to how blackness structurally differentiates the disabled body, Bell's critique does localize the disabled body vis-à-vis the social, frustrating, no matter how well intended, Davis's search for the universal or more

precisely, a point of analogy. Upon closer observation, Davis's desire for the cosmopolitan body—the universally “wounded” body that resists localization enables the return of what he fears—the able-bodied white male subject as the proxy for normalcy. Incidentally, in a slightly different but nevertheless relevant context, Julia Kristeva's ethico-political orientation toward the “stranger” has come under similar criticism. As Sara Ahmed queries, does not the model of “call[ing] ourselves (i.e. all human subjects) strangers ... perform the gesture of killing the strangers it simultaneously creates, by rendering them universal: [as] a new community of the ‘we’ is implicitly created. If we are all strangers (to ourselves), then nobody is” (73).⁶ Or in Bell's more scathing critique: “Far from excluding people of color, White Disability Studies treats people of color as if they were white people, as if there are no critical exigencies involved in being people of color that might necessitate these individuals understanding and negotiating disability in a different way from their white counterparts” (282). Though Bell does not go on to explore what specific “critical exigencies” differentiate how “people of color” embody disability or suffering, it is clear from his critique that he intuitively discerns a certain “grammar” to suffering which Davis's “Dismodernism” cannot accommodate.

For instance, what at first glance seems merely naïve—that is the observation that in the U.S. “[b]eing disabled is just like being black”—actually does index how disability cannot be synonymous with Whiteness. For what is suggested through the forced parity between the construction of blackness and disability is that the disabled body or mind cannot properly embody Whiteness *in toto*. And that is what Anna Stubblefield demonstrates in “‘Beyond the Pale’: Tainted Whiteness, Cognitive Disability and Eugenic Sterilization,” which iterates how disabled white persons have historically been categorized as embodying a tainted form of whiteness. She convincingly argues that beginning from the 1800s in the U.S. those who were considered feeble-minded, a form of cognitive disability, lost the full privileges attendant with white citizenship. As she writes, “... to grasp feeble-mindedness fully as a signifier of tainted whiteness, it is important to understand that the state-sponsored, involuntary sterilization of tainted whites meant that they had, in effect, *lost* the full protection that whiteness conferred in a white supremacist society” (178; emphasis added). Not only did the so-called feeble-minded whites come to embody a

⁶ See Ahmed.

compromised form of whiteness but also the “ ... white men [and women] labeled as criminal, sexually deviate, homosexual, ... or insane ... ” (Stubblefield 178).

What Stubblefield emphasizes is that disability as a social construct cannot easily be detached from its imbricated positioning within a network of material forces that include not only race but sexuality, class, and gender. Her study foregrounds the need for Disability studies to attend to racialization as not a tangential focus but central to its overall theoretical and political project. Interestingly Stubblefield’s study of how disability can dispossess whites of their “full personhood” under U.S. law seemingly lends support to what “Dismodernism” authorizes, which is the idea that the suffering of blacks can be made equivalent to not only what disabled whites come to embody but also to all those other Others represented under the category of “people of color.” In short, disability has the potential to democratize civil society by recalling how all citizens are common in their humanity—that is, equally exposed to disability. Yet, if we read between the lines of Stubblefield’s summary of how “feeble-minded whites” can become “tainted,” the singularity of “blackness’s grammar of suffering” emerges. For what distinguishes “blackness grammar of suffering” is how it does not operate according to the assumptive logic of capability. In other words, to approach “blackness’s grammar of suffering,” Wilderson insists that one must be able to imagine “an ethicality ... so terrifying that, as a space to be inhabited and terror to be embraced” (41), it resists language. It is a “grammar of suffering” based not upon the logic of a “lost” capacity but that of a deontologized property, the Slave that is not “exploited and alienated” but rather “accumulated and fungible.” The effect of this singular grammar on Asian American and Disability studies is significant, but the impact of Wilderson’s critique on the “scholarly and aesthetic production” of the “Black theorist” is radical by comparison. As he writes:

This [“blackness’s grammar suffering”] makes the labor of disavowal in Black scholarly and aesthetic production doubly burdensome, for it is triggered by a dread of both being ‘discovered,’ and of discovering oneself, as ontological incapacity. Thus, through borrowed institutionality—the feigned capacity to be essentially exploited and alienated (rather than accumulated and fungible) in the first ontological instance (in other words, a fantasy to be just like everyone else, which is a fantasy to *be*)—the work of Black film theory

[and by extension Black studies] operates through a myriad of compensatory gestures in which the Black theorists assumes subjective capacity to be universal and thus ‘finds’ it everywhere. (42)

Placed within the frame of “blackness’s grammar of suffering,” I want to examine the consequences of Davis’s attempt to render disability cosmopolitan. While the move has the virtual effect of equalizing all bodies around human capacity to suffer—such an ethical cum political strategy requires the disavowal of how concepts such as “human” and “civil society” in the U.S. have structurally depended on the production of social death, i.e. the Black (and the Red). As it should be obvious by now, what is therefore unthinkable in Davis’s attempt to make civil society cohere around the universality of human suffering is the contingent nature of the term human itself. This in fact is what Bells intuits but cannot name in his influential essay entitled “Introducing White Disability Studies: A Modest Proposal.” Bell’s hesitation is partly attributable to how pain or suffering is both social (that is communicable, sharable by all humans in equal measure) and incommunicable within Disability studies. That is, Disability studies’ uneven attention to the incommunicability of suffering is seemingly capable of accommodating the unrepresentability that is constituent of “blackness’s grammar of suffering.” As Siebers insists, “[i]ndividuality derived from the incommunicability of pain easily enforces a myth of hyperindividuality, a sense that each individual is locked in solitary confinement where suffering is the only object of contemplation. People with disabilities are already too politically isolated for this myth to be attractive” (176). Yet in an attempt to intervene in the poststructuralist tendency to idealize “physical pain” as site of either transcendent power or pleasure, Siebers also adds, “... [p]hysical pain is [at once] highly individualistic, unpredictable, and raw as reality. Pain is not a resource of political change. It is not a well of delight for the individual” (178). What is directly pertinent to the present essay is how the universal figure of the “individual”- human marks the critical horizon of Disability theory. Or, to put a finer point to it via Widerson’s reading of Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Mask*, “... the Negro ... ‘is comparison,’ nothing more and certainly nothing less, for what is less than comparison? ... [And as such] ‘No one knows yet who [the Negro] is, but he knows that fear will fill the world when the world finds out’” (42).

We find in the most sophisticated Asian Americanist deployment of poststructuralist strategies of reading—such as the one advanced in the

influential work by Kandice Chuh—a similar call to abandon politics based on social identity.⁷ While I am in agreement with both Davis’s and Chuh’s overarching critique of uniform identity, I find troubling their wholesale critique of all identity formation as *a priori* essentialist. For such framing of social identity as necessarily restrictive can only lead to the return of the repressed in our present era of colorblindness—the ideal of abstract citizenship. As she writes: “‘Asian American’ ... connotes the violence, exclusion, dislocation, and disenfranchisement that has attended the codification of certain bodies as variously, Oriental, yellow, sometimes brown, inscrutable, devious, always alien. It speaks to the active denial of personhood to the individuals inhabiting those bodies” (Chuh 27). In this, Chuh—along with Davis and Siebers—unwittingly announces the displacement and the erasure of “blackness’s grammar of suffering,” as their strategies of reading the presence or absence of justice within U.S. civil society is predicated upon exploitation and alienation of the *a priori* human subject.

Nevertheless, by embodying the self—Disability studies helps to shift (though only slightly) critical theory toward an alternative ethicality that does not programmatically endorse the idea and ideals of abstract citizenship. For contrary to the liberal model of the political subject that achieves “hyperindividuality” through social and material detachment, the alternative model of subjectivity that is afforded through the disabled body is a self that is always already in the process of negotiating complex relations to the materiality of the social. Thus, the embodied model of subjectivity helps to re-imagine “personhood” as relation itself, leading not to the reification or essentialization of self, this relational model of subjectivity demands that any identity whatsoever be thought not as autonomous substance but rather as a site, comprising of unfinished, mobile, heterogeneously constituted relations across an embodied hermeneutic horizon. It bears mentioning here that it is this interconnected and radically open vision of “personhood” as relation that is foreclosed in the liberal model of abstract citizenship. For in the liberal model of the self, the ideal is to attain singular indeterminacy through the negation of such social relations, without which no self can hope to attain intelligibility. As Alcoff’s important work suggests:

⁷ See Chuh.

Social identities ... are more properly understood as sites from which we perceive, act, and engage with others. These sites are not simply locations or positions, but also hermeneutic horizons comprised of experiences, basic beliefs, and communal values [...] . We are not boxed in by them, constrained, restricted, or held captive—unless ... it makes sense to say that we are boxed in by the fact that we have bodies (287)

Interestingly it is by attending to how the self is embodied and embedded in social reality that clarifies the radical singularity of the Black's structural *non*-relationality, which in turn helps to bring into focus not only what Wilderson calls the "structural antagonisms" that contour U.S. civil society but also unexplored ethico-political limits and possibilities of sub-fields such as Disability and Asian American studies. For according to Wilderson's *Red, White & Black* what gives internal coherence to such terms as "human" and "civil society" in the U.S. is the disavowal of the structural (historical) relation blacks have with what is essentially non-human, a form of social death known as slavery. As he summarizes:

During the emergence of new ontological relations in the modern world, from the late Middle Ages through the 1500s, many different kinds of people experienced slavery. ... But African, or more precisely *Blackness*, refers to an individual who is by definition always already void of relationality. Thus modernity marks the emergence of a new ontology because it is an era in which an entire race appears, people who, a priori, that is prior to the contingency of the 'transgressive act' (such as losing a war or being convicted of a crime), stand as socially dead in relation to the rest of the world. (17-8)

Wilderson's intervention therefore hinges on isolating and exposing this dual operation by which civil society makes sense of itself to itself—the simultaneous disavowal of and parasitic dependency on the Black. In other words, the desire to make blackness an analogue of disability amounts to denying the structural relevancy of slavery to the formation of U.S. civil society. Wilderson's reading of Fanon helps to articulate the radical singularity of "blackness's grammar of suffering," as it emphasizes how "... the gratuitous violence of the Black's first ontological instance, the Middle Passage, 'wiped out [his or her] metaphysics ... his [or her] customs and

sources on which they are based.’ Jews went into Auschwitz and came out as Jews. Africans went into the ships and came out as Blacks” (38). What Wilderson calls the “blackness’s grammar of suffering,” consequently, has no analogue in either the assumptive figure of the “individual” that subtends Disability studies and those other Others within U.S. civil society that have become included within the frame known as “people of color.” In this, “blackness’s grammar of suffering” gestures toward what is unnamable, a form of suffering that is in excess of any ethical language which is based upon the universal figure of the human. This is how Wilderson radically undermines the desire to transpose “blackness’s grammar of suffering” into the ethico-political language upon which civil society’s depends to make suffering (physical, psychic or otherwise) intelligible. As he writes:

The ruse of analogy erroneously locates Blacks in the world—a place where they have not been since the dawn of Blackness. This attempt to position the Black in the world by way of analogy is not only a mystification, and often erasure, of Blackness’s grammar of suffering (accumulation and fungibility or the status of being non-Human) but simultaneously also a provision for civil society, promising an enabling modality for Human ethical dilemmas. It is a mystification and an erasure because ... their grammars of suffering are irreconcilable. (37)

Such is the logic that animates Bell’s critique of Disability studies but it does not, cannot obtain the force of Wilderson’s intervention because Bell cannot or dare not disarticulate the Black from the world. Nevertheless both Wilderson and Bell help foreground the important fact that even suffering obtains a “grammar,” that is, has a way of indexing—whether positively in the form of identification or negatively through dis- or even through non-identification, the presence or absence of a world. What Bell’s and especially Wilderson’s critique bring into sharp relief is that anti-blackness is part and parcel of the episteme that gives internal coherence to U.S. civil society. To approach “blackness’s grammar suffering” is therefore to contemplate, albeit always indirectly, not the paradigm of disability which is always already predicated on agency but a radical non-capacity.

Wilderson’s illumination of how the “antagonism” that obtains around blackness is structural to the formation of U.S. civil society has the effect of clarifying the positioning of sub-fields such as Disability and Asian

American studies, especially when their protocols aim toward establishing some form of political justice based upon “exploitation and alienation,” which is at odds with “blackness’s grammar of suffering.” As previously mentioned, Wilderson draws a sharp distinction between “conflict” and “antagonism.” And this is key, as it is only when anti-blackness is positioned as an “antagonism” that the residual and structural effects of the Slave (the non-human) can be allowed to erupt into the living present of U.S. civil society. As such, though by comparison far more optimistic than Wilderson’s study, Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow* (2010) gives powerful evidence to Wilderson’s theory of the “structural antagonisms” that contour U.S. civil society. This is how a critical theory based upon advancing a colorblind world or an ethicality based upon the universal human effectively silences the suffering of the Black. As Alexander argues:

Far from being a worthy goal ... colorblindness has proved catastrophic for African Americans. It is not an overstatement to say that the systematic mass incarceration of people of color in the United States would not have been possible in the post-civil rights era if the nation had not fallen under the spell of a callous colorblindness. ... Saying that one does not care about race is offered as an exculpatory virtue, when in fact it can be a form of cruelty. ... Our blindness also prevents us from seeing the racial and structural divisions that persist in society: the segregated, unequal schools, the segregated, jobless ghettos, and the segregated public discourse—a public conversation that excludes the current pariah of caste [the incarcerated black males in U.S. civil society]. (228)

In this, Wilderson’s *Red, White, & Black* and Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow* bring into sharp focus why the framing of blackness within U.S. civil society cannot do without the ruse of analogy which effectively puts under erasure a “... violence which turns a body into flesh, ripped apart literally and imaginatively, destroy[ing] the possibility of ontology because it positions the Black in an infinite and indeterminately horrifying and open vulnerability, an object made available (which is to say fungible) for any subject” (Wilderson, 38). Put otherwise, this “violence” which is in excess of that ideologically saturated term called Humanity demands the infinitely difficult yet necessary encountering with what gives U.S. civil society the simulacrum of ethical and political decency.

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A Poetic Politics of Place: Desire and Dwelling in the Works of Jimmy Santiago Baca and Terry Tempest Williams

CHERYL CHAFFIN

Jimmy Santiago Baca and Terry Tempest Williams exemplify in their poems and prose the desire of humans to merge with the natural world that they inhabit. Place gets made, in part, through poetic response, a response of the body, mind, and heart to environment. It is important that each of these writers chooses to experience place in ways unique to them and to their own distinct autobiographies. Their lives as they have lived them in specific places—for Baca the Black Mesa of Southern Albuquerque in New Mexico and for Williams the red rock lands of Utah—emerge in their work as desire for place as a way of knowing and, too, as acknowledgment of the mystery that is life. The works of these writers reflect a desire to reconceptualize our notions of place through engaged experience and overcoming separation as fear to create new ways of being in relationship with culture, the body, and memory. Baca's and Williams' work exemplifies radical notions of place as a poetic politics of thinking and being based on relationality. Several thinkers offer unique ways of conceptualizing these authors' works: the history of place rendered by Edward Casey in his intellectual history of place in *The Fate of Place*; French feminist theory that contests reality dictated by normative thought, particularly the work of Hélène Cixous on writing from the body; and bell hooks' critical work on the need for an evolving aesthetics that reflects the lives of people of color.

Baca's and Williams' writings reveal an intimate relationship with place and its life forms as a politics of dwelling and attending to environments in unique and idiosyncratic ways. The writer divulges this relationship to the reader, adding depth and acuity to understanding the relations she shares with earth, with others, and with herself. The definition of place becomes multiple selves in relationship, rather than a single self that lacks dynamism. These various selves the writers experience in relation to and their openness to multiplicity allows all forms of life as potential lovers.

Simone de Beauvoir, addressing women and creativity, asserts that truly great works “are those which contest the world in its entirety” (*French Feminists* 28). Of course, she argued when she gave her lecture in Japan in 1966 that the works of women had not yet contested the world, largely because women had not had the education and opportunity, let alone place and position, to contest the world created by men. Baca and Williams contribute to a tradition rapidly evolving of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, one which makes its central purpose not only contestation of the world as we’ve known and inherited it (in de Beauvoir’s case through gender), but new understandings of what it means to know and be in place-world. Baca gives us poems of grief and forgiveness in coming to terms with familial, cultural, and personal loss as a man of color. Williams’ work creates elemental explorations of body in relation to Utah’s desert. Utah also represents the region where her family and community have been exposed to atomic weapons testing by the United States government in the second half of the twentieth century. Her sensual connection with the earth in *Desert Quartet* becomes a means of renewal from the loss of health and community due to the testing. As we engage the work of these authors, we expand the ways in which we receive and engage place-world as it presents itself to us and we offer ourselves to it, knowing that it will change us and that the places we love and respect are in constant flux.

Tom Lynch describes Jimmy Santiago Baca as “one of America’s great bioregional poets” (*EJR* 257). In his poems Baca becomes the earth of his people. The poet’s mother abandoned him and his two siblings when he was seven years old. She left her family to live with a white man. After Baca’s release from Florence State Prison at the age of twenty-five he became reacquainted with his mother. Shortly thereafter, his mother’s husband murdered her. “Then he shot you and himself,” Baca writes in one of his poems (*Mesa* 28). Lynch asserts that mother abandonment has been for Baca an uprooting. He writes to his mother in his semi-autobiographical poem “Martín”: “Your departure uprooted me mother/hollowed core of child/your absence whittled down/to a broken doll/in a barn loft. The small burned area of memory/where your face is supposed to be/moons’ rings pass through/in broken chain of events/in my dreams” (Baca, *Meditations* 14). Mother memory haunts Baca, as does father-brother-sister-family memory. The adjectives and verbs he chooses in this passage—hollowed, whittled, broken, burned (two times)—address specifically the hole of mother absence and convey violent homelessness at the root of abandonment. The sense of being

torn from home and the hole it leaves is for Baca embodied in the loss of his physical mother and the emotional support she might have offered him, but given her own limitations of culture, time, and place, did not.

In Baca's passionate poems, he asserts the need for merging, a burning desire for possession by the earth, by another, and of himself. He wants to be known and to know totally. This knowing seems improbable, if not impossible. However much we long for total understanding by and from another, that knowing somehow eludes our grasp. He returns again and again to poetry to find this knowing within himself and his life in relationship to others through language. In "Who Understands Me But Me" he writes of learning to live with himself, his limitations and beauty, even while imprisoned and mistreated by guards. "I practice being myself/and I have found parts of myself never dreamed of by me" (Baca, *Immigrants* 84). It is this multiplicity of selves he engages and inhabits and comes to love. He finds his own best company within his fallible and injured body. That love arrives in total acceptance of all that he has incurred; following the signs like an old tracker into himself "deeper into dangerous regions" he finds so many parts of himself. He is not alone. He can live with himself now (*Immigrants* 84).

Baca becomes a place *for* himself and *to* himself. It is clear in reading his work that if the poet had not discovered that he himself was a place, he would not have survived time in prison. I believe that Baca in some of his poems enacts what feminist theorist and writer Hélène Cixous critically describes as coming to writing in physical movement toward the desired thing. The body serves as a means to writing. It carries us toward what we want and love. Writing is not an occurrence that happens outside the body. Writing is desire expressed through the body. We contain all histories and geographies, a vastness of being within ourselves: "Search yourself, seek out the shattered, the multiple I, that you will be still further on, and emerge from one self, shed the old body" (Cixous 41). Cixous's thought in the tradition of French feminism has been influenced by Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, which posits a splitting of self when the child sees his mirror reflection. Cixous further urges shedding the Law, which Lacan postulates as the father's rule, or perhaps in metaphoric terms, the past itself. Baca sheds neither the old body nor his past. Neither is his desire to shed Law, as Lacanian thought asserts is first established by the parent in the role of father. He works these elemental influences in his poetry but does not abandon them. Baca integrates a sense of himself as a child, a growing man, a

(sometimes nearly dead) wounded prisoner, and a flourishing poet as a dynamic process grounded in the present. In poetic utterances, cries for love, and expressions of grief, language allows Baca to create himself without separation from and abandonment of that which has created him. In the poems exists the palpable presence/absence of family, home, and community steeped in place and located in time.

What emerges in Baca's poems is a living autobiography of the complex development of a consciousness in relation to self, others, and the material-sensual world. The combination of these relations forms Baca's response to place. His poems are songs, inspired by poets like Pablo Neruda, Federico Garcia Lorca, lengthy, breathless improvisations of jazz, and the insatiable desire to experience union with all living things. He sings his amazement in existence, captured in the most incongruous of pairings, such as when he writes in his collection of river poems: "I catch glimpses of eternity sometimes in stray dogs" (Baca, *Winter* 18). Simultaneously, he pushes away in hatred those who have betrayed him. The repulsion is complex. He refutes betrayals that he has experienced in the form of racism, violence, alcoholism, bureaucratic and corporate corruption, and "amenity migrants" (qtd. in Lynch 260) to his Southwestern homelands. He also insists on closeness to suffering as embodied knowledge as he makes these betrayals the subject of his poems.

Like Baca, the semi-autobiographical character Martín lives for a time in an orphanage after his mother runs away with her lover and his father disappears into a vagabond life of alcohol. There were times in his childhood and in prison that through dream and visualization Baca was able to transport himself above or away from embodiment. In one poem Martín leaves his body while lying on a cot in a Catholic orphanage. "I dreamed my spirit was straw and mud/a pit dug down below my flesh/to pray in/and I prayed on beads of blue corn kernels/slipped from thumb to earth/while deerskin drumhead of my heart/gently pounded and I sang/ all earth is holy" (Baca, *Martín* 17). Baca reaches back through lines of ancestors to the earth. In his willingness to inhabit a past that lives in the narrative present of his body, he forges bonds with his Mexican and Apache ancestors. This transfiguration opens Baca to a different consciousness, as expressed in an interview with Bill Moyers, to "see the reality behind the reality" (Baca, "*Swirl Like a Leaf*"). In Baca's work place is earth, *acequía*, leafy cottonwood, deerskin, and blue corn kernel. He finds place when he sets foot to ground. When absente from the things he loves—land, culture, mother, family—he

discovers place as prayer, body-memory, heart-rhythm-beating-song that allows him to recall what matters and who he is in the present because of the past.

What are the philosophical underpinnings to our considerations of place in our contemporary experience? Immanuel Kant first spoke to the body as a locus of perception. His thinking later gave way to phenomenology, pursued by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and Bachelard, thinkers who considered space local to the body and experienced intimately in daily life and in one's sensate knowing of the material world. In *Being and Time* Heidegger leaves behind an early interest in region to consider dwelling as an act of nearness. This helps him locate place not only in the physical world but as an indwelling, so that place becomes infused with interiority. Nearing is an activity of drawing close, in physical proximity as well as in perception, body, and mind. Dwelling or inhabiting is residing in the nearness of things. Is this, then, an aesthetic as an intimacy with experience? One dwells not only with things but with feelings, senses, and the presences of others. Heidegger's reflections posit a rehabilitation of space, making it place-world and intimate. There are no monovalent definitions in this way of considering being in the world. He writes: "We always go through spaces in such a way that we already experience them by staying constantly with near and remote locations and things" (qtd. in Casey 276).

Forced migration, poverty, racism, and family separation characterizes place in a postmodern age. What are the ways that we experience displacement and replacement? The destruction of place through warfare, which includes racism, poverty, and violence, induces forced migration and creates homelessness, years of living in squalid camps or living in exile away from the origin of birth, culture, and family. Common to modern life is the presence of those without shelter, living on the streets, in the dumps, and under the highways of the world. Globalized industry and transported popular culture erases local, regional, and even national practices and identities. The places that cultures need to thrive dissolve under the pressure of corporate and/or governmental interests. Finally, and this list is not exhaustive, there is a growing sameness (cultural, visual, experiential, material) of the world's cities under the pressure of globalization. Casey makes an argument for the vitality of place in the midst of these nonarbitrary conditions of modernity that impose sameness as uniformity. "An active desire for the particularity of place—for what is truly 'local' or 'regional'—is aroused by such increasingly common experiences. Place brings with it the

very elements sheared off in the planiformity of site: identity, character, nuance, history” (Casey, *Fate* xiii).

Baca has experienced such displacement and his writing becomes an effort to create for himself, mostly through poems but also in stories, memoir, and film, a renewed relationship to his native New Mexican land. He finds himself in cities—Albuquerque, San Diego, and Los Angeles, often homeless or situated in temporary housing and vulnerable to police harassment. Baca reminds us that lived experience of place—physically, in memory, and as expressed through language—allows intimacy with the body. Place fosters nearness to the *thingness* of multitudinous environments. It connects us, beyond site and sight, to that which gives us meaning and value in the world. When place is insufferable, it lets us occupy our experience. Place helps us determine what is real, if the ability to discriminate remains through suffering and deprivation, and to decipher what’s happening and where we are.

In his later *Winter Poems Along the Rio Grande* (2004), Baca records the river as a teacher, one that shapes the character of the lands of his origin. “The river has taught me/patience—a year I’ve stood every day to watch it,/pray to it that I connect my present moment/to my origins as it does,/that I am connected now/to my beginnings as it is” (Baca, *Winter* 13). Place, here as river, allows his loves and accepts his despair. Returning to place as a ritual of solace and wisdom provides a vital form of nourishment for life and resistance to nihilism. The river is the dwelling, the thingness and nearness for Baca, to which Heidegger refers in his thoughts on place. Baca’s relationship with the New Mexican earth fuels his desire to enact rituals that connect him with his people, his culture, and the historic longing he has carried in an effort to return to true things. These later poems, written nearly thirty years after his release from prison, are untitled and numbered as a series of autobiographical vignettes. They are prayers of a man in gratitude to life and its sensual offerings, particularly as those sensualities arise in place:

over to the coffee shop to pick up
my latter with soy milk and two brown sugars,
and while my corn meal coagulates on the stove
and my garlic head is roasting,
I compose this poem, to my friend,
celebrating the small things—garlic, oatmeal, coffee,
soy, music, sage, prayers, friendship, laughter,

setting off on this day
prepared to honor the flame in each of us. (Baca, *Winter* 80)

In bell hooks' *Belonging*, a collection of essays in which she explores living a culture of place, she writes of creating a black aesthetic that emerges from black culture and relationships to the earth. She suggests that people of color must reconceptualize beauty as an aesthetic inclusive of their experience. She shares a conversation with her sister upon a return to her native Kentucky in which she learns "to think about blackness in a new way. We think about our skin as a dark room, a place of shadows. We talk often about color politics and the ways racism has created an aesthetic that wounds us, a way of thinking about beauty that hurts... In that space of shadows we long for an aesthetics of blackness—strange and oppositional" (hooks, *Belonging* 134). Reading her recommendation for an aesthetic of color and culture, I am reminded of Baca's separation from his Mexican and Apache (*mestizo*) culture. In his memoir *A Place to Stand*, he awakens to the damaging impact of split from his culture when he meets Chelo in prison. He describes Chelo, whose body is covered in tattoos, as connected to his Aztec ancestry. He sees the man's tattoos as written testament to culture, "a walking library" (Baca, *Place* 223). Others perceive criminality and rebellion in his tattoos, but Chelo shares a perception of beauty new to Baca. "I wear my culture on my skin. They want to make me forget who I am, the beauty of my people and my heritage, but to do it they got to peel my skin off" (223). Chelo *is* the art, the aesthetic of his people. He wears the stories of his ancestral lineage on his skin. Chelo's courage and love returns Baca to his own memories that eventually manifest in poems and autobiographical writings that culminate in an aesthetic of his Chicano culture. The bio-regionality that Lynch detects in Baca's poetry exists in the centrality of rituals, journeys, and social situations that infuse his poems with the nearness and *thingness* of culture lived and known in a particular place.

Baca's poetic renderings of desire and memory connected with the past evoke those he has loved and lost. He experiences the earth as salve and nourishing parent. Terry Tempest Williams, on the other hand, experiments in *Desert Quartet* with sensuality in relation to the earth's elemental forms: earth, water, fire, air. In the Utah desert, Williams opens to elements that inhabit, please, and pleasure her. She has written often about the damage of places due to human interference and thoughtless action, and, in this vein, *Desert Quartet* represents an effort to know the land and its life in renewed and life-sustaining ways. Though she does not necessarily recommend an

erotics of place to others, as a philosophy or lived system of thought (the risks of such eroticism in open, wild lands are evident to most readers, as they are to her), we can travel with her, sensing her attitude of experimentation. “I dissolve. I am water. Only my face is exposed like an apparition over ripples. Playing with water. Do I dare? My legs open. The rushing water turns my body and touches me with a fast finger that does not tire. I receive without apology. Time. Nothing to rush, only to feel” (Williams, *Desert* 23). On one trail, within sandstone walls that rise sharply on either side of her, Williams feels her chest and back “in a vise of geologic time” (8). She must surrender in order to experience sensually the structures of rock. With that surrender she finds breath as arousal, a relationship with rock of giving and receiving so that “there is no partition between my body and the body of Earth” (10).

The possibilities of the erotic and of sensuality expand in Williams’ literal and figurative explorations of intimacy with all material forms. In interviews the author speaks to the influence of French feminists on her work, particularly Cixous’s injunction to write out of the body. In *Desert Quartet* her erotic experimentation evokes the mystery of female embodiment. Williams believes that thinking and relating constitute erotic activity. The editor of *A Voice in the Wilderness: Conversations with Terry Tempest Williams*, Michael Austin, notes: “For her, wildness represents a force that is at once restorative, transgressive, erotic, playful, and deeply intuitive—terms that French feminist theory applies to the feminine body and to the art that flows from it” (Austin 5). Williams, for example, compares thought to a river because “rivers inevitably follow their own path, and that channel may change from day to day...even though the property of water remains consistent, life sustaining, fierce, and compassionate, at once” (qtd. in Austin 5). In *Desert Quartet* we can experience her physical contact with the earth as a way of thinking and relating that offers a connected way of being with the place-world in ourselves.

Williams commits a feminist act of non-reservation in her willfulness to open to the desert. Luce Irigaray in “Sexual Difference” imagines that immanence and transcendence might be recast by the female sex. An opening comes in the mystery of female identity, of its self-contemplation, of that strange world of silence (Irigaray, *Feminists* 128). She wonders “is there not still something held in reserve within the silence of female history: an energy, morphology, growth or blossoming still to come from the female realm? Such a flowering keeps the future open. The world

remains uncertain in the fact of this strange advent" (129). It is this flowering that Williams embodies in the desert as she explores physical and sensual contact with the earth as a means of knowing. She has shared that this contact is not expletive, but one undertaken in a manner of reciprocity. The idea is that the body is not just a receptacle of and for the elements, but that we are made of the earth, elemental in our very composition (water, fire, air, and dust). How we approach another—rock, river, flame, lover—creates a space of intention and possibility in our relating. Irigaray writes that desire is a tending toward. It exists in the intervals, the gaps, and requires "a sense of attraction: a change in the interval or the relations of nearness or distance between subject and object" (120). Rather than one subject moving toward or away from, *both* subjects move toward and away from each another. This, I believe, is the kind of reciprocity in which Williams engages the desert elements. Irigaray draws upon Heidegger's idea of nearness as specified in place and induced by things and people who cohabit a common place (Casey 282). Nearness then becomes a means of relationality. Williams is radically thoughtful in her desire for nearness with the unknown and potentially dangerous in *Desert Quartet*. She draws near to what is not necessarily an anthropocentric space-made-place.

Each encounter in the desert is a way to realize something about human *being*. Like pulled-apart rock that reflects internal tensions and stresses that cause fissures in the earth, our bodies, too, break open with change. The insinuation throughout this sensual work is that we can allow ourselves to "be acted upon" and to "accept the life of another to take root inside" (Williams 11), as we feel life everywhere around and within us. Intimacy is a way to care for place while caring for ourselves. She asserts, "our lack of intimacy with the land has initiated a lack of intimacy with each other" (Austin 75). A question central to *Desert Quartet* is how we cross borders so that fluidity, rather than fixity, shapes our exploration of relations between our bodies and the earth. Such fluidity becomes "No separation. Eros: nature, even our own" (75).

Thinking in terms of one's relationship with land as eros is risky, even uncomfortable. Williams proposes place as an engaged dynamic between body and location, making love to land as "an ultimate reciprocity" (Austin 83). As she explores fire in the desert, with its harsh flame that sears and beckons, we find that it is our nature to be aroused repetitively. Such an assertion leads to questions as provocations: "Where do we find the strength to not be pulled apart by our passions? How do we inhabit the canyons

inside a divided heart?" (Williams 45). Binaries become sensual areas of exploration and engaged relationship. Questions are arousals that lead us to explore the possibilities of close contact. Williams suggests one, two, even three bodies, as if bodies themselves were flames that jump and retract, play and sear in relation to one another and the earth. In this spirit she says that we cannot preserve or protect wildness. Courage provides impetus to move into what we do not know. "It is the desert that persuades me toward love, to step outside and defy custom one more time" (Williams 46). Love is courage that manifests in our willingness to experiment and to try new things. For Williams, that experimentation becomes a bodily play with flame in the desert as an active contemplation that permits her to honor the element of fire as life.

Irigaray writes that in reciprocity (what she calls "double desire") each lover possesses place and that no lover is static and fixed in her position to another. Attraction and support might then elude disintegration or rejection; the double pole of attraction and decomposition replaces the separation that articulates all encounters and gives rise to speech, promises and alliances (Irigaray, *Feminists* 121). Such is the movement Williams shares with fire. In relation to the earth, she does not speak. She feels and intuitively the language of the elements through embodied and visceral sensation. Williams offers us a poetic politics of being in place that allows reception as a mode of living. If we listen, she teaches us that to open to all life expands our singular life in the plural existence of multitudinous forms. Our lovers are many. We are loved, caressed, stimulated, burned, and blown by many forces.

Even as there is the risk of discomfort and unfamiliarity in thinking about our relationships with place as erotic, there is value and vitality in pondering environmentalism as primarily relational. When we begin to think in the way that Baca and Williams suggest, we enact an environmental politics as relations between places, bodies, thoughts, and communities of beings—current and ancestral. We create spaces that allow for difference (in race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and expression), places that allow us to experience without fear the kind of reciprocity these writers enact and imagine in their work. Gary Snyder writes: "A person with a clear heart and open mind can experience the wilderness anywhere on earth. It is a quality of one's own consciousness. The planet is a wild place and always will be" (qtd. in Cronon 89). Attention to place and care for ourselves happens in heart and mind as well as in the physical environs we inhabit. A politics of place

asks us to mend separation from environments that surround us. Baca and Williams show us that place is made partly in our evocations of it. Writers pore relation with place into language, forming new visions and versions of space. There is little separation between desire and the formation of places loaded with human meaning and longing for intimacy with the worlds we inhabit. These worlds woo us to know in the midst of the unknown. Our notion of intimacy with the land includes ignorance of it. The mystery of unknowing is a source of knowing.

Two blocks from my front door lays the Pacific Ocean. Though I hear the surf from my bed at night, I do not know its depths. There are dolphin, otter, and seal, but I glimpse them on the surface of the water. I do not fish, swim, or surf in it. Intimacy with this enormous, volatile body of water challenges me. How do I consider it a place—truly a human notion—when I do not inhabit it but live at its edge? My experience of the ocean happens from a trail in Big Sur. I ascend through redwood into a terrain of oak and chaparral and turn towards the Pacific, white-capped and blue under mist-shrouded sun. I feel the ocean as my son and I bike through redwoods that grow along this strip of Pacific Coast from Northern California into Washington. I wake to fog and live summer under a gray marine layer until the warm months of early autumn arrive. I buy lettuce, berries, and basil grown in coastal soil. I cherish the mystery of this place and that there are still some secrets here. I appreciate the ocean in simple ways—at its shore, playing with my young son, dry seaweed ornamenting our sand castles, wind in my hair, cold waves pounding against my thighs, with my child's hand in mine. It is this spine of land, the coastal ecosystem where mountains meet sea that I know in a personal way and love.

We have to value intimacy in order to achieve it. This valuation requires care of human relationships as well the places of our planet. It asks for awareness of our limited knowledge. Baca and Williams demonstrate that we can create situations for mending within ourselves as well as in cooperative relations with others. These writers show us our desire to explore individually and collectively how we know, experience, and engage with these places that we love in relationship to self and to each other. We think in new ways about places as we replace words like wilderness, pristine, untouched, endangered, transcendent, even nature, with radical notions of passion, intimacy, erotics, and relationship.

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Darkness Denied: An Exploration of the Predilection for Light

RYAN SCACCI

And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does
not comprehend it

—The Gospel According to John 1:5 (p. 713)

The light from above made the darkness still darker; but the
lumen naturae is the light of the darkness itself, which
illuminates its own darkness, and this light the darkness
comprehends. Therefore it turns darkness into brightness...

—C.G. Jung, from *Alchemical Studies* (1967, p. 160)

Darkness as a psychological component of the human being has been all but rejected by the West, pushed to the hinterlands of the psyche. We may flirt with darkness, but at a cursory level, then we favor the light. At first glance, we might think this is a relatively recent phenomenon, but with deeper investigation the reticence to integrate darkness can be traced back to the very foundations of Western civilization, appearing at the beginning of both the Judeo-Christian tradition, and in the cradle of Western philosophy, the golden age of Greece. From this point on, the bifurcation of dark and light has widened through 2,500 years of slanted interpretations of history, selective explorations of literature, and narrow aesthetic visions.

This paper traces out the psychological implications of the reluctance to deeply integrate darkness. First I examine the historical cornerstone set in the golden age of Greece and in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Next I turn to the cost of failing to integrate darkness. This is explored by comparing the consumption of binary motifs in the culture industry; and a concurrent lack of deep engagement with the same motif in literature. A number of ways the denial of darkness has been amplified by a

selective editing of anthropology and history is then examined. A final section covers technological advancements. This investigates how technology has exacerbated the rejection of darkness, thus created a “culture of light,” to use R. Dyer's phrase (1997, p. 106).

The psychological cost of refusing to integrate darkness must be highlighted as it is woven through this paper. To put it very simply: when we deny darkness we deny a portion of our psyche. Robert Bly (1988) visualizes this denial the terms of plane geometry. Bly writes, “The shadow energies seem to be part of the human psyche, a part of our 360-degree nature, and the shadow energies become destructive only when they are ignored” (p. 59).

Bly's use of the full 360 degree circle echoes an older conception of the complete human being: the microcosm. Jung (1967) discusses the awareness of the complete microcosm as a state of wholeness, then goes on to compare gaining knowledge of the microcosm with the alchemical process, “The moral equivalent of the physical transmutation into gold is *self-knowledge*, which is a re-remembering of the *homo totus*” (p.284). If we accept the model, the integration of darkness amounts to a deepening of self-knowledge and a step towards psychological wholeness.

The complete microcosm is the very image invoked by Goethe, through the voice of Mephistopheles, as Faust is pushed towards integration. Goethe writes, “If Man, that microcosmic fool, can see/ Himself a whole so frequently,/ Part of the Part am I. Once All, in primal Night, -/ Part of the Darkness which brought forth the Light” (1930, 54).

A Historical Backdrop

The denial of darkness is rooted in the very foundations of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the book of Genesis, the third sentence declares, “Let there be light”; and, the fourth sentence calls the light good, and banishes the darkness via separation, “And God saw the light that *it was* good; and God divided the light from the darkness” (Genesis 1:3, 1:4, p. 1). The notion of light as “good” coming from God is continued and even amplified in the New Testament, particularly in the Gospel of John. John the Evangelist opens his gospel with the notion of God as light, and continues the binary of light as good and darkness as bad. Later in the Gospel of John, we see Jesus of Nazareth identified with light and again darkness is rejected: “I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (8:12, p. 721). Indeed, this theme continues to the very end of the New Testament with the final Book of Revelation and the voice of

Jesus proclaiming, "I am the Root and Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star" (22:16, p. 834). Through his identification with light, Jesus becomes quite literally the alpha and omega of the Bible – the beginning and end. This is echoed in the beginning creation myth of Genesis, and the eschatological vision of Revelation; thus, the symbolic "alpha and omega" becomes the literal beginning and end. This constitutes a concretization of what was most likely intended to be metaphorical.

The rejection of darkness is not however, limited to the theology of Judeo-Christian religion; it is also well rooted in the academy. We can trace a very similar psychological rejection of darkness to the very heart of Western philosophy, Plato's *Republic* - *specifically*, to the heart of the *Republic* itself, book VII and the Allegory of the Cave. Plato gives us the image of the unenlightened prisoners chained in darkness, looking at shadows on the cave walls. The escaped prisoner is, in contrast, taken, "by force, up the rough ascent, the steep way up...out into the light" (1956, p. 313). When he returns to the cave he is in the state of having, "...his eyes full of darkness coming in suddenly out of the sun" (p. 315). With this allegory Plato has not struck one blow but two; he has rejected darkness, and has also rejected the psychological depth of the underworld. The direction is upward and outward, into ever increasing light.⁸

Literature and Film

The focus in this section is placed much more on the overall effect of the literary work rather than on the work *per se*. After all, it would be

⁸ Plotinus (CE 204-70) augmented the sharp division in Plato's model. This would prove indispensable to the integral vision of Renaissance Neoplatonism, which can be said to have read Plato through the lens of Plotinus; however, Plotinus's modifications remain an undercurrent to the better known model of Plato. Demonstrating great potential value of the shadowy images on the cave wall, Plotinus writes, "Still the arts are not to be slighted on the ground that they create by imitation of natural objects; for, to begin with these natural objects are themselves imitations; then, we must recognize that they give no bare reproductions of the thing seen but go back to the Reason-Principles from which Nature itself derives, and, furthermore, that much of their [the artists] work is all their own; they are holders of beauty and add where nature is lacking. Thus Pheidias wrought the Zeus upon no model among things of sense but by apprehending what form Zeus must take if he chose to become manifest to sight" *The Enneads*, VIII, 1 (1991, p. 411).

rather crass to level a claim of depthlessness against Dante. While reading Dante's *Divine Comedy* or Milton's *Paradise Lost* can offer an integration of psychological depth and metaphorical darkness, simply having the binary such works can create thrust upon us is a different experience indeed.

The overall world view created by these works seeks to redeem and overcome darkness, as opposed to integrating it. Of the two, Milton represents a sharper denial of darkness, and division from light. In the opening description of Hell, Milton writes, "At once, as far as angel's ken, he views/ The dismal situation waste and wild./ A dungeon horrible, on all sides round,/ As one great furnace, flamed, yet from those flames/ No light, but rather darkness visible/ Served only to discover sights of woe," (2006, p. 12).

We might contrast Milton and his hulking division of light and dark, to a seldom read classic like *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius (1951). Herein is found the story of Cupid and Psyche, as well as heavy emphasis on the importance of the underworld descent (psychological depth) and the integration of darkness - as opposed to rejection of darkness and division of darkness and light. It might also bear mention that towards the end of the text, the narrator of *The Golden Ass* is initiated as a priest of Isis. His initiation, however, is not considered complete until he is also initiated into the cult of Osiris - a dark and underworld god. It should go without saying, Apuleius is now all but unknown; while most people have heard of Milton and are at least familiar, we can guess influenced by, the basic story of the battle in heaven and exile of Lucifer to a darkness visible.

A relatively recent example along similar lines can be found in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Here, we see a similar division of light and dark. The dangerous change is how the division now becomes literalized in the contrast of the white skinned Englishman and the dark skinned African. Where Milton can be said to have contributed to a loss of psychological depth, Conrad creates a division conducive to outright racism. This notion is developed by Chinua Achebe in *Hopes and Impediments* (1989). Achebe begins his discussion of Conrad with the thought that Europe has set up Africa as a "foil" to Europe, with the end result of making sure that "Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest" (p. 3).

While Achebe explicates the elements of racism in *The Heart of Darkness*, the concurrent psychological rejection of darkness also calls for attention. In Conrad's work, there does not seem to be a psychological positioning allowing for possible integration, the "foil" of Achebe is set in stone. Kurtz himself is the best testament to this fact. Kurtz integrates all of

Europe, but when he is faced with the “darkness” of Africa – he breaks, goes over, and cannot hold the tension of opposites. He gives up his whiteness, and is consumed by the darkness he, at the moment of death, calls the “horror”. There is ultimately no integration for Kurtz, he remains caught on one side or the other of, what for Kurtz, remains an irresolvable antinomy to the very end. The problem of refusing to integrate psychological darkness, or on the other hand entering it to the exclusion of light, could be called nearly ubiquitous. In *A Little Book on the Human Shadow* Robert Bly has noted, “The Western man or woman lives in a typical pairing of opposites that destroys the soul” (1988, p. 56).

With the case of Kurtz in *The Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz likewise remains caught in a soul destroying duality. On the bottom line Conrad paints Africa, darkness, and all that goes with it, in abyssal tones. The deathbed scene of Kurtz solidifies the binary of: light as good standing opposite of dark as bad, Conrad writes, “... [his stare] piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness. He had summed it up – he had judged. ‘The horror!’” (1988, p. 69).

My guess is, that to many people, the phrase “The horror...the horror!” conjures up an image not of Joseph Conrad, but rather of a bloated Marlon Brando from the film *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Along a similar vein, if I were to repeat the phrase, “the horror!” (one of the most recognizable in literature) to an undergraduate class, most would think I was referencing the cinematic genera of horror – often a favorite topic of undergrads. It is only a short jump from this observation to one of the biggest objections to the heretofore mentioned assertions of this paper: What do we make of the pervasive popular interest in horror and the macabre? Hollywood has given us a steady stream of psychological darkness in film. Outside of film, writers such as Stephen King and Dean Koontz flood printing presses. Furthermore, what is to be said of canonical (or nearly canonical) works that could be argued to integrate darkness? After all, we have to recognize Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein*, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, and almost everything written by Edgar Allan Poe.

There seems to be an unquestionably pervasive call from the unconscious to engage darkness; however, this call also seems to lean in the direction of fluff and filler—regardless of how graphically violent the film, comic book, or pulp paperback may be (a point I will soon return to). The glaring lack in all of these potential entry points of darkness is a lack of psychological depth. The notion of psychological depth will also offer a

caveat to the earlier critique of Milton. The widespread lack of psychological depth in mass culture and lack of integration of the dark facets of the psyche is best seen when contrasting the experience of film to that of literature. We must not look at content alone, but also the manner in which that content is being consumed. Literature offers an entry point for psychological depth, while contrariwise, the same motif in popular culture very rarely does.

Few would argue that the experience of reading Milton's *Paradise Lost* is vastly different from that of getting the world view of a hulking binary of good versus evil second hand from the contemporary culture industry. The same can be said of all the examples of darkness in literature that are given above. If we wish to distill the difference between viewing a film and fully investigating a printed literary work down to a single word, that word would be "depth."

In his classic work *The Dream and the Underworld*, James Hillman states this emphatically (the italics appear in the original), "Our familiar term *depth psychology* says this quite directly: to study the soul, we go deep. The logos of the soul, *psychology*, implies the act of traveling the soul's labyrinth in which *we can never go deep enough*" (1979, p. 25).

To illustrate the varying levels of psychological depth we might briefly compare a well-crafted cinematic production, in this case, the 1992 film *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, starring Gary Oldman, with a deeply investigative printed edition such as *The Annotated Dracula* (1975). In the film we are offered the spectacle of Renfield devouring flies, though the depiction is acted well and is convincing, the experience begins and ends with little more psychological depth than an adolescent's gross out gag. Contrariwise, in *The Annotated Dracula*, we first encounter a deeper treatment via Stoker's text directly (where the flight of the fly is connected to that of the butterfly, and furthermore to the butterfly as a symbol of the soul), then when we follow the annotation we read an Oxford dictionary definition of psyche and are next treated to the poetry of Coleridge, "The butterfly the ancient Grecians made/ The soul's fair emblem, and its only name/ But of the soul, escaped the slavish trade/ Of mortal life! For in this earthly frame/ Ours is the reptile's lot – much toil, much blame..." (p. 237).

A similar comparison could be made with Dante and the motif of the descent into Hell. If we take the motif alone (whether marginally developed through film or developed even less when taken second hand via culture industry at large), we are left with the binary division of light and dark; however if we go deeper and engage the text (perhaps better yet, an

edition containing the classic Gustave Dore etchings), the darkness is not so much left on the surface of the spectacle, but can be worked with, ruminated upon, and hopefully integrated. After all, the work of integrating darkness takes time. A perfect illustration is Saturn, an underworld god, often depicted with the hourglass – a symbol of death and mortality, but also of the slow work of deepening the psyche.

The example of Dante and the descent into Hell perfectly illustrate two key points. The first of these points is an additional example of the way in which a sense of psychological darkness can be deeply integrated via the text. The second is an example of the widespread fascination with darkness in the culture industry; importantly, this fascination is at the same time, paradoxically, a fascination that keeps darkness at arm's length – ultimately to the detriment of integration.

Much as was suggested above with the tarrying in Stoker's *Dracula*, a slow reading of Dante's *Inferno* yields layer after layer of richly imaginative darkness – more so when we include the spectacular illustrations of Dore. The experience of sinking into Dante's rich underworld strata, word by word, line by line, and ponderous etching by ponderous etching, bears remarkable similarity to Hillman's call for depth in psychology. Hillman writes, "Depth means death and demons and dirt and darkness and disorder and a lot of other industrial strength *d* words familiar to therapy... Therapy has to be sublime. Terror has to be included in its beauty" (1992).

A film treatment of a similar motif (descent into Hell), even a well-crafted treatment like the widely popular *What Dreams May Come* (1998), may be called beautiful, moving, and perhaps even meaningful, but it is not sublime. Deeply read and slowly considered: Dante is sublime.

The second point is perhaps more important than the first. The unconscious possesses an uncanny way of getting what it wants. If part of its nature is denied, a call goes up to the ego for awareness of the neglected facet. When viewing darker films we pay lip-service to the psyche's inherent call to integrate and develop the richness of a full 360 degree being. Darkness can be checked off of the ego's to-do list; however, the cost of such cursory treatment is high. Hillman, in *The Dream and the Underworld*, muses that our "Ego, over black coffee (a ritual of sympathetic magic), chases the shadows of the night and reinforces his dominion" (1979, p. 116). A similar sympathetic magic is at work in the use of film. When we buy a ticket or purchase a copy of the film, we claim ownership of it, yet this conscious (and quite literal) ownership of the film and consumption of the binary motif does

not equate with integration. The ego addresses the unconscious call for integration of darkness but does so in a piecemeal way. The overall effect is not the towering dark *and* light generated by a deep reading of Dante, Milton, or Goethe, but, is something that might be called “darkness lite” – a lightweight, cursory, and ultimately a shallow engagement with the dark facets of the psyche.

If the two well-crafted films discussed above are lacking in psychological depth when juxtaposed to a close reading of the printed page, the steady stream of slasher movies and pornographically violent pulp fiction films can only be seen as lacking moreso. Watching an orgy of violence and believing that the dark side of the psyche has been integrated is akin to camping in an RV with its accompanying flood of artificial light, and believing that night and nature have been engaged.

History and Anthropology

“Indeed says [Hayden] White, a ‘narrative account is always a figurative account, an allegory’, it being only a modern empirical prejudice ‘in favor of literalism that obscures this fact to many modern analysts of historical narrative’” (Jenkins, 1995, p. 24).

Perhaps what is more destructive than the heretofore mentioned is the slanting of history and anthropology. Again we see a dangerous literalization and concretization of the metaphorical concepts of darkness and light. This “literalism” is nowhere more destructive than in the notions of race that have positioned whiteness at the pinnacle of racial perfection, and have constructed darkness as a degeneration of that ideal. Here we see something very similar to the notion of Africa as a “foil”; yet, the consequences are more severe, as now the arena is not literature but what is billed as objective science.

In Stephen Jay Gould’s *Three Centuries’ Perspective on Race and Racism* (1981), the development of the term “Caucasian” is explored. Two facets of the discussion are relevant to this paper. First, Gould discusses how J. F. Blumenbach invented the term “Caucasian” in 1795, thus the entirely arbitrary nature of racial classification is exposed (see appendix A). Blumenbach is quoted as calling the peoples of the Caucasus Mountains “...the most beautiful race of men...” (p. 401). It should not be surprising they are also the lightest skinned. Secondly, Gould delves into the implications of Blumenbach’s system. Gould explains how Blumenbach added the Malay race to an older system of racial classification, thus putting Caucasians at the

pinnacle of a hierarchical model, and relegating all other races to an aberrant status. We should note, Blumenbach places the African race at the diametric opposite of the Caucasian – the very bottom of the hierarchy. Science has now objectified the “foil” we have seen in Achebe’s review of *The Heart of Darkness*.

Contamination

Blumenbach’s hierarchical model of race opened the door to another avenue by which darkness could be rejected, that of contamination and purity.

“Disgusting things are contaminating; any contact, however minor, is repulsive” (2004, p. 159). Thus begins psychologist Paul Bloom’s treatment of disgust. Bloom goes on to describe the innate, hard-wired response we have when faced with situations that could threaten our survival. The top of list of objects triggering disgust are rotting meat, rotting vegetation, feces, urine, and blood. All potentially sources of contamination. The survival value of being repulsed by such things is obvious.

However, things can go easily awry. When our innate sensitivity to be disgusted by contaminating material is linked with a race or group of people, we have just arrived nowhere short of abject racism. One only needs to think of American segregation and those disturbing photos of black and white water fountains; the fear of contamination is almost tangible. To return to Blumenbach, it is easy to see how a system positioning a “pure” Caucasian race at the top of a hierarchical ladder ending with black Africans at the bottom could well lead to fears of contamination.

These fears play out along two lines. First, in a literal way, with concepts like the “one-drop rule” and the legal classification of the 1970 Louisiana law declaring that an individual with as little as 1/32 African blood is a “negro” (Omi and Winant, 1994). Secondly, they play out along purely perceptual lines – the bizarre notion that Rodney King could be seen as the threatening individual on the video tape of the roadside beating, serves as a perfect example (Butler, 1993). Both cases could be reduced to a fundamental fear of being contaminated with darkness.

While the Rodney King jurors can be seen as an extreme of rejecting darkness, the flip side of integration bears mention. K. Anthony Appiah uses “contamination” as an ideal of cosmopolitanism. His New York Times Magazine article is so much as titled *The Case for Contamination* (January 1, 2006). Indeed, the notion of contamination can be seen as a

prerequisite to integration – the benchmark of Jungian psychology and a rallying cry of this paper. Via contamination we open ourselves to the unknown, the repressed, and the alien. We move from a state of separateness to a state of connection, from division to synthesis. Contamination also constitutes the opposite pole to the misguided notions of racial purity and cultural purity. Appiah references the Roman poet Terence, and gives us a line that equally serves as a great maxim of cosmopolitanism and of psychological integration. Appiah writes, quoting Terence, “And it's in his comedy 'The Self-Tormentor' that you'll find what may be the golden rule of cosmopolitanism - *Homo sum: humani nil a me alienum puto*; 'I am human: nothing human is alien to me.'” (2006, p. 6).

Technology and Power

“But today, in the modernist West, people have sold their souls to technology, expertise, and quantification. It's unfortunate, because only daring to address the dark night of the soul can we truly heal each other”, the archetypal psychologist Thomas Moore, from *Dark Nights of the Soul* (2004, p. 274).

The psychological push towards light and rejection of darkness may have begun with the beginning of the book of Genesis; but, it was not until the wide spread use of the electric light bulb that it boomed. In the history of humanity, electric light, in all its forms, may have had more psychological impact than any other factor. Electric light has taken us out of a natural circadian rhythm, has taken away nature and pushed people indoors, has radically altered workplaces, utterly changed leisure, has taken from us the night sky, and perhaps more powerfully than all of these effects, has created a media pipeline via: movies, television, and internet. Electricity has truly spawned a culture of light.

R. Dyer (1997) lays out the details of what he calls “a light culture” (p. 106). The transformation of light in the eighteenth century is the central player. Through the new technologies, light became bright, commonplace, and overhead. The long and short of this, is rejection of the dark and darkness (and all the psychological value therein); and, a normalization of white and brightly lit.

This notion comes to a heightened pitch with the “glow” of “idealized white women” (p. 122); and, the connection that is made to the pseudo-Christian notion of the idealized white woman as “angel” (p. 127). Thus, we are brought full circle to this papers opening historical remarks

about the psychological rejection of darkness in the Christian worldview. We have been given an image of whiteness, full of light and the angelic. This vision is then contrasted with dark, diseased, and demonic. If we extend this notion, the extreme examples of what I have been calling a “psychological rejection of darkness” are found in the Protestant world North of the Alps, and in the “North’s” extension in England and America. While the loss of psychological “soul” North of the Alps has been deeply discussed by archetypal psychologists such as James Hillman (1975), the most succinct observation of the darkness-rejecting Northern psyche is found in Goethe’s *Faust*. Goethe writes, in the voice of Homunculus, “Northwestwards, Satan, is thy park and pale,/ But we, this time southeastwards sail” (1930, p. 302). Here, Homunculus is pushing Faust out of the harsh Protestant duality and coaxing him towards a polytheistic integration – a “contamination” with another culture, to use Appiah’s phrase. In the pagan world of Hellenistic Greece the light/dark division is dissolved via the integration of the entire spectrum of archetypes – darkness and the underworld included.⁹

Again, with the example of the Protestant North, the loss of psychological depth should be stressed, along with the elements of racism and power. We might well be reminded of Foucault (1982) and the notion of turning human beings into subjects to place them in a subjugated status. It is far beyond the scope of this paper, but the massive economic machine serving to maintain the whiteness of the white society is simply staggering. More than anywhere else the power dynamic Foucault explicates, is playing out in the marketplace and driven by advertising which very often uses images of bright whiteness in its visuals. Advertising itself is powerfully enabled by recent technological advances; pouring through an ever increasing media pipeline. The most glaring recent example is an *I-Pad* ad (*Time Magazine*, back cover, April 19, 2010) showing a white mother holding a white child. The pair glows with an unnatural halo of light –

⁹ It could well be argued that Eastern religions such as Hinduism (with gods and goddesses such as Shiva and Kali), and Tibetan Buddhism (with works such as the *Bardo Thodol*, commonly called *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*) can offer a similar psychological experience to pagan Greece, but I am particularly pleased with a Western solution to what I believe to be a problem that is more pronounced in the Western psyche. As I hinted at with the footnote on Plotinus, Renaissance Neoplatonism represents a resplendent integration of the full spectrum of human experience, but it is complex and does not offer the accessibility of Hellenistic Greece.

presumably caused by their contact with the device. The I-Pad itself ultimately serves to deeper entrench the user in a media society.

The changes in Apple's advertising over the years are also worth noting. Some time back the logo changed from a bitten apple decorated with the entire spectrum of colors to a luminous glowing apple, or a chrome-plated apple. The older logo stressed creativity and bright color; the new logo puts heavy emphasis on flash, technological wizardry, and we might go as far as to say exclusivity. A similar meditation could be applied to Apple's use of white wires when marketing the I-Pod. For a time, the white ear-buds and white wires of the I-Pod represented an exclusive ideal that could be possessed by paying a premium price.

To return to the notion of "ideal": the ideal is not just light and white; as Dyer notes, it is a particular kind of whiteness. Two selections from Dyer's paper highlight this fact. The first repeats many of the hitherto mentioned observations on the "North", and light from the North promoting such virtues as, "vigor, cleanliness, piety, and enterprise of whiteness" (1997, p. 118). The second is the notion of technologies in movie lighting catering to blonde-haired, light-skinned actresses.

With such a model of the "ideal", we have created not just fractured individuals, but fractured individuals who dangerously see themselves as morally superior to anyone who does not shine with equal "whiteness" under the stinging-hot spotlight. The psychological risks of such a state are well documented by Erich Fromm (1955) in *The Sane Society*, and James Hillman (1975), just to name a few; but the condition was captured spot-on by the character Howard Beale in the movie *Network* (1976),

This is no longer a nation of independent individuals. It's a nation of some 200 million transistorized deodorized whiter-than-white steel belted bodies... The whole world is becoming humanoid. Creatures that look human but aren't. The whole world, not just us. We're just the most advanced so we're getting there first. The whole world's people are becoming programmed, numbered... (spoken).

What is called for in response to a society of "whiter-than-white humanoids" is the same mantra that has been echoing throughout this paper: *integration and awareness*. To this we can add synthesis. Not this or that, but both. We can retain light without rejecting darkness; as well as integrate

darkness without turning away from the culture of light. The necessary view point is not singular, but a multiplicity of viewpoints.

This thought is wonderfully summed up by Goethe in his legendary treatise on light, in paragraph 228 of *Theory of Colours* (1840), Goethe writes, "...we should not remain in one spot, we should not confine ourselves to the insulated fact...for it is only by combining analogies that we gradually arrive at a whole which speaks for itself, and requires no further explanation" (p. 52).

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Truth in Literature: A Comparative Perspective

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It might seem hopelessly quaint, even naïve, to write about truth in literature in an age when, at least in the realm of theory, postmodernism and poststructuralism have accustomed us to be skeptical of truth. While both related (or at least often linked) theories are still prevalent, this article will argue that they have never been universally accepted and may be in the process of being succeeded by a new paradigm known as post-postmodernism. Moreover, there should be nothing privileged about any theory. Rather, theoretical perspectives in literature should be accepted only insofar as they prove useful in evaluating works of imagination, where there can be little claim to truth in a literal sense. It can, however, be argued that there is an aesthetic truth in literature that is different from literal truth and that postmodernists have overlooked in their general skepticism. As this article will further argue, there is value in assessing this kind of truth for the pragmatic reason that it helps to assess what is useful and important in literature, which will be basically defined here to mean fiction that addresses more serious concerns than simply entertainment.

The motivation to write this article about truth in literature, beyond its pragmatic utility, is the postmodern failure to consider aesthetic truth as a possibility. While the more radical among them would almost certainly reject the notion, this article will argue that it deserves to be considered. The methodology of this article will be to address statements about truth in literature by William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Joseph Conrad, and the philosopher Donald Sherburne, the last of whom coined the term, "aesthetic truth." The article will then apply their notions to novels and short stories by Philip Roth, Franz Kafka, and Ernest Hemingway to show how their concepts help to find what can be considered aesthetic truths in those three disparate writers, including Roth's *American Pastoral*, in which the narrator questions the possibility of truth. While the range of authors is necessarily limited, it does extend from modernists like Faulkner, Welty, Conrad, and arguably Kafka to a postmodernist in Roth and from American to European literature. What unites these writers is their use of imagination to illuminate reality.

They can hardly be said to represent all of literature, but their approaches are different enough to provide a reasonable sample for purposes of discussion.

A good place to begin a consideration of the kinds of truth that can be found in literature is a well-known passage in one of the novels of William Faulkner. Although Faulkner's prose was notoriously long-winded and difficult, one of his most famous quotations is comparatively brief and clear. It comes from his novel, *The Town*, where Faulkner's lawyer and southern romanticist, Gavin Stevens, says, "Poets are almost always wrong about facts. That's because they are not really interested in facts: only in truth; which is why the truth they speak is so true that even those who hate poets by simple natural instinct are exalted and terrified by it."¹⁰ Although critic Irving Howe pegged Stevens as Faulkner's "intellectual alter ego,"¹¹ we cannot simply assume that the author necessarily agreed with this statement.

That he did is suggested by Faulkner's Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1950 (seven years before the publication of *The Town*). There, Faulkner speaks of "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about. ... the universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed—love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice." Later he adds "endurance" to his list and says, "The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things."¹²

These words seem to confirm that Faulkner did believe in the universal truths hinted at in Stevens's statement, although in *Faulkner from Within*, William H. Rueckert advises his readers not to accept the Nobel speech "as a thematic key to [Faulkner's] fictional creations." Rueckert also writes, however, that what Faulkner says in the speech describes "in an accurate way the change in Faulkner's vision ... in all of his fictional works after 1942."¹³ But since Stevens often says things in Faulkner's novels that are clearly not as astute as his learning might imply they should be, there is still some doubt that his comment about truth should be taken at face value.

¹⁰ Faulkner, *The Town* 88. It seems clear that although Faulkner did write poetry, he was using the term poet here in the generic sense to include writers of literature, as he stated in his Nobel acceptance speech, quoted below.

¹¹ Howe 71

¹² Faulkner, "Nobel Speech."

¹³ Rueckert 272.

Arguably, though, in putting the words in Stevens's mouth, Faulkner states his own beliefs. His long story, "The Bear," supports this argument through the protagonist, Ike McCaslin's statement, "Truth is one. It doesn't change. It covers all things which touch the heart—honor and pride and pity and justice and courage and love." Shortly after Ike says these words, he qualifies them: "what the heart holds to becomes truth, as far as we know truth." Earlier in the same section of "The Bear," Ike reflects on "two threads [of cotton] frail as truth."¹⁴ So obviously Faulkner recognizes that truth is not something we can know absolutely, but the litany of truths here is similar to the one in the Nobel Prize acceptance speech. As usual in his writing, Faulkner recognizes the complexity and ambiguity of reality.

In February 1959, Faulkner's editor at Random House, Albert Erskine, was checking the three novels of the trilogy, *The Hamlet*, *The Town*, and *The Mansion*, for discrepancies in the details they related. Faulkner wrote Erskine, agreeing to the fact checking. But he insisted that "the essential truth of these people and their doings, is the thing; the facts are not important."¹⁵ This is totally in line with Gavin Stevens's quotation about facts and truth. (Incidentally, it also provides an interesting comparison with the narrator's statement in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*: "But it's the truth even if it didn't happen."¹⁶)

Further evidence for Faulkner's basic belief in truth comes indirectly from Bennett Cerf, co-founder of Random House, who quotes Faulkner in his *Reminiscences* as saying to Erskine when the editor pointed out the discrepancies after delivery of the manuscript for *The Mansion*: "That doesn't prove a thing, Albert. As I wrote those books, I got to know the people better. By the time I did the third volume, I knew a lot more about them than I did in the first volume." To this comment, Cerf appended "as though they were actually real people."¹⁷ His comment to Erskine suggests that to Faulkner they were real and that through them, he was trying to reveal truths about reality. Irving Howe seems also to believe this when he writes in his critical study of Faulkner: "In some basic sense *The Sound and the Fury* is about modern humanity in New York—and apparently Paris—to the extent it is about modern humanity in Mississippi." The novel, Howe added,

¹⁴ Faulkner, *Go Down Moses*, "The Bear" 256, 297.

¹⁵ Blotner, vol. 2: 1,721.

¹⁶ Kesey 8.

¹⁷ Cerf 133.

“seems a terrible criticism not of the South alone but of the entire modern world.”¹⁸

Another theme of Faulkner that relates to truth and his deep sense of reality is the past. In *Requiem for a Nun*, he has Gavin Stevens respond to the statement by the deeply flawed Mrs. Gowan Stevens (Gavin’s niece by marriage) about her former, unmarried self, Temple Drake: “Temple Drake is dead.” To this, Gavin says, “The past is never dead. It is not even past.”¹⁹ This pithy statement can be interpreted as only specifically related to Gavin’s attempt to get the former Temple Drake to accept important aspects of her life and herself.

But that interpretation seems too limiting within the context of Faulkner’s other writings. His sense of the past, especially as universalized from the Southern experience about the Civil War, runs through much of Faulkner’s fiction. In *Go Down Moses*, for example, Faulkner has the narrator talk of protagonist Ike McCaslin’s education by Sam Fathers, son of a Choctaw chief: “gradually to the boy those old times [as related by Fathers] would cease to be old times and would become a part of the boy’s present, not only as if they had happened yesterday but as if they were still happening, the men who walked through them actually walking in breath and air and casting an actual shadow on the earth they had not yet quitted.”²⁰ This is obviously less pithy than Gavin’s statement about the past but says the same basic thing. In a literal sense, what Gavin says to his niece by marriage is false, though true in the figurative sense of the longer quotation. This illustrates a statement by philosopher Donald Sherburne in his book, a *Whiteheadian Aesthetic*, that a “bluntly, clearly false” statement “can be aesthetically true in the highest degree.” Sherburne is referring specifically to Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis.”²¹ Gavin’s two sentences are less “bluntly” false (i.e., literally implausible) than Kafka’s having Gregor Samsa wake up as an insect, but in the everyday sense of the term, the past is already over, hence dead.

An even clearer example of Sherburne’s point occurs in Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, where Quentin Compson remembers a statement of his grandfather, a general in the Civil War: “no battle is ever won he said.

¹⁸ Howe 6.

¹⁹ Faulkner, *Requiem* 80.

²⁰ Faulkner, *Go Down Moses*, “The Old People” 171.

²¹ Sherburne 189.

They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools.” The statement occurs in the context of “the long diminishing parade of time you didn’t hear [in the sense of hearing a clock or watch tick]”²² and is relevant to Faulkner’s point about the past because, according to Jean Paul Sartre’s interpretation, “Quentin sees the present only in terms of the past.”²³

Faulkner nails down what he means about the past not being past in a statement made in 1957 while writer-in-residence at the University of Virginia. Answering a student’s question about the long sentences he usually wrote, Faulkner said:

There is no such thing really as *was* because the past *is* [my italics]. It is a part of every man, every woman, and every moment. All of his and her ancestry, background, is all a part of himself and herself at any moment. And so a man, a character in a story at any moment of action is not just himself as he is then, he is all that made him, and the long sentence is an attempt to get his past and possibly his future into the instant in which he does something.²⁴

This statement has the advantage of offering one explanation of Faulkner’s long sentences, made fun of by critic Clifton Fadiman in his review of Faulkner’s novel *Absalom, Absalom!* Fadiman calls them “Non-Stop or Life Sentence[s],” and he writes, “To penetrate Mr. Faulkner’s sentences is like hacking your way through a jungle.” Of the novel as a whole, Fadiman opines that it is “the most consistently boring novel by a reputable writer to come my way during the last decade.”²⁵

William Rueckert, by contrast, adjudges *Absalom, Absalom!* to be “Faulkner’s greatest, most complex, and most intricately narrated novel.” Rueckert does agree with Fadiman to the extent that he refers to the style of the novel as “so opaque as to be nearly impenetrable at times.” But Rueckert has a much more intricate and sophisticated (and not at all humorous) view of what he calls Faulkner’s “verbal density” in *Absalom, Absalom!* (and

²² Faulkner, *Sound* 76.

²³ As paraphrased in Rollyson from Sartre’s “On the Sound and the Fury: Time in the Work of Faulkner” 3.

²⁴ Faulkner in the University 84.

²⁵ Fadiman 546-48.

elsewhere) than does Fadiman. Rueckert writes that Faulkner's "unbroken series of words ... [his] handling of time and the jumbled release of narrative details" are "deliberate obstacles to the rapid taking in and comprehension of the fiction ..., a stylistic trait deliberately employed to a specific end, even if Faulkner did it 'unconsciously.'" This is an acknowledgement of "the complexity of things and the inability of the mind or imagination to reduce any of the truly difficult human questions to simple terms."²⁶ We may interpret Rueckert here to mean that Faulkner's style created the ineffability necessary to express the ambiguity and impenetrability of reality—itsself a kind of truth, although one that at least moderate postmodernists might accept.

To return to Sherburne, his difficult and little known study corroborates two other points about Faulkner, made above: even though Sherburne does not mention Faulkner, who in turn is unlikely to have known about Sherburne's *Whiteheadian Aesthetic*, published in 1961, only a year before the novelist's death. Sherburne argues, in line with what was said above about Faulkner and reality, "art is not a realm apart, it is a realm indissolubly linked to the world, to reality."²⁷ And with regard to Faulkner's differentiation (through Gavin Stevens) of facts and truth, Sherburne himself distinguishes between a "literal sense of truth" and "truth in art." He writes that "falsehoods are of great aesthetic importance—grass in paintings need not be green; people in novels need not act as our neighbors do. A man couldn't wake up one morning as a cockroach, but Kafka's story ["The Metamorphosis"] is a work of art." What is "aesthetically true," he says, has to be "compatible with ... dim emotional patterns." He emphasizes "truths of feeling" in much the way that Faulkner does, as quoted above.²⁸

But in an age of postmodern skepticism about truth, can we trust Faulkner's (as well as Sherburne's and this article's) views about truth in literature? Two philosophers, Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen have written a lengthy book entitled *Truth, Fiction, and Literature* in which they reject literature's truth claims. Although neither critic cites Sherburne's earlier book (1961) nor Faulkner, each seems to disagree with the specific notion of aesthetic truth (though not aesthetic value). Certainly Lamarque and Olsen's skeptical view of truth in literature is complex in that they

²⁶ Rueckert 295-96.

²⁷ Sherburne 190.

²⁸ Ibid. 5, 188-91, quotations not in that order.

distinguish between literature and fiction and reject truth in literature while accepting that we can learn from it. Thus, they argue in *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*: “We have denied that literary value can be located in a truth-telling function. At the same time we have argued that ‘literature’ is an evaluative concept, which bears with it a commitment to some sort of universalist view of value.” They accept that “works of fiction” (distinguished from literature in terms of the “literary aesthetic value” and “humanly interesting content” in literature) “can ... be about all of us but not about any one of us” and that we can “learn from fiction.”²⁹

These quotations from the two philosophers are consistent with their admission that “the problems of the relationship between literature and fiction have no obvious solutions,” but Lamarque and Olsen do insist: “the problem itself is at least clearly defined in relation to the description of particular characters, situations, events, actions, plots, etc. which constitute this level of a literary work.” Further complicating the picture, they argue that for many commentators, “although literary works are not *literally* true ... they are none the less *metaphorically* true.” Lamarque and Olsen themselves reject this view, stating “the unfamiliar juxtapositions effected by metaphor can, on a modest view, reveal previously unnoticed aspects of the world or, on more radical views, even create new realities. But this does not solve the truth problem.” Ultimately, what the two philosophers seem to conclude is that “literature like philosophy challenges the reader to make his own construction, to invest time and effort in reaching a deeper insight into the great themes, though this insight is ‘literary.’” And: “When we reject literary truth we do not reject literary value, even of a cognitive kind, properly understood.” This last point is perhaps best elucidated by one further quotation: “Much of what we know about life, mortality, pride and prejudice we have learned from fiction, not by adopting ‘the attitude of scientific investigation’ but by an imaginative engagement with fictive content which can be judged to be about these conceptions.”³⁰ In short, although Lamarque and Olsen do not accept the concept of aesthetic truth *per se*, they do accept

²⁹ Lamarque and Olsen 123, 256, 285, 443.

³⁰ Ibid. 135, 285, 339-40, 455. Interestingly, perhaps, Lamarque and Olsen do not mention the concept of “faction,” the blending of fact into works like Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* that uses a novelist’s techniques. The best of these works called faction can both approach (but not achieve) literal truth in the way that the best historians do and achieve aesthetic truth.

the existence of value in literature in a way that is not far removed from what Faulkner, Sherburne, and this article have been arguing.

Lamarque and Olsen are not postmodernists,³¹ despite their skepticism about truth, and writers of a postmodern persuasion would be even less likely than they are to accept literature as providing essential truths about reality, however aesthetic. But throughout our allegedly postmodern age, critics and book reviewers have not stopped referring to truths in literature.³² And postmodernism itself may be passing out of fashion in favor of a category that has been clumsily labeled post-postmodernism, which is not yet clearly defined.³³ When (or if) it is clarified, it, too, will not last forever but will be succeeded by another viewpoint in the same way that postmodernism succeeded modernism.

In the meantime, whether or not we fully accept Sherburne's argument for aesthetic truths as relating to reality, his and Faulkner's views about truth as distinguished from mere facts can be useful in discerning what is of value in works of literature. Calling them aesthetic truths does not obviate the certainty that truth is elusive. We can accept that much from postmodernism. But the concept of aesthetic truth does have a pragmatic utility.

This can be illustrated, for example, by an examination of Philip Roth's Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel, *American Pastoral*. This is a particularly interesting example because the novel is often considered to be a representative of postmodernism in literature. Yet Faulkner's conception of truth works as a way to interpret it. Roth's novel tells the story of Seymour "Swede" Levov, a Jewish athlete and businessman who acquires his nickname from his Nordic appearance. He marries a beauty queen of Irish extraction (Miss New Jersey), has a daughter called Merry (short for Meredith), and moves from a Jewish section of Newark to a non-Jewish suburb of the city. Merry becomes a radical opponent of the war in Vietnam,

³¹ For their repudiation of postmodernism, see 3, 161-62, 172-75, 222-24, and especially 322-24.

³² See e.g. Cokal, Giraldi, *The Secret Miracle* 27. Giraldi says of the content's of one book, "These stories will endure for as long as our hurt kind remains to require their truths." Cokal argues about a novel, that its author's "invented emotional lives convey truths that lurk below the surface of historical events." And in *The Secret Miracle*, Tayari Jones, winner of two awards and a teacher in a master of fine arts program, says that what she looked for in a novel was "a story to give me hard truths."

³³ See, e.g., Nealon's book entitled *Post-Postmodernism*.

blows up a post office in protest, and in the process, kills a person outside, who is mailing a letter. This act destroys the lives of her parents, though they, too, oppose the war. Merry goes into hiding and, according to her comments in a later meeting with her father, explodes more bombs in protest, killing more innocent people. By the time of the meeting she has become a radical Jain and refuses to eat much or even wash so as not to injure other living beings of any kind, including bacteria.

Roth's narrator is his alter ego, Nathan Zuckerman, who reflects on truth in the early part of the novel: "The sight of a coffin going into the ground can effect a great change of heart—all at once you find you are not so disappointed in this person who is dead—but what the sight of a coffin does for the mind in its search for the truth, this I don't profess to know." He also says, "That's how we know we're alive: we're wrong."—a curious (though unstated) inversion of the basis of Descartes's epistemology, "I think, therefore I am." Zuckerman/Roth also states about Seymour, "He had learned the worst lesson that life can teach—that it makes no sense." In one other place, the narrator quotes himself in a conversation, "Writing turns you into somebody who is always wrong." Then on p. 83 of the novel, Roth has Zuckerman shift from a self-reflective narrator making these skeptical comments about truth to an omniscient author telling Seymour and Merry's story in the third person with quoted dialogue that Zuckerman could not plausibly have taken precise notes about.³⁴

Zuckerman's comments about truth, whether Roth agreed or not, at least superficially separate this novel from Faulkner's claims for truth in writing and Sherburne's related conception of aesthetic truth. Yet in the largest part of Roth's novel, the part narrated omnisciently by Zuckerman, Faulkner's "problems of the human heart in conflict with itself," which he identifies with universal truths, are movingly evoked in Seymour's states of mind, as are Merry's sacrifices for what she believes in: first radical opposition to the war and then an equally radical Jainism, which of course conflicts with her violence in supporting her earlier belief.³⁵

³⁴ Roth 35, 63, 66, 81, 83, quotations not in the order in which they appear in the novel.

³⁵ This, of course, is by no means the only way to interpret Roth's novel. For a variety of interpretations, see Shechner, especially 142, 145; Parrish 138-39; Brauner, especially 161. Shechner sees Merry as a fanatic, like her Levov grandfather, whom he quotes as calling President Nixon a "miserable fascist dog!" Parrish says that in this novel and its two sequels, *The Human Stain* (2000) and *The Plot against America* (2004) Roth explores "the cost of sacrificing one's ethnic identity for the pursuit of American success." Thus, for him, Merry's

Here, some views of Eudora Welty, a great admirer of Faulkner, and also of Joseph Conrad come into play and help to make sense of Roth's complex novel. In *On Writing*, Welty holds that "Making reality real is art's responsibility." She says this could be achieved through "a cultivated sensitivity for observing life, a capacity for receiving its impressions, a lonely, unremitting, unaided, unavoidable vision" to be transferred "without distortion ... onto the pages of a novel." Here, it seems, Welty means to equate the reality made real by art with life and with truth about it.³⁶ She writes, "Human life is fiction's only theme." And, a bit later, "it is not to escape his life but more to pin it down that [a writer] writes fiction." She also states that Faulkner's novels about his invented Yoknapatawpha County in Mississippi are "twice as true as life." And relatedly, in novelist Joseph Conrad's preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* he writes that his task is, "by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel ... before all to make you see. That—and no more, and it is everything."³⁷ This obviously is highly similar to Welty's comment about reality and also to Faulkner's and Sherburne's statements about art and feeling, through which it is related to their conceptions about art and truth.

In accordance with Welty's dictum, the later sections of Roth's novel (as distinguished from the self-reflective comments of Zuckerman in the earlier sections) make the complexities of reality real, and Roth also makes the reader feel the horrors Seymour experienced, per Conrad's

rage . . . is directed not only at the US government but the idealized American success that her father represents." Brauner notes, in a view related to Parrish's, that Seymour's brother Jerry finds the Swede's marriage to an Irish-American contender for Miss America and their moving from a largely Jewish part of Newark to a WASP suburb "both a calculated betrayal of Seymour's origins and a naïve retreat from the reality of life."

³⁶ Without reference to Welty, critic Lionel Trilling, *Liberal Imagination* 65 makes clear what appears to be the relationship between reality and truth in Welty's statement. He does so by quoting poet Marianne Moore's statement that the function of literature is to create "imaginary gardens with real toads in them." Trilling refers two sentences later to "questions of reality and truth in fiction," suggesting his view that reality in fiction is closely related to truth. Trilling does not give the source for Moore's quotation, but it comes from her poem titled "Poetry." Incidentally, she says nothing in the poem about the function of literature, though Trilling is justified in extrapolating that meaning from the poem. The lines including the quotation are: "nor till the poets among us can be/'literalists of /the imagination'—above/insolence and triviality and can present/[space]for inspection, 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them', shall/we have/it." By "it" she means poetry.

³⁷ Quoted in Lynn 142. Lynn cites the Boni and Liveright reissue of the novella, but the website for "Joseph Conrad" quotes the same statement from the 1897 original preface.

prescription about the power of “the written word to make you hear, to make you feel.”

Faulkner, Welty, and Conrad are likewise helpful in elucidating Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis.”³⁸ The pathos that Kafka does not state but implicitly evokes in the character of Gregor Samsa—as contrasted with the egotism of his family—Samsa’s sacrifice and the pity we feel for him³⁹ (without any rhetorical suggestion from Kafka) fit into Faulkner’s universal truths. James Wood makes a different point about truth in “The Metamorphosis.” After admitting that truth in fiction is highly problematic, Wood writes that while the story does not portray “likely or typical human activity,” it is nevertheless “harrowingly truthful. This, we say to ourselves, is what it would feel like to be outcast from one’s family, like an insect.” Also “strik[ing] us with [its] truth” is “Gregor Samsa, being pushed [actually, chased] back into his room by his own, horrified father.”⁴⁰ And, as seen above, Sherburne sees the story as art without explaining exactly what is artistic about it.⁴¹ But clearly, as quoted above, he sees Kafka’s masterpiece as exhibiting aesthetic truth.

Of course, it is something of a paradox to associate Kafka with truth since, in the words of one of his biographers, “he set out to find the truth and discovered instead its infinite ambiguity.”⁴² Kafka himself writes in “Prometheus,” “The legend tried to explain the inexplicable. As it came out

³⁸ Kafka 89-139.

³⁹ This is well explained in Nabokov. The Russian novelist dismisses Freudian interpretations relating the story to “Kafka’s complex relationship with his father and his lifelong sense of guilt.” He also speaks of Samsa’s “utter unselfishness, his constant preoccupation with the needs of others—this, against the backdrop of his hideous plight comes out in strong relief.” By contrast, his family was “completely egotistic.” And Gregor’s sister Greta, who had been sympathetic if repulsed by the vermin her brother had become, herself turns into “clearly the villain of the piece.” Nabokov even sees the family as “insects disguised as people,” whereas Gregor is “a human being in an insect’s disguise.”

⁴⁰ Wood 238, 244. Wood makes these comments about “The Metamorphosis” in conjunction with related points about other works of fiction, hence my bracketed changes to his text, which do not distort what he is saying about Kafka’s story.

⁴¹ In fact, Sherburne elsewhere (127) says there is no way of defining art because of its constantly changing nature. Wood 106, 190, makes a similar set of comments about the novel in particular, calling it “the great virtuoso of exceptionalism: it always wriggles out of the rules thrown around it. And the novelistic character is the very Houdini of exceptionalism.” Examples of this failure to follow rules can be seen in his statement, “Flaubert feared repetition, but of course Hemingway and Lawrence would make repetition the basis of their most beautiful effects.”

⁴² Pawel 11.

of a substratum of truth it had in turn to end in the inexplicable.”⁴³ The same could be said of all Kafka’s stories, which range in type from parables to fantasies. Perhaps Kafka’s major truth is that life and reality are in essence incomprehensible, absurd, and futile, as he well illustrates in his posthumous novel, *The Trial*, which he had asked his friend Max Brod to burn. Fortunately for us, Brod did not comply with this wish.⁴⁴ Faulkner’s novels suggest he would agree about the ambiguity and the inexplicability of truth, and Kafka certainly makes his particular view of reality absolutely real in Welty’s sense and makes the reader feel its palpability in accordance with Conrad’s dictum.

Further illustrating the utility of Faulkner’s conception of truth in literature as well as the perceptions of Welty and Conrad is Ernest Hemingway’s Spanish Civil War novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. In it, Hemingway presents the nature of the war and of Spain through the narration and self-reflections of his fictional (if partly autobiographical) character, Robert Jordan, a former Spanish instructor at the University of Montana who journeys to Spain to fight in the war. Jordan as narrator also quotes dialogue with other characters in a guerilla band he partners with. Jordan has become a specialist in demolitions and is sent by a general on the Republican side to work with the guerillas to destroy a strategic bridge in support of an offensive against Franco’s anti-Republican forces. Through the narrative and the different perspectives of the characters, Hemingway succeeds in portraying the atrocities committed by both sides in the war.⁴⁵

The novel provided an artistic and balanced picture of the war through the microcosm of the guerilla band and its members plus a number of other characters whom Jordan reflects about and quotes. Hemingway’s narrator makes the characters in the book come alive, causing the reader to share their emotions, to grieve with them over their dead, and to empathize with all of the suffering the war brings. This is so despite the “lack of political sophistication” with respect to events in Spain that Kenneth Lynn attributes to Hemingway in his acclaimed biography of the author.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the novel exhibits Faulkner’s point in his Nobel acceptance speech about love, compassion, and sacrifice as constituting universal truths. Clearly,

⁴³ Kafka 432.

⁴⁴ Brod 265-67.

⁴⁵ Hemingway, *passim*.

⁴⁶ Lynn 444.

Hemingway's account in no way presents literal truths, but it does, I think, capture the feel of the war, an example of Welty's "making reality real" as well as Conrad's description of his task as a writer.

Even more, perhaps, than most novels, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* has been evaluated in widely disparate ways by critics. J. Donald Adams calls the novel "the fullest, the deepest, the truest book that Hemingway has ever written."⁴⁷ Ralph Thompson characterizes the novel in a 1940 review as "a tremendous piece of work," adding "the bell that began tolling in Madrid four years ago [when the Spanish Civil War began] is audible everywhere today [France having recently fallen to Nazi Germany]." Thompson even claims, "the dialogue, handled as though in translation from the Spanish, is incomparable. ... A few of the scenes are perfect. ... Others are intense and terrifying, still others gentle and almost pastoral, if here and there a trifle sweet." It is, he proclaims, Hemingway's "finest novel."⁴⁸

Distinguished critic Edmund Wilson writes in only partial agreement, "Hemingway the artist is with us again; and it is like having an old friend back." But Wilson holds that the novel's shape is "sometimes slack and sometimes bulging." He also criticizes the narration of the love affair between a character named Maria and Jordan. Lynn himself assesses the book in terms of Hemingway's dark psychology and the novelist's own biography. The biographer also points out that Communists had attacked the novel for its portrayal of the Communists in Spain. At the same time, Dwight Macdonald, an opponent of Stalinism, criticized the portrayal of anarchists. This appears to indicate the balance of the novel, though Lynn does not say so. However that may be, Lynn believes that "while the novel's most memorable action scenes had the immediacy and fluidity of a motion picture, they also were suffused with the magic of Hemingway's language."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Quoted in Lynn 485 from The New York Times Book Review.

⁴⁸ Thompson.

⁴⁹ Lynn 485-97. More recently, Daniel C. Strack has written, without using the word "magic": "The straightforward prose of Ernest Hemingway is enigmatic in that, despite its repetitious vocabulary and abrupt sentences, it resonates deeply in the minds of many who encounter it. Even though evidence for subtlety of expression is rarely evident in Hemingway's fiction upon first reading and often defies even careful analysis, few authors have succeeded in creating works in which the total psychological impact so exceeds the sum of the individual words. The perceived weaknesses of Hemingway's Spartan style actually conceal a sophisticated literary taste and carefully formulated writing strategy. For this very reason, any 'message' to be found among Hemingway's clipped sentences will not often be construed as heavy-handed. Therein lies Hemingway's narrative power."

In short, while truth is elusive, whether in works that attempt to portray reality in a more or less literal way through journalism, history, political science, economics, sociology, and anthropology, or in literature, which offers more aesthetic kinds of truths, the views of Faulkner, allied with those of Sherburne, Welty, Conrad and others are worthy of consideration even in a still at least partly postmodern age. While we may not be fully able to accept them in an uncritical way, they are helpful in a pragmatic sense in elucidating themes from literature that have at least a ring of truth and help us to understand our world in a deeper way than we can grasp without their help. This is even the view of Lamarque and Olsen, even though, as we have seen, they did not accept the notion of truth in literature.⁵⁰ And this is something that the skepticism of postmodernism, post-structuralism, and other recent paradigms do not help us to do.

The framework of ideas from Faulkner, Sherburne, Welty, and Conrad has wider application than could be illustrated specifically in this article. It clearly could help to illuminate classical as well as contemporary works of literature ranging from, for example, the writings of William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, and Thomas Hardy to Gabriel Garcia Marquez and other writers of postmodern and magic realist fiction and to Jhumpa Lahiri, who arguably is post-postmodern. This framework perhaps hearkens back to the older paradigm of humanism in a sense, but it does so in a way that recognizes postmodernism's elusiveness of literal truth. Yet it recognizes values in literature that postmodernism and its allied paradigms would reject. This does not mean that all postmodernists do so. This can be shown by a conversation between Günter Grass and Salmon Rushdie, who often are considered magic realists, a category closely allied with postmodernism.

Their discussion takes place in 1985. In it, Grass says that in the post-World War II period the official position about the Nazis "didn't tell the truth." He wanted, he says, to show that all the atrocities the Nazis committed "happened in clear daylight." So he tried in his novels *The Tin Drum* (published in 1959 in German) and *Dog Years* (1963 in German) to tell the story of how Germany went "slowly, with all knowledge, into crime. Political crime." Rushdie responds, "What you're saying is ... that the fiction

⁵⁰ It might be added that epistemologists have not agreed among themselves about truth and have had no widely agreed-upon reply to skepticism. See Moser 273-8 and Audi *passim*, where he outlines a variety of conflicting theories of truth.

is telling the truth at a time in which the people who claimed to be telling the truth were making things up. You have politicians or the media or whoever, the people who form opinion, who are, in fact, making the fictions. And it becomes the duty of the writer of fiction to start telling the truth.” Grass does not respond directly to this comment, but he obviously agrees. A bit later in the conversation, he speaks of fairytales and says, “They are telling truth. The flying horse is really flying.”⁵¹ Clearly Grass does not mean this literally but in the sense that Rushdie speaks about stories like the Arabian Nights in which carpets fly, “the belief was that by telling stories in that ... marvelous way, you could actually tell a kind of truth which you couldn’t tell in other ways.”⁵²

This conversation, although it does not use the word “aesthetic,” clearly is talking about the same kind of truth in literature that Faulkner and Sherburne discuss in the quotations above. This convergence of viewpoint provides a kind of postmodern imprimatur upon Faulkner’s and Sherburne’s views, and thereby, upon the arguments made in this article.

Finally, in their quotations about emotions, Faulkner, Sherburne, and Conrad help us to grasp what is beautiful in many novels that evoke Faulkner’s “problems of the human heart” and that make the reader feel, hear, and see, as Conrad says. These are not the only ways in which novels can be beautiful, but they help to understand some of the beauty of novels which such theories as postmodernism and deconstruction totally fail to capture because of their emphases on uncertainty and finding contradictions. Nevertheless, beauty is a difficult concept either to define or to pin down. As Eudora Welty wrote, “beauty is not a blatant or promiscuous or obvious quality; indeed, it is associated with reticence, with stubbornness, of a number of kinds. ... beauty we may know, when we see it.” She also associates it with truth.⁵³

Clearly, however, neither her association here of beauty and truth nor the more famous ones of Plato and Keats⁵⁴ are in any way definitive or

⁵¹ “Fictions are Lies that tell the Truth” 14-15.

⁵² Ibid. 75.

⁵³ Welty, *On Writing* 27.

⁵⁴ In *The Republic*, Plato develops the ideas and linkage of truth, beauty, and goodness through the dialogue of Socrates and others. *Great Dialogues of Plato: The Republic*, 118-422. Keats equates truth and beauty in his enigmatic couplet in “Ode on a Grecian Urn”: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty— that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” See *Little Treasury of Great Poetry* 95-96. Lionel Trilling provided one interpretation of these problematical words in “The Poet as Hero: Keats in His Letters,” reproduced in *Moral Obligation* 245-53.

simple. And her subjective view of beauty as something we know when we see it is valid in the sense that not everyone agrees on what is beautiful any more than critics agree in their interpretations of literature. But not everyone accepts beauty as being subjective in nature. It is perhaps suggestive of the problems of associating truth and beauty that Lamarque and Olsen in *Truth, Fiction, and Literature* do not even include the words beauty and beautiful in their index, even though both men are aesthetic philosophers. Thus it may be more relevant for us to conclude this article by repeating their quotation about the utility of literature: "Much of what we know about life, mortality, pride and prejudice we have learned from fiction, not by adopting 'the attitude of scientific investigation' but by an imaginative engagement with fictive content which can be judged to be about these conceptions." The ideas of Faulkner, Sherburne, Welty, and Conrad together with Sherburne's conception of aesthetic truth help us to pinpoint what it is that we can learn from literature in ways that cannot be simply stated in terms of eternal truths or the master narratives so criticized by postmodernism. Such knowledge is too ineffable to be straightforwardly articulated, but it is imbedded in the prose of the greatest of our novels in ways that engaged readers can equate with wisdom if not necessarily with beauty.

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An Interview with Myriam J.A. Chancy

JOHN GIORDANO, ELIZABETH AIOSSA,
JON ROSS, AND GARIOT PIERRE LOUIMA

Myriam J.A. Chancy is a Haitian-Canadian writer born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and subsequently raised there and in Canada. After obtaining her BA in English/Philosophy (with Honors), from the University of Manitoba (1989) and her MA in English Literature from Dalhousie University (1990), she completed her PhD in English at the University of Iowa (1994). In 1997, she was awarded early tenure on the basis of two influential books of literary criticism published in the same calendar year, Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women (Rutgers UP, 1997) and Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile (Temple UP, 1997). As the first book-length study of its kind, Framing Silence was instrumental in inaugurating Haitian Women's Studies as a field of specialization. In 1998, Searching for Safe Spaces was awarded an Outstanding Academic Book Award by Choice, the journal of the American Library Association, while her work as the Editor-in-Chief (2002-2004) of the Ford Foundation-funded academic/arts journal, Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism was recognized with the Phoenix Award for Editorial Achievement (for redesign, cover art, and creative/academic content) by the Council of Editors of Learned Journals (CELJ, 2004). Her third academic book, From Sugar to Revolution: Women's Visions of Haiti, Cuba and the Dominican Republic, closes a trilogy on Caribbean women's literature (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2012). She is currently at work on a book-length academic work focusing on Black subjectivities intra-diasporically.

As a novelist, Chancy garnered a shortlisting for Best First Book, Canada/ Caribbean region category, of the Commonwealth Prize in 2004 for her first novel, Spirit of Haiti (London: Mango Publications, 2003), and published a second novel, The Scorpion's Claw (Peepal Tree Press 2005) to critical praise. Her third novel, The Loneliness of Angels (Peepal Tree Press 2010), was awarded the inaugural 2011 Guyana Prize in Literature Caribbean Award for Best Fiction 2010 [Caribbean Award Jury: Stewart Brown, Funso Aiyejina, and Rawle Gibbons], and was longlisted for the 2011 OCM Bocas

Prize in Caribbean Literature (along with works by V. S. Naipaul, Kamau Brathwaite, Derek Walcott and Edwidge Danticat) while being shortlisted in its fiction category. All three of her novels are currently taught in universities and colleges throughout the U.S., Canada and the Caribbean.

A frequently invited guest speaker internationally, delivering talks and creative readings in the areas of Caribbean, Haitian and social justice issues, and as of summer 2012 she will have a recurring invited op-ed column appearing in Port-of-Spain's Trinidad & Tobago Review addressing Haiti/Caribbean affairs.

Chancy is professor of English at the University of Cincinnati, where she teaches courses in African diaspora studies, Caribbean literature, postcolonial literature and theory, feminist theory and women's studies, and creative writing (fiction). She has served as an expert reviewer/advisor for the Prince Claus Fund (Netherlands) and the NEH. A recent editorial advisory board member of PMLA, the journal of the Modern Language Association, she currently sits on the editorial board of the Journal of Haitian Studies (UC, Santa Barbara), the advisory board of Voices For Our America (VFOA) housed at Vanderbilt University, and the Advisory Council in the Humanities of the Fetzer Institute.

Chancy was the scholar-in-residency and keynote speaker at Union Institute & University's July 2012 PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies Program Residency. While at the residency, she spoke with founding Penumbra editor John Giordano, associate editors Elizabeth Aiossa and Jon Ross, and Gariot P. Louima, who later joined the editorial team.

Editors (Eds.): You make a statement on your website that serves as a great launching point for this discussion, or any discussion, for that matter: "Write passionately and without apology." What does that mean to you—as a scholar, writer, and teacher?

Myriam Chancy: I wrote that off the cuff when I was working on the webpage. But I remember one of my very first publications as a scholar had part of that sentence as a subtitle. It was called something like "Sans Frontières/Sin Fronteras: Women writers of color writing without apology." As a young scholar, I had published a piece with an overview of what women of color were writing about across differences of ethnicity. I did so in the context of my own PhD program, in which there was a lot of resistance to what women of color were doing in terms of epistemes, their knowledge

bases, and their aesthetics, their perspectives and so forth. The essay was trying to investigate what were the differences in terms of knowledge base and expression. What I determined was that, across the board, whether you were looking at Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, Michelle Cliff, Gloria Naylor, etc., in the early 90s, they were writing unapologetically about issues facing women of color and were using aesthetic strategies, also unapologetically—fragmented writing styles, styles we might think of as postmodern. They were doing so out of a cultural impulse—this is how one translates culture into literature, whether that was from an oral base, or call-and-response. So that’s what I mean by “write passionately...”

Recently it has had more to do with that struggle for an authentic self on the page; it’s something that’s an ongoing struggle, both for myself and others across racial and class lines. In the early 90s, I thought it was an issue that had solely to do with women of color, but as I’ve gone along my career, I’ve realized that, for most writers who are concerned about bringing to the fore social justice issues, that it really isn’t about a discrete identity. It’s about the degree to which we allow ourselves not to censor and do the work we should do on the page, and take the risk that we should. To do so without apology is my directive.

Eds.: Is that how you in part define authenticity?

Chancy: Yes, and I’m using that term differently than the ways in which it circulates especially in literary discourse having to do with ethnic literatures, specifically where authenticity has more to do with whether someone is from a particular ethnicity or culture and whether he or she is being “authentic” to that origin. I’m using it in the sense of coming truly and deeply from the spiritual self, from a place where someone is not responding to the dictates of the market or a particular audience, but actually writing about a core sense of self and some value which may not be shared by all but that one wants to express and have disseminated into the world.

Eds.: *The Loneliness of Angels* (excerpt on page 80) features a character named Rose who lived in the climate of fear in her home country of Haiti. Two issues surrounding this environment come to mind. First, you suggest that your country is full of people who live in fear, and second, that it is a state viewed as something less than sovereign, less than free—by its own leaders and certainly by colonial/postcolonial nations, including the United

States, which occupied Haiti from 1915-1934. You write about your country as one that even though it is historically uniquely sovereign, it is not treated that way. Can you speak to that?

Chancy: Haiti is uniquely positioned in this hemisphere and in the Americas because of the Haitian Revolution and the manner in which it became sovereign (via a slave rebellion against the French from 1791-1804). That's very important to know; it was the only slave revolution that was successful and that resulted in the creation of a nation-state. As I remind my students, it resulted in the United States we know today. A lot of people don't realize that. Napoleon and France were almost bankrupted by the loss of this "Pearl of the Antilles." One-seventh of the entire French population at the time derived its income directly or indirectly from this particular colony (then called Saint-Domingue), so they lost that source of revenue, but what they lost in terms of the war between the French and the Africans and others who fought to liberate Haiti was so monumental that the Louisiana Purchase took place. That amounts to a third of the United States as we know it today. A lot of people don't recognize that. I always show my students what the United States looked like before the Haitian Revolution and after the Louisiana Purchase, and they're astounded. Most people think the Louisiana Purchase was just Louisiana, not this huge swath of land from the Gulf Coast all the way up to the Northwest.

Part of what I've been tracing through my work is the degree to which Haiti has had to pay the cost for that sovereignty—the indemnity paid to France for those losses, which has never occurred in another case in modern history, when a winning power had to actually pay a losing power for the cost of the war. Ideologically, Haiti has had to pay for the cost of that sovereignty, and there are particular reasons for that. If you look at the literature coming out of Latin America and the American South, throughout the 19th Century, Haiti was called a place of "black terror." But with the slave trade taking place throughout the Americas, the U.S. was a slaveholding state and there were slave rebellions throughout the Americas. In some of those cases, those rebellions and their leaders were looking to Haiti for a sense of how to liberate ourselves. In others, there is a very quick understanding of the cost of that sovereignty: being locked out of trade, repression, certain kinds of violence, and a shunning or disavowal of Haiti that takes place over time. And I argue that this is still occurring today. Now, post-earthquake/post-2010, with the reconstruction, there is a lot of lip service

being paid at the inter-governmental level to sovereignty—that we should respect the Haitian state, we should respect the Haitian government. But the truth of the matter is that the economy of Haiti, which by and large does measure up to the economy of a sovereign state, is not actually controlled by the Haitian government. In that case we really need to reimagine what we mean by sovereignty today, and how do we safeguard a legacy of sovereignty that has never been respected. That is a real tension in the nation itself, which is not to say that the Haitians themselves don't think of themselves as sovereign human beings. But their ability to play out that sovereignty is very limited.

This takes me back to the passage (see attached), which revolves around a character named Rose in 1958, one year into the Duvalier regime. This woman is about to marry, to meet her husband, but is very intuitively connected to what is going on at a psychic and spiritual level as the dictatorship is gearing up. The worse years of the Duvalier dictatorship are at the beginning of its 30-year reign. And she's aware of the brutality that's going on against women specifically, which is what the passage is about. In the structure of the novel, there's a reason why this woman is called Rose and it relates to the issue of sovereignty. I utilize a structure to tell this story that has an indirect spiritual dimension. What I use is a Christian labyrinth, based on a pagan labyrinth, when people would go on pilgrimages, something that became codified in the Christian church. If you go to the cathedral at Chartres, outside of Paris, there is a famous labyrinth with four quadrants. It's supposed to be a meditation. When you get to the middle of it, you arrive at what's called "the rose," which then provides you with an understanding. You're supposed to pause in that center and receive an answer to your meditation or prayers, and then walk out in a counter fashion to the one you walked in, thinking about how you're going to live out that information you have received. So, in the novel, Rose's character only appears in the middle. And the information you receive there is about the Duvalier regime you don't get elsewhere. Only she is able to release it, because as a mystic she's been processing the pain of people who were tortured and killed during the regime but is unable to cope with what that does to her psychologically and emotionally. She eventually leaves for Canada, and what's interesting is the same thing happens to her in that context. I parallel the kinds of violences that take place in societies that aren't under dictatorship, but there are still all kinds of interpersonal violences that can be just as harmful. The reason I bring that up is that part of her function in the novel is to bring up the

sovereignty of the self and what our responsibility is to greater liberations. If one is aware of harm taking place outside of oneself and has some access to what that means or its effect—the violence may not be directed at you, but you are aware that your neighbor has been taken away and tortured, for example—what is your responsibility? Do you tell that story? Do you keep it to yourself? If you tell that story, what does it do to you? What will it do to you socially, psychologically, and to generations ahead of you? That's what the novel speaks to—the trickling down of the violence that the regime does to other generations and what their responsibilities will be towards that. One last point: the Duvalier regime is a major interruption of the sovereignty of the state from within, because in a sense the state becomes kidnapped by the dictatorship.

Eds.: What you're getting at is that Haiti, even though it was looked to as a model for sovereignty and gave a boost to American expansion, what it got from the U.S. in return was an occupation. Some historical and scholarly accounts of that occupation view it as buttressing a weak Haitian government; others call it a way to protect American corporations and their interests. How do Haitians and scholars like you see the occupation?

Chancy: There are mixed views on that question. For some who lived under the occupation it is remembered as a time of great repression and suppression. On the other hand, even people who are still alive from that period will tell you that a number of things were built then. So it's hard sometimes to reconcile some of the infrastructural legacies—hospitals, roads, even the capitol building was built by the American occupiers, though now under (post-earthquake) reconstruction, the French are going to rebuild it. You can see traces of the occupation still standing that many Haitians view positively, but I think, for the most part, that what people are aware of is what was negative. There was a lot of violence, segregation that hadn't existed before the occupation, because the United States purposefully sent in troops from the American South. The language (of President Woodrow Wilson, who authorized the occupation) of that time clearly states that was why Southern troops were sent, because they were thought to better handle "Negroes." So the language of the occupation, the behavior under the occupation [were negative]. There also was a feminist movement during that time, in the 1920s, which documented lynchings, rapes, burning of women on the pyre, things that you never would have imagined would take place

under the watch of U.S. Marines. But these were acts performed by U.S. Marines. The real reason—this is my view, one shared by a number of scholars—that the U.S. invaded Haiti at that time and occupied for so many years is because of the First World War. The occupation coincides with the beginning of the war, and Germany had heavy economic interests in Haiti at that time. If you look at a map and notice Haiti's location, you see that it becomes very strategic to control that landmass. There was guerrilla warfare against the occupation, both by Dominicans and Haitians, and it was violently put down.

I write about this in *From Sugar to Revolution*. One of the things I discovered in doing that research is that there is confusion as to which year the guerrilla war ended. Officially it ended on the Haitian side in 1919; that was led by Charlemagne Peralte, who led the Cacos guerrillas and was killed in 1919. He was from the middle classes, worked with the poor and the peasant classes who were part of these uprisings, and when he was killed by the Marines. He was tied to a door and propped up and photographs were taken of him. U.S. Marines actually dropped flyers across all the rural areas where these campaigns were taking place to make clear to the people that they had killed their leader. It was very effective. What also happened was that they made a god of him; you can still see his image on people's altars. One Haitian scholar, Suzy Castor, unlike anyone else writing about this period, dates the end of the guerrilla war to 1922...Though she doesn't make this argument; it appears in her work like an error, I argue that this confusion results from the fact that on the Dominican side of the island (of Hispaniola) there was man named Liboro who was working with the Haitians and was killed in 1922, and that effectively ended the guerrilla war on both sides, as well as any unity between the Dominicans and the Haitians against foreign occupation.

Eds.: It's wonderful how you weave history, culture and a beautiful literary feel through your work. It's so accessible to scholars and students of many disciplines.

Chancy: Access is very important to me. In being accessible, I try to think about tools. I think of theory as a resource. And as a creative writer, I find that most theory—postcolonial theory, feminist theory, philosophical inquiry, etc.—is actually creative. Some of my students say, "I can't read Homi Bhabha. He's indecipherable." And I suggest they think of him as a

creative writer and see what happens. All of a sudden they start understanding what they thought they couldn't before. I see that there are uses for dense discourses, and we're trying to meet others halfway where they are, so at times you have to deploy something less accessible if you're trying to talk to a particular group of people for whom accessibility means a lack of rigor or profound thinking on a subject. Part of the reason why I do my work is that I want to bring out voices that are not being heard. If I want to do justice to those voices, who am I to set myself apart from them and render my own work completely inaccessible, even to those with whom I'm trying to speak?

Earlier in my career, I made it my duty to always leave behind traces of the work I was discovering. So if I did some research on a particular topic—at that time I was doing work on what was considered somewhat obscure (especially around Caribbean woman writers) and lived between countries—while gathering all that information it occurred to me that there might be somebody else who comes out of a similar background or thinks about these issues the same way I do and doesn't have the liberty of going from one country to another as I did, or going to independent bookstores and seeking this information out. Everything I read or collect must somehow result in a placement in a publication that is accessible to someone who needs access to that information. So how must it be written to be accessible? I try to weave in ideas so that people who are trained theoretically can recognize that I'm talking about a particular paradigm or school of thought. Yet someone who doesn't know anything about that topic can still access it. A wonderful example of that is a text I came across as a graduate student, Trinh T. Minh-Ha's *Woman, Native, Other*. It took me years to realize how layered that book was. She's a filmmaker trained in philosophy who gathered feminist theory along the way. If you read that book without knowledge of theory, it reads as a poetic meditation. With some references to women writers she's trying to make central to her discussion (Adrienne Rich, Cherrie Moraga, and Amy Tan), the discourse appears to be a storytelling mode. Then, if you're trained in philosophy, you realize she's engaging a number of different philosophers, and footnotes who they are. If you're engaged in postcolonialist theory and feminist theory that's very dense—something she's not foregrounding—then there's another layer. So you can read this text again, ten or 15 years later, if you've acquired those tools and suddenly realize this is someone who's speaking simultaneously to different kinds of people with different knowledge bases all at the same time.

But perhaps the reader is only reading it at one level. So I'm moving in that direction: How can I build those layers in? In my critical work now, I'm doing something where I'm trying to fold into the work highly dense theory, but by the time it hits readers, they're willing to go through it to access it. For example, in the new book, the door of access comes from interviews—three chapter-length interviews with woman writers and artists whose work I address (Edwidge Danticat, a Haitian-American writer; Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, a Cuban visual artist; and Loida Maritza Pérez, a Dominican writer). Most people think of Magda's work as diasporic Cuban, but she doesn't see herself that way. I really struggled with how to talk about her visual work if everyone who's familiar with her work sees her as a diasporic Cuban....So to bring her identity together with that of many familiar with her work, I turned to geography theory, which engages speech-act theory, gender theory, race theory, and all kinds of things of which I was not aware. It's very, very dense to engage. But that's how, in a section of the text looking at Magda's work, I deploy and invite my readers into that theoretical work as a means to rethink how, as literary critics, they might be doing the decoding of visual texts. I think it's possible to do all that.

Eds.: You mentioned Bhabha. Some of us find both him and [Gayatri] Spivak very challenging to read. Some would question if, especially when work is so dense, the writer has an obligation to be more accessible, to provide greater access to his or her ideas. We don't all have the same skills to decipher discourse. Do you think people like Bhabha or Spivak have less impact because of the density of their work, and do scholars and students respond better to other forms of discourse, such as looking at art as a source?

Chancy: I want to be clear about the use of art in my recent work. We have to distinguish between how art has been positioned in cultural studies and sometimes dismissed as something to investigate versus the use of art, such as the critical production of art historians and critics, and I'm leaning more on that side. Maybe there's a bridge between them. I'm not looking at the art to produce theory; I'm looking at the art as a text. As a literary critic, I'm using the strategies of literary criticism with visual art, and using it as a text that is worthy of investigation like a literary text, then deploying theory as a means of investigating what that art can teach about that particular artist.

In terms of density, I actually think Bhabha and Spivak are different kinds of writers. Spivak is very clear that she has little interest in being

accessible or even speaking to different constituencies that are reflected in what she's speaking. I don't think she has that interest, so I don't think I would make the case that she needs to be accessible or can be easily accessed; she just doesn't have that interest. There have been critiques of her work by other feminists that claim she is elitist, and one needs to consider that in thinking about the work. I, for one, disagree with some of her statements in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" at the same time as I think she has a point in terms of the limits to representation for those who don't have the resources to disseminate what they think, regardless of class, which was part of the argument of her revised version of that essay. In terms of Bhabha, I don't find him as impossible to read. And think it's interesting that so many think he's indecipherable. Because when one reads him carefully, it becomes quite clear that there is a kind of creative, meditative impulse in the way he writes. There's a play in language that is not inaccessible, though I've found more recently with some younger students and scholars that some of his terminologies are becoming outdated. So, for example, he used the term "transparency" in some of his work on hybridity, and he's hoping that his reader knows what an SLR camera and emulsions for film are. Having to describe to young people who've only worked in the digital age what "transparency" means is a challenge. But even once you've done that work, you realize he's talking about something very tactile in the real world then moving it to the ground of something highly theoretical. He uses a lot of literature in his work, and a lot of storytelling. And he is accessible in that way. And I do think given how he writes about literature and the hybrid, the colonized and the subaltern, etc., that he is interested in access. And that's what makes him distinguishable from someone like a Spivak.

Having said all of that, I think each of us has to make a decision about the degree to which we want to be accessible, and who our audiences are. I do think there's a strategy to say, "I'm trying to convert those who aren't yet converted. I'm trying to intervene in the ivory tower, and this is the language it speaks." The danger of that, as we saw with Foucault's work, for example, is that one can become enthralled with the ivory tower and wanting to become a power base in that tower, and then what is the work really for? When we start talking about social justice, whose social justice are we serving if we're only talking to each other and there's no point of access...Spivak makes that point at the end of her "Subaltern" essay when she says that the feminist scholar of color has the burden to do that work. ...I think the argument should be that we don't hear the subaltern, or we mishear the

subaltern. I'm not sure that she thinks that subalterns speak, and I would disagree with that.

Eds.: Rose is an example of a character who has to hear the stories of those who aren't heard and who are suppressed. Can you talk about your own sense of responsibility to tell the stories of those whose voices aren't heard?

Chancy: That's an interesting question, because the character of Rose says that she doesn't have a choice because [ghosts come to her and speak to her and she has to listen, because she hears them. The issue then becomes whether she tells the stories, what does she do with them? And as a writer and scholar, I feel compelled to tell the stories. I think that's my role, to tell the stories, to unpack and analyze them, even as a creative writer. What I want to write about and what I think I have to write about are two different things. I'm also someone who did not intend to be a scholar or move into academia, and I also left academia about ten years in, then came back. One of the reasons why I came back was that I felt I had something to offer that was different because I'm not a career academic, although I look like one! I feel it's a place where I can serve as an interventionist. And I do take that responsibility very seriously.

Eds.: You really embody so much of what our journal is about—not only interdisciplinarity, but a layering of critical thinking, giving voice to others, and arousing our interest so we are piqued to engage as scholars and researchers. You layer politics upon culture upon language, upon gender, especially in bringing out the voices of women. It appears as if you're quite conscious and intentional about it. Is that so?

Chancy: Yes, it is. But it has shifted. I am a feminist, and I make no apologies about that. I say that somewhat humorously because there still is some tension in the Caribbean about being a feminist, especially in Haiti. Even today as we have many different Caribbean women writers publishing, from many nation-states, there is still a great deal of silencing around those voices. So even though women have those voices, the silencing still exists. One brief example: there is a Jamaican literary festival called Calabash that was held for many years then suspended for a while due to lack of funds. It was revamped this year and was highly successful. A number of writers spoke highly of it, and there was a good mix of women and men. Then, more recently, someone

published a long piece about how successful it was, and quoted from a number of Caribbean male writers. And the only woman writer referenced—even though there was an equal number of women and men—was an African woman writer. And I wondered how that was possible, that such a long piece presenting how successful this was doesn't mention even one of the Caribbean women who was there and had presented...

I feel it's really important to represent Caribbean women in literature, in my teaching, in my criticism. In my fiction, *The Scorpion's Claw*, for example, I focus on women's voices, but there are two centerpieces about male characters. My first novel, *The Spirit of Haiti*, has a male protagonist, and that was very intentional on my part. The main character there is ambiguous in terms of his gender and sexuality. He works as a male-to-male prostitute in the tourist trade, which is very common, but happens to be very ambiguous sexually. And he's dying of AIDS-related tuberculosis, and his mother had died of non-AIDS-related tuberculosis. So I was trying to make a number of points there about choice, identity, and so forth. But he's the most spiritually centered character in that novel. I was trying to make a point about the ways in which from the outside we can condemn what people do to survive, yet people who do things on the fringes—whether they're drug traders or whatever—can sometimes be more spatially in tune than those who think they're in the right. So what happened in my fiction is that I've more and more brought male voices into the picture, either as part of a mix or central to the work. The latest novel doesn't do that; it primarily goes back to women's voices, though it does have one character, Romulus, a male character based on a real person. The reason why I've done that is because I've realized that change cannot be led only by women, that in feminist movements in different parts of the world, women are still—even in the most privileged countries like the United States—behind in many ways. In the U.S., many women think they're ahead of women in other parts of the world, but that's not represented in government, they make less money than their female counterparts in other parts of the world that are not considered developed countries. What I realize is that men have to be on board, part of that conversation. In a place like Haiti, men often are privileged by their gender, but don't realize they are as impoverished in every other way.

Excerpt from *The Loneliness of Angels*

MYRIAM J.A. CHANCY

January 1958, Port-au-Prince

Bruises, scrapes, smears of pressed dust dusky against the white of her sleeping robe. There isn't any way to hide. Not any more.

The city is on fire.

Rose is standing in the middle of the flames.

Under cover of night, they find her in the kitchen. They come in their bedclothes and make themselves at home. Stare at her. Consuming. Moments she wishes she could crawl out of the envelope of her skin when the intruders leave behind grains of sand to grate between nerve ends and tissue.

The best she can do is run to the harbour when morning comes.

Run out of the house letting the small stones that cover the front yard fly loose beneath the soles of her shoes. Run down the cracked pavements while the heat rises from the asphalt and makes the world waver and undulate in front of her eyes. Run until there is no firm ground left to hold her, only the drop of the sea below, dark and deep. She could drown there, down below. She wishes she could keep running and just let her body drop, sink feet to head, her dress billowing around her like a cotton bloom emerging from its pod, the seaweed, thornlike, pawing at her body. The only thing that keeps her from throwing herself into the waves is the memory of her grandmother, and her mother, still bereft, in the house, cleaning rice alongside Virginie, their housekeeper.

Running and sinking.

Every time she thinks she's done it, she wakes in a cold sweat with a feeling of dread clutching at her from her insides, remnants the ghosts have left in their wake.

Rose is afraid of telling anyone what she sees. La cubana, their next door neighbour, is the one who comes to her the most. No one knows if she's really from Cuba or from somewhere else. She has straight, jet-black hair and

Penumbra

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a chalky white complexion that recalls the flesh of the coconut. To her face, they call her Coco.

Rose watches the woman from the corners of her eyes as she drifts into the kitchen like the others when night falls. Watches her eat leftover potato pudding with her hands. It's been days since anyone has seen her in person, except for Rose, sitting at her mother's kitchen table in the dark, seeing the ghosts walk by her in search of solace.

Rose knows they aren't really ghosts, or zombies. They sleepwalk in search of rest. Unlike her, they have somewhere to go.

It's not that she's never walked in her sleep.

She used to walk the house in the dark, barefoot, inching forward with her splayed toes, trying to remember how the cold ground felt beneath her feet, charting a map of the house around furniture and the corners of walls. Her mother had told her that it would end when she was older and it had, for a time. But since the disappearances started after the elections, or just before—it's hard to keep track—she sleepwalks restlessly, imitating the ponderous fear that catches everyone in the throat when they leave their houses. Some don't even make it that far, don't even make it to the stoop of their houses. One of them had told her, as he ate cold chicken down to the bone, that they'd found him collapsed in a pool of blood pouring out of four bullet holes, still holding a sock in his two hands that he'd been pulling on, sitting on the edge of his bed.

Rose hears the delicate chicken bones grind between his teeth. Is he dead? Must be dead, she thinks, as she listens to the man standing against the kitchen counter dressed in a soccer uniform. She peers down at his feet and sees he has only one sock on. With the bare foot, he scratches the bulging calf muscle above the curled top of the ribbed sock.

Sometimes Rose isn't sure what to believe, but the next morning she reads in the paper that they found the bodies of all the members of a soccer team, killed before a big match, none of them in the same place, as if the killing had been random, unplanned. Except that they were all dead. The opposing team won by default. They claimed their victory in silence, wondering who would be next to fall.

Who would be next? No one knew.

They lived daily in an elaborate game of hide and seek. No one knew who was it, who was safe, just that it was necessary to hide away.

They're not always dead, Rose comes to realize. Often, they're only dreaming, sleepwalking like her. They've left their bodies behind and appear to her like mirages. She's meant to be their silent witness. It's all they want. Someone that sees: to be seen.

Rose has no choice in the matter: she sees.

Some of the neighbours saw them take Coco away, the men dressed in lightning blue, saw how they dragged her out of her house in a sheer pink nightgown, the areolas of her breasts like dark eyes beneath the fabric, dragged her out by the hair so that the pebbles of her driveway were marked by scarlet drops. It takes weeks before she returns.

She doesn't have her slippers, is all that her husband can babble. Rose listens to him speak to her mother across the fence. Her mother nods and walks away. What can they do? What can be done? As she watches the two separate, Rose is full of dread. She knows Coco will be next. And she is, standing in the kitchen, eating her way through the leftovers Rose will be blamed for taking in the morning, standing there with the others as they tell their stories, words slipping over each other until she can't make out what they're trying to say. They don't seem to realize that all of this is slowly driving her to the edge. Rose tells this only to the water as she runs to the port and looks down, wanting to plunge.

Once, Rose looks out of a window into the yard and sees Coco's husband sitting on a chair in the middle of the driveway. It's as if he's waiting. It's dark but she can see his eyes are filled with tears, red. He wears the pink slippers, frayed and worn, on his feet, rubs his hands together as if he is a genie who could bring her back with a thought. Rose looks away, ashamed of witnessing something she hasn't been asked to take in: his vulnerability, his nakedness. Feels the grains like sandpaper grating against her nerves. She'd scream if she could. If the night air wasn't already choked with screams. It's her burden. The others dwelling in the house are just bystanders who've heard the car crash but won't inspect the carcass, people too afraid to bear witness in case they recognize a face lying inert against the asphalt, skin pocked with grit from the ground.

Lying in her bed, Rose's body throbs with pain. She doesn't know how to make it stop. She places pillows below the places that hurt. She swallows four or five aspirins at a time. She cries softly into the bed sheets that smell of coarse detergent. And once, after seeing Coco in the kitchen, face twisted and

wistful, she feels a searing pain in her genitals, as if she's been knifed, flamed there. She presses her hands between her legs but it doesn't go away until she begins to recite Hail Marys. Hail. Hell. Mary. Mary. She moans. She twists in the sheets and moans. Hell.

She wishes she were dead. Just like the person whose pain she is feeling, with no explanation other than the fact that this is how she is, has always been.

One morning, Coco's husband walks out of his house wearing her slippers on his bare feet as he crosses the sharp stones of their driveway.

He shuts the gates even though they are broken and can't be locked. He places a large metal chain around the two sides of the gates and locks them with a large cadenas.

He won't let anyone in, not even Rose.

Ravishing Scheme

CHRISTOPHER SMITH

1

no singing pours out onto the sidewalk stood our dream,
no cowardly wind crests, no waiting for a nod to leave,
no bright sun beckons and no hollow moon howls and we are
not moving on but engulfed by our loneliness as the bus stops

2

when every past address and passage is a full new concept,
when pleasures swirl in our buzzing and the past goes void,
when we may heave aside all our boldly scribbled letters and
the stakes are never be as high as us, and loom no longer or stare us down,
and we don't need to run or chase or pant or run each other out of the room

3

I know we beat each other up over that fight we had and we have to
know that all the places we made love are not places anymore
know they are places that have become owned by others
and get to be in our dreams now
and in our dreams is some remaking,
more beautiful than knowing
it is not where you are

4

and shown off in the cool fizz below the rim of your drink
revealed over the waking and rousing and routine of our short time
as unwitting as folly in theater: we stared at mad overspent days and
revealed by the action of our sliding, on the gray ice of a cold morning
revealed

5

as was said, as if any relocation could really seal the deal,
as if those spheres we rode and left taught us something about
departing but not thinking of ourselves as apart
just like on that late summer night before,
when we kept quiet in the warm rain
like calm shadows as we were caught
and slid longingly into night

6

we hang no longer and no closer than ever, which means
we are no closer to love, which is the only way to escape
the ugly luster of our reconcile, we hang separately, uncontained
limited to only what appears in memory's grainy image

7

on a street in a city I do not know
your toes curl over the edge of some concrete curb, waiting to pass the traffic,
and we are alone and my hands are empty and elsewhere
than where your rutted street is transfixed and your heart throbs,
and we have learned how the odds stack up and occupy
this, our world that grows

8

there was the second when I held you, before we split
and took our brief and gentle steps and parted into dusk,
and that second will live on forever,
no matter who goes back to which clouds
and what lives continue in unsung dust and unexpected lift,
there will always be that second, of embrace and division,
never has and never will be part of any dream

and our affection remains stamped on the city
where our kissing on the edge of the bay was sudden, and
where we avoided the rush of sleep and drove winding pavement
and you knew where we were headed and we did not vanish,
where we could not have vanished even if to vanish was what we wanted
and also separately now a real heat and
wind unfurls to us a more exacting place
than together we had been

Fourth of July at Toscano

GEORGE E. LONGENECKER

From our table by the window we watch a constant procession of leashed Poodles, Collies, Corgis and mutts on Charles Street's cracked brick sidewalk, one Collie wears a flag tucked into its star-studded collar and a fat man in baggy shorts wears a red, white and blue *USA* top hat, our waitress recites house specials like poetry: *Vino Nobile Corte Alla Flora, Funghi Portobello, Minestrone di Vedura, Argosta*, we sip our wine, across the street three starfish decorate the sash of third story apartment windows.

Already there are crowds on Charles and Chestnut moving to the river for the concert and fireworks, a flag that once flew over Kandahar drapes the band shell on the Esplanade where the Boston Pops will play *Stars and Stripes Forever*, in the Back Bay a gigantic flag hangs high on the old Hancock Building, its field of stars as big as the restaurant while inside away from the heat on brick and cobblestone we enjoy our minestrone and argosta.

As we eat three fighter jets roar over in formation, soon fireworks brighter than stars will light Boston, a cannonade of thunder and fire too much like real artillery or like the cannonballs over Boston Harbor in the Revolution, for all the noise it's hard to believe in God or anything at all—the tables at Toscano are full while outside grayness descends into humid night, all of us happy to at least have a holiday with good wine.

A Shiny Pink Bra

E. SEPÚLVEDA RODRÍGUEZ

I wanted that new shiny pink bra with the bow in the center, even though I was too young to need one. It would be years before I could wear it but I wanted it mostly because it was new. Most everything I wore as a child was ropa vieja, worn by someone else, and bought at Mami's favorite segundas-the secondhand store, conveniently located upstairs in Doña Alba's apartment. The old woman kept the discarded clothes in old steamer trunks and sold every article for twenty-five cents; bras, underwear, blouses, and skirts, any garment was just twenty-five cents apiece. The old shoes were just a dollar a pair. The used Stetson hats for men were Doña Alba's prized merchandise. She sold each one for a whole five dollars.

Every other Friday, ten dollars in hand, Mami and I would walk upstairs to shop. The more you bought, the bigger the discount Doña Alba would give her favorite customers. Hyped by the promise of savings, Mami would dig, stop to gossip briefly and then dig some more. She dug deep in the trunks for two hours or more, and marveled aloud at all the treasures she had found this day: a naked doll for me, floral batas with fancy rick rack on the sleeves and neckline for her, and even handmade crochet doilies to put under her favorite saints' statues and for the back and arms of our sofa and chair.

"Mira pa ya, lo que bota la gente," Mami would exclaim over again to the shoppers present. It was always amazing to her what people would throw out and that is what kept her coming back. Mami would sniff the clothing, smelling for smoke and mold in the items, but not everything made its way into her shopping bag. There was her ten-dollar budget limit, for sure, and she never bought used underwear or anything that had been worn by a dead person or a whore. "La peste de muerte o de pecado no se puede quitar." Mami was convinced that there were some smells, like the odor left behind by death or after committing sins of the body, which could never be fully washed out.

Mami bought the few new clothes I owned from the street vendors, who also sold out-of-date food, along with socks, underwear, communion dresses, veils, and holy medals from the trunks of their Buick Chevis. Don

Prudencio, who sold the pasteles and alcapurrias that his wife made, sold biblias, light up pictures of Jesus with eyes that glowed and a halo that radiated beams of fire; he also preached the Nuevo Testamento, sat in the front seat of his car, and provided guidance and comfort to the pretty girls in the barrio. Don Hector, el mudo, my favorite vendor, sold limbes in all my favorite flavors: coco, tamarindo, and mango; and in all the years I bought limbes from him, I never once heard him say a word. “La tristeza se llevó su voz,” Mami told me, and everyone talked in secret about the terrible sadness that had taken the old vendor’s voice away. None of these other vendors sold a shiny pink bra.

My apartment building- a five-story, red brick structure, with a two-level courtyard separating two wings had fifty apartments, five to a floor. The Puerto Rican families that lived here knew each other very well. Some had recently come over from the Island; they were the ones that hung the Puerto Rican flag from their windows and the railings of the fire escape, and when they drank would sing “En mi viejo San Juan” loudly for all in the streets to hear. Our neighbor, Doña Yolanda, who had been in Nueva Yor for a long time, like us, was my mother’s closest friend; her daughters, Violeta and her younger sister Consuelo, were my best friends in the world.

It was on a Monday, and our mothers had gone to work at the Madame Alexander Company in the garment district, sewing clothes for expensive dolls we would never own or play with. From the fire escape of my kitchen window, three floors up, we first saw the bra salesman approach and enter our building. Light hair, very pale skin, and blue eyes, he looked like the pictures of Jesus in the wall calendars that Don Pepe, who owned the only bodega on the block, gave his customers every New Year. My mother kept those calendars from year to year and hung them up, along with framed pictures of La Virgencita and wooden crosses, on the walls of our apartment. Mami, who knew the names of all the saints and holy virgins, would start every sentence, even every curse, with Jesu Cristo or Ave Maria Purisima and kept images of her favorite holy people in every room of our apartment. Just above her bed, she hung her favorite—the light up picture of *El Corazón de Jesús* showing God’s bleeding heart surrounded by thorns and on her nightstand, on top of a crocheted doily she had stitched herself, she kept a favorite statue of San Judas, who according to her, was the only saint that helped los desesperados, those who in despair felt they had nowhere else to turn. In the living room, on the wall above the floral sofa with the clear plastic covers, which squeaked when you sat down, made you sweat and

stuck to your skin, she hung all the blessed rosaries that she had bought throughout the years from the old priest at Our Lady of Victory Church. It was the light coming from the eyes in the light-up framed picture of Jesus and the sound of the water in it, which appeared to be constantly moving, which would make the bra salesman, with the face of the Lord, the most uncomfortable.

Tap. Tap. Tap. No one home. It was a Monday morning, and most of the adults in the building were working. *Tap. Tap. Tap.* He knocked hard on several of the other apartment doors before knocking on mine. "Are your Mami's home. Can I come in?" he said softly in the doorway entrance. "No, my Mami is not home," I said, and as usual, *miedosa* Violeta objected that I had been too friendly, said too much to the man, but I was the leader of our group and we always did what I wanted; the bra salesman came in. He figured out early that I was the one in charge and talked mainly to me. He talked to us about the bras and showed us the samples in his case. "I have a sale price on most of the articles," he said directly to me. "I have bras ranging from 32 to 38, but I don't carry all sizes in every style." So soft, so new. I touched everything and then I saw it. The shiny pink bra with the bow at the center was in the middle of the stack of underclothes, just under the panties, and enaguas. As he picked up the shiny pink bra he said to me, "You've picked the prettiest one and I only have one like this. Only one." Only one shiny pink bra. "If it fits, you can keep it," he teased me, as he held the bra close to my face. "No need to try it on, I can tell if it fits by feeling your breasts." He slowly worked his hands upwards, under my cloth scapular and the rosary beads that I wore for protection and stroked the hard masses behind my nipples. "Putting lotion right here and rubbing it in a circular motion, like this, will help you grow one cup size larger," he suggested. "If it fits, you keep it." But it didn't fit, and he turned to Violeta.

I liked her lots, and she was my best friend in the whole world, but Violeta was nothing like me; always a big *miedosa*, she refused to let the bra salesman touch her. She had done the same with the underwear salesman-Don Luis, who had insisted on making me try several different sizes for the right fit. "There is nothing worse than underwear that falls down because it is too big or irritates the skin because it is too tight", he had argued. He had grabbed a tape measure from his case and very carefully measured my waist first and then measured the space between my inner thighs. "The most important thing is a comfortable crotch." Violeta would not pull down her

underwear, or let him touch *Consuelo* either. It was always up to me to be the brave one.

A new shiny pink bra. "If it fits, you keep it." How could anyone, I thought to myself, pass up a deal like that, how could anyone? I knew of someone who would also like the shiny pink bra and I was certain it would fit her. I suggested he visit Migdalia, the bigger girl, who lived on the fourth floor with her mother and Joe Cuba -her brother. The salesman, with the face like Jesus, thanked us and walked upstairs.

The next morning, Violeta and Consuelo had come over early to play. We drank Malta and listened to the sounds of people talking in the other apartments, babies crying and the sirens of police cars speeding up and down Third Avenue. We took turns standing up in the corner of the fire escape, looking up at the small patch of blue sky and looking out across 149th Street, pass Willis Avenue to the places we had never visited. My turn to stand up by the railing, and when I looked down, I got a glimpse of a body. I turned to my friends, "Look, there's a man lying near the garbage cans. There's blood. I think he's dead. Let's go look at it." Miedosa Violeta was the first to refuse to go. "Miedosa, I've seen dead bodies before. They can't hurt you no more," I yelled and convinced her and Consuelo to come with me.

I went ahead of them, and was the first to see that it was the bra salesman, who was lying on his side; blood was pooled around his head. Afraid, Consuelo shivered, and Violeta complained of having difficulty breathing. "It's just an *ataque de nervios*," I scoffed. "Mami gets them all the time." I made sure to not step in his blood, and touched his face to make sure he wasn't still alive. Violeta whispered, "Let's go tell your Mami, and she can call the police." I protested, "Not yet. Not yet." Frantically, I looked around for the samples suitcase, and the shiny pink bra. I found nothing. We ran upstairs to tell Mami the news. She never called the police for anything, not for the syringes we found in the hallway, not even for dead bodies, and so somebody else in "*el bldin*" finally called the police to take the bra salesman's body away.

For weeks, everyone gossiped about the dead man, saying it was Migdalia's brother who had killed him, but Joe Cuba kept silent. We never saw Migdalia again after that summer, and *chismes* reported she had gone away because the bra salesman, with the face like Jesus, had done something very bad to her. Don Luis, the old man who sold lady's underwear from his suitcase, stopped coming to the *barrio* and Joe and his *ganga* took turns watching out for him and other door-to-door salesmen.

Most nights, for weeks and months later, I would hear Mami saying the rosary aloud, the dozen Hail Marys and Our Fathers, giving thanks that the bra salesman had not visited her little girl. She also had the old priest come to our apartment and sprinkle it with holy water, and even hung a picture of La Virgencita holding baby Jesus above my bed to watch over me and protect me during the day while she went to work, to sew the clothes for the dolls I could never own. Every night, on my knees, I prayed to Mary to protect me, but during the day, I pleaded for protection from the Jesus in the framed print in the living room—the one with the light coming from His eyes and the sound of the water in it, which appeared to be constantly moving, and which had made the bra salesman, with the face of the Lord, the most uncomfortable. I also prayed for Migdalia, from time -to- time, and wondered about what might have happened to her. “If it fits, you keep it.” I wondered too if it was she, who got to keep the shiny new pink bra with the bow in the center.

Blind Justice

RAÚL MANZANO



Contributor Biographies

Cheryl Chaffin teaches English composition, literature, and rhetoric at Cabrillo College in Santa Cruz, California. She is director of the college Writing Center. She has an MFA in Writing from Goddard College where she focused on feminist literature of exile and immigration. Cheryl has published poetry as well as personal and academic essays. Currently a doctoral candidate in Humanities at Union Institute and University, her dissertation project, *Speaking from Memory: Writing and Reading Women's Political Memoirs*, concerns the role of memoir in directing public attention to injustice and towards activism for change. Specifically, she examines works written by women who have suffered severe limitations to freedom due to social, economic, political, and cultural situations.

Myriam J.A. Chancy, PhD, is a writer/scholar born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and educated in Port-au-Prince, Quebec City, Winnipeg, and Halifax. Her first novel, *Spirit of Haiti* (Mango 2003), was a finalist in the Best First Book Category, Canada/Caribbean region, of the Commonwealth Prize 2004. She is also the author of the critical works *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* (Rutgers 1997) and *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile* (Temple 1997; Choice OAB Award, 1998), as well as the novels *The Scorpion's Claw* (Peepal Tree Press 2005) and *The Loneliness of Angels* (Peepal Tree Press 2009). Her work as editor of *Meridians* (2002-2004) garnered the CELJ Phoenix Award for Editorial Achievement (2004). She is a professor of English at the University of Cincinnati.

J. D. Hunley earned his PhD in history from the University of Virginia in 1973. He has published five books in that discipline, most recently the two volumes, *Preludes to U.S. Space-Launch Vehicle Technology: Goddard Rockets to Minuteman III* and *U.S. Space-Launch Vehicle Technology: Viking to Space Shuttle*, published as separate titles by the University Press of Florida in 2008. Interested his whole life in literature, he has written a

manuscript titled *Different Truths in Imaginative Literature and History* with which this article overlaps.

Hyo K. Kim is an assistant professor of English at Medgar Evers College, City University of New York, where he teaches Asian American literature and literary theory. He is currently involved in two research projects; one editing a collection of critical essays on Theresa Cha's *Dictee*; another is a book-length study exploring the connections between minor affects and the aesthetics of minority literatures in the United States.

George Longenecker of Middlesex, Vermont, teaches technical writing, poetry, literature and history at Vermont Technical College. Some of his recent poems can be found in Santa Fe Review, Atlanta Review, and Memoir. When he's not writing poetry he can be found working in the garden or hiking in the nearby Green Mountains with his wife, Cynthia Martin.

Raúl Manzano is an artist, author, and mentor at SUNY/Empire State College in New York City where he teaches art history, drawing and conduct museum lectures. Since 2000, he has been the resident-director of the School of Visual Arts' summer program, Painting in Barcelona, in Barcelona, Spain. He earned his MA at Empire State College and his BFA at the School of Visual Arts. He is a PhD student at Union Institute & University. www.raul-manzano.com.

E. Sepúlveda Rodríguez, a Nuyorican-Puerto Rican short story writer and *cuentista*-storyteller, is a student-scholar at Union Institute & University. As part of a creative and interdisciplinary dissertation writing project, she has written a collection of *cuentos* titled, "Virgins, Whores and Madwomen of Guaidia" for later publication. She is an associate professor at Trinidad State Junior College in Alamosa, Colorado, teaching humanities, English, literature, women's storytelling, and children's literature and storytelling for early childhood classrooms.

Ryan Scacci currently teaches psychology and philosophy at several New Jersey community colleges. From a childhood in Texas, he has spent considerable time in many regions of Ireland and America. He also takes pride in centering his work in a true interdisciplinary orientation. Complimenting his training in clinical psychology, his professional

background also consists of over a decade of work as a professional visual artist, including a number of gallery exhibitions, display work in major American shopping malls, and a sculpture installation in the Colombian Embassy in New York City. He is currently co-curator of The Philosopher's Stone Gallery in Belvidere, New Jersey.

Christopher Smith, MFA, MEd, is an assistant professor of English, humanities, and social sciences at Vermont Technical College. His writing has appeared in newspapers and journals; a compilation of his creative work may be found at smithforecast.com. Chris serves as vice president of the Faculty Federation of the Vermont State Colleges (AFT Local 3180). He hosts a weekly radio program, The Superhero Sandbox, on Royalton Community Radio. Chris lives in Tunbridge, Vermont, with his partner, Jennie Harriman.

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