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*Essence & Critique: Journal of Literature and Drama Studies* is an open access, peer-reviewed, academic e-journal aiming to publish original and international research articles that bring solutions to issues and examines scientific issues and problems in all subfields of literatures, theatre, drama and performance studies, and cultural studies. Each submitted article is evaluated by at least two referees of the field expert and the final result is reported to the authors within three months. The journal is published twice a year in June and December.

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Welcome to the Inaugural Issue

\* Dr. Önder Çakırtaş  
Founding Editor-in-Chief

On behalf of our authors, reviewers, editorial board, and editorial team– I warmly welcome you to the inaugural issue of *Essence & Critique: Journal of Literature and Drama Studies*.

I am proud to present the first issue of *Essence & Critique: Journal of Literature and Drama Studies*. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the editorial board and the refereeing committee, especially the issue writers, for their help in delivering the first issue of this journal. I am equally grateful for the many authors who offered candidate contributions to this first issue – and for the many more colleagues around the globe who consistently provided critical but supportive reviews. Many of these reviewers were drawn from our Editorial Board, whose broader support has likewise been essential.

*Essence & Critique*, like many scientific and academic journals that have pioneered literature and drama studies, aims to host self-sacrificing and qualified works that have not had the chance to be published but must be delivered to readers and literature/drama experts. Each work that is filtered from the theoretical and practical knowledge of the authors and passed through the filter of field expert referees and editors will be included in the scope of this journal, which aims to close a gap in the world of literature and drama studies. I wish *Essence & Critique* to be beneficial to the academic world, and I wish it to guide our dear readers, field experts, professionals, undergraduate and graduate students in literature, cultural studies and the arts of stage, performance, theatre and drama.

Last, but certainly not least, my profound thanks go to our associate editor, Professor Paul Innes, for promoting the first issue. We welcome new writers to join us with their groundbreaking academic studies on literature, cultural studies along with performance, theatre and drama studies.



## Introduction

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\* **Prof. Paul Innes**  
Associate Editor

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Essence & Critique*, a journal of Literature and Drama Studies. The appearance of a new journal should be celebrated, especially in the difficult and challenging circumstances that constantly seem to be arising at this cultural moment. The title of the journal gestures towards a felt necessity for interdisciplinary engagement and we wish to provide a place for work on any aspect of literary and/or dramatic study.

It is difficult to overestimate the continuing importance of interdisciplinary work, not just in generic terms but also as a productive site of cross-disciplinary practice within the area conventionally as critical theory - as if that is somehow separate from creative production. We therefore invite critically aware articles, especially those that challenge existing preconceptions. A prime consideration for the journal is constantly to move beyond what could be called the Anglosphere in cultural and critical enquiry.

As you will see from the articles in this premier issue, the range of material is extraordinary. We find that the negotiation of identity remains fraught, especially in the relationship between the Israeli context and its long prehistory of Jewish wandering in Eshkol Neva's *Neuland* – a timely intervention in the current debates about identity politics which Neha Soman and Balasubramaniam Padmanabhan underline in their article. Such enquiry is addressed directly in the literature of travel itself with Eva Opperman's article, as she moves from Boswell to Boorman and McGregor. This often-overlooked genre foregrounds the difficult question of the status of the observing figure, something that surely must be a major concern for any theorised position. To some extent Ayusman Chakraborty reverses the polarity by examining the Western cultural reception of Hindu *ūrdhva* ascetics, asking suggestive and apposite questions about a process of cultural exchange that never seems to be neutral.



## Introduction

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The writing set in Britain inevitably includes an emphasis on class politics within an overarching context of exploitation, as Elvan Karaman gives us a timely reminder of the continuing importance of British political drama with a focus on Arnold Wesker's *The Kitchen*. We see a productive relationship between Greek drama and contemporary British cultural politics in Philip Zapkin's article about the performance of democratic protest. Here, the multi-cultural and/or post-colonial considerations that lie behind the productive recreation of classic texts are shown to inflect the politics of gendered positions.

Christopher O'Brien further extends our geographical range by providing a welcome investigation of the resonances of inner-city African American life, in August Wilson's *King Hedley II*. O'Brien here draws attention to the conflicted terrain of class and postcolonial structures of power. Eric Sterling does something similar with another of August Wilson's works, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* as he interrogates what we now call by that anodyne phrase 'white privilege', as if giving a mediocre name to something so fundamental is adequate to the reality. Within the American context, Jay Malarcher's article on the linguistic interplay that lies behind the paradoxical conception of the American Dream takes on the iconic importance of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Intriguingly, this issue also breaks boundaries with an example of writing about speculative fiction as Ashley Fernando analyses the representations of power in N.K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth Trilogy*. Not only does this recall the old adage that provocative science fiction is really about our own societies, it also helps to redress the old critical imbalance that relegated genre fiction to the sidelines, an operation of the kind of marginalisation this journal seeks to address directly.

In this journal we seek to address crucial areas of liminal practice – not understood as a relatively marginalised position, but instead as open to multiplicity and plurality.



## Racial Discrimination, Exploitation, and Singing the Blues in August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*

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### ABSTRACT

This essay concerns the exploitation of African-American musicians by White businessmen in August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*; it serves as a microcosm of institutional racism in America. In Wilson's play, the famous blues singer Ma Rainey, in the zenith of her career in the 1920s, makes a fortune for record producer Sturdyvant and agent Irvin, who treat her badly because they are racists with little respect for her talent and little understanding of the blues. Sensing their disrespect, Rainey comports herself like a diva to show them that she earns money for them and should be in charge of the song list and recording session. Levee's impetuous stabbing of band mate Toledo over the innocuous stepping on his shoes manifests how the exploitation of Black workers by Whites leads to rage and Caucasians successfully turning Blacks against themselves. Levee's shoes are important in the play, for they symbolize his dream of upward mobility, which will never take place after Sturdyvant steals his songs and Toledo dies. The attempt by trumpet player Levee to write his own arrangement of Rainey's signature song signals his ambition to supplant her and his willingness to corrupt the blues for his own gain. The essay concludes with an exploration of why Wilson chooses to write about the blues in this play. The blues are integral to African-American culture—deriving from their African heritage and a source of comfort when working on plantations during slavery in America. In this play, like in most of his others, Wilson pairs two protagonists—one devoted to African-American culture of the past (Rainey) and an ambitious and mercenary character who looks toward the future and willingly sacrifices his heritage for financial gain (Levee).

### KEYWORDS

blues, music, singer, racism, exploitation, shoes, culture, heritage, African-American, commercialize, commodity

## Introduction

August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1984), set in 1927, concerns the exploitation of legendary blues singer Ma Rainey and other African-American musicians by White music record producers, who garner wealth at the expense of those who lack power and financial opportunities in the industry because of their race. Wilson dramatizes how Whites take advantage of their superior status in Jim Crow society in their business relationships with Blacks. Wilson shows that in a White-dominated culture, racial privilege in the music industry supersedes talent and diligence in the effort to thrive socioeconomically, with the advantages that Whites enjoy over Blacks serving as a microcosm for all professions and segments of American capitalistic society. Institutionalized racism enables White businessmen to turn Black workers against themselves, as we see in the murder that concludes Wilson's drama. Furthermore, Wilson demonstrates that the financial exploitation of African Americans can lead to Black rage, which, in turn, hinders their ability to succeed socioeconomically and leads to self-destruction. This essay concludes by demonstrating Wilson's purpose in selecting the blues not only as a theme in the play but also as an archetype that demonstrates the blue singer's essential role in African-American culture. Wilson feels compassion and admiration for blues singers; he claims that their singing and "music [contain] a cultural response of black Americans to the world they find themselves in. Blues is the best literature we have" (Shannon, "Blues" 540) because it brings African Americans closer to their roots and heritage. In *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, as in most of his other plays, such as *The Piano Lesson*, *Fences*, *Two Trains Running*, and *Jitney*, Wilson creates a pair of African-American characters going in opposite directions, one remaining linked to the past and cultural heritage, with the other looking ambitiously toward the future and wealth, to show his audience the importance of preserving and valuing Black culture.

## Rainey's Conflict with Her White Music Producer and Agent

In *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, two White businessmen (record producer Mel Sturdyvant and Rainey's business manager Mr. Irvin) record four songs by the blues singer and her band in Chicago. The friction between Sturdyvant and the Black singing star derives from racial tension, disrespect, financial exploitation, and a dispute concerning who controls the recording session. Wilson's play links the blues, capitalism, power, and institutionalized racism. Clearly the music industry, like virtually all businesses and capitalistic pursuits in 1920s America, is controlled by White entrepreneurs such as Sturdyvant, who owns the studio and equipment but lacks the blues singer's talent. Wilson mentioned in an interview that White people do not understand the blues

and mistakenly consider it sad and negative, not realizing that the “blues are life-affirming music that guides you throughout life” (Shepard 111). Ralph Ellison considered the blues “a transcendence of those conditions created within the Negro community by the denial of social justice. As such they are one of the techniques through which Negroes have survived and kept their courage” (256-257). Wilson’s drama explores the tension between African Americans who are inspired by and find their courage in the blues and the White businessmen who profit from it as a capitalistic enterprise. Although both groups need each other, the relationship, as Wilson portrays it, is parasitic because Caucasians control the power and exploit the talented African-American musicians who work for them.

From the onset of the play, Sturdyvant and Irvin clearly despise Rainey and dislike being in a business relationship with the blues singer. The two White businessmen engage in the following heated discussion:

**STURDYVANT:** “[Y]ou keep her in line, okay? I’m holding you responsible for her[. . . ] [Y]ou’re her manager. . . . She’s your responsibility. I’m not putting up with any Royal Highness. . . . Queen of the Blues bullshit!

**IRVIN:** Mother of the Blues, Mel. Mother of the Blues.

**STURDYVANT:** I don’t care what she calls herself [. . . ] I just want to get her in here [. . . to] record those songs on that list [. . . ] and get her out. (18)

Sturdyvant’s diatribe, holding Irvin responsible for the singer, indicates his disdain for Ma, as if she is a petulant child for whom he does not want to babysit (as opposed to the valuable money-making blues star she is). The producer tells Irvin to be responsible for Ma because he doesn’t want to interact with her himself. He simply wants to make money off her talent. It is difficult to believe that Sturdyvant would feel such disdain for a White singer; clearly his abhorrence of the star derives from racism. Sturdyvant knows little about the music business and even considers switching to the textiles industry. He definitely prefers the financial to the artistic aspect of the music business, which is clear when he emphasizes not Ma’s singing but rather the sheets (lists of record sales in major American cities). His sardonic reference to Ma Rainey as “Royal Highness” and “Queen of the Blues” manifests not only his contempt of her but also his ignorance of his own vocation and failure to recognize how much her blues singing means to her Black audience. He does not realize that “Ma” is an abbreviation for “Mother” and “Madame,” not “Queen.” “Queen of the Blues” was, historically, the nickname Columbia Records gave to their recording star, Rainey protégée and rival, Bessie Smith. Sturdyvant does not know the nickname given to his biggest recording star. Furthermore, his confusion between the nicknames of Rainey and Smith suggests that all Black singers are the same to him. And Sturdyvant

misleads Irvin when he declares that she calls herself “Mother of the Blues.” As Ma states to her pianist Toledo, fans say “I started it [the blues] . . . but I didn’t. I just helped it out [. . .] But if they wanna call me the Mother of the Blues, that’s all right with me. It don’t hurt none” (83). Her humility contradicts Sturdyvant’s claim that she arrogantly demands to be called “Mother of the Blues.” Sturdyvant’s disdain for her manifests his jealousy that a Black woman became famous and could potentially dominate him in their business relationship.

The friction between Sturdyvant and Rainey plays out during the recording session with the record producer resorting to impotent threats. He fails to realize that Ma behaves like a diva to punish him for his rudeness and protect her limited rights as an African-American blues star. When Ma threatens to walk out of the studio without recording her songs because of his inadequate equipment (the first song is not recorded because the cord is chewed up), he yells, “Ma, if you walk out of this studio. . . You’ll be through. . . washed up! If you walk out on me” (88). The fragmented sentences, with the ellipses and poor syntax, indicate his frustration because he will lose money if she leaves the studio and because during the Jim Crow era, the thought of a Black woman walking out on a White businessman humiliates him. The impotence of his threat suggests his lack of power since he needs her singing talent. The audience witnesses her domination when she refuses to sing trumpeter Levee Green’s arrangement of her song. Levee insists that Sturdyvant will choose his arrangement and make Ma sing it: “[T]he man’s the one putting out the record! He’s gonna put out what he wanna put out!” (37); yet Rainey declares, “I don’t care what you say, Irvin. Levee ain’t messing up my song . . . I’m singing Ma Rainey’s song. I ain’t singing Levee’s song” (62). Ma tells Irvin that he and Sturdyvant cannot force her to sing the song in a way that displeases her and corrupts her conception of the blues. Sturdyvant and Irvin feel helpless and passively concede victory to her because they fear that she will leave. They are so much in her power that they fail to realize that she cannot leave because her car is being repaired and White cab drivers decline to transport Black passengers.

Wilson suggests that White businessmen make large profits by benefitting from the fruits of the labor of Black entertainers such as Ma and her band. Sturdyvant even attempts to cheat Sylvester out of twenty-five dollars for speaking the introduction to her song—initially refusing to pay him and then subtracting Sylvester’s pay from Ma’s salary. As Rainey astutely declares, “If I wanted the boy to have twenty-five dollars of my money, I’d give it to him. . . . He supposed to get paid like everybody else” (103). Sturdyvant reluctantly acquiesces only because Ma has yet to sign the release forms, so he deceitfully blames his initial refusal to pay Sylvester on Irvin. The twenty-five dollars for Sylvester is important to Ma, who hopes that by earning money, her nephew will gain the confidence to overcome his stuttering problem and become a

productive part of the workforce. Furthermore, as Mary Bogumil astutely notes, by demanding that Sylvester speak the introduction, “Ma quite literally gives voice to those African Americans who previously had no voice, no venue as she has had through her music to articulate the burden of marginalization” (29). Thus, the record producer’s attempt to withhold the money serves, in Rainey’s opinion, not only as an effort to cheat Sylvester but also to hinder her nephew’s progress and restrict his voice. Sylvester’s attempt to find his voice represents the struggle of many Blacks during the Jim Crow era who wanted to participate actively in American society.

Irvin consistently attempts to appease both Sturdyvant and his client (Rainey), which proves impossible because the two feud incessantly. Ma needs a Caucasian manager because a Black manager in the 1920s would not be allowed to work with a White record producer given the racism inherent in the music industry. Even if a Black manager would have the opportunity, that person would no doubt be treated with much condescension and rudeness. Because of his prejudice, Irvin does not have Ma’s best interests at heart, which he should as her agent, and often sides with Sturdyvant against his own client. The manager manifests his prejudice toward his client by blaming Rainey’s lateness on her skin color, telling Sturdyvant, “You know they’re always late, Mel” (47). Irvin exploits Ma to show off to his friends: Ma laments to Cutler, her guitarist and trombonist, that “Irvin don’t care nothing about me either. He’s been my manager for six years. . . and the only time he had me in his house was to sing for some of his friends” (79). She recognizes that Irvin does not want any Black person in his house as his guest, only as a worker whom he may treat as an object. He is supposed to work for her, yet when he invites her to his home, she works for him as a spectacle or servant.

### Racial Exploitation and the Blues

The conflicts in the recording studio, Ma believes, emanate from the failure of the White businessmen to understand her music or livelihood, and their refusal to respect her because of her skin color. The racial barrier becomes a significant issue in their relationship, leading to distrust, disrespect, and conflicting attitudes about music and other aspects of culture. Rainey explains to Cutler:

White folks don’t understand about the blues. They hear it come out, but they don’t know how it got there. They don’t understand that’s life’s way of talking. You don’t sing to feel better. You sing ‘cause that’s a way of understanding life. . . . The blues help you get out of bed in the morning. You get up knowing you ain’t alone. There’s something else in the world. Something’s been added by that

song. This be an empty world without the blues. I take that emptiness and try to fill it up with something. (82-83)

Through her music, Ma pleases thousands of people, primarily the Black community but also anyone who loves the blues. Her songs give solace, pleasure, and hope to many in the Black community who suffer because of poverty and racial injustice. She fills up the emptiness in their world with her soulful singing and improves their lives. Wilson claimed, “what’s contained in the blues is the African American’s cultural response to the world. . . . [W]hatever you want to know about the Black experience in America is contained in the blues. . . . It is our sacred book. Every other people has a sacred book, so I claim it as that” (Livingston 58). The culturally and emotionally enriching experiences that Rainey provides for her fans are quite important to her and give her a purpose. Yet Sturdyvant and Irvin fail to recognize her gift, hurting her feelings by commercializing her music. Sturdyvant also diminishes her music by paying her “a fee rather than receiving contractual residuals, reducing her art to mere labor” (Nadel 105). He and Irvin myopically fail to see the profound effect of her music upon her fans. The cultural and spiritual significance of her music is reduced to dollars and cents. Sturdyvant and Irvin’s exploitation of her resembles other Caucasian music entrepreneurs’ victimization of Black musicians. Wilson explains: “White people went down [South] with their recorders, gave these guys a bottle of whiskey and three dollars, and had them sing twelve or fifteen songs, took the songs back to Chicago and sat down and decided which of these twelve or fifteen songs had any worth or value to them“ (Sheppard 111).

Ma is bitter because the White businessmen treat her not as a partner or equal but rather as a prostitute. She remarks that Sturdyvant and Irvin

don’t care nothing about me. All they want is my voice. Well, I done learned that, and they gonna treat me like I want to be treated no matter how much it hurt them. They back there now calling me all kinds of names. . . . They ain’t got what they wanted yet. As soon as they get my voice down on them recording machines, then it’s just like I’d be some whore and they roll over and put their pants on. Ain’t got no use for me then. (79)

Discerning their disrespect and bigotry, she protects herself from racist exploitation as best she can. Just as a prostitute withholds sex until she is paid, Ma refuses to give them her voice (which Sturdyvant records, captures, and then sells for his profit) until he heats the building and buys her a Coke. She sagaciously avoids signing the release form, which gives Sturdyvant permission to sell her music, until he pays all the band members, including Sylvester. In Wilson’s dramas, “Written texts such as legal documents often function as tools of White hegemony that Black survival skills must confront or even circumvent. . . . Her delay in signing is an exercise of

resistance to the power of the written document” (Elam 42). Although Elam correctly observes that Whites used legal documents to control African Americans, Rainey employs documentation to her advantage, refusing to sign until Sturdyvant treats her respectfully. Alan Nadel believes, however, that her advantage is temporary because although the blues star sings the songs, “not even Ma Rainey[,] at the peak of her power, can control the record. For the record to be produced, in fact, Ma Rainey must sign away her voice. The play thus pivots around the historical moment when her song, in its unique moment of production, becomes the property of the White company” (105). Although she cannot earn their respect because of their prejudice, she can make them temporarily dread her power in their business relationship.

### Ma’s Conflict with Levee

Ma clashes with Levee, who also spars with the other band members. These battles, like all the other arguments in this drama, concern the blues, money, and power. The friction between Levee and Rainey begins when Green creates his own arrangement of the blues singer’s signature song, “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom.” Ma is insulted when she discovers that Levee, merely a trumpet player in *her* accompaniment band, revised her eponymous song and convinced Sturdyvant and her own manager to replace her traditional version with his. Ma realizes that to maintain her authority over the band, she must control the song that bears her name. Levee’s arrangement differs from hers in various ways, such as his removal of the introduction. Rainey sees the removal of the introduction as a threat to her because she has promised her sister that she will help Sylvester (Ma’s nephew) gain confidence by speaking it. As the band practices the song, Ma learns that Sturdyvant plans to use Levee’s arrangement, thereby eliminating her nephew’s part and removing him from the enterprise. Levee mocks Sylvester and insists that Ma’s nephew is incapable of speaking the introduction: “How In the hell the boy gonna do the part and he can’t even talk!” (65). He then mocks Ma’s nephew for stuttering, telling Sylvester, “B-b-b-boy, ain’t nobody studying you” (66), and he refuses to rehearse Rainey’s version. Ma seems to be close to her family, so insulting Sylvester constitutes an attack on her.

After several takes, Sylvester finally speaks his part correctly, but the song is not recorded. Irvin claims, “Levee must have kicked the plug out” (87). Angry that his song arrangement is not being used, the petulant trumpeter kicks out the plug. Knowing that the penurious Sturdyvant does not allow many “takes” and that the odds of Sylvester reciting the introduction correctly twice are unlikely, Levee sabotages the recording of the song to force the record producer to use his arrangement. Furthermore, Levee composes his arrangement so that

Ma has difficulty singing the beginning of it: “She got to find her own way in”(38), Green says, indicating that his instrumental music could overpower her voice. It would be a way for his art to supersede hers.

Levee’s attempt to steal Dussie Mae from Ma serves as a microcosm of his attempt to steal Rainey’s glory and financial success as a blues legend. The trumpeter tells Dussie Mae: “A man what’s gonna get his own band need to have a woman like you” (81). To Levee, the beautiful Dussie Mae symbolizes the power and wealth he can attain at Ma’s expense. As bass guitarist Slow Drag reports, Dussie Mae “told Levee he’d have to turn his money green before he could talk with her” (22). Levee is poor; the only thing green about him is not his money but rather his cognomen, so he purchases expensive shoes to provide the illusion of financial security. Green impresses Dussie Mae when he tells her that he writes his own songs (80) and will soon create his own band—Levee Green and his Footstompers (81). This name for his musical group is ironic considering that he becomes irate when anyone stomps on his feet and that Toledo’s accidental stepping on Levee’s shoe leads to the murder of the pianist and the destruction of Levee’s life. Dussie Mae treats herself (and in turn is treated) as an object of commerce, offering herself to Levee only if he can start his own band and buy her presents. Just as Doaker tells Lymon in Wilson’s *The Piano Lesson* that women are only interested in men who can buy them presents (65), Levee acknowledges to Dussie Mae that he understands:

**DUSSIE MAE:** A woman like me wants somebody to bring it and put it in my hand. I don’t need nobody wanna get something for nothing[. . . .]

**LEVEE:** I knows how to treat a woman. Buy her presents and things. . . treat her like she wants to be treated.

**DUSSIE MAE:** When you getting your own band?

**LEVEE:** (*Moves closer to slip his arm around her.*) Soon as Mr. Sturdyvant say.

**DUSSIE MAE:** (*Moves away.*) Go on now. I don’t go for all that pawing and stuff. When you get your own band, maybe we can see about this stuff you talking [. . . .]

**LEVEE:** [C]an I introduce my red rooster to your brown hen?

**DUSSIE MAE:** You get your band, then we’ll see if that rooster knows how to crow. (81-82)

Although Levee assures her that he will have his own band, his promise is beyond his control, contingent on the promise of a White man who controls his future. As a Black musician dependent upon the whim of a prejudiced White businessman, Levee has little power over his career—and thus over his ability to win over Dussie Mae.

Not coincidentally, Ma offers to buy Dussie Mae nice shoes on the same day that Levee purchases and shows off his prized new Florsheims (60). Dussie Mae might leave Ma for the trumpeter if he proves successful and generous. The victor in Levee's struggle to replace Ma's arrangement of her eponymous song with his version and to supplant Ma as a blues star will earn the body and "love" of Dussie Mae. Rainey wins because she relies on her own talent while Levee naively places his career in Sturdyvant's hands.

The friction between Levee and Ma and her band involves his vision of the future of blues music, his condemnation of her songs as old fashioned, and his desire to break free from his colleagues so that he can capitalize financially on modern music. Toledo complains that "Levee think he the king of the barnyard. He thinks he's the only rooster know how to crow" (59). Toledo means that Levee arrogantly believes that he should rule, like a king, over Rainey and her band because he is smarter than they are and knows more about the blues than they do. Like the trumpet he plays, Levee is brassy—as in brazen and loud. According to Toledo, Levee uses his male bravado to try to dominate Ma. The reference to Levee being a rooster is significant in that Toledo claims that Levee believes he is the only rooster in the barnyard—that the other male musicians in the studio are irrelevant. Levee employs the rooster metaphor when he brags about his masculinity to Dussie Mae and intends to have sex with her after he surpasses Rainey and his fellow musicians by starting his own band (82). In both cases, the rooster reference suggests male authority, the seizure of control over a situation, and ultimately financial and professional success. Levee exemplifies this control in the band sessions.

In his stage directions, Wilson describes Levee as ("*somewhat of a buffoon. But it is an intelligent buffoonery, clearly calculated to shift control of the situation to where he can grasp it. . . . He plays wrong notes frequently. He often gets his skill and talent confused with each other.*") (23).

**MA:** Why you playing all them notes? You play ten notes for every one you supposed to play. It don't call for that. . . . You supposed to play the song the way I sing it. The way everybody else play it. . . .

**LEVEE:** I was playing the song. I was playing it the way I felt it.

**MA:** I couldn't keep up with what was going on. I'm trying to sing the song and you up there messing up my ear. That's what you was doing. . . .

**LEVEE:** I know what I'm doing. . . . You all back up and leave me alone about *my* music.

**CUTLER:** [I]t ain't about *your* music. It's about *Ma's* music. . . .

**MA:** That's all right, Cutler. I done told you what to do.

**LEVEE:** I don't care what you do. You supposed to improvise on the theme. Not play note for note the same thing over and over again. (101-102, "my" is my emphasis)

By playing extra notes and improvising, Levee intentionally distracts Ma. Green is bitter that she refuses to sing his arrangement because he wants his version of "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" recorded and sold throughout the country. Wanting to surpass and intimidate her, Levee ruins her concentration so that she cannot sing the song as well as she wants. He considers himself her superior, which is why he claims that Ma should "leave me alone about *my* music." Realizing that Levee poses a threat to Ma's hegemony over the group, Cutler corrects him by declaring that it is Rainey's music, not his. The personal pronouns indicate Levee and Cutler's viewpoint concerning who is the blues authority. Feeling threatened, Ma reminds Cutler to remove this menace to her power by firing Levee when they reach Memphis.

### Sturdyvant Exploits Levee and Takes His Songs

It is impossible to discern whether Levee is excited or upset when Ma, tired of Levee's quest to usurp her authority, fires him. Levee responds, "You think I care about being fired? I don't care nothing about that. You doing me a favor. . . . Good! Best thing that ever happened to me" (102). Although hurt because he has lost his job and income (just after spending a large amount of money on shoes), and although his happiness at being fired might indicate false bravado, he now is free to pursue the golden opportunity that Sturdyvant promised him. He is quite optimistic because he is too naïve to understand that talented Black workers are easily and often exploited by White businessmen in a nation where racial discrimination and Jim Crow laws are prevalent and where solid financial opportunities for African Americans are rare.

In the beginning of the play, Sturdyvant asks Irvin excitedly if Levee will be playing in the recording session:

that horn player. . . the one who gave me those songs. . . is he gonna be here today? Good. I want to hear more of that sound. Times are changing [. . .] We've got to jazz it up. . . put in something different. You know, something wild. . . with a lot of rhythm. (19)

Sturdyvant is excited about Levee's songwriting ability and intends to cheat him; in fact, Wilson manifests that Sturdyvant does not care about Levee when the record producer, despite his earlier conversations with the trumpet player, does not even know his name, labeling him "that horn player." To Sturdyvant, Levee is merely a Black musician, not an individual with rights and

feelings. To the record producer, all African Americans are alike, and he cares only about how much money he can make off their talent.

Wilson clearly delineates that Sturdyvant has praised Levee and requested his songs, promising Green that he could record them himself. Yet after gaining possession of the songs, Sturdyvant destroys Levee's dream, claiming falsely that he had a band play them and that he does not "believe people will buy them. They're not the type of songs we're looking for" (107), contradicting his previous statement to Irvin that he covets these songs. To assuage his guilt, Sturdyvant gives Levee five dollars per song—a mere pittance because he can have another music ensemble record the song and make thousands of dollars for each one, not having to pay Levee anything more:

I'm doing you a favor. Now, if you write any more, I'll help you out and take them off your hands. The price is five dollars apiece. Just like now. (*He attempts to hand LEVEE the money, finally shoves it in LEVEE's coat pocket and is gone in a flash. LEVEE follows him to the door and it slams in his face. He takes the money from his pocket, balls it up and throws it on the floor.*) (109)

Although Sturdyvant essentially steals the promising songs from Levee, he falsely claims that he is doing the trumpet player a favor and that the musician is getting the better end of the deal, just as minutes earlier, Levee declares that Ma has done him a favor by firing him.

Because Levee wants to record the songs as he was promised, he refuses to accept the money. Sturdyvant shoves the cash in Levee's pocket so that Green can never claim that he has not been paid for the transaction and that the songs still belong to him. The door slamming in Levee's face resembles the door of job opportunities being shut in the face of many Blacks in the 1920s. It is Sturdyvant's way of terminating the transaction and his relationship with Levee, for he knows that Green is not stupid enough to write him any more songs. The door slam, with Levee's incapacity to respond, symbolizes Green's inability to have any legal recourse to regain ownership of the songs and his dismal future in the music industry. Levee knows in 1927, as Wining Boy claims in the 1930s in *The Piano Lesson*, "That's the difference between the colored man and the white man. The colored man can't fix nothing with the law" (38).

Levee Green is left with no job, no band, no contract with Sturdyvant, no Dussie Mae, and no future. He wants to hurt Sturdyvant for destroying his future in the music business, but he cannot act because he views White people as being of a superior social status, people whose approval he needs. In his lucidity, Toledo astutely observes that Blacks rely too heavily and subserviently on the approval of Whites: "As long as the colored man look to white folks to put the crown on what he say. . . as long as he looks to white folks for approval. . . then he ain't

never gonna find out who he is and what he's about. He's just gonna be about what white folks want him to be about" (37). Like his colleagues, Levee speaks in a familial and aggressive manner to his fellow band members, but he, like them, calls Sturdyvant and Irvin "Sir" and converses with them in a deferential and subjugated tone. Levee claims previously, when discussing the time eight or nine White men gang raped his mother, that he acts politely toward White men while he bides his time, but when one crosses him, he will kill that man: "I studies the White man. I got him studied good. The first time one fixes on me wrong, I'm gonna let him know just how much I studied" (67). Wilson dramatizes, however, what Levee actually does when he is being hurt by a White man—nothing. He accepts the door slam, drops the money, and walks away. He wants to stab Sturdyvant for stealing his songs and falsely promising him a job as a bandleader and songwriter—a gig so promising that Levee has allowed himself to get fired. Although Levee wants to plunge his knife into the body of the record producer, he cannot because the man is White. The murder of a White man by a Black man in the 1920s was an act that would surely lead to very harsh and quick consequences, with life imprisonment or even capital punishment. He feels intimidated and is thus afraid to act.

### Black Rage

Although Levee decides not to pursue Sturdyvant, he seethes with Black rage. This insult, like the gang rape of his mother and murder of his father, burns inside of him. Throughout his life, he has suffered racial discrimination and bigotry at the hands of Whites. Then Toledo accidentally steps on his shoe. Although the mistake is accidental, it unleashes the Black rage burning inside of Levee. His band members express no sympathy for the loss of his job, and they are clearly glad to get rid of this troublemaker. Levee has hoped to impress Sturdyvant with his songs and shoes, but Levee Green and his Footstompers will never come to fruition, and now Toledo dirties his expensive shoes. Levee grabs his knife and stabs Toledo in the back, slaying him: ("*All the weight in the world suddenly falls on LEVEE and he rushes at TOLEDO with his knife in his hand*") (110). Levee kills a fellow Black musician who, like him, never has been able to thrive because of racism. They are like brothers, so the murder gives new meaning to Levee's first speech in the play about not being his brother's keeper (23); although Levee's comment does not refer specifically to Toledo, it clearly refers to Cain's murder of his brother Abel. Tragically, Levee stabs Toledo shortly after the band colleague has stressed to him that the only way for Blacks to thrive financially and to achieve happiness is by working together as brothers (42). Wilson dramatizes how racial discrimination, financial exploitation, and the crushing of dreams victimize Blacks, how the rage within them causes them to self-destruct and become

what Toledo calls a “leftover” of history (58). The culmination of *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* also demonstrates that during the 1920s and other times when Jim Crow laws prevailed, the inability of Blacks to achieve social justice and equality in business sometimes incites them to turn against each other. Levee and Toledo will never play the blues again.

### The Blues

Wilson could have selected any theme to represent the African-American experience in the 1920s, but he purposefully chose the blues because it is so integral to Black culture, dating back to slavery in America and even their African heritage. Oppressed American slaves attempted to cope with their horrific suffering by singing the blues and hymns. Slaves composed these songs on plantations or derived them from their African culture. Speaking in an interview about the history and cultural significance of the blues, August Wilson claims:

If you look at the singers, they actually follow a long line all the way back to Africa. . . They are carriers of the culture, carriers of ideas—like the troubadours in Europe. Except in American Society they were not valued, except among the black folks who understood. I’ve always thought of them as sacred because of the sacred tasks they took upon themselves—to disseminate this information and carry these cultural values of the people. And I found that white America would very often abuse them. I don’t think it was without purpose, in the sense that the blues and music have always been at the forefront in the development of the character and consciousness of black America, and people have senselessly destroyed that or stopped that. Then—you’re taking away from the people their self-definition—in essence, their self-determination. (Shannon 540-541)

They were not merely songs but rather a significant aspect of African-American culture that comforted them and helped them survive their tribulations. The blues were a part of their essence.

The blues embodies African-American rituals and culture. Wilson uses the blues to create a past and future dichotomy, as he does with the piano in his Pulitzer-Prize-winning drama, *The Piano Lesson*. In that play, Berniece wants to keep the piano because the Charles family’s history and African-American rituals, such as jumping the broom, are carved into it, while Boy Willie wants to sell it to purchase land and be a farmer. Berniece treasures the piano because she considers her family’s history as slaves, which she plainly sees on the musical instrument, while Boy Willie views it as a commodity that he can sell to make money. Similarly, in *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*, the blues is precious to Ma because her singing gives pleasure to her fans, as the

blues comforted slaves a century before. Levee, although seemingly inspired, views the blues as passé and his “improvements” as a commodity to attain wealth and have sex with beautiful women like Dussie Mae. Rainey believes that her power to sing the blues comes from her ancestry and her heart and soul. Levee, on the other hand, asserts that his musical talent comes from within and from his expensive shoes. Bragging about his Florsheims, Levee sings, “When the world goes wrong and I have the blues/ He’s the man who makes me get on my dancing shoes” (40). Green commercializes the blues, with his foot stomping songs of the future, for his own benefit, while Rainey, in contrast, reflects back on her ancestral and archetypal past.

Wilson transforms images (such as a piano and blues singer) into an African-American archetype. The playwright allows us to see the archetype from a Black perspective rather than the typical White racist or paternalistic stereotype. (Drowning 76) After hearing from White music business functionaries (Sturdyvant and Irvin) how rude and immature Ma Rainey is, audiences see, upon her entrance, how charming and intelligent she is. She is not combative but defends her rights, which her White bosses find offensive. After August Wilson tricks audiences into briefly accepting Sturdyvant and Irvin’s bigoted perspective, the dramatist then allows the blues singer to enter and charm them, allowing theatre attendees to comprehend that perceiving African Americans from a White perspective can be deceptive and unreliable. Audiences see that Rainey is talented, funny, and dedicated to the blues and her nephew. She exhibits much more patience than the White music employees, who consider themselves superior to her. The blues is sacred to her, so she will not sing until she is ready and will not allow White businessmen who commercialize the blues to dominate her. She sings the blues not for money but for the benefit of her fans.

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**BIO**

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## The Metaphysics of Pronoun Confusion in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

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### ABSTRACT

The lineage of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) may be drawn from several important bloodlines, the two strongest being the American Realism of Eugene O'Neill in his plays *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*, and less realistic works of Europe from playwrights such as Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, and especially Harold Pinter, whose *The Birthday Party* (1957) sets a similar tone of unconvincing and subversive backstory that Albee uses to great effect and thematic purpose in his own celebrated masterpiece. The classical traditions of stalwart categories like Metaphysics gave way in the twentieth century to a more linguistic-based philosophy, and Albee's play replicates this shift in a meaningful way.

The intellectual level of puns and allusions points to the elevated education level of the characters. The reality reflected in the stories told (out of school, so to speak) points to a fundamental question of the nature of reality itself, since any false story necessarily stands in for the truth of what actually happened. Thus, Albee calls into question metaphysical reality versus illusion or fiction at almost every twist in the plot. The concreteness of George and Martha's invented son in their own minds merely emphasizes the extent to which truth has been supplanted by the conjured alternative reality they have shared for more than a score of years. The substitution of a weaker "reality" for the stark truth that they might suffer through calls to mind a parallel linguistic substitution: the pronoun as a stand-in for an established person.

While absence is a theme explored to some degree throughout, the larger concept of standing in for an absent object, which task the pronoun performs, occurs more obliquely when George and the son are confused. Albee moves his drama of drunken academic games from the particulars of the two couples into the realm of metaphysical questioning of reality by imbuing the conversations with the motif of pronoun confusion. This confusion-and-correction cycle allows the characters to explore (willingly or otherwise) the nature of truth and illusion, where an invented reality stands in for the awful existential reality that pains them. Truth and illusion: we must know the difference, or at least carry on as though we did.

### KEYWORDS

Albee, miscommunication, pronouns, modernism, metaphysics, American drama

“Don’t you tell me words.”

—Martha, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Albee 63)

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In a 1955 article about moral categorization in philosophical arguments, “The Case of the Obliging Stranger,” William H. Gass concludes a hypothetical scenario with the observation, “Something has been done wrong. Or something wrong has been done” (193). The value that comes from such chiasmatic structure enlightens a motivic technique that Edward Albee employs in his 1962 masterpiece, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, namely the confusion of terms—especially pronouns—leading to a similar pair of questions, “Was something wrong said? Or was something said wrong?” Whether a character simply corrects another character’s misspeaking, or that character’s meaning, forms the basis of this paper. While this central question arises from a philosophical and linguistic/semiotic starting point, the most compelling philosophical questions emerge as one examines the interplay these examples of *parole* have with metaphysics itself. Since metaphysics operates within several philosophical traditions, it naturally takes on several divergent meanings, but here I use it in the simple-sense questioning of what is real, what exists, and how this knowledge helps us approach a kind of Truth. The classical traditions of stalwart categories like Metaphysics gave way in the twentieth century to a more linguistic-based philosophy, and Albee’s play replicates this shift in a meaningful way.

The lineage of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (which opened 13 October 1962) may be drawn from several important bloodlines, the two strongest being the American Realism of Eugene O’Neill in his plays *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, and less realistic works of Europe from playwrights such as Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, and especially Harold Pinter, whose *The Birthday Party* (1957) sets a similar tone of unconvincing and subversive backstory that Albee uses to great effect and thematic purpose in his own celebrated masterpiece.

Moreover, Henrik Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck* (1884) and O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh* (written 1939/first performed 1946) both present those who live within safe illusions and the comfort it allows. *The Wild Duck* presents the realistic story of Hjalmar Ekdal, whose estranged friend returns and, in the hope of setting the record straight and curing Hjalmar’s life-illusion that his daughter is his own, ruins the man’s life and family. An intriguing play, for it postulates that in some cases, ignorance may be bliss, especially when it actually performs a noble service.

Similarly, the denizens of the bar in O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* drink to forget the awful truths of their lives. When the main character, Hickey, enters and preaches the gospel of breaking free of "pipe dreams" and living only in the truth, the barflies initially respond positively; when Hickey turns out not to be practicing what he preaches, the bar's customers return to their heavy drinking. The connection to the imaginary child's comforting effect on George and Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* makes these earlier plays significant as Modernist precursors.

Even John Osborne's revolutionary and realistic *Look Back in Anger* from 1958 presents a correlative motif in the main characters' adoption of (imaginary) furry characters to hide behind as a coping mechanism. In this watershed "Angry Young Man" play (a label for a type depicted in Osborne's play), the main characters, Jimmy Porter and his wife, Alison, are finally able to interact civilly toward each other whilst taking the roles of timid, furry animals, speaking in childish tones, and using them as stand-ins for the loving parts of themselves. Building on these realist models, Albee in *Who's Afraid?* seems to argue not that living in an illusion is the problem, but that living in a *confusion* of truth and illusion is the problem.

Reactions to Realism (i.e., Surrealism, Expressionism, etc.) seemed to implore the theatre to remember the profound magic of the inexplicable and the ineffable. Even Anton Chekhov includes an enigmatic string-snapping sound cue in the realistic masterpiece *The Cherry Orchard* (1904), marking a technical need for symbol or metaphor in the context of the realistically portrayed Russian generational decline. Perhaps the so-called Theater of the Absurd created a new kind of illusion since the Realistic theater had done away with the illusion on stage by making the theatrical illusion as "kitchen sink" as possible. Albee does not probe the nature of reality in a broad, direct, or classically metaphysical context (cf. Calderón de la Barca's 1636 *Life Is a Dream*), but in the reality of this couple, George and Martha, as they have attempted to create a life together through games with rules they themselves concoct.

Albee's characters participate in this series of games, many of which revolve around either wordplay or the veracity of various statements, remembrances, and even the existence of George and Martha's son (an ontological question that forms the central dramatic question). Interestingly, Albee lists the cast not as "Cast" or "*Dramatis Personae*," but as "The Players." Speaking of the cast, and because Albee is often consigned to the Theatre of the Absurd movement in twentieth-century dramatic literature, it may be significant that in the original draft of the play, Nick is not named, but instead left as "Dear" in the text, partnered with Honey (Bottoms 17). "Dear and Honey" certainly have an absurdist ring to them, even when compared to the established "George and Martha" (Washington) of the older pair. So, when Albee actually assigns a name to Nick—reportedly after Nikita Khrushchev (see Holtan 47 and Shea, among others)—it may very well be that he wished the play to be anchored in a more solid reality, a

level of naturalism, than the audience might assume, given the more whimsical labels of the first draft. Still, “Nick” is never spoken in the play: he remains “dear” throughout to Honey.

Significantly, too, George and Martha’s child is never named in the play, although a great deal of comic mischief arises from the avoidance by the older couple (or simply the mischievous playwright) to name him. Consider this seemingly innocent exchange between Honey and George:

GEORGE: . . . Now, take our son. . . .

HONEY: (*strangely*) Who?

GEORGE: Our son. . . . Martha’s and my little joy. (213)

The ambiguity of “We” in English plays tricks here, as inclusive of the listener (is George suggesting a son with Honey?) or exclusive and referencing a group to which only the speaker belongs. George clarifies, but not before Honey asks (“*strangely*” according to the dialogue direction), “Who?” How delicious is this *strangely* here! Albee seems to be letting Honey feel the odd truth that the son has never been named to her, and offer a deep desire for the answer to “Who?”—what is your son’s NAME? Of course, in performance, her question could simply be chalked up to drunken inattention in the moment, which would cheapen the profundity that Albee absolutely demands in his “*strangely*.” Finally, as a rather telling parapraxis, George calls him their “little joy,” which continues the running gag of the vague age and size of the imaginary son to be sure, but here with the added diminution of the joy the son brings to the present circumstances.

The unnamed college—where the two men teach and Martha’s father reigns as president—only adds to the elliptical nature of the discourse. Albee does have George state the town name, though, New Carthage—a rather cheeky joke at the expense of the losers of the Punic Wars, which George also alludes to at the beginning of this self-deprecating monologue: “When I was sixteen and going to prep school, during the Punic Wars, a bunch of us used to go into New York on the first day of vacation. . . .” (94-5).

The intellectual level of puns and allusions points to the elevated education level of the characters, certainly, but the way they proffer the fun of the title pun or George’s early declension of “Good, better, best, bested” (32) lays a foundation for less entertaining—and more pointed—wordplay that involves errors and corrections. Ultimately, the two types of games, which I will conveniently label performative (for simple wordplay) and constative (for explorations of truth) intermingle in ways that underscore the play’s overarching plot and themes.

The reality reflected in the stories told (out of school, so to speak) points to a fundamental question of the nature of reality itself, since any false story necessarily stands in for the truth of what actually happened. Thus, Albee calls into question metaphysical reality versus illusion or fiction at almost every twist in the plot. The concreteness of George and Martha's invented son in their own minds merely emphasizes the extent to which truth has been supplanted by the conjured alternative reality they have shared for more than a score of years. The substitution of a weaker "reality" for the stark truth through which they might suffer calls to mind a parallel linguistic substitution: the pronoun as a stand-in for an established person. When Martha challenges Nick—"You always deal in appearances? . . . you don't see anything, do you?" (190)—she reinforces the idea that appearance presupposes presence, something from which the sign/pronoun allows escape.

Starting with an object such as a cow the existence of that animal standing in our midst would be beyond question, but one may find having a cow available (or a particular cow) inconvenient. And so, we create the noun "cow" to stand-in for the animal being discussed. Once we have established the animal in our discussion, we may revert to the pronoun "she" to stand in for the actual noun because of the clear referent. We have moved several stages away from the flesh-and-blood animal, and we invite confusion at every subsequent level of abstraction. The idea of acting as a place holder for the object in question, the primary function of the pronoun, shares its role with the zero in mathematics; it is not a number, but merely a place marker, or as Martha regards George, "you're a blank, a cipher . . . a zero" (17). This linguistic abstraction echoes the Modernist obsession with visual abstraction and theatrical, alienating abstraction. Albee's skill with language even manages to employ the word "blank" in this description, perhaps a reference (Freudian slip?) to the infertility that undergirds the problem.

It is this very confusion of pronoun and antecedent that fuels the conflict at the core of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*<sup>1</sup> critics, readers, and audiences have all attempted to explain the elitist pun in the title, British author Virginia Woolf (1882–1941), which confounds the title of a song from Disney's animated classic *Three Little Pigs* (1933), "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" This focus on this play on words ignores (for our present purposes at least) the huge relative pronoun confusion behind the "Who?" of the title. In a way, Albee points to the importance of this original pronoun confusion that sets off the play through its title and subsequent singing in the first scene with the guests:

MARTHA: Ha, ha ha, HA! (*To HONEY and NICK*) Hey; hey!

(*Sings, conducts with her drink in her hand. HONEY joins in toward the end*)

<sup>1</sup> According to imdb.com, Albee stated that he got the title from scrawled graffiti in a New York City tavern's bathroom.

Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf,  
 Virginia Woolf,  
 Virginia Woolf,  
 Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf.

(*MARTHA and HONEY laugh; NICK smiles*) (25).<sup>2</sup>

Albee reinforces this core question of identity by having Martha herself answer the seemingly rhetorical question in the last lines of the play: "I . . . am . . . George . . . I am" (242). Thus, the title represents the play in microcosm as a sleight-of-hand leading to audience fascination with the witty, powerful, allusive games, while slyly inserting the very question of meaning behind that ambiguous initial relative pronoun.

Mistakes of meaning engendered by pronoun confusion contribute to the fundamental questions of truth and illusion. Indeed, the truth or falsity of the character's statements can be reframed as questions of constative vs. performative utterances, so that the question of reality has to compete with the completeness and skill of the speaker to move beyond the verbal pyrotechnics of the various games.

In the earliest examples of pronoun confusion Martha relates that, in the movie she cannot recall, Bette Davis is "married to Joseph Cotten or something," to which George responds, "somebody" (4-5). The textual direction to emphasize the *-body* shows that George is correcting with a purpose: thematically, the object of discussion is a human being; the precision and clarity of thought that George demands from Martha in this rather innocuous correction points to further identification of George as teacher, as pedant at times, and his later admonition that in this late hour and (even later) with all the drinking, he needs Martha "a little alert" (208).

George interrogates Martha in the opening scene concerning the guests, and practically asks for the referent to Martha's vague descriptions of the younger couple: "Who's 'What's-their-name'?" (9) She does not substantiate the young couple by answering with their names. Once the guests arrive, George fixes his sights on his rival, Nick. He engages in wordplay designed to diagnose Nick's skill level in game playing, especially of the verbal variety. One early pass takes this form of referent confusion to task:

GEORGE: What made you decide to be a teacher?

NICK: Oh . . . well, the same things that . . . uh . . . motivated you, I imagine.

GEORGE: What were they?

<sup>2</sup> Evidently Disney did not allow their song to be used in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (on stage or in the film), so the melody to "Here We Go 'Round the Mulberry Bush" was used (imdb.com).

NICK: Pardon?

GEORGE: I said, what were they? What were the things that motivated me?

NICK: Well . . . I'm sure I don't know. (31)

If the two cannot agree on the ground rules in common for faculty games, Nick particularly is in for a long night. A moment later, Albee brings in a vague antecedent on George's part to set the trap for Nick once more:

GEORGE: You like it here?

NICK: Yes . . . it's . . . it's fine.

GEORGE: I mean the University.

NICK: Oh . . . I thought you meant. . . .

GEORGE: Yes, I can see you did. (31-2)

Note the use of "meant" to underscore not just verbal confusion, but confusion of intent and fundamental meaning.

Nick lashes out at George in the young academic's first attempt at understanding and explaining the reality he encounters in the late-night bombast that George and Martha have wrought:

NICK (*Snapping it out*): All right . . . what do you want me to say? Do you want me to say it's funny, so you can contradict me and say it's sad? or do you want me to say it's sad so you can turn around and say no, it's funny. You can play that damn little game any way you want to, you know! (33)

Note the vague yet universally applicable use of "it" in the whole of this speech. At first glance, Nick seems to be referencing a specific antecedent (how he takes George's "Good, Better, Best, Bested" declension), but the pronoun can pretty much sum up any of the games foisted upon the younger couple on this night. Significantly, Nick is singled out as a seeker of meaning—and with it perhaps a modicum of truth—from the night, culminating in his comprehension of the primal nature of George and Martha's need to create a son.

A more pointed form of unclear antecedent confusion, again linked to identity and the changing nature of the reality of George and Martha's home, occurs a few times in the play. At first the example, as above, seems innocuous, but as the play unfolds, the confusion adds more layers of thematic material as well.

GEORGE: Martha is a remarkable woman. I would imagine she weighs around a hundred and ten.

NICK: Your . . . wife . . . weighs . . . ?

GEORGE: No, no, my boy. Yours! My wife is Martha.

NICK: Yes . . . I know.

GEORGE: If you were married to Martha, you would know what it means. (36)

Note the absence of any dialogue direction or pause in the first line to indicate George is switching back to Honey as the subject pronoun. He simply pushes along with full knowledge that his young rival will be lost. Note also the repeated use of “mean” to emphasize the intentional meaning of words and names throughout, since in metaphysical terms Meaning has to come before Truth. In these examples, meaning is corrected at the expense of Nick’s ability to keep up with the conversation. In fact, it may be said that George and Martha know their set of antecedents, so their elliptical and pronominal relationship is indecipherable to the younger couple and, by extension, other outsiders.

Not all corrections are demeaning, though. In a relatively late and humane moment, George corrects Honey’s “I peel labels” with the understanding and compassionate, “We all peel labels.” Of course, George then proceeds to set up his next attack from this revelation (212-13). Honey is not George’s rival, but Nick and Martha both challenge George in their own ways, and must be dealt with accordingly. Honey remains, more or less an ally to George, as Nick and Martha sometimes seem to pair up throughout. Recall that George goes to Honey for corroboration of the truth and even the existence of the telegram:

GEORGE: (*Snapping his fingers at HONEY*) Did I eat the telegram or did I not?

HONEY: Yes; yes, you ate it. I watched . . . I watched you . . . you . . . you ate it all down.

GEORGE: . . . like a good boy.

HONEY: . . . like a . . . g-g-g-good . . . boy. Yes. (234-5)<sup>3</sup>

George’s age and maturity level seem as fluid as the imaginary son’s, another thematic mash-up. Honey’s emotional response to the pain that George feels in relating the news and Martha’s in hearing it seems akin to the catharsis that Aristotle cites as the *telos* of effective tragedy: more remarkable still that Honey’s reaction of pity and fear replicate the audience’s first hearing of George’s story. But what of Martha, who presumably knows the story of their son (just as Greek audiences already knew the myths dramatized by the poets of their day)? Just so with Greek tragedies, George’s story builds on the myth to create pity and fear even in those familiar with the story—but with an unexpected but inevitable twist that makes the new fiction a contrivance born of the blending of truth and illusion.

<sup>3</sup> According to Kathleen Turner, Albee deleted this passage in the most recent productions to add to the ambiguity of the story George tells.

Just as the guests are primed with liquor for the sake of the game playing, the audience of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is primed by early examples of unclear antecedents for the crucial pronoun confusion of the drama: THE SON.

When George admonishes Martha not to start on the “bit” about the son, this clever wordplay on Albee’s part brings two meanings with this one word, both the “narrative routine” and the sense of “small piece/kid” come to mind. Martha, initially confused by what precise connotation to accept, questions him, which expands the time that the audience has to ponder both meanings. All of this is in keeping with the larger motif of imprecise language and the need for sounder grounding of meaning to describe the reality accurately.

Once it is clear to George that Martha broke the ground rules for their child, George reacts viciously and enigmatically, thanks to the unclear pronouns employed, but not before Honey drunkenly confuses the adverb at the heart of her one question:

HONEY: When is your son? (*Giggles again*)

GEORGE: What?

NICK (*Distastefully*): Something about your son.

GEORGE: SON!

HONEY: When is . . . where is your son . . . coming home? (*Giggles*)

GEORGE: Ohhhh. (*Too formally*) Martha? When is our son coming home?

MARTHA: Never mind.

GEORGE: No, no . . . I want to know . . . you brought it out into the open. When is he coming home, Martha?

MARTHA: I said never mind. I’m sorry I brought it up.

GEORGE: Him up . . . not it. You brought *him* up. Well, more or less. When’s the little bugger going to appear, hunh? I mean isn’t tomorrow meant to be his birthday or something?

MARTHA: I don’t want to talk about it!

GEORGE (*Falsely innocent*): But Martha . . .

MARTHA: I DON’T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT!

GEORGE: I’ll bet you don’t. (*To HONEY and NICK*) Martha does not want to talk about it . . . him. Martha is sorry she brought it up . . . him. (69-70)

Tellingly, Albee has George indicate the importance of the confusion and the illusion when he curiously says, “isn’t tomorrow meant to be his birthday” in the above passage. Grounded meaning within the illusion!

George kills the son using the scenario from his novel, the identity of whose protagonist has shifted (like the vague antecedents of pronouns tossed imprecisely about). First, a school chum, then (in Martha's telling) George himself, "This isn't a novel at all . . . this is the truth . . . this really happened . . . to ME!" (137). Martha's explanation ties so many motifs together in one line—truth, the real, and the blatant pronoun identity establishment, George/ME—that the climax of the play seems from this point to be inevitable. The climax is, of course, the connection of the son to the novel's plot, making "sonny-Jim" the youth who, with his learner's permit in his pocket, swerved and crashed. Thus, the pronoun "he" in the novel, as a work of fiction, like the son, has no real referent, no grounding in reality.

Martha's father, too, is an absent character (but one who objectively exists to be sure), but this absence allows Martha the drunken apostrophe at the top of Act III:

MARTHA: I cry all the time too, Daddy. I cry alllll the time; but deep inside, so no one can see me. I cry all the time. And Georgie cries all the time, too. We both cry all the time, and then, what we do, we cry, and we take our tears, and we put 'em in the ice box, in the goddamn ice trays (*Begins to laugh*) until they're all frozen (*Laughs even more*) and then . . . we put them . . . in our . . . drinks. (185–6)

— 26 — While absence is a theme explored to some degree throughout, the larger concept of standing in for an absent object—which task the pronoun performs—occurs more obliquely when George and the son are confused . . . George for "sonny-Jim" (recall that we are never told, nor do Honey or Nick ask, the son's name). Martha and George engage in one of the pronoun confusion moments that is at once comical (as the others), and directly applicable to the George/son confusion later:

MARTHA: George talks disparagingly about the little bugger because . . . well, because he has problems.

GEORGE: The little bugger has problems? What problems has the little bugger got?

MARTHA: Not the little bugger . . . stop calling him that! You! You've got problems! (71)

Other examples of the conflation of George with the concept (if not the character) of the son include when Honey tells George that he ate the telegram like a "good boy"; Martha tells George to "come give Mommy a big kiss"; and George himself comingles the autobiographical novel with the details of the son's death. His relating of the son's car accident contains many more words or descriptions than could be contained in a single telegram, emphasizing the fictive nature of the son, his death, and the whole sham parenting between George and Martha. "The play is about the death of that metaphor," Albee told an interviewer (Drake 40). Like pronouns with their antecedents, metaphors have a grounding. The grounding of the metaphor is usually based

in reality, but in the case of George and Martha's son, it is not, and the lack of an actual referent ultimately dooms (one may argue) the son and his power over the couple. As Arthur K. Oberg observes about Albee's style, "Using metaphor *as cliché* and cliché *as metaphor*, Albee pushes them as far as they will go, exposing established systems and personal arrangements which outworn metaphor thoughtlessly would perpetuate" (Oberg 140).

George lashes out after this humiliation over his novel with another story; he has one score to settle, the game of "Get the Guests." The couples, now on stage together for the first time in a while it seems, hear Nick and Honey's own story, but Honey is too vague or drunk to latch on until the cruelty brutalizes everyone: "Well, it's an allegory, really" (142). Honey realizes slowly as the story unfolds that there is a familiar, real-world referent to the allegory, herself, and this causes her to exit quickly and nauseously. George's only point in telling the story is to drive home the antecedent as solidly and unambiguously as necessary.

As they declare total war, Martha gets in a rare clarification with George using pronoun reference: "You want to know what's *really happened?* (*Snaps her fingers*) It's snapped, finally. Not me . . . *it*" (156-7). Note the use of IT by Martha, recalling for the audience momentarily the son, tied as he is to the pronoun "it" from the earlier altercation. In effect, could she be admitting that the son is now, for all practical purposes, snapped—untenable and unusable? George, for his part, soon thereafter feigns a pronoun confusion when Martha is seducing young Nick:

MARTHA: I'm entertaining one of our guests. I'm necking with one of our guests!

GEORGE: That's nice. Which one? (170-1)

And just later, more effective pronoun confusion:

MARTHA: Why you miserable . . . I'll show *you*.

GEORGE (*Swings around to face her . . . says with great loathing*): No . . . show him, Martha . . . he hasn't seen it. Maybe he hasn't seen it. (*Turns to NICK*) You haven't seen it, have you?

NICK (*Turning away, a look of disgust on his face*): I . . . I have no respect for you.

George: And none for yourself, either . . . (*Indicating MARTHA*) I don't know what the younger generation's coming to. (172)

Such an exchange (including the euphemistic pronoun confusion of "it") allows for a sub-motif with questions of Nick's identity as houseboy, math/science professor, and even as the absent son who has come home:

GEORGE: Sonny! You've come home for your birthday! At last!

NICK (*Backing off*): Stay away from me.

MARTHA: Ha, ha, ha, HA! That's the houseboy for god's sake!

GEORGE: Really? That's not our own little sonny-Jim? Our own little all-American something-or-other? (195-6)

In Act III, with Honey easily confused, and Nick sufficiently so by the older couple's word-and-reality play, Albee begins in earnest the destruction of the metaphor.

MARTHA: That is not true! That is such a lie!

GEORGE: You must not call everything a lie, Martha. (*To NICK*) Must she?

NICK: Hell, I don't know when you people are lying, or what.

MARTHA: You're damned right!

GEORGE: You're not supposed to.

MARTHA: Right! (199-200)

A little later, reminding George of the Nick-as-Houseboy question, Martha lays it out for George this time, in especially thematic terms:

MARTHA: Truth and illusion, George, you don't know the difference.

GEORGE: No, but we must carry on as though we did.

MARTHA: Amen. (202-3)

— 28 — The "Amen" is not simply an affirmation; it sets up the ritualized confrontation that gives the third act its title, "The Exorcism." It is through this psychological and spiritual upheaval that Nick sorts through the fictions and the truths and ultimately sets up the most masterful, climactic pronoun correction in the play. As George finalizes the killing of the imaginary son, Martha vainly attempts one more pronoun correction:

GEORGE: I can kill him, Martha, if I want to.

MARTHA: HE IS *OUR* CHILD! (235, italics mine)

The assigning of a referent to an unnamed, vague, or ambiguous pronoun could be seen as the first step in moving the language from performative to constative, which means that the veracity could be tested and re-rooted in reality:

NICK (*Very quietly*): I think I understand this.

GEORGE (*Ibid*): Do you?

NICK (*Ibid*): Jesus Christ, I think I understand this.<sup>4</sup>

GEORGE (*Ibid*): Good for you, buster.

NICK (*Violently*): JESUS CHRIST I THINK I UNDERSTAND THIS!

.....

<sup>4</sup> The use of "Jesus Christ" here adds to the mythic reading of the play as George is God, Martha, the Earth Mother, and the whole of the play an attack on patriarchal theology, but I will leave that here without additional comment.

Nick (*To GEORGE, quietly*): You couldn't have . . . any?

GEORGE: *We* couldn't.

MARTHA: *We* couldn't. (236, 238)

In English, more than most other languages, the pronoun you is ambiguous. Singular? Or Plural? When Nick poses the question using this imprecise pronoun, the couple, in turn, emphatically remove any doubt about the cause of the lack of . . . any. WE, they repeat, creating a synthesis of motivic and thematic completeness that not only brings the conflict to a clear end, but also removes any doubt about whether George and Martha love each other. They, despite the chaos of the night, harbor no illusions about that particular reality.

In this light, the relationship of the older couple may be interpreted to be based on holding each other to a higher standard—an established set of truths and another established (and assumedly agreed upon) set of illusions. Martha's "Truth and illusion" comment to George could arguably be a regularized, touchstone phrase in their marriage that Martha is loath to bring up in George's moment of pain, but the ethos of their marriage requires that he be called on his lapse. Similarly, in the climax of the play, George kills their son because the ethos of the marriage requires that action ("Did you have to?" Martha asks him). George lightens the trip up those "well-worn stairs" with an abundance of yesses, an affirmation of the necessity and the love, until we receive the poignant answer to the rhetorical question of the title and the play ends—in all senses of "play."

In conclusion, Edward Albee moves his drama of drunken academic games from the particulars of the two couples into the realm of metaphysical questioning of reality by imbuing the conversations with the motif of pronoun confusion. This confusion-and-correction cycle allows the characters to explore (willingly or otherwise) the nature of truth and illusion, where an invented reality stands in for the awful existential reality that pains them. Truth and illusion: we must know the difference, or at least carry on as though we did.

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**BIO**

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## Violence as Resistance in N.K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* Trilogy

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### ABSTRACT

Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy details the subjugation of the Orogenes and the Tuners at the hands of the Stills and the Sylanagistines. In this essay, I contend that Jemisin's trilogy suggests that the violence used by the Orogenes and Tuners is not only an effective means to defeat their respective oppressors; it is also a tool to create hope for a more egalitarian society for all. Although Jemisin's trilogy ends before a more equal society can be formed, I claim readers can infer that it is through the use of violence that there now exists the potential for both oppressor and oppressed to be free, autonomous individuals and learn from the past to prevent history from continuing to repeat itself. Through the analysis of Jemisin's trilogy, this essay aims to argue that not all violence inherently equals destruction.

### KEYWORDS

marginalization, oppressor, oppressed, resistance, subjugation, and violence.

## Introduction

The *Broken Earth* trilogy completed in 2017 is arguably N.K. Jemisin's most critically and commercially successful trilogy to date. This compelling trilogy takes place on a single supercontinent called the Stillness. Despite its name, there is nothing still about this supercontinent. Every few hundred years, a devastating climate change triggered by human activity or catastrophic tectonic movement leaves humanity on the brink of extinction. It periodically forces the citizens of the Stillness into survival mode where the society fragments and the survival of the local community or "comm" supersedes all other concerns. These devastating events - "Fifth Seasons" - set an unstable and precarious backdrop for most of the trilogy.

This precarious setting also serves as a metaphor for the relationships between the four groups in Jemisin's trilogy I am interested in exploring- the Orogenes, the Stills, the Tuners and the Sylanagistines. Throughout her books, Jemisin shows that the Orogenes and the Tuners are subjugated and oppressed by their respective oppressors, the Stills and the Sylanagistines. Although Jemisin's trilogy does highlight how these two marginalized communities are abused, I argue Jemisin's work also shows how her marginalized communities' resist.

— 33 — In this essay, I contend that Jemisin's trilogy suggests that the violence used by the Orogenes and Tuners is not only an effective means to defeat their respective oppressors but is also a tool to create hope for a more egalitarian society for all. Although Jemisin's trilogy ends before a more equal society can be formed, I claim readers can infer that it is through the use of violence that there now exists the potential for both oppressor and oppressed to be free, autonomous individuals and learn from the past to prevent history from continuing to repeat itself. To illustrate my argument, I will be focusing my analysis on the characters Nassun, Alabaster and the group of six Tuners. This essay's analysis will be broken down into three parts.

In the first section, I will be focusing on the character Nassun and her volatile relationship with her father, Jija. Upon his discovery that Nassun is an Orogene, Jija manipulates, abuses, and torments his daughter into suppressing her Orogeny to prevent himself from hating her. This leads Nassun to internalize that her father's love is contingent on her despising herself as an Orogene. While this section does highlight the many ways Nassun is forced to contort herself into her father's ideal daughter; this section will also show why this proves to be unsustainable for Nassun. In the end, the violent act of murdering Jija empowers Nassun to metaphorically unbind herself from her father and fully accept herself as an Orogene.

In the second section, I argue through the characters Alabaster and the Tuners that there is legitimacy to using violence to destroy systems of oppression. Although both instances led to

irreparable destruction for themselves and the rest of the world, I claim that even before Alabaster and the Tuners employed violence, their oppressors had already caused irreparable damage to the oppressed and by extension the world. In other words, it is unfair to demonize these marginalized people without first holding their oppressors responsible for placing them in that position. Analysing these characters' decision through this lens reframes their narrative from being a destructive tale to a story about collective liberation.

Finally, the third section will highlight how violence can create hope for a more egalitarian society for all. In this section, I will show how the dangerous act of bringing the moon back into orbit metaphorically does restore humanity for all oppressed people, and ironically, even their oppressors. This violent act sets the stage for a better world.

### Systems of Oppression and Tools of Resistance

The most prominent institution that enslaves Orogenes is the Fulcrum. The Fulcrum is an institution whose purpose is to 'train' Orogenes and use them to prevent the occurrences of "Fifth Seasons". Within the Fulcrum, Orogenes are trained to behave 'respectfully' and control their abilities of Orogeny. If an Orogene demonstrates the aptitude to learn 'correctly', they climb up the Fulcrum hierarchy and earn more rings. An Orogene who is unable to demonstrate control to the desired level has two options in this system. If they are 'lucky' they are killed. However, most of them endure a fate worse than death: they become node maintainers.

An Orogene is 'selected' to be a node maintainer usually from childhood and they remain node maintainers for the rest of their lives. More often than not they are usually Orogene children that are unwanted by the Fulcrum. They are either "feral Orogene" children that are too old for the Fulcrum to train yet "young enough that killing's a waste", or they are children from the Fulcrum that are unable to master control over their Orogeny (Jemisin, *Fifth* 140).

An Orogene becomes a node maintainer through a very complicated, painful and dehumanizing surgery. A cut is made at their organ at the base of their brain stem known as the "sessapinae" - the same organ that allows Orogenes to perform Orogeny. The effect of this surgery is cruel. It completely severs Orogenes' self-control whilst still allowing their instinctive powers to function (Jemisin, *Fifth* 141).

Once the surgery is finished, the Orogenes are barely kept alive. All their bodily functions are hooked up to machines that feed, oxygenate and allow the Orogene to excrete their waste - but they are not thinking or feeling human beings (Jemisin, *Fifth* 141). Instead, they have become mindless, drugged-out servants whose bodies are used solely as machines to quell micro-shakes across the Stillness.

Tuners, on the other hand, are a synthetically created group of individuals made by the Sylanagistines forty thousand years prior to be a group distinctly different from humans and also caricatures of the Niess people. The Tuners sole purpose in their creation is to perform magic and serve as a battery to feed the society of Syl Anagist. The most prominent agents that ensure the Tuners are performing their tasks efficiently are the conductors. They manage and control the Tuners by monitoring their output of magic. They also ensure the Tuners continue to internalize the message of their inferiority to the Sylanagistines.

If the Tuners are not able to perform magic efficiently or to the satisfaction of the conductors, they are sent into ‘retirement’ to the briar patch. The briar patch functions like a backup generator that is meant to add extra power to the magic produced by the Tuners. All the Tuners that have been “retired” and all the Niess people that have been exterminated from society are taken by the Sylanagistines and are kept in the briar patch in a similar condition to the node maintainers. They are kept alive because the Sylanagistines require the use of their bodies to produce “magic” that fuels and maintains the entire Syl Anagist operating system (Jemisin, *Stone* 263). There are millions of bodies in the briar patch, some of whom have been trapped in that condition for centuries.

— 35 — Much like the node maintainers, the briar patch victims are neither thinking nor feeling human beings. Rather, they are mindless, drugged-out, near-corpses who are kept alive in a limbo state because the Sylanagistines have found a way to keep them servile for eternity.

Although both Orogenes and Tuners live in incredibly torturous environments, Jemisin shows readers’ these marginalized people have more power at their disposal through the weapon of the obelisks. Interestingly, these incredibly powerful weapons are only accessible to the Orogenes and Tuners. Neither the Stills nor the Sylanagistines can weaponize the obelisks on their own.

Forty thousand years ago, the Sylanagistines created the obelisks by seamlessly fusing magic and advanced technology. The obelisks were created to drain the earth’s essence to provide an inexhaustible source of energy for the Sylanagistines to consume for the rest of eternity. Upon the Tuners’ discovery about the briar patch victims, they came to a deep realization that the city of Syl Anagist is built on the subjugation of others.

Hence, the Tuners decided to connect all the obelisks, form the obelisk gate and use it against the Sylanagistines and their city. Through their actions, the Tuners set off the first “Fifth Season” by inadvertently flinging the moon out of the earth’s orbit. The first “Fifth Season” is also known as the Shattering - the first world’s end.

In the present time of the narrative, the obelisks are merely seen as floating relics, objects from a distant failed civilization. Their nature and true purpose have long been erased from

history. However, Alabaster uncovers the truth about the obelisks and much like the Tuners, he decides to use the obelisk gate to rid the world of oppression. He breaks the world in half by setting off the worst recorded “Fifth Season” since the Shattering.

In the latter part of my essay, I will draw a parallel between Alabaster’s and the Tuners’ decision to use the obelisk gate. Much like the Tuners, Alabaster also uses the obelisk gate to liberate himself, other Fulcrum Orogenes and node maintainers: individuals that are unable to free themselves on their own. However, I will also show that Alabaster’s motives differ slightly from the Tuners. While the Tuners focused on destruction solely for the sake of liberation, Alabaster is motivated by his desire to build a better society for all people. To do so, he is acutely aware that it is only possible through the act of bringing the moon back into orbit.

Therefore, I will show how the obelisks and the obelisk gate are weapons used by the Orogenes and Tuners as a means to resist. Although there are severe consequences to their use of violence, Jemisin’s trilogy emphasizes that it is only through the use of violent resistance that hope for a better society can flourish.

### Reframing the Dominant Narrative of Violent Resistance

— 36 —  
More often than not, the term violence insinuates something negative. According to the Oxford dictionary, violence is “behaviour that is intended to hurt or kill someone”. Hence, judging from this description, violence connotes this notion of wrongness, evil and injustice. This is especially ironic considering that more often than not those in power themselves utilize sanctioned violence against resisters whilst prohibiting them from using violence themselves. Therefore, who determines what is considered violent and what is not? And what is the relationship of violence to the state and the law?

Onur Günay notes that those in power define what is violent and what is not. Günay argues that the “*violent other*” is “constructed” by the state through a repertoire of “images, texts, knowledges and imaginaries” which are all grounded in colonialism, racism and dominant nationalist rhetoric (176). However, state-sanctioned violence is shielded by sovereign law and hence protected from being condemned as violence (Günay 171). In other words, it is the state that creates a narrative around the violent ‘Other’ and uses its available resources at hand to disseminate it to the public.

Freire also emphasizes that it is those in power that decide who and what is violent. He argues violence always begins with the oppressor and is never initiated by the oppressed (Freire 45). The oppressors are those that oppress and exploit because they fail to recognize the “Other” as a person (Freire 46). Instead, the oppressors view the oppressed as “subversives”, “natives”

and “savages” - “these people” that are “violent”, “barbaric”, “wicked” and “ferocious” because they dare to react against the violence committed towards them by their oppressors (Freire 46).

Nevertheless, different theorists have shown that although violence is a legitimate form of resistance, it is a journey that is fraught with difficulty. Despite its difficulty, Andrea Dworkin argues that it is nonetheless a vital journey to undertake. Dworkin argues that disruption, disobedience and violation of conventional ideas are needed to create change (19). Time after time, women have demonstrated that “in order to change laws” and “change convention” women had to “violate them” (Dworkin 19). This tactic of “civil disobedience” was employed by the suffragettes, a militant political activist group, and they managed to “achieve their goals” (Dworkin 19).

bell hooks however notes, while there is power in unleashing Black rage, more often than not Black people are not allowed to show disobedience. hooks argues that throughout the years, Black people have been forced to repress their rage because white people are unable to “hear” Black rage (12). This leaves Black rage “trapped” and “contained” in the “realm of the unspeakable” (hooks 12). Hence, to hooks, it is “humanizing to be able to resist it with militant rage” (17). It is a form of power to be able to express discontent, anger and rage towards white America that has suppressed and oppressed Black resistances for years.

— 37 — hooks’ argument around violent resistance stems from Malcolm X who unashamedly defended Black Americans’ right to self-defence. X consistently argued that “retaliatory violence” is a “necessary response to criminal acts” committed against Black Americans by whites (Cone 179). As X argues, “violence” is the “only language” that “criminals understand” (Cone 179). To inherently “love someone who hates you, is to speak a language they do not understand” (Cone 179). In other words, violence is the only option available to the oppressed to gain their freedom from their oppressors. To negotiate with their oppressors is impossible seeing as they are not treated as equals in the first place.

This is concurred by Fanon: violence is inevitable in a struggle towards freedom. He argues “decolonization is always a violent phenomenon” (Fanon 35). As violence has always plagued the relationship between the native and the settler, for those that are most oppressed and marginalized within a society to be set free, a “murderous and decisive struggle” between the native and the settler is inevitable (Fanon 37).

In application to Jemisin’s trilogy, these theorists’ ideas around violence will be invaluable in understanding why Jemisin’s Tuners and Orogenes view violence as their only available option. These ideas also prevent readers from demonizing Jemisin’s characters’ decisions but instead allows readers to reframe the narrative around violence to focus on the oppressed instead of the oppressor.

### Violence as a Means for Personal Liberation

Nassun begins her journey in the trilogy as the nine-year-old daughter of Jemisin's protagonist Essun. Just like her mother, Nassun is also an incredibly gifted and powerful Orogene. To protect Nassun and her three-year-old son, Uche, from being taken by the Fulcrum, Essun teaches them Orogeny in secret to keep their identities as Orogenes hidden. Essun, being a product of the Fulcrum, teaches her children Orogeny using the same cruel and torturous Fulcrum techniques that she learned as a child to harden her children and equip them with the necessary 'survival' skills to survive in the 'real' world.

However, Essun's cruelty drives a painful wedge between herself and her daughter. Nassun learns to hate being an Orogene and her mother, which in turn drives her to depend on and seek comfort from her father, Jija, who unbeknownst to Nassun, is only able to love her because he is completely unaware of her identity as an Orogene.

One day, Jija accidentally uncovers the truth about his children. Completely disgusted that he had spent years being a "rogga-lover", Jija beats Uche to death in a fit of rage and kidnaps Nassun to take her away from Essun. To cope with the death of her brother, Nassun uses a form of cognitive dissonance to protect herself from fully understanding the extent of her father's hatred towards all Orogenes, and more specifically towards her.

Nassun begins to blame her mother for all the pain she caused her father. She even goes to the extent of blaming Essun for causing Jija to murder Uche: "But. No. He *is* Daddy. Whatever is wrong with him now, it's Mama's fault" (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 79). Her thoughts start with "But", indicating that she is confused; she then says "No" – making a conscious decision to put that confusion aside and choose not to blame her father. This emphasizes how badly Nassun desires to revert to being in a position where she is loved by one parent. Nassun is able to easily blame Essun due to their already tumultuous relationship. However, the cruelty she now experiences from her father pushes Nassun to further hate her Orogene mother, and herself for being an Orogene.

Over time, Nassun forces herself to accept that her relationship with her father has completely altered. The first moment she realizes this is when Jija hits her when she attempts to hold his hand. The disgust that Jija visibly shows Nassun in this simple act of tenderness emphasizes how Orogene children are never seen as mere children. Rather, Stills perceive them as dangerous, diseased animals that must be cured of their illness of Orogeny: "There is only one disease that afflicts her in [Jija's] eyes, only one poison he would journey halfway across the world to have drawn out of his little girl" (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 114).

Therefore, Nassun learns that to ensure her continued survival around Jija, she has to resort to tricks and manipulation to recreate memories of her relationship with him before his discovery that she is an Orogene. Nassun does so by calling him “Daddy”:

it is the thing that has swayed him, these times when he has come near to turning on her: remembering that she is his little girl. Reminding him that he has been, up to today, a good father (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 83).

In these moments, Nassun allows Jija to pretend that he is a loving father who has not murdered his son or threatened the life of his daughter. Nassun feeds Jija’s fantasy of what he wants his daughter to be instead of the person she is. She forces herself to play the role of “his little girl”, and not an Orogene, a monster he despises.

Nassun’s relationship with Jija can be related to Dworkin’s argument of binding. In her chapter, “Gynocide: Chinese Footbinding”, Dworkin equates the literal foot binding Chinese girls were forced to endure for a thousand years with the psychological and emotional binding all women are forced to undergo to appear more appealing to men.

Chinese girls’ feet from the tender age of seven (and perhaps even younger) are forced to be bound and broken to ensure the marriageability of the girl. Chinese customs believed that foot binding made girls more attractive and desirable in the eyes of men. It supposedly “distorted the natural lines of the female body” and provided a “most useful alteration of the vagina” (Dworkin 96). However, in reality, foot-binding did nothing to beautify the vagina and the practice was “excruciatingly painful” (Dworkin 96). It was so harmful that it later even prevented girls from being able to walk.

To Dworkin, this practice serves as an example of how a “man’s love for a woman”, his “sexual adoration for her, his human definition of her, his delight and pleasure in her, requires her negation: physical crippling and psychological lobotomy” (112). In other words, for a man to love a woman, a woman must undergo cruel and sadistic changes within herself to be accepted and valued.

Similarly, Nassun is forced to bind herself physically, psychologically and emotionally as an Orogene to be accepted by her father. She is forced to refrain from doing Orogey and thus appear non-threatening around her father, “because her life depends on it” (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 113). Nassun is constantly forced to repress herself to provide space for Jija to be able to view her as a human being. This emphasizes how Nassun is bound.

However, Jemisin shows that this dynamic proves to be unsustainable for Nassun. While it appeases her father and prevents him from killing her, by forcing herself to be someone she is not, Nassun runs the risk of completely losing herself. Nassun is constantly forced to hear the same derogatory rhetoric from Jija that all “*Roggas*... lie, sweetening. They threaten, and manipulate, and use. They’re evil, Nassun, as evil as Father Earth himself. You aren’t like that” (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 310). Jija has manipulated the situation so that Nassun’s entire existence is solely about being the perfect daughter for her father.

Nassun finally comes to her breaking point when she realizes that her father has completely altered the truth with lies to ensure he can continue to live out his fantasy as a loving father. He has demonized Essun and Uche and placed them in the category of “*Rogga*” but has completely separated Nassun from this category through cognitive dissonance to allow himself to continue to love her.

More than that, Nassun discovers that he has changed the narrative to make it seem like he is the victim and not Uche, the son he murdered:

In a sudden blur of understanding as powerful as magic, Nassun realizes Jija does not remember standing over Uche’s body... Now he believes he has never threatened her.... Something has rewritten the story of his orogene children in Jija’s head.... It is perhaps the same thing that has rewritten Nassun for him as *daughter* and *not roggas* (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 311).

This violent rewriting of the narrative awakens Nassun to the truth of who her father really is - a man who has murdered, kidnapped and threatened his children. She stops feeding herself lies about her father and finally accepts the truth. Her younger brother Uche was murdered by Jija simply because he hates all Orogenes, including Nassun.

This profound realization finally pushes Nassun to accept that she can never stop being an Orogene nor should she stop to simply appease her father: “I am trying to get better, Daddy... I’m trying to become a better orogene” (Jemisin, *The Obelisk Gate* 313). At first glance, this interaction may suggest that Nassun is again attempting to change for the sake of her father. On closer inspection, Nassun is subverting this and becoming the Orogene that she wants to become. Through this empowering line, readers learn that Nassun is finally able to unbind herself from her abusive father, Jija.

However, this is unacceptable to Jija. Once again, in his fantasy, Nassun has been corrupted by other Orogenes and the only way he can save her is by murdering her. He twists his actions to view himself as a hero and justify his hatred towards all Orogenes. Therefore, to

survive and finally cleanse herself of Jija's lies and abuse, Nassun decides to use the obelisk to protect herself and kill Jija:

She wills [the obelisk] to move to a new position and it does. In front of her. Between her and Jija, so that when Jija angles his body to stab her, he cannot help bumping right into it. This makes it easy, inevitable for her powers to lay into him (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 388).

Here, Nassun uses the obelisk as a weapon to enact her violence against her father. Through this discussion, I argue that Nassun uses violence as a cleansing force. It allows her to reclaim her space against her oppressor, Jija, who has forced her to repress herself and be small. Moreover, Nassun also learns to free herself from her inferiority complex that both her father and mother imposed on her. She learns to embrace herself as an Orogene and use her Orogeny to empower herself to fight against an attack from her father.

This directly mirrors Fanon's argument that "violence is a cleansing force", it can "free the native" from "his inferiority complex" and "from his despair and inaction" (94). Violence also makes the native "fearless and restores his self-respect" that has been stripped by the settler (Fanon 94). This emphasizes how the violent act of murdering her father empowers Nassun to accept herself without hatred and liberate herself.

### **The Legitimacy of Violence as a Tool to Resist**

Aside from being a tool of empowerment, violence is also a legitimate weapon to use in resistance against systems of oppression. This is because not all violence can be equated. The effect of the violence committed in self-defence by the oppressed is not comparable to the violence used to persecute and subjugate them.

It was Malcolm X who strongly argued it was unjust to demonize the choice of Black Americans to use violence to protect and defend themselves when the violence used against them by their oppressors is not only socially accepted but is also legalized. X argues,

when you can bring me a nonviolent racist, bring me a nonviolent segregationist, then I'll get nonviolent. But don't teach me to be nonviolent until you teach some of those crackers to be nonviolent.

Therefore, “retaliatory violence” according to Malcolm X is not only legitimate but also a “necessary response to criminal acts” committed against Black Americans (Cone 179). It is the only means which Black Americans can use to achieve their freedom and liberation. As X notes, because it is the “only language” that “criminals understand”, it is the same language that Black Americans are forced to use (Cone 179).

In Jemisin’s trilogy, through Alabaster and the Tuners, Jemisin demonstrates that the decision to use retaliatory violence is forced upon them by their oppressors. Moreover, Alabaster’s and the Tuners’ decision is shown to be calculated and not only reactive. It is fueled by the understanding that violent resistance is the only option available to them to gain their freedom and the freedom of all oppressed individuals.

When Hoa and the other Tuners are first introduced, they all collectively identify themselves as “tools”. It is an identity that they take immense pride in: “we may be tools, but we are fine ones, put to a magnificent purpose. It is easy to find pride in that” (Jemisin, *Stone* 98). They are brainwashed to believe that as tools they are seen as an integral part of the city of Syl Anagist. Although they may not be treated equally to the Sylanagistines, the service they render to the city is nonetheless valued.

However, the Tuners begin to understand the extent of their persecution upon their — 42 — discovery of the briar patch victims. This horrifying reality forces them awake and out of their learned docility and down a path of resistance. As Hoa notes,

there are stages to the process of being betrayed by your society. One is jolted from a place of complacency by the discovery of difference, by hypocrisy, by inexplicable or incongruous ill-treatment. What follows is a time of confusion – unlearning what one thought to be the truth. Immersing oneself in the new truth. And then a decision must be made (Jemisin, *Stone* 311).

This step-by-step guide on how to awaken to resist violently, clearly shows that violent resistance is premeditated and not reactive. In a parallel situation, Alabaster also decides to use violent resistance through a moment of realization. It dawns upon him that, “*the world as he knew it could not function without forcing someone into servitude*” (Jemisin, *Stone* 313). Just like the Tuners, Alabaster realizes that all Orogenes will always be enslaved. They will always be forced to become node maintainers and Fulcrum Orogenes in service to the Stills.

Thus, the only available option for both the Tuners and Alabaster is to destroy all forms of power structures that keep the Tuners and Orogenes oppressed. Violence is the only weapon

they can utilize against their oppressors. Therefore, both the Tuners and Alabaster use the obelisk gate to bring the world to an end.

For the Tuners, they realize that the system of oppression in Syl Anagist, much like the Stillness, can never self-destruct. Rather, it is a system that self-replicates. This is seen through Hoa's reflection:

The Niess were not the first people chewed up in its maw, just the latest and cruelest extermination of many. But for a society built on exploitation, there is no greater threat than having no one left to oppress. And now, if nothing else is done, Syl Anagist must again find a way to fission its people into subgroupings and create reasons for conflict among them. There's not enough magic to be had just from plants and genengineered fauna; someone must suffer, if the rest are to enjoy luxury. (Jemisin, *Stone* 334)

— 43 — This idea of feeding on oppression is emphasized by the phrase “chewed up in Syl Anagist's maw”. The personification of Syl Anagist suggests a monstrous consciousness that is behind the oppression of the Tuners and the Niess people. Syl Anagist will always be a society that ravenously feeds on oppression - it is a society fundamentally built on exploitation. Hence, while the Tuners are technically breaking the world to ‘set free’ themselves and the briar patch victims, they are also doing it to destroy the corrupted city of Syl Anagist and prevent any other group's oppression.

Furthermore, this notion that one person must suffer for the rest to enjoy luxury strongly resembles the idea behind Le Guin's short story, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”. Le Guin's short story centres the narrative of the perfect utopian city Omelas, with its advanced technology, pristine nature and happy citizens. However, lurking beneath this utopia in a basement lies the secret behind Omelas' success. Chained, malnourished and lying in its own excrement is a child confined in its prison because the subjugation of the child is needed for Omelas' continued happiness.

In this sense, Syl Anagist is a direct parallel to the city of Omelas. To the Sylanagistines, the Tuners must also remain trapped in servitude for eternity for the rest of Syl Anagist to thrive. However, that is the extent of the similarity between the two cities. Unlike Omelas, Syl Anagist is eventually destroyed by the Tuners. Thus, I argue that through this act of destruction, Jemisin's trilogy demonstrates a narrative that centers the liberation of her oppressed people. Jemisin empowers her Tuners to destroy the city that

requires their subjugation to thrive, while Le Guin's narrative illustrates a sense of futility because there is no escape for the child in the basement.

Forty thousand years later, Alabaster also uses the obelisk gate to destroy the Stillness. Part of his intention is to destroy the Fulcrum and with that, 'set free' the Fulcrum Orogenes and the node maintainers. Just like the city of Syl Anagist, Alabaster concludes that the system the Stills have imposed is broken, "*I've decided. It's wrong. Everything's wrong. Some things are so broke that they can't be fixed. You just have to finish them off, sweep away the rubble, and start over*" (Jemisin, *Stone* 299). Whilst Alabaster is advocating for the destruction of a corrupt system, in the latter part of this essay, I will also show how Alabaster uses this destruction as a hopeful avenue to create a more egalitarian society.

In both instances of violence used by Alabaster and the Tuners, ironically, 'setting free' the node maintainers, Fulcrum Orogenes and briar patch victims means killing them. At first glance, their decision seems horrific. It can be viewed as another way in which more violence is committed on the bodies of these already marginalized people. However, I argue that the killing Alabaster and the Tuners perform through this violence is, in fact, an act of mercy.

Death here is the only true way out for the oppressed. It is the only solution to end their misery and suffering. Unlike the oppressors, neither Alabaster nor the Tuners perform this act lightly. Rather, they are giving the most marginalized people in society freedom, through any means necessary. This mirrors Malcolm X's words as he notes, "we want freedom by any means necessary. We want justice by any means necessary. We want equality by any means necessary".

Moreover, despite their good intentions for using violent resistance, there are devastating consequences. For a start, the Tuners created the "Fifth Seasons". In their actions to destroy the world, the Tuners unintentionally used too much power from the obelisk gate and with that flung the moon out of the earth's orbit. With the moon gone from the earth's orbit, the world fell out of balance and is now plagued with "Fifth Seasons" every hundred years or so.

The second consequence came at the expense of the bodies of the Tuners and Alabaster. Jemisin shows that tapping into the enormous power of the obelisk gate has a dire unintended effect on the body of the user. In the case of the Tuners and Alabaster, they undergo a very painful transformative experience in which they turn into stone eaters.

Stone eaters are essentially immortal beings whose bodies are made completely out of stone. The Tuners are the first original stone eaters. The consequence for the Tuners breaking the world in half is that they are forced to live for eternity experiencing the horrendous disasters of the "Fifth Seasons". More than that, with more time that passes, more and more of their identity is forgotten. Forty thousand years later, in the present time, Hoa is the last of the original stone eaters that remember their history and even their name.

Although in both cases Alabaster and the Tuners set off horrifying “Fifth Seasons”, I still claim it is wrong to view their actions as unwarranted. Doing so erases the responsibility of their oppressors for the years of subjugation and abuse they committed. For the oppressed, the world was already broken and inhospitable. Alabaster and the Tuners are merely responding to these abuses through the only means available to them, violence. Furthermore, I assert that for those living in these inhumane conditions, this destruction is an act of hope for them. It creates hope to build a new society in which they are now free from further persecution.

### **The Utility of Violent Resistance to Create Hope for a Better Society**

As I have demonstrated in the previous section, violent resistance can cause destruction that negatively affects both the oppressor and the oppressed. However, I have also firmly claimed that more than destruction, violent resistance also creates room for a better society.

According to Paulo Freire, the act of rebellion, although it can be as violent as the initial violence committed by the oppressors, also has the power to “initiate love” (46). Freire strongly distinguishes between the violence committed by the oppressed and the oppressors. When the oppressors use violence, it strips humanity away from both parties - the oppressed and the oppressors. On the other hand, by removing the oppressors’ power to “dominate and suppress”, the oppressed also ironically restores their oppressors’ “humanity” which they had lost in the “exercise of oppression” (Freire 46). Simply put, it is only the oppressed who through freeing themselves can also, in turn, free their oppressors (Freire 46). In Jemisin’s trilogy, she uses the characters Alabaster and Nassun to show how violence utilized by the oppressed can also be a symbol of hope.

Although Alabaster uses the obelisk gate to destroy the world, as mentioned he also uses it to create a better world. In this section, I will show that he also uses violence with the desire to create a better future in which Orogenes are no longer oppressed. This is observed through a letter he writes to Syenite: “*I’m breaking [the world] because I was wrong. Start it over, you were right, change it. Make it better for the children you have left*” (Jemisin, *Stone* 300).

The way in which Alabaster hopes to accomplish this task is by bringing the moon back into orbit. Alabaster’s decision to use the power of the obelisk gate to bring the moon back symbolizes both a literal and metaphorical act of bringing equilibrium back into this world: only when the “moon is back in orbit”, can “equilibrium be re-established” and “peaceful coexistence by any means necessary” be achieved with the end of the Seasons (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 127).

This line “peaceful coexistence through any means necessary” echoes Malcolm X’s words “freedom through any means necessary”. Interestingly, X’s words demonstrate that for the

oppressed to gain their freedom, the oppressors are required to relinquish their power, or the oppressed will take it through any means necessary.

On the other hand, while Jemisin's line also illustrates the same sentiments as X, I argue that Jemisin's words also highlight the hope that peaceful existence between different groups of people is possible. Although violence and destruction are needed for the oppressed to break the cycle of abuse, in the long run, it will bring peace for everyone. This also emphasizes Paulo Freire's words that violence committed by the oppressed can instigate love.

In this instance, the resetting of the moon is a cosmic metaphor for things being set right with the world through the end of the "Fifth Seasons". For a start, "Fifth Seasons" would no longer force citizens into survival mode, where the survival of the local "comm" supersedes all other concerns. This would also mean that individuals that are not deemed useful within the "comm" are no longer ousted or worst eaten by the "comm" in times of difficulty. The end of "Fifth Seasons" would allow actual communities to build and develop – not just the truncated "comm".

Secondly, it would allow the relationships between Orogenes and Stills to heal. In Essun's "comm" Castrima, the leader Ykka, another Orogene, and Essun frequently disagree about the relationship between Stills and Orogenes. Ykka has faith in the "comm" she is trying to build where Orogenes and Stills can exist together in harmony. However, Essun disagrees with this possibility. For Essun, through her traumatic experiences with Stills from her time in the Fulcrum to her relationship with Jija where he killed her son and kidnapped her daughter, she has learned that Stills are untrustworthy and dangerous and therefore "roggas and stills can never live together" (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 294). This prevents her from trying to build any form of meaningful relationship with Stills. However, Ykka argues that Essun's divisive attitude prevents Orogenes and Stills from moving past the labels of "oppressed" and "oppressor":

You're saying these people—my parents, my creche teachers, my friends, my lovers— You're saying just leave them to their fate. You're saying they're nothing. That they're not people at all, just beasts whose nature it is to kill. You're saying roggas are nothing but, but prey and that's all we'll ever be! No! I won't accept that (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 295).

Hence, to Ykka, because the "Stills *learned* to hate us. They can learn differently" (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 294). Only through time can trust between these two fractured groups heal and lead to a community in which all people are allowed to live in freedom. Therefore, as much as Orogenes should be allowed to be free from persecution, the Stills should

also be allowed to grow and learn from their history. However, this idealistic future can only come to pass with the cosmic resetting of the world.

Lastly, with the end of the “Fifth Seasons”, it would also mean the end of abusing Orogenes and turning them into node maintainers. When the “comm” Castrima is forced to migrate to Rennais, they discovered,

to survive in Rennais, Castrima will need the node maintainers. It will need to take care of them. And when those node maintainers die, Castrima will need to find some way to replace them. No one’s talking about that last part yet (Jemisin, *Stone* 268).

However, with the end of the “Fifth Seasons”, Castrima will be able to finally put the node maintainers out of their misery and will not have to worry about turning any other Orogene into a mindless, drugged-out servant, forced to live in a dehumanized state for the rest of their lives. It would also mean Ykka would not be forced to turn into an oppressor and her dream of building a community built on equality can finally become a reality.

Thus, although Jemisin’s trilogy shows that the use of violence is needed to achieve this progress, in the long run, I argue Jemisin’s narrative rejects a constant state of conflict as its outcome. The end of all “Fifth Seasons” brings an end to all forms of tumult.

Before Alabaster can complete this task though, he dies and turns into a stone eater. Therefore, the task of bringing the moon back falls unto another powerful Orogene. The mantle is eventually taken up by young Nassun. At first, Nassun is torn between using the power of the obelisk gate to bring back the moon into orbit or killing everyone in the world. Her anger and rage at the unfairness of the fact that all Orogenes are raped to serve the Stills overwhelms her and pushes her to the extreme:

*I wouldn’t fix it... I’m sorry, I don’t want to fix it I want to kill everybody that hates me — G-g-gone! I want it all GONE... I want it to BURN, I want it burned up and dead and gone, gone, NOTHING l-l-left, no more hate and no more killing just nothing, r-rusting nothing, nothing FOREVER — (Jemisin, *Stone* 90).*

The broken syntax, the stuttering, the capitalisation, all show the extremity of Nassun’s emotions. It comes as no surprise that Nassun craves to destroy and kill off everyone that hates Orogenes, including all Orogenes. If everyone is dead, then no one else has to suffer in the same

way that Orogenes have been forced to suffer. Moreover, by killing all Orogenes, Nassun is inadvertently also saving them from a life of persecution.

Through this line, Jemisin also highlights the overwhelming hopelessness that Nassun feels towards society. Nassun cannot imagine a world in which power structures such as the Fulcrum do not exist because that is the only world Nassun knows. Therefore, destruction at this moment will bring a sense of relief for Nassun. It will liberate her from all the trauma she is forced to carry around with her from the abuse she suffered at the hands of her mother, father and the rest of society. Through this act, Nassun will be breaking the cycle of abuse forever.

However, Nassun changes her mind due to her mother's sacrifice for her. As I have mentioned, using the obelisk gate comes with repercussions of turning the user into a stone eater. Acutely aware of the danger Nassun and the rest of the world are facing, Essun decides to take control of the obelisk gate and recapture the moon herself.

When Nassun refuses to let go of the obelisk gate and its power, it forces Essun to decide to either let Nassun win and be turned into a stone eater or choose to sacrifice herself. Without hesitation, Essun chooses to sacrifice herself and she turns into stone. This action by her mother, with whom Nassun has had a tumultuous relationship with, shocks Nassun beyond belief: "She inhales, her eyes widening as if she cannot believe what she is seeing: her mother, so fearsome, on the ground. Trying to crawl on stone limbs. Face wet with tears. *Smiling*" (Jemisin, *Stone* 386).

Nassun cannot understand how her mother whom she strongly believes hated her would sacrifice herself for her daughter. At that moment, Nassun realizes that the trauma that she has undergone from being an Orogene is one that her mother also lives with. Through this act, Nassun can let go of her hatred towards her mother and see her as a person for the first time:

But she cannot stop staring at [Essun's] drying tears. Because the world took and took and took from [her], too, after all. She knows this. And yet, for some reason that she does not think she'll ever understand... even as [Essun] died, [she was] reaching for the Moon (Jemisin, *Stone* 387).

Therefore, in the end, Nassun chooses to bring back the moon into orbit and save everyone from total annihilation. The motivation that Nassun uses is the love that she feels from her mother. With this action, Nassun brings the equilibrium back both physically and metaphorically to the society of Orogenes, Stills and even the stone eaters. This emphasizes the words of Freire that violence from the oppressed can restore the humanity of both the oppressed

and the oppressor. Hence, Jemisin's trilogy ends with a symbol of hope. This is especially felt through the words of Hoa:

Imprisonment of Orogenes was never the only option for ensuring the safety of society... Lynching was never the only option. The nodes were never the only option. All of these were choices. Different choices have always been possible (Jemisin, *Stone* 395).

This line clearly illustrates that destruction is only the first step; the next step is the act of rebuilding a better world. The options are limitless for how the Stills and Orogenes can choose to rebuild this world together.

While Jemisin's text does not directly illustrate what type of system is created, the final words spoken by Essun as a stone eater, "I want the world to be better" (Jemisin, *Stone* 398), fill readers with hope that the world that is born anew will not be worse than the one that Alabaster just destroyed. Thus, once again illustrating Fanon's point that "violence is a cleansing force" (Fanon 94).

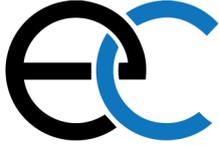
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**BIO**

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## Breaking the Cycle: The Forgiving Blues in August Wilson's *King Hedley II*

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### ABSTRACT

This essay argues that in *King Hedley II*, his sequel to *Seven Guitars*, August Wilson presents a bleak picture of life for African Americans living in the inner cities in the 1980s. King, the titular protagonist and now-grown son of characters from Wilson's previous play, struggles to build a future in a world that constantly reminds him that he doesn't count. Wilson uses King, a character thoroughly enmeshed in the inner-city hoodlum culture of "blood for blood" violence, to dramatize a way to break that cycle and navigate American reality. Although King is ultimately sacrificed at the end of the play, he learns his own and his community's history and adopts a "bluesman" mentality, which allows him to learn forgiveness and, thus, transcend cycles of violence.

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## Introduction

"The past is never dead. It's not even past."

—William Faulkner

The ten plays of August Wilson's Twentieth-Century Cycle (or Pittsburgh Cycle) display the various crises assailing the African-American community, ranging from external threats by exploitative and conniving white capitalists—the plots of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1982) and *Radio Golf* (2005), for instance, both hinge on this particular danger—to the internal strife caused by the over-ready trigger fingers of young black men—note especially the title character of *King Hedley II* (1999), described by Sandra Shannon as bearing "mental and physical scars that turn him into a walking time bomb" (127). As the only true sequel within the Twentieth-Century Cycle, *King Hedley II* effectively demonstrates the ways that the past can catch up with us as well as the importance of communities maintaining meaningful connections. Following up on the characters first presented in *Seven Guitars* (set in 1948), *King Hedley II* (set in 1985) dramatizes the state of black America in the era of Ronald Reagan's presidency—after the battle for Civil Rights allegedly had been won, demonstrating that, at least for some segments of the African-American community, those gains have proven illusory.

— 53 — Told in flashbacks, *Seven Guitars* (1995) begins at the funeral of its main character, Floyd Barton, an aspiring blues musician. In one of these flashbacks, we witness Floyd's murder at the hands of the drunk and delusional King Hedley. Also in this play, we meet Ruby, who has just become pregnant by a man who is in jail back in Alabama. She soon begins a relationship with Hedley and then tells him that she is pregnant with his child.

In *King Hedley II*, set roughly thirty five years later, we meet Ruby's child as the titular grown man. As the play opens, King<sup>1</sup> has just returned home from prison to try to build a new life. Tonya, his wife, is pregnant, and he and his friend Mister are raising money to open their own video store. Unfortunately, these dreams are stymied when he falls into conflict with Elmore, his mother's fiancé. Elmore tells King both the truth about his patrimony and that he (Elmore) killed King's biological father back in the 1940s as they were fighting over Ruby. King vows revenge, but in the play's finale, he and Elmore decide to leave their conflict in the past. Tragically, however, in the midst of their reconciliation, Ruby accidentally shoots King in the throat, killing him.

According to Harry Elam's assessment of the play, Wilson uses King to represent "a generation of black children unable to thrive in their kingdoms in the self-destructive

<sup>1</sup> To avoid confusion, I use "King" throughout this essay when discussing the title character of *King Hedley II*, and I use "Hedley" to refer to the character from *Seven Guitars*.

1980s” (82). Believing himself the son of the character from *Seven Guitars*, King “feels compelled to repeat his father’s violent actions as the sole means of inheriting his legacy. Instead of a beneficent patrimony, King Hedley II inherits this trauma as the deep truth of his own existence” (Pease 1). Riffing on Langston Hughes’s “Harlem,” Elam declares that “[t]hrough King, Wilson reveals what happens to dreams deferred, to hopes unfulfilled, to the power of the past unrealized in the present,” adding that King “is a toxic combination of heredity and environment; the sins of the father are, in fact, visited on the son” (82). Further, he notes that “Wilson creates an ironic portrait of royalty and a kingdom steeped in the depressed circumstances of the 1980s urban milieu, where black poverty, despair, and cultural devastation are the norm” (ibid). Yet, Wilson’s vision of black America is by no means without hope; however, to find that hope, it is necessary to experience multiple Wilson plays since they do often tend toward the tragic. Seemingly every time the final curtain descends on one of his plays, Levoy is knifing Toledo (*Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*), or Hedley is severing Floyd’s windpipe with his machete (*Seven Guitars*).

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 With one play for each decade of the twentieth century, it becomes quite easy to connect William Faulkner’s often-quoted line—from his only real attempt at writing a drama, *Requiem for a Nun*—with Wilson’s plays since each one is suffused with a sense of history and since each of the plays is at least loosely connected to the rest in the cycle. Faulkner’s statement refers to the tendency of the past to catch up with us, which is wont to happen in the Twentieth-Century Cycle, since all but one are set within the Hill District where Wilson grew up. Furthermore, Wilson wrote his plays to help ensure a meaningful connection to that past so that his characters (and his audiences, of course) can learn from past mistakes and move forward with an enabling sense of community.

Many critics have pointed to the exceedingly dark picture painted in *King Hedley II*—especially as follow-up to *Seven Guitars*. For instance, in his introduction to *August Wilson: Completing the Twentieth Century Cycle*, Alan Nadel describes it as “Wilson’s most tragic play” (5). As Charles Isherwood notes, in this sequel, “almost 40 years on, King is still fighting the same battles that Floyd fought, against limited opportunity and the demons of self-destruction. If anything, the odds seem to have become tougher for a man from the black underclass” (Isherwood). Furthermore, as he notes, “The past impinges with particular weight upon the characters of ‘King Hedley II,’ which reverberates darkly with echoes from events depicted in ‘Seven Guitars’” (ibid). Thus, when the two plays are viewed in succession, audiences can then “see with unusual clarity how powerfully Mr. Wilson illuminated the destructive legacies of history — personal and cultural — in the lives of African-Americans over the course of the 20th century” (ibid). Indeed, the end of the play features Ruby, King’s mother,

accidentally shooting her own son in the throat as she tries to protect him. However, as we will see, this very act dramatizes a break in the cycle of disappointed hopes familiar to black America.

Other critics have also noted the redemptive arc when connecting the two plays together. For instance, in her essay "If We Must Die: Violence as History Lesson in *Seven Guitars* and *King Hedley II*" (2010) Soyica Diggs Colbert discusses "King's choice at the end of the play to enact his own law in order to end the cycle of violence creates a historical detour that ruptures the chronological relationship between *Seven Guitars* and *King Hedley II*" (97). Diggs's article, which is drawing on Elam's commentary of the play in *The Fire This Time*, adds that the latter play "promises, nevertheless, conditional redemption from the incessant violence that plagued urban black communities in America in the late 1980s and early 1990s" (101). While Colbert's article is informed by psychoanalytic theory, this study will focus much more heavily on reading the two plays, especially *King Hedley II*, within their historical moments. Furthermore, my arguments here assume, but do not require, that the reader is fairly familiar with *Seven Guitars* since that play sets up the events which unfold in its sequel; however, my argument places more emphasis on the later play since it is there that the cycle of disappointed hopes is symbolically broken. Paying close attention to Wilson's narrative, we find a few important criteria for breaking this cycle and achieving that illusory "hope." The first of these is a connection to the past and to community. The second is the ability to use a blues mentality to overcome an "economics of slavery." The final criteria in breaking the cycle and salvaging hope is learning to forgive.

### *The Living Past*

As a commentary on the African-American experience of the twentieth century, history is obviously an important component in Wilson's Twentieth-Century Cycle, both in terms of his plays' settings and in terms of a criteria for achieving hope. First, let's take a look at the historical moment captured in each play and then examine history as a theme—that is, a connection to history, and therefore community, is essential for survival. While *Seven Guitars* is set in the pre-civil rights era, Wilson places *King Hedley II* in 1985, when (white) America had decided that the battle for civil rights had been won and we could move forward in a new post-racial era. Wilson sets *Seven Guitars* in a significant moment in American and African-American history. While more notable landmark events like the *Brown vs. The Board of Education* decision and the Montgomery Bus Boycott were still on the horizon, the nation began taking some essential baby

steps toward ensuring the full rights of citizenship to African Americans. In July of 1948, following on the heels of World War II, President Truman issued two executive orders. The first of these "instituted fair employment practices in the civilian agencies of the federal government" ("Desegregation"). In the second, Truman ordered the desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces. While these orders didn't eliminate redlining or a grossly uneven distribution of the benefits of the G.I. Bill, they were still significant steps forward. Outside of the realm of government, the nation had just witnessed the beginning of desegregation in Major League Baseball as Jackie Robinson broke the "color barrier" in the year preceding Wilson's play. Within the play itself, in Scenes 4 and 5 of Act I, the characters listen to the radio as Joe Lewis, the Brown Bomber, defeats yet another white man, Billy Conn. While Lewis's victory here is a slight anachronism since the two men had last fought several years earlier, it nevertheless emphasizes the burgeoning presence of African Americans in American society and the high notes yet to be hit. The play's sequel, however, dramatizes a state of the nation in which the hopes of African Americans have been severely dashed.

*King Hedley II* is set in the midst of the Reagan years, remembered as an era of tremendous prosperity for "yuppies" (young urban professionals), stock brokers, and corporations. On the other hand, among the nation's urban lower classes, particularly in the African-American community (including the residents of Pittsburgh's Hill District), the same cannot be said. Shannon provides a useful snapshot of urban America in the Reagan era, describing it as "a time characterized in urban areas by guns, crime, family dysfunction, and neglect" (126). Paraphrasing Wilson's commentary on the play, Pease describes this turbulent era within the Black community as the outcome of a "transgenerational structure of violence" that "originated from African Americans' unconscious transference of the collective aggression aroused by an oppressive white supremacist social structure onto black surrogates" (4). Through the character of Tonya, Wilson provides an elaboration on this snapshot within the play: As she protests to King that she doesn't want to have another baby because of the world she'd be bringing it into, she points to the child she does have—Natasha—and the world in which her daughter exists ("exists" as opposed to "lives"):

Look up and the whole world seem like it went crazy. Her daddy in jail. Her step-daddy going to jail. She seventeen and got a baby, she don't even know who the father is. She moving so fast she can't stop and look in the mirror. She can't see herself. All anybody got to do is look at her good and she run off and lay down with them. She don't think no further than that. Ain't got no future 'cause she don't know how to make one. Don't nobody care nothing about that. All they care about

is getting a bigger TV. All she care about is the next time somebody gonna look at her and want to lay down with her (37-8).

If we were to try to root out causes of this lamentable situation, we might describe them as legislative, economic, and narcotic: On the legislative side, the Reagan government vigorously set about crippling New Deal and Great Society programs, "cutting federal support for virtually every program important to African Americans" (Shannon 127). Due to both national and global shifts on the economic front, many of the industries had begun to shut down—most notably in terms of August Wilson's Pittsburgh, the American steel industry had begun to falter and shut down foundries. The 1970s and 80s "brought the collapse of the steel industry and civic unrest which combined to speed the decline of the Hill District's business artery and housing stock. The neighborhood experienced rampant deterioration of buildings, increased crime and random demolition leaving vacant lots" ("Developers"). Making both of these problems worse for the urban poor, the price of cocaine dropped by fifty percent, bringing about a "new and corrosive industry that proved devastating to the inner cities" (ibid). Thus, "by 1985, many neighborhoods that had once been run-down but still thriving" had become "savage war zones" wherein "[g]ang culture, street justice, and lyrics of gangsta rap advocated new, antisocial codes of behavior" (ibid).

While these causal factors are easily assessed, at the beginning of *King Hedley II*, Wilson stresses an equally important factor that has generated this state of affairs: the African-American community had lost its sense of history. As Canewell/Stool Pigeon prophetically phrases the situation, "The people wandering all over the place. They got lost. They don't even know the story of how they got from tit to tat" (8). He laments that the path to Aunt Ester's house "is all grown over with weeds, you can't hardly find the door no more" (8). August Wilson uses Aunt Ester as a quasi-supernatural manifestation of the African-American experience, she having been born the same year the first slaves landed in America and enduring through all the perils of that 366-year experience up to Ronald Reagan's second term as president. The People of the Hill District, however, have forgotten her. They no longer seek her counsel; thus, the path to her house is overgrown, and thus, Natasha has no future because she doesn't know how to make one.

Critics have commented upon the apocalyptic nature of *King Hedley II*'s setting with its rundown houses, barren lawns, and barbed-wire around the only specimen of plant life—Harry Elam and Robert Alexander situate the play as "a meditation on apocalyptic history" (Colbert 99). To make this stark apocalyptic situation even more dire, the seemingly immortal Aunt Ester dies at the beginning of the play, leaving little hope for the future, a situation contrary to the blues-inflected ebullience and hopefulness of the post-war situation of *Seven Guitars*. Onto the apocalyptic stage steps the Glock-toting King Hedley II and his compatriot Mister, both

thoroughly enmeshed in street culture and street justice with its "blood for blood" rule, as Mister chants at the end of the play (100-101). It becomes obvious as the action of the play commences that King and Mister are little more than two-bit hustlers; they have been going around the neighborhood selling \$200 refrigerators, which, no doubt, have been stolen. We will note a connection to the play's internal history in that T. L. Hall, Floyd Barton's manager, found himself arrested for selling fake insurance all throughout the neighborhood. King remains tight-lipped, so all the other characters or the audience know about the owner of the refrigerators is that he is a contact King made while he was in prison for killing Pernel. When this scheme proves insufficient to raise the money King and Mister need to achieve their very-1980s entrepreneurial dream of starting their own video store, they, like Floyd before them, resort to robbery. History, we can be certain after reading *Seven Guitars*, is constantly repeating itself. Regardless, audiences will note that the primary problem facing the characters is a lack of historical knowledge, or a lack of connection to history—and through history, a connection to community.

King Hedley II, the man, lacks a historical frame of reference. As the play commences, all of the well-connected community members of *Seven Guitars* are either dead (Hedley, Louise, and, importantly, Aunt Ester, whose death commences the play), absent (Vera and Red Carter may well be dead), or marginalized: Canewell is considered crazy by everyone and has now been rebranded by Ruby as Stool Pigeon because he testified that King Hedley I murdered Floyd, and King Hedley II, mistrustful of his mother, keeps her at arm's length. King seeks solace in Tonya, who is pregnant with the child who he hopes will carry his name.

The seeds that he plants at the beginning of the play take on obvious symbolic value as it progresses—he is trying to set down roots even though he has been told that he doesn't have good dirt. The soil may be inferior, but King declares, "This is the only dirt I got" (37). He anxiously nurses his seeds, hoping to breed flowers out of the dead land, to paraphrase T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land*. Though part of King's motivation in this act seems to be proving everyone else wrong, the seeds hold deeper significance for him—they are a reflection of himself. To step on his plants is to step on him. As symbolic entities, these seeds function on multiple levels. On the one hand, the seeds are stand-ins for King himself; he is the one in need of roots, of good dirt to grow in, and almost solely through his stubborn will, the plant survives just as King does in allegedly bad dirt (we are reminded of Tupac Shakur's rose that grew through concrete). Beyond this, the seeds are his legacy, just as the child growing in Tonya is his legacy; just as he doesn't want to see his plants stamped out, he doesn't want Tonya to get the abortion she has decided to get after deciding that she has failed her previous child as a mother.

At the end of Act II when King has learned the truth of his own patrimony, he ruthlessly rips the plants from the ground so that he may use that spot to vie with Elmore in a literally

cutthroat dice game. Despite protecting his seeds for so long, he rips out the plants just as he has been ripped out. He has been set adrift, and he vindictively takes the plants with him. The only real connections that King has had to the past are Louise, who is now dead, and the urban legend of his faux father, King Hedley I. All he really seems to have of this father, who we saw as a fleshed-out character in *Seven Guitars*, is a one-line embodiment of street justice: "I want everybody to know, just like my daddy, that you can't fuck with me" (58). Not until Elmore gives him a rude awakening by telling him about his real father does he even know that that part of his history is illusory. King is a character utterly without a frame of reference but desperately seeking one.

King's lack of connection is largely due to another one of the play's aforementioned repetitions, for his mother is similarly adrift. When she first arrives on the scene, it is with few connections to time, place, or people (exacerbated by the fact that one of her lovers was on his way to prison for murdering the other). Louise, when Ruby arrives unexpectedly, says "I got [your] letter last week. It ain't had no day, no time, no nothing. Just 'Aunt Louise, I'm coming.' I know you can do better than that" (54). Ruby responds "I didn't know the time when I sent the letter" (ibid). This is a simple enough transgression to overlook, but we soon note another broken connection: She claims, "I ain't country. Don't care where I come from. It's all in how you act, and I know I don't act country" (55). Ruby offers the opposite extreme as Louise's neighbor Mrs. Tillery who cannot seem to part with her roosters in spite of her irritated neighbors' exhortations to just go to Woolworth's and buy an alarm clock. While the discussion of roosters, especially by Canewell, demonstrates the characters' understanding of their history, Ruby would bolt from that history. She wants to deny her roots, and as we know from reading *King Hedley II*, she didn't stay long in Pittsburgh before heading to Chicago, leaving her baby boy behind for her aunt Louise to raise.

We also know from Wilson's later play that she would abandon this lifestyle, too. She attempts a reconciliation with her King, who greets her with an icy reception, claiming that Louise is all the mother he needs, for he doesn't really know her in the capacity of mother—they have no history together (though as *King Hedley II* opens, we see that she is living with her less than congenial son). The day she stops singing, she begins dying, symbolized by her hair turning white. Moreover, this symbolic change is hugely significant, for it shows that she is living outside of the blues (or, as Houston A. Baker might phrase it, outside of the blues matrix). This exclusion from the blues is accompanied by a disconnection from history, and the connection to history, as has already been noted, is essential for any possible of chance of breaking the cycle of despair extant in Wilson's later play. But, so too is a connection to the blues.

*A Blues Harmony*

How, then, does the blues fit into the cycle of these two plays? Within *Seven Guitars*, the answer, on the surface, seems obvious. For instance, Steven Tracy has written extensively on the number of blues songs within the text, focusing especially on Wilson's use of "Anybody Here Want to Try My Cabbage," "That's All Right," and "Buddy Bolden's Blues." The play, in fact, starts with the first of these songs, a bawdy blues number sung by Louise as a "much-needed affirmation of life" (7). Floyd "School Boy" Barton, the central figure of the play, is a blues singer with a "hit" record with the second song. The third song, aside from being sung throughout the play, is instrumental in the play's ending. Hedley, either from drunkenness, delusions, or both, murders Floyd, mistaking him for blues legend King Buddy Bolden (his namesake). Hedley, we learn, has had a recurring dream of Bolden bringing him money from his father so that he might start a plantation.

But, what about *King Hedley II*? Ruby no longer sings the blues. Canewell/Stool Pigeon never plays his harmonica in this sequel. King's pistol-packing lifestyle screams gangsta rap, not old-timey blues rhythms. Where're the blues? To answer this, we'll need to look at Baker's conception of the bluesman. Reading through the lens of Baker's *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* (1987), I will demonstrate that the blues are not merely present in *King Hedley II*, but they are the most important unifying factor between it and *Seven Guitars*.

Baker claims that in his text, he is attempting "to provide suggestive accounts of moments in Afro-American discourse when personae, protagonists, autobiographical narrators, or literary critics successfully negotiate an obdurate 'economics of slavery' and achieve a resonant, improvisational, expressive dignity" (13). Phrased differently, Baker aims to point out examples of bluesmen/blueswomen. By "economics of slavery," he refers to "the social system of the Old South that determined what, how, and for whom goods were produced to satisfy human wants.... an exploitative mode of production embodied in the plantation system," marked by a mythology of patriarchy and economic paternalism on the part of whites (26-27). Importantly, while slavery was abolished in America, the economics of slavery persisted beyond the antebellum days of chattel slavery and into the post-bellum experience of African Americans as social and economic second-class citizens. We see this economic relationship throughout the Twentieth-Century Cycle of plays. Wilson dramatizes the people Baker refers to as America's "vernacular" voices, presenting his audience with "the living and laboring conditions of people designated as 'the desperate class' by James Weldon Johnson's narrator in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*" (Baker 3). The lives of these people, as Baker would assert, have been conditioned and shaped by an "'economics of slavery' as they worked the agricultural rows,

searing furnaces, rolling levees, bustling roundhouses, and piney-woods logging camps of America" (ibid). Even when Wilson gets to *Radio Golf*, set in 1995, we see the white capitalist paternalistically set up Roosevelt in the radio business—explicitly because he needs a black face to front his enterprise.

Returning to Baker's bluesmen, to negotiate the economics of slavery, then, means to recognize one's place in the economic system and use this to one's own best advantage, and this can only be done, due to the very nature of that economics, in an improvisational fashion because it is the aim of the system to maintain non-whites in a subjugated position. Whether an instrument is in hand or not (be that instrument a harmonica or a straight razor), this lived blues experience becomes expressive through the sharing of it in story and song, and thus, the expression of overcoming the economics of slavery—perhaps like the signifying monkey overcoming the lion—leads not necessarily to pride or profit but to dignity and a solidified understanding of self worth.

By this definition of the blues and of a bluesman, Floyd Barton falls short. He may have a hit record, but he doesn't have a dime to show for it. If he wants another chance at getting rich off his music, he must first secure the funds to get himself and his band-mates back to Chicago. Unlike Ma Rainey, an uber-blueswoman in the Baker sense, who calls the shots—she controls her recording sessions by including who she wants to include and starting when she wants to start—Floyd has not achieved that level of mastery. He can master the music, and his wooing and winning back of Vera ultimately by performing masterfully at The Blue Goose demonstrate that he can parlay that music into sexuality, but he has not learned how to negotiate the economics of slavery. Mr. T. L. Hall, his "manager," and the industry of white record producers who have learned to harness black musical talent and turn it into gold have victimized Floyd's ignorance of the business: They convinced him to sign away the enduring royalties from his record "That's All Right" in exchange for giving him a small payoff up front. He knows there's more money to be had from his music, but he has to find a way back to Chicago. To do this, he resorts to felonious methods, and in the process, "Poochie" Tillery, his accomplice and neighbor, is killed. Moreover, the money he gains from this criminal enterprise leads directly to his demise as Hedley slays him with his machete, severing "his windpipe with one blow" (98). The symbolic positioning of the wound should not be overlooked: his ability to sing is cut off along with his life. In thirty years, King Hedley II will be shot in the throat, recreating this wound.

Floyd is a blues singer in the literal sense, but let's not forget that, for Baker, the term transcends the literal. The bluesman in Baker's writing is much akin to the trickster. He is able to manipulate situations to his advantage to, as noted before, "achieve a resonant, improvisational, expressive dignity" (Baker 13). Canewell/Stool Pigeon and Elmore prove themselves quite able

to improvise and talk their way through, and it also helps that luck seems to stay on their side. Thus, they survive. Note, for instance, that when the police pick up Canewell and Floyd (in the events preceding the action of *Seven Guitars*), Canewell has five dollars on him, so is able to go on his way but Floyd gets put in the workhouse after being charged for "worthlessness" (*Seven* 14). Of course, that luck is on Canewell's side is no accident on Wilson's part: The bluesman is connected to the community and to his history. We may note, for instance, Canewell's discussion of roosters from different Southern states as a connection to both personal and cultural past. Canewell's knack for survival is telling, since even at the end of *King Hedley II*, Floyd is gone, Hedley is gone, Red Carter is gone, Louise is gone, and Ruby is a shell of her former self, but Canewell lives on. When looking into the sequel to *Seven Guitars*, we meet Elmore, a character even more able to improvise and survive.

Though not as obsessively connected to the past as Canewell with his hoarded collection of newspapers, Elmore has been lucky enough to survive the process of learning life's lessons. He tries to pass on what he has learned to King, who seems to have learned precious little from the school of hard knocks. Referencing Baker's idea of the economics of slavery, Elmore tells King, "Boy, you wouldn't have lasted three days in Alabama in 1948. I done got my ass whipped so many times I done lost count" (53); however, he has learned to pick his battles more carefully rather than fly off the handle at any provocation. Elmore is responding to a sulking King who has had an unfortunate run-in trying to retrieve the pictures Tonya has had developed. In a scene that mirrors and exacerbates Floyd's inability to retrieve his pay from the workhouse because he doesn't have the proper documents, King, receipt in hand, has been told that his receipt "don't count." King takes this as an affront directed solely at him because he doesn't understand the universalizing experiences of the economics of slavery and doesn't have a proper sense of connection to the community. "You see what I'm saying. That's like telling me I don't count" (*ibid.*). In a sense, he *is* correct; he doesn't count because he is one among a multitude being marginalized by capital. King is spoiling for a fight, but Elmore counsels him to let it go. He says, "You got to pick and choose when to fight. If you pick and choose the right place you'll always be victorious" (*ibid.*). One cannot fight the economics of slavery all the time on every front; Elmore tells King to learn to recognize the battles that are winnable, and otherwise let the rest go. Earlier in the play, we find that Elmore, too, was once like King, but he was able to learn to negotiate the march of events. Ruby tells King that there was a time when Elmore wasn't ever satisfied with his life and always wanted more, and Elmore responds, "I wanted to have [life] to where I could get a handle on it. Only that was a large sucker to try and wrestle to the ground. It took me a long time to figure out I didn't have to do that. I could just learn to live with life" (44).

His blues-inflected instincts and his ability to connect with history allowed him to learn to adapt and survive.

The blues, then, are a survival technique, whether we look at the pre-Civil Rights era *Seven Guitars* or the post-Civil Rights era *King Hedley II*. They are also, therefore, one of the important criteria for hope. Again, the central theme Wilson is expressing by joining these two plays together is the possibility of breaking the cycles of violence, of defeat, of despair. The blues offer a means by which to accomplish this end and ensure a hopefulness for future possibilities despite the disastrous endings of the two plays. This seems to be what King needs to learn more so than anything else. If he is unable to adapt, he will thus be unfit to survive in a naturalistic, social Darwinistic world. As the play reaches its conclusion, we find that—and this is one of the most pivotal scenes in Wilson's cycle of plays—King *can* adapt. He doesn't kill Elmore, which leads us to another important criteria for hope: forgiveness.

### *Power in Forgiveness*

— 63 — It would be easy to assert that the problem with a number of the characters within the Twentieth Century Cycle is that they have learned to forget but not to forgive. The final and most pivotal element required to break the cycle and manifest hope from the forlorn endings of *Seven Guitars* and *King Hedley II* is the capacity for forgiveness, which involves, at its core, a certain kind of letting go. One of the pivotal scenes of the former play is Hedley's description of his dream about his father. Even though it did not happen in the "real" world, Hedley and his father have been reconciled (which, lamentably does lead to Hedley's drunken murder of Floyd). Hedley describes that in this dream, his father says,

"Are you my son?" I say, "Yes, Father. I am your son." He say, "I kick you in the mouth?" I say, "Yes, Father. I ask you why you do nothing and you kick me." He say, "Do you forgive me?" I say, "Yes, Father, I forgive you." He say, "I am sorry I died without forgiving you your tongue" (68).

While this was not a real life situation, Hedley is able to put his father's transgressions behind him, especially because his father is supposed to be sending dead Buddy Bolden to give him some money to buy a plantation. Up until Floyd's money metaphorically turned to ashes in his hands, Hedley is able to maintain his hopes, including the hope that he will bear a son; Ruby makes good on this hope by telling him that she is pregnant with his (rather than Leroy's) child.

When Wilson moves forward to the squalid situation of 1985, forgiveness is a lot harder to come by. King, like Hedley and Elmore before him, spent a chunk of his life incarcerated for

murder. And while Hedley was by no means inculpable, King and Elmore were guilty of intentionally taking another life, and in the cases of both men, they let rationality and community take a back seat to raw emotion—rather than choosing their battles, as Elmore advocates later in life, they let the battles choose them. As it turns out, King killed Pernell because he refused to call him King (we learn in *Seven Guitars* that Hedley committed precisely this same act but learns over time to be ashamed of the act since, in spite of his aspirations of being the next Garvey or Toussaint, he killed one of his fellow blacks). Instead of calling him "King," Pernell calls him "champ" (72). While we understand that this is somewhat of an insane reason to kill a man, King feels that Pernell is robbing him of his identity (as with the clerk at the photo lab at Sears who said that his receipt didn't count). Wrapped up in street justice and a warped sense of self-importance, King mercilessly slaughters Pernell.

Furthermore, when King tells his story to Elmore, he says, "If he hadn't called me 'champ,' my whole life would have been different" (ibid). He doesn't seem to want to take full responsibility for his own actions; he is, again, unable to pick his own battles. Elmore can sympathize because he made the same mistakes in his youth; nevertheless, he counsels patience and asks King to learn from his mistakes. King says, "People try to say Pernell calling me 'champ' was a little thing. But I don't see it that way," to which Elmore responds, "It didn't seem like it at the time. But it was a little thing in the grand scheme of things" (73). King could not let go of Pernell's insult, so the state lets him go to jail; thus, for now, the cycle of violence is kept intact, but it will soon be up to King to take his name seriously and lead by example.

The very end of *King Hedley II* is heart-wrenchingly depressing, and particularly so if we are unwilling to accept the messianic explanation of King spilling his blood as a sacrifice to resurrect Aunt Ester's cat, and thus Ester herself, "the matriarchal wisdom figure who had accompanied the African community throughout its 366 years in America" (Pease 2). This resurrection allows the African-American community to reconnect with their history and with one another. Ruby, who has lost her own singing voice (her ability to sing the blues), shoots her own son—the next generation—in the throat, ending all of his future possibilities by destroying his ability to sing the blues (and, yes, too, of course, by killing him). However, we must consider that Wilson's plays are about more than just the endings. For instance, Lavoy kills Toledo and damns himself, but we cannot forget the example of Ma Rainey, both black and a woman, but still able to assert her will over white men.

In the case of *King Hedley II*, we must consider what happens just before King's tragic death. King wields his "father's" machete—with Floyd's blood still upon it—which Stool Pigeon has provided for him, telling him that it is "the machete of the Conquering Lion of Judea" (61) and "the Key to the mountain" (62), though he doesn't explain what this means. However, what

he does explain is the real story behind Hedley killing Floyd—King always believed it was because Floyd had stolen Hedley's money, but Stool Pigeon relates to him the events of *Seven Guitars*—that is, he provides King with a connection to his past and the past of the community.

Wilson depicts the penultimate moment of the play with a double-dose of restraint and a triple-dose of forgiveness, played out primarily in the stage directions. "Unable to harm Elmore, King turns and sticks the machete into the ground" (101). Elmore may have killed his father, but he has formed a bond with the man who will soon become his step-father. He attacks Elmore, but he restrains his vicious nature; he lets go of Mister's idea of "blood for blood" street justice. King has used the machete, "The Key to the Mountain" (*ibid*) to save a life rather than to take a life. Elmore, still angry over the confrontation, then pulls out his pistol and demands of King "Turn around, let me see your eyes!" (102). When King complies, Elmore follows King's lead. "Elmore, unable to shoot King, lowers the gun and fires shots into the ground" (*ibid*). While the viewing audience doesn't get to read the stage directions, the meaning of the character's actions are nonetheless clear. King's final action, however, is one that is easy to overlook. He cries out "Mama!" just after Ruby accidentally shoots him. His heart has been moved by forgiveness again, opening his heart to Ruby, even though in the first scene of the play, he declared "My mama dead. Louise my mama. That's the only mama I know" (12). Even as she destroys him, they are reconciled. As Elam notes, when Ruby spills King's blood, the characters are able to "bring about social, spiritual, and cultural resurrection" (213). The ritual at the end of the play, then, signifies the possibility of constructive change.

### *Conclusion*

Like *Seven Guitars* before it, *King Hedley II* ends with tragedy. Nevertheless, Wilson tries to sow the seeds of hope in King's bad dirt. King is dead and Tonya's child, if it is born, will grow up without a father. Worse, Ruby has to live with not only the death of her child but also the reality that he died by her own hand. However, unlike what we witness in the earlier play, the sequel features a "King" who can lead by example. King is able to connect with his community's past and abandon "blood for blood" vengeance. Moreover, he learns to pick his battles, and, most importantly, he learns how to forgive. Because he has matured as a person, his blood nurtures the soil, reviving Aunt Ester's spirit to heal her fractured community. If we'd like, we can view *King Hedley II* as a blueprint for success—if you learn from the past, learn to pick your battles wisely, and learn to forgive your brothers, the cycle of violence can be undone.

Though tensions arose between Red Carter and Floyd or between the other characters in *Seven Guitars* and violence was often threatened, the other members of the community were always around to mitigate the conflict, and because they were friends, and because they had history together, they were able to forgive each other. This is the lesson that King learns just before his death; he now has the Key to the Mountain and the others bear witness to King's actions (as do we the audience). Pease asserts that King's personal drama "allegorizes events that the characters in [Wilson's] earlier plays were unable to work through, and indicates that the community must work through them before its members can secure a viable future" (3). We are led to an understanding that the cycle of violence, the cycle of murders, and the cycle of hopelessness can be broken if the members of the community can learn forgiveness.

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**BIO**

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## Limits to the Self: Revisiting the Jewish Wandering Syndrome in Eshkol Nevo's *Neuland*

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### ABSTRACT

The notion of self attends to individual identity in relation with meaningful social interactions. It is a system expanded to multidisciplinary paradigms, often discussed in psychological and sociological perspectives. Man as a social being is entitled to understand and accept the social significance of self which is also an outgrowth of accumulated experiences of the past. However, this process is challenging especially to the members of a community with an unusual record of history. To that end, this paper attempts to examine the case of Israeli Jews for the complexity in their identification of self even after the establishment of Israel as a Nation State. Israeli writer Eshkol Nevo's most discussed novel *Neuland* is closely read to engage with the concept of self in the Israeli context and to accentuate its centrality among the new generation Jewish Israelis. Based on the socio-psychological theoretical frameworks, specifically of William James, *Neuland* is synthesized as a textual journey to subjective and social identifications of the notion of self. The causes and consequences of limits to self and its problematic representation among a particular group of Jewish Israelis as manifested in the text are subjected to textual interpretation.

### KEYWORDS

Israeli Jews, self, identity, wanderism, social interaction

The establishment of a sovereign Jewish State in the ancient *Eretz Yisrael*<sup>1</sup> discloses the dramatic Jewish victory in one of the excruciating battles human race has ever witnessed. Israel, the decisive hope of persecuted diasporic Jews exposed to the threat of annihilation, embodies Jewish spirit and determination. Israeli historian Anita Shapira states, “the Jews were presented as powerless and without a homeland – two essential deficiencies that the national movement aspired to remedy” (354). The identification of a national landscape became the prior necessity of the Jewish sentiment to frame their political actions, social thought and cultural creativity as envisaged by Theodor Herzl<sup>2</sup> about a Jewish Utopia in which “ideas about the establishment of a Jewish state were shaped by conceptions of progress in a global community of enlightened peoples, a world in which problems were solved by reason and common agreement” (Shapira 354). The collective Jewish aspirations were actualized through the Zionist<sup>3</sup> movement in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that propelled the immigration of Jewish refugees to Mandatory Palestine which eventually led to the establishment of the State of Israel. The State of Israel reflects the obstinacy of a unique ethnic group to survive and flourish in a land which is central to their history and collective identity. A new type of “Jew” was meant to emerge in Israel “with all its ambivalence towards the use of force” and “the attitude towards the land gradually lost its “conceptual” dimensions and became more “down-to-earth” in nature” (Shapira 370). The land prospered acquainting Israel as the historic birthplace of Jews, gratifying “the role Palestine had fulfilled in Jewish history” (Sachar 311). Sachar notes that Israel was “open to all Jews who wished to enter, would extend social and political equality to all its citizens without distinction of religion, race, or sex, and would guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, education and culture to all” (311). But what is the nature of Jewish life in Israel after the solidification of the State of Israel? How does the *sabra* (a Jew born in Israel) shape his/her life in the new State? Did Israel fulfil its mission of a Jewish settlement? This paper attempts to discuss the discrete methods of adaptation opted into by young native Israelis to confront the difficulties in identifying “self” amidst the social newness of Israel. Eshkol Nevo’s *Neuland* in its realistic portrayal of the problematic phase of being an Israeli Jew delineates the complexities of everyday life, demonstrations of escapist tendencies and its consequences among the new generation Israelis.

<sup>1</sup> *Eretz Yisrael/Israel* means the Land of Israel. However, the term is not exclusively geographic rather it is used to address the Israelite tribes established by the children of Jacob. For more information, refer Shlomo Sand’s *The Invention of the Land of Israel: From Holy Land to Homeland* (2012).

<sup>2</sup> Herzl is the father of political Zionism which formed the Zionist organization and promoted Jewish immigration to Palestine.

<sup>3</sup> Zionism is the Jewish national movement developed in the nineteenth century eastern and central Europe for the protection of Jews by establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. For more details, refer to Jacques Kornberg’s book *Theodor Herzl – From Assimilation to Zionism* (1993).

Nevo, named after his grandfather Levi Eshkol, the third Prime Minister of Israel, stands unique in his literary modality by employing objectivity and rationality as narrative styles. His position in the modern Israeli literature is pellucid when placed in the larger canvas of Israel's literary arena.

The foundations of literary achievements in modern Israel lay back to the group of literary pioneers from the second *aliyah*<sup>4</sup> between 1904 and 1914. Later in 1921, the Hebrew Writers' Association was established in Tel Aviv marking the beginning of abundant literary production with major focus on the predicament of Jewish people. When the first generation Israeli writers were highly influenced by the classical writers of the Hebrew revival, the next generation of writers symbolized the rootlessness of diasporic Jews. The third generation of writers experimented with exploring national ethos as they emerged during the time of the Israeli war of Independence. In the 1960s, Israeli literature flourished with its unique aspects of Jewish life and identity. The following generation curiously divulged into the collective consciousness of Israel by examining the changing modes of engaging with the notion of nation since the consecutive wars that the State had to fight for survival altered collective perceptions of nationality. Eshkol Nevo (born in 1971), belonging to the new generation of Israeli writers, has been highly influenced by his literary fathers, Amos Oz (born in 1939) and A.B. Yehoshua (born in 1936). He deliberates on the Jewish question of identity and attempts to place the notion of "wandering Israeli" in the narratives of modern Israeli society.

Nevo's *Neuland* was first published in Hebrew by Kineret Zmora Bitan in 2011. The novel was translated to English by Sondra Silverston in 2014. *Neuland* spectacles the physical and psychological journey undergone by Jewish Israelis amidst Israel's collective efforts to build a new type of Jew who is secular, progressive and enforced by instinctive and creative vitality (Shapira 355). The prototypical embodiment of the new Jew is complex with problematic identity, manifested in the portrayal of *Neuland*'s protagonists Dori and Inbar. Dori is a teacher by profession which he belittles against the exalted image of his father Menny who is a war hero of Israel. He is also trapped in an unhappy marriage with a difficult relationship with his son. Dori sets on a journey when his father goes missing but turns out to be a self-seeking endeavour. Inbar has also encountered similar familial issues. Inbar's problematic relationship with her mother Hannah is intensified with the suicide of her brother during his service in the army. This tragic incident escalates Hannah's anger and disappointment towards Israel to the extent that she leaves Israel for Germany, the country where her ancestors were brutally murdered during the Holocaust.

<sup>4</sup> *Aliyah* in the Israeli context infers to the waves of immigration of diasporic Jews to then Palestine.

Inbar's perplexed self is caught between her Israeli identity and her mother's antithetical detachment from Israel. Both the characters represent the confused new generation of Israelis whose dubious association with Israel impel them to search for alternatives to postpone Israeli reality. However, there exists an undeniable psychological longing for a return to the roots which is in conflict with their inability to identify her own self, amidst the expectations and historical underpinnings of being native Israelis.

In this essay, *Neuland* is construed as a spiritual travelogue portraying the desperate attempts of two Israelis to identify their complicated self, caught amidst the expectations and realities of Israel. The paper discusses the following arguments by elaborating on the political and psychological disputes encountered by the protagonists of the novel.

- i. What is the significance of defining self?
- ii. How can limits to the self obstruct communal existence?
- iii. What are the causes of detachment inflicted upon modern Israeli society?
- iv. What is connection between the Jewish traumatic past and the divergent Israeli present?

The creation of a collective national identity was inexorable to extinguish the "Jewish longing for national grandeur, dignity, and an equal status among the nations of the world" (Shapira 355) and the fulfillment of this aspiration did achieve an independent democratic State for the Jewish refugees from all over the world. However, the process of settlement in Israel was not facile. The memories of the diasporic past, cultural shock of immigration, geographical differences, conflict with the Palestinian communities and the hostility of neighbouring countries continue to disrupt the process of the creation of a unified Israeli identity.<sup>5</sup> The emergence of wandering/backpacker culture in Israel on the other hand was antithetical to the prototypical image of the *sabra*.<sup>6</sup> Professor Yael Zerubavel theorises this anomalous combination by reflecting on the agonising aspect of *yerida*. *Yerida* refers to the emigration of Jewish people from Israel, as opposed to *aliyah* which is the immigration of Jewish people from the diaspora to the land of Israel. The *sabra* was designed to be entrenched in Israel and the notion of wandering was supposedly the inevitable trait of the Jews of diaspora. But the unusual combination of *sabra* with wandering, says Zerubavel, protrudes an ideological crisis that ignites the urge to perform *yerida* despite their seemingly accomplished Israeli lives and unravels the painful realisation of incongruity between the vision of Israel's founding fathers and the reality of their sons (127-128). This unfortunate disparity which Zerubavel has observed in

<sup>5</sup> There have been contested narratives on the inclusivity and exclusivity of Jewish past and trauma in the Israeli public sphere. See Yael Zerubavel's "The "Mythological Sabra" and Jewish Past: Trauma, Memory, and Contested Identities."

<sup>6</sup> For more discussions on *sabra* ideology refer to Almog Oz's book *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*.

Israeli society during the 1980s is still relevant and recurring as it is the major theme in Nevo's *Neuland* published in 2011. This paper attempts to decipher the mystery of the wandering Jew by placing the notion of self at the center of its narrative. The self as an internal environment (Charon 72) is analyzed and limits to its facets are identified to be the latent forces behind what Zerubavel calls the *yerida*.

*Neuland's* protagonists Dori and Inbar are perplexed by their problematic Israeli identities. Both experience disconcert and seek emotional rejuvenation by dissociating themselves from the Israeli reality despite their seemingly promising lives. They follow the trails of Israeli backpackers and undergo a journey that seeks to solve their existential predicaments in Israel. Dori finds his life meaningless with an unrelieved teaching job and an impassive marital life. Inbar, on the other hand, is hopeless about her stilted relationship with her mother. They are incapacitated from experiencing their lives which, as Zerubavel indicates, ignites their urge to leave. The land of Israel appeared inconsequential before them as they perceived insensitive premonitions regarding their future in Israel. Dori's father, a war veteran and a grief-stricken widower, goes missing and Dori decides to go in search of him. But deep within, he realises that he certainly seeks his lost self through the journey. Inbar does not return to Israel from her visit to her mother in Germany, rather she transits to South America as she could not feel home at Israel. The paths of destiny unite them, and together they unfold their selves and identities which cannot be severed from their Israeli roots.

The significance of self in establishing societal interactions that are productive confide within the norms of "mutual recognition and communication between individuals in a society" (Itzigsohn and Brown 232). Self can be theorized as an ongoing social process which is inevitable to construct and reconstruct the meaning of identity through the acts of social interactions. Man's realization of self is attained when it is capable of identifying and distinguishing oneself from others, as the act of self-discovery is intensely associated with an individual's competency to identify the space that extricates his/her self from the self of the others. But the recognition of self is limited when one denies mutual recognition and appreciation, leading to the ruination of a healthy environment. The process of self-formation is prominent in creating a dynamic society with productive social groups (Hiller 190). Therefore, the discovery of individual identity or the self is crucial in establishing a social background which is satisfying and meaningful.

The notion of self and identity are seemingly conflicted in Israeli society. Israeli Jews constitute a social group with a shared culture based on the sense of a common history but the formation of collective identity is still an ongoing process in Israel as the society is heterogeneous in nature.<sup>7</sup> The native Jews of Israel, unlike their preceding generation, were not

bewildered by the cultural shock of immigration. They were rooted in Israel and the formation of their identity was supposed to be uncomplicated. But the emergence of the backpack culture, especially among the young Israeli Jews, provides distressing evidence to the problematic nature of being a *sabra* and the disillusionments associated with that reality. Similar to the memories of the Holocaust which “remains a basic trauma of Israeli society” (Elon 198-199), the syndrome of wandering Israeli as Zerubavel defines it, inverts the foundations of the Zionist project and extends Israel’s existential dilemmas. The acts of wandering or even the desire to get away are symbolical associates of limits to the process of self-identification and the inability to merge into the social group. It is significant for an individual to experience the reality of self to attain the state of fulfillment as he/she is expected to identify themselves not only with their individual identities but also with the collective identity of their social group. However, self-formation in social groups is challenging as an individual needs to acknowledge the self associated with the group as the process of developing “social selves emerge through mutual recognition between people and from the internalization of the images that the other carries of us” (Itzigsohn and Brown 233). In *The Principles of Psychology*, William James deliberates on the concept of self.

No more fiendish punishment could be devised, were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof. If no one turned round when we entered, answered when we spoke or minded what we did, but if every person we met “cut us dead” and acted as if we were non-existing things, a kind of rage and impotent despair would ere long well up in us, from which the cruelest bodily tortures would be a relief; for those would make us feel that, however bad might be our plight, we had not sunk to such a depth as to be unworthy of attention at all. (293)

James argues that a human’s behavior is interconnected with how he/she identifies him-/herself in a social group and how he/she aligns his/her social selves demanded by the group. He also claims that being invisible and unacknowledged by the members of the society is the worst punishment one can ever experience. Identifying oneself with a non-existing entity can cause a devastating impact on the formation of self as self is developed from the internalization of views that others have of us. A cogent analogy can be observed in *Neuland* where the protagonists dissent their inability to explore and place their individual self amidst the social requirements of the state. Dori’s and Inbar’s *sabra* image and their contradicting social actions reflect the ideological crisis corresponding to the discrepancy in the Zionist dream of native Israelis. But the psychological predicament behind the wandering syndrome results from a disoriented and ambivalent liaison between Israel and the native Israelis. Both Dori and Inbar are convoluted in

<sup>7</sup> Israeli society constitutes of Jews from different origins (Ashkenazim, Sephardim, Mizrahim), Arab Israelis, Arab Christians and other citizens. See Moshe Semyonov’s *Stratification in Israel: Class, Ethnicity and Gender*.

ascertaining emotional legitimacy and meanings in their lives in Israel. Detached from Israeli reality, they suffer seclusion which ignites their desire to seek alternates through wandering. Passages like the one below abound.

And many times, she'd left lonely here. Of all places. Many times, she'd felt that there was not a single person in the group who was close to her. And as she stood in front of the closed gate, the smell that filled her nostrils was the smell of loneliness. And the taste on her lips was the bitter taste of the longing to finally be understood. Not desired or admired. Understood. By one person, at least. (Nevo 209)

Inbar echoes the *sabra* dilemma caught between national expectations and Israeli reality. She is emotionally detached from the land and finds her life meaningless in Israel. She is discontent about her identity being associated with the land and argues that Israel has shattered its people by transforming them into an impassive populace perplexed about their future amidst the wars and bloodshed. Being born to the first generation migrants of Israel, Inbar was subjected to chaotic domiciliary, causing limitations to her identity formation. She was left alone with absurd images of her self as the environment around her was equally inactive with no opportunities for social interaction. James claims that the “central part of the self is *felt*” (298) and an individual can experience it as long as it can stimulate the sense of belonging. However, — 75 — Inbar was denied the aspect of belonging and felt detached from her surroundings. The intense burden of seclusion buried within Inbar forces her to assume that her future in Israel is absurd. Professor Shanyang Zhao<sup>8</sup> claims in his re-reading of James’s theory of self that “human individuals are both conscious of their environment and self-conscious of their existence” (201). He also states that the “stream of consciousness” within individuals constitutes the meaning of “I” which facilitates the process of awareness and self-awareness (201). Inbar experiences inconsistency between the conscious of her existence and the environment. This leads to the *sabra* predicament, forcing her to search for alternate life options. She convinces herself that her dream of writing a travelogue on Jewish wanderism would help her achieve a state of tranquility where she would finally understand the reasons behind her unsettled consciousness. Inbar chooses to wander rather than to stay at a place where she is perceived as an unidentified non-existing entity.

Dori encounters a similar existential crisis latently connected to his unidentified self regarding his life in Israel. His meaningless married life and tiring teaching job constantly remind his subjective and social disconnection. He questions his self, presumably contradictory to the

<sup>8</sup> Zhao is a professor of sociology at Temple University. In his article “Self as an Emic Object: A Re-Reading of William James on Self”, Zhao theorizes self as a unity of a person’s empirical existence and the perception of that existence. His dynamic and multi-vocal discussions on the concept of self provide diverse explanations to James’s definition of self.

*sabra* image of strength and virility. Unlike his father who was a war veteran, Dori considers himself to be naïve and unworthy of his family's gallant history. He seeks solace from the hustles of expectations and responsibilities which implicitly hinder the process of self-discovery. "Business or pleasure? the driver continues his interrogation. Neither, Dori admits." (Nevo 20) His journey of escape begins with this truthful revelation that he is in search of himself. Sociologists Jose Itzigsohn and Karida Brown emphasize the centrality of "accumulated experiences" and "social interaction" in the interpretation of self as enumerated by William James (233). They consent with the notions of shared experiences and interaction being focal points of the identification of self in every individual. American sociologist Charles Cooley's earlier studies on human nature also share similar observations that acknowledge the significance of social factors in the recognition of the self. He states that an individual needs "fellowship" and "appreciation" from his/her social group to provide "social corroboration and support" to his/her self (261). Both Dori and Inbar are seemingly deprived of social factors that constitute their meaningful selves. The pressures of personal, communal and political aspects of Israeli society seemingly disrupt the social lives, specifically of young Israelis who are forced to seek escape in journeys.<sup>9</sup> Israeli Professor Chaim Noy states that "what lies at the core of the backpackers' stories, though often covert, is these youths' selves and identities, rather than the exciting activities and accomplishments" (79). Noy's observations consent to contextualize the young Israeli predicament captured by Nevo within the broader notion of self being determined by social factors. American sociologist Joel Charon<sup>10</sup> observes that when the uniqueness of self is celebrated, human mind becomes vigorous and compassionate, transforming itself into the process of action which is being taken towards an impulsive, spontaneous and socially created source of freedom (90). What Nevo attempts to capture is the consequences of limitations to self among young Israelis who seek temporary yet intense escape from reality. He subtly places the wandering syndrome on a larger social canvas to enumerate the irrefutable connection between human behavior and the environment. In this process, Nevo identifies the concept of self as a deterministic force capable of shaping the environment and constructing a space appropriate for its further actions. Both Dori and Inbar are conditioned by the forces of their past, social structures, culture and social institutions. Their ability to determine self is regulated by these forces and lacks their instinctive ability to determine their own action without being controlled. Literary evolutionist Joseph Carroll deliberates on the prominence of the environment in

<sup>9</sup> Chaim Noy's observations on young Israeli backpackers recorded in his article "This Trip Really Changed Me: Backpackers' Narratives of Self-Change," identifies the journeys of escape, relaxing and peaceful unlike the relentless trauma of Israeli society.

<sup>10</sup> Most of Charon's works in the field of sociology focus on the interdependent nature of human-environment interaction. He examines the components of individual identity and behaviors from the vantage view of sociology.

modifying human behavior in his seminal text *Reading Human Nature: Literary Darwinism in Theory and Practice*.

Humans have evolved in an adaptive relation to their environment. They argue that for humans, as for all other species, evolution has shaped the anatomical, physiological, and neurological characteristics of the species, and they think that human behavior, feeling, and thought are fundamentally constrained and informed by those characteristics. (6)

Environmental conditions play a pivotal role in shaping individual identity through which the self is revealed. The credibility of instinctive human action is perceptibly questioned as the self which is an inevitable result of human action, is shaped through collective experiences. Unlike several philosophical observations on self as a subjective phenomenon,<sup>11</sup> the objectivity of self befits current implications. James divides the concept of self into “I” and “Me”. “I” identifies self as knower and “Me” identifies self as the known collective experiences. Here, “Me”, the empirical self, is discussed for the acute interpretation of social experiences, behavioral patterns, emotion and cognition as interconnected phenomenon of human minds. His analysis of the empirical self is very broad.

The empirical self is tempted to call by the name of me. But it is clear that between what a man calls me and what he simply calls mine, the line is difficult to draw. We feel and act about certain things that are ours very much as we feel and act about ourselves. Our frame, our children, the work of our hands, may be as dear to us as our bodies are, and arouse the same feelings and the same acts of reprisal if attacked. (291)

James classifies the empirical self into three indigenous subdivisions namely the Material Self, the Spiritual Self and the Social Self. The material self is not circumscribed to physical entities like objects, people or places that carry an individual’s identity, rather it comprises one’s psychological possession of them. The reality of the material self is defined by its fluidity and encompassment rather than restricting it with the mere ownership of tangible objects. James’s definition of the material self is similar to what Rosenberg<sup>12</sup> calls the extracorporeal self or the extended self. James argues, “not only the people but the places and things I know enlarge my self in a sort of metaphoric way” (308). He states that the emotional investment of an individual in an entity can decide its reliability as a part of the self. Similarly, disruptions or limits to the material self can result in an unrecognized self as in the case of young Israeli Jews rightly captured by Nevo. Though Dori and Inbar possess access to material entities, they are unable to identify them as their extended selves. This is a disheartening condition experienced among Jews in Israeli society which makes them ineffective in acquiring psychological supremacy over material attributes crucially because of the trauma of the past and relentless socio-political unrest.

<sup>11</sup> The subjective definition attributed to self elucidates it as entity observed about an individual from his/her own perspective. See Flanagan (2009), McIntosh (1995), Jopling (2002) and Zahavi (2008).

Israeli journalist Amos Elon traces how the Jewish traumatic memory has become the “rhythm and ritual of public life” and identifies it as a “latent hysteria in Israeli life” (199). The following excerpt from *Neuland* reflects the same.

And for what? The girl continued, what am I leaving Mama for? Eretz Yisrael? What do we know about it? What does it have to do with us? Before they used all that propaganda on us in the training camp, we had no desire to go to that country. Who is waiting for us there? The British? The Arabs? (Nevo 162)

Though this is a conversation recollected from Inbar’s grandmother’s memory, it has strong implications of psychological detachment observed among Israeli Jews even years after the establishment of the State of Israel. This detachment and obfuscation formed out of unattained material self cause the wandering syndrome albeit temporary among the young Israeli Jews. Zerubavel notes that the Zionist image of *sabra* is challenged not only by the Jews who have already left the country but also by those “who obsessively fantasize about life in another place.” (128) He explains that the latter “even if they never actually leave – are symbolically a part of the syndrome of the wandering Israeli and, likewise, challenge the basic premise of the Zionist dream” (128). This concern is reflected in the words of Alfonso, Dori’s guide, who is occupied to search for lost people. “Twenty per cent of my clients are Israelis . . . Sometimes I have the feeling that you Israelis really want to get lost” (Nevo 30). The political fury, charges of delegitimization, the complexity of heterogeneous ethnic groups and endless combats pose a menace to the Zionist vision of the final Jewish settlement. However Elon adds “even had there not been any Arabs, or if by some wondrous event their enmity were to disappear overnight, the lingering effect of traumatic memory would probably be almost as marked as it is today” (199). Nevo exemplifies Jewish consciousness in its dichotomy where the Jews are expected to re-establish self in Israel but reluctant to identify their existence in a land where chaos is persistent. Dori and Inbar, threatened by the chaos, find themselves deprived of material self and chose to wander.

The spiritual self, on the other hand, is the inner self. James defines it as “man’s inner or subjective being, his psychic faculties or dispositions” (296). He identifies these dispositions as enduring and intimate. An individual’s acquired abilities, behavior, emotions, virtues, opinions and traits constitute the spiritual self. It is the state of consciousness related to man’s innate characteristics which facilitate his/her connection to the environment. James claims that human beings are self-satisfied “when we think of our ability to argue and discriminate, of our moral sensibility and conscience, of our indomitable will, than when we survey any of our other

<sup>12</sup> American social psychologist Morris Rosenberg (1982, 2015) has made significant contributions to the concepts of self and self-esteem. Rosenberg’s extracorporeal self can be construed as the sub-structure of material self differentiated from the bodily self.

possessions” (296). Similar to material possessions, the spiritual attributes are also owned by the self as logical assets<sup>13</sup>. The connection between limits to spiritual self and the Israeli wandering syndrome is intriguing. The *sabra* is presumably conceived of specific traits that determine their pivotal role in executing the dream of Zionist forefathers. Their psychic dispositions are imbued of ideological properties and disparities in the same obfuscate their access to spiritual selves. This is unraveled through the character of Inbar.

No, I am sorry, she says. You tried so hard the whole time. And I . . . I just . . . I haven't been feeling great lately. And I came here to find out why. I mean, also to be with you . . . But also to try and understand myself . . . and I haven't really managed to do that. I mean, I have, but I am afraid to admit it. And all this . . . this confusion . . . spilled over on you in the end. (Nevo 233)

Inbar's confession to her mother exemplifies the impact of spiritual illness, causing emotional insanity in her life. The mother and daughter sense discomfort in their relationship due to ideological and emotional disparities. Inbar as a *sabra* is supposed to be strong, determined and rooted in Israel. But from the beginning, she appears to be an undetermined soul seeking to solve the mystery of the Wandering Jew, a metaphorical reference to herself. She was deprived of comfort and compassion from her mother who had immigrated to Germany from Israel to build a new life. Inbar is disgusted and loathes her mother for living in a country which educes their unhealed wounds of the Holocaust. She confronts her mother when she chooses a German man as her partner. “And what did he do during the Holocaust? And his father? Which camp did he serve in? . . . But they were all here the Nazis ruled, weren't they?” (Nevo 173) Inbar is persistent whenever her mother attempts to justify her decision. This behavior is indeed a *sabra* trait; however, Inbar is contradictorily unsure of her life in Israel too. As her insecurities grow stronger, Inbar develops an aura of passiveness to detach herself from Israel by building a hopeless space of irrationality. She attempts to justify her conscious denial of spiritual self by claiming that there is no escape for Jews from the scantiness of spiritual tranquility. Dori, on the other hand, is in constant conflict with his spiritual self. Psychologists De Dreu and van Knippenberg observe that people often find themselves to be personally attacked when they are in any disagreement. They become uncompromising and confrontational when they fail to acknowledge the multiple perspectives of people. For instance, Dori is in disagreement with his *sabra* image. He could not follow the path of his brave father who fought for the country. He is uncertain about his affection for his wife Roni who is impassive. He doubts his ability as a good father to his only son. Dori's internal conflicts with his psychic dispositions ignite his urge to take a temporary break from reality in pursuit of discovering himself. The disturbed spiritual

<sup>13</sup> For elaborate discussions on the connection between Material and Spiritual Self, see Heider (1958), Abelson (1986), Gilovich (1993).

selves of both the characters affect their inconsistent lives in Israel, causing the wandering syndrome.

Social self refers to the ways in which human beings are recognized and regarded by each other in society. James emphasizes man's prime instinct to be noticed and accepted in his/her environment. In that way, peoples' social self constitute the recognition they acquire from their mates, says James and claims that "we are not only gregarious animals, liking to be in sight of our fellows, but we have an innate propensity to get ourselves noticed, and noticed favorably, by our kind" (293). Human beings demonstrate the tendency to be acknowledged for their individuality and they attempt to engage in social activities that would manifest the self they expect to be identified. When an individual is able to express his identity in a social group via mutual recognition and environmental interaction, his/her possibility of developing a strong social self is higher as the self is being acknowledged with all its empirical elements. James positions the trait of social self as an instinctive drive to be recognized by others and reiterates its significance in forming social relations. In *Neuland*, both Dori and Inbar experience obstacles in their process of achieving social selves. They are either detached from their social group or forced into an emotional impasse. Dori's insensitive relation with his wife and Inbar's belligerent attitude towards her mother reflect the consequences of neglect and exclusion. James's concept of social self has paved the way to further developments in modern scholarship related to the prominence of interpersonal associations in communal living.<sup>14</sup> The concept of relational self is modified as social self, elucidating the important aspects of what human beings perceive as "ours" such as paternities, siblings, romantic partners, friends, colleagues, etc. Both the notions of social self and related self accredit that the recognition from what we call as "ours" define what we are. Nevo provides a fictional representation of this phenomenon by portraying the complex lives of individuals devoid of interpersonal relations. For instance, Roni's justification for her insensitive attitude towards Dori is depressing.

Right at the beginning, during their first months together, she told him that she didn't know how to miss anyone. And that he shouldn't be hurt by it. That's how it is with kibbutz survivors. When you cry for your mother all night in the children's house and no one comes to you . . . I don't know . . . my missing mechanism must have got screwed up, she tried to explain once. (Nevo 117)

Roni grew up in a *kibbutz*<sup>15</sup> in the outskirts of Jerusalem. *Kibbutz* is a collective agrarian communal settlement in Israel that functions under the combination of socialist and Zionist ideologies. The development of the *kibbutz* had played a crucial role in the influx of Jewish immigration to then Palestine. Roni claims that her unfortunate experiences as a *kibbutz*<sup>16</sup> had

<sup>14</sup> For more information see Anderson & Chen (2002) and Chen et al. (2006).

transformed her into an insensitive individual. The loss of family in her early childhood and life in kibbutz has supposedly caused her impassive nature as she was conditioned to prevent herself from expressing her emotions. She is obstinate on her perspective even when Dori confronts her. “Say whatever you feel like. Just don’t be hurt if I don’t say it back.” (Nevo 117) When Roni was in need of recognition from her fellow beings, she was rejected and left alone to suffer. Thus she had conditioned her mind to reject the society and create a personal space where she would be protected and unaffected from the emotional outrages of the environment. She forced herself to disconnect from people and expected Dori to understand her complex psychological structure. However, Dori is the most affected person from Roni’s ineffective social self. He seeks companionship and emotional dependency in his wife but she does not recognize them. What takes him on the journey is the relentless search for recognition which he finds through Inbar. The significance of relational or social self can be explained through various aspects. The unconscious and impulsive mention of others while describing oneself (Dollinger and Dollinger 337), the exchange of thoughts, feelings, traits, attributes and the determination of relational identities (Baldwin 326-329) enumerate the importance of an active social self. The negation of these elements can hinder the establishment of meaningful social relations. Similar to Roni, Inbar also experiences social detachment. She could not seek comfort in her mother. When her mother found a new life that Inbar thought was against their ideological belief, she felt abandoned. Her seemingly impulsive decision to leave Israel was actually an outburst of her suppressed fears regarding her life in Israel: “I don’t want Tel Aviv, she explained again. I want to fly out on your next flight, to wherever it’s going. Whatever the price.” (Nevo 236) The journey for Inbar was an escape from reality. It was a symbolic act of rediscovering herself through other people who would recognize and notice her. When she meets Dori, she finds her lost self as they accept and appreciate one another. Both Dori and Inbar were deprived of their relational selves in Israel only to achieve them in their journey towards freedom, discovery and existence.

The self is an inevitable aspect of individual identity. Charon identifies self as an indispensable possession of human beings.

[T]o see yourself in time and space; to see yourself as part of the environment; to talk to yourself about yourself; to constantly evaluate yourself as you act; to realize that you yourself are living, you were born had a past, you have a future, and you will die; to recognize that you are the object of others and that others too see themselves as objects make the self the tremendously important quality that makes us human. (71)

<sup>15</sup> See Ranen Omer-Sherman’s text *Imagining the Kibbutz* for detailed information.

<sup>16</sup> Kibbutznik refers to a member of a Kibbutz.

Identity is an element aware of time and space. As Heidegger notes, the notion of human existence or *being* in the world is marked by the temporal dimensions of man's material and extracorporeal attributes or selves. An individual's empirical reality evolves over time as he/she progresses in his/her ability for introspection or in other words, for self-reflection. Nevo captures this intriguing process of discovery by contextualizing it from the perspective of Israeli Jews. Though Dori and Inbar chose to wander to postpone reality their journeys which traverse through different spaces in time facilitates them to explore the aspects of self that were denied due to subjective and social factors. The dilemma of Israeli life reflects throughout the text where the social, political and psychological unrest of the State of Israel are identified to be some of the crucial reasons behind the wandering syndrome observed among the young Jewish Israelis. Nevo does not blame the State of Israel, rather he attempts to elucidate why the process of self-discovery is complex for the native Israelis. He observes an acute connection between social experiences and the self. Nevo asks his readers to contemplate this inexorable association as discussed by sociologist G.H. Mead in his text *Mind, Self and Society*. Mead states that the self is constructed "through the process of social conduct . . . it is impossible to conceive of a self arising outside of social experiences" (138-140). However, this image of self cannot be obtained until an individual develops the ability to act towards oneself in every situation or the environment in which he/she enters. The process of adaptation and the ability to take the perspective of the other result in the emergence of self, as its recognition is associated with objectivity.

Nevo captures the consequences of limits to the self and emphasizes its centrality in human lives through the story of Dori and Inbar who represent the bewildered new generation of Israeli Jews struggling amidst the incessant social unrest of the State. However, there is a strong undercurrent of hope in Nevo's narration as his protagonists are oriented towards their identities rooted in Israel. The problematic phase of confusion and temporary detachment from Israel is gradually surmounted by Dori and Inbar when they demonstrate the ability to connect with their subjective, material and social selves in Israel. Though they were offered an alternate reality in the form of a Utopian society, they chose Israel which is a powerful *sabra* trait. The revelation of this trait has a cogent connection with the revelation of the self. The initial tendency to follow the path of a wandering Jew is elevated because of the challenges encountered by Dori and Inbar in understanding and accepting their self. Their material, spiritual and social selves were incapacitated which in turn escalated their urge for leaving Israel and wandering. Dori's journey in search of his father and Inbar's desire to continue her travel rather than returning to Israel manifest disconnection from their self. But the temporary detachment from Israel unravels the invincible connection between their self which is socially and psychologically rooted in Israel.

Dori and Inbar realize that their true self will only be actualized in Israel as their personal and social lives are rooted in the cultural landscape of Israel. Dori's blatant rejection of Menny's "neuland" and Inbar's decision to return to Israel exemplifies the *sabra* spirits rekindled with the revelation of self. Nevo's approach towards the Jewish Wandering Syndrome appears optimistic as his protagonists demonstrate deep-seated national affinity despite the subjective and social challenges through the discovery of their self. The momentousness of self is therefore unraveled in defining the persistence of new generation Israeli Jews who are connected to Israel in entirety.

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**BIO**

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## Class Conflict with its Causes & Effects in *The Kitchen* by Arnold Wesker

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### ABSTRACT

*The Kitchen* by Arnold Wesker is one of the remarkable plays of the post-war period in England. This paper will analyse the class conflict with its causes and effects in this play in the light of Marxist literary criticism to point out that the socio-economic conditions of the post-war period do not promise a good future to the lower class with developed living and working circumstances. The working class characters, the personnel of the Tivoli Restaurant, are observed to work heavily under harsh conditions, because of which they always have the possibility of injuring themselves. Apart from their fast tempo, their hardwork is never appreciated. Thus, their labour-power is commodified by the owner of the restaurant, Mr. Marango, and they are alienated from their work along with the food they cook. What is more, their hard working and living circumstances result in a moral decline in the lower class characters. In consequence, they cannot change their viewpoints to improve their conditions and they continue living in a vicious circle. They just work under the tension of being rebuked or humiliated by Mr Marango, whose life is his restaurant.

### KEYWORDS

class conflict, alienation, moral decline, commodification of labour power

Arnold Wesker is one of the outstanding playwrights of the post-war period as one of the founder members of “the ‘new wave’ of British Theatre running from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s” (Bull 171). Wesker was brought up in a politically active and “culturally rich, thriving environment” (Pattie 91). In his long career, he wrote more than forty plays (Bull 171). *The Kitchen* is the first one of his major and well-known plays. He was “a socialist, and his experiences in the 1950s honed and shaped his politics, as they honed and shaped his writing” (Pattie 93). Wesker’s being a socialist playwright can be observed in his plays and characters in the post-war period. Before starting his writing career, he worked in different areas and the most famous one of them is cooking in various kitchens in London and Paris. His experiences and observations in this field provided him a considerably useful material for his works. In his first play *The Kitchen*, written in 1957, he kneads his experiences “as successively a kitchen porter, a pastry cook and a chef” and observations in the kitchen with his creativity (Bull 171-172). In this respect, Wesker successfully composes his first play and “depicts a single day in the kitchen of a somewhat second-rate London restaurant” (172). *The Kitchen* is one of his most significant plays and from its setting to characters Wesker recreated a context of the 1950s in England.

— 88 — A kitchen is one of the most significant places in not only houses but also restaurants as there is an important kind of production there. Especially, the kitchen in Wesker’s play is a kind of microcosm of the country as a production area with its staff members and the boss representing their contradictory relationship in the capitalist system of the post-war period. As Christopher Innes observes, “The characters are all types, one from each European nation. The setting is explicitly a microcosm, with Wesker’s introductory note that ‘The world might have been a stage for Shakespeare but for me it is a kitchen’ indicating the seriousness attached to a speech like ‘This stinking kitchen is like the world – you know what I mean?’” (110). The kitchen also provides the playwright “to broaden the focus of the action to include a greater range of characters” (Lacey 106). Likewise, there are members of two different classes in the play, including the working class personnel and their boss Mr. Marango, belonging to the middle class. As David Ian Rabey argues, “*The Kitchen* ... present[s] intensified critical images of British society: hierarchical, compartmentalised and dehumanising through purposeful narrowness of focus” (37). Thus, Wesker produced the kitchen as a discourse where he reshaped the working class, their living and working conditions along with the relationship of the lower class with the middle class in the play.

According to Marxist literary criticism, literature has a particular background as its writer

<sup>1</sup> This article has been adapted from the author’s unpublished Ph.D. thesis, named “Theatre as a Product and a Mirror of Socio-Economic Structure in English Society”. This part is between the pages 85-107.

cannot be independent of the period when s/he lives as the base, the economic system, and the superstructure, institutions of the state, influence everyone in society. When the content of literary works is analysed in respect of the class constructs, agents of the superstructure and other impacts of the economic system, it is possible to discover if the work of art supports or subverts the dominant ideology of the period. In this sense, literary works can raise awareness of the reader and encourage him/her to struggle so as to change things around him/her. Literature, thus, is a mirror, which has power to change the dominant ideology. Literature does not reflect the reality as it is, but it puts a broken mirror to society while it shows some socio-economic features of the historical period when it is written. Meanwhile, it is affected by the ideology and other circumstances of the period, so it is also a product of that period. When *The Kitchen* is evaluated with a Marxist lens today, it is unfortunately seen that the working class still has a lot of troubles resulting from the oppression of the capitalist system. They experience alienation, commodification of labour power and degeneration of their moral values as a consequence of being exposed to harsh living and working conditions at the bottom of society. Additionally, climate crisis emerging from the consumerist system based on the cycle of production and consumption bring about more problems today which cause people to question the economic system of the world. In that regard, the crises the capitalist system constantly cause, which bring us on the edge of the end of the world today, have motivated me to return back to the immediate post-war period, in which after such a big war, a new system could potentially be established for the whole world. However, what I have found is the reality that the lower class that had suffered for centuries before World War II in the middle of poverty in English society continued to have similar agonies after the war. What is more, the negative impacts of the economic crisis that the country went through brought about worse living and working conditions resulting in more problems in their lives, like alienation and degeneration of moral values. Hence, this study aims to analyse the class conflict that the lower class characters have to suffer from in English society after the Second World War in order to demonstrate with a Marxist point of view *The Kitchen* that indicates the socio-economic circumstances of the post-war period do not promise to the lower class a better life in which they can be glad with their products in a working area which is designed according to their needs and in which their labour power is appreciated by the boss.

In the kitchen of the Tivoli Restaurant, the labour-power of the characters has been commodified because of the rush in their work and the attitude of the owner of the restaurant towards them. As a result, the staff members are alienated and there is a moral degeneration among some characters as a consequence of the capitalist relations of production. They sacrifice their moral values and have a kind of conformism resulting from economic difficulties they have to bear as the working class. On the other hand, there are only a few characters that are able to

reject this moral degeneration and still have some ethical values. Another negative impact of the capitalist system is the characters' inability of thinking differently. Owing to the feeling of desperateness and some effects of the ideology on the characters, they are not able to find the correct way of improving their conditions or changing their lives. They live unhappily and hopelessly in a vicious circle. In Rabey's words, "*The Kitchen* shows how pressured and hierarchically separated working conditions intensify resentments and lead workers to drop standards in ways which are apparently acceptable to industrialised consumerism" (37). What is more, the viewpoint of the bourgeoisie is indicated in the play with Mr. Marango. As he is the owner of production, he has domineering and humiliating attitudes towards the personnel. Hence, there is constant tension and a big gap between the boss and the staff. Accordingly, in *The Kitchen*, the harsh working and living conditions of the working class are depicted with a number of negative impacts of the capitalist economic system.

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The relations of people in their social lives are closely connected with "the way they produce their material life" (Eagleton 4). Their relations transform as their means of production changes. Now, these social relations have been "between the capitalist class who owns [the] means of production, and the proletarian class whose labour-power the capitalist buys for profit" (5). In the play, the kitchen of the Tivoli restaurant is the working area of the staff. However, it is not a peaceful place where they can produce and become happy. In contrast, it is the place where their labour-power has been commodified by the owner of the production, Mr. Marango. The root of 'commodification' of labour-power of the working class lies in the 'exchange' of production that turns "labour-power itself into a commodity" when it starts to be purchased by "capitalists with a view to profit" (Bidet 8). It means to buy production, as Jacques Bidet highlights, "at a lower price than the value it will produce" (8). At that moment, "relations of exchange" transform into a complex relationship among individuals as "relations of exploitation between classes" emerge and interests of upper classes become more conflicting for the working class (8). As a consequence, the upper classes having more money become wealthier and more powerful, whereas the working class becomes poorer economically, socially and psychologically with the commodified labour-power.

In the play, there is a pretty fast tempo in the kitchen where the cooks and service staff work to death and the play starts with it. As Wesker remarks, "Somehow its maniacal tone is part of the whole atmosphere of the kitchen" (11). He, thus, underlines the hard working conditions of lower class people and their negative effects on the personnel. As Stephen Lacey expounds, "One of the major political points of all three plays [*The Kitchen*, *Chips with Everything* and *the Quare Fellow*] is the way that human actions are structured by the institutional contexts in which they

are placed, a theme that is best explored when a collective is actually represented” (106). In that regard, the fast and intense work makes everyone in the staff crazy. For example, in the beginning, Peter, the “strong central character”, who is “still concerned with the situation of the larger group”, highlights how much they have to work (106):

PETER. No, I mean what restaurant you work in before?

KEVIN. Parisito, Shaftesbury Avenue.

PETER. [*rubbing his thumb and finger together*]: Good pay?

KEVIN. [*shaking his head*]: That’s why I came here.

PETER. Oh, you get good money here – but you work! [*raising his hands in despair*]... (1.24)

They earn a good amount of money, but they have to work extremely hard to deserve their salaries. What is more, they have some missing staff along with this heavy load of work. The extra work makes the kitchen ‘a mad house’ as the characters often call it. Frank and Peter, for instance, argue:

FRANK. Co-Co is off today. Someone must do the fry.

PETER. Bloody house this is. The middle of summer and we got no staff. I got six dishes. (1.25)

In this sense, the heavy work load of the kitchen makes some characters angrier and more aggressive and Peter, for instance, has a fight with Gaston, who is from Cypress and who “is inclined to go to pieces and panic and cry at everyone” while working (Wesker 11). Peter apologises for having punched Gaston and giving him a black eye, but Gaston is still furious with him and does not accept Peter’s regret. As Vandana Goyal puts it, “The workers in the kitchen are not only alienated from each other but also from their own selves, for they do not act as one expects people to act in such situations. Their normal human impulse appears to have been inoperative. Instead, they have bad tempers and are ready to fly at each other’s throat on the minutest possible excuse or provocation” (572). Similarly, Gaston wants revenge:

PETER. Hey Gaston, I’m sorry – your black eye, I’m sorry about it.

GASTON. DON’T TALK TO ME.

PETER. I say I’m sorry, that’s all.

GASTON. You sorry because half a dozen Cypriot boys make you feel sorry – but we not finished yet!

PAUL. Gaston! What’s the matter with you? A man is saying sorry – so accept!

GASTON. Accept? He gives me this [*pointing to black eye*] and I must accept?  
[To PETER] We not finished yet, I'm telling you. (I.26)

All these extreme feelings emerge from the harsh working conditions and the menace they feel at any time of their working in the kitchen.

The negative effects of the bad working conditions are not limited with the points above. Dimitri highlights: "But you think it was Peter's fault? They all wanted to fight. Listen, you put a man in the plate-room all day he's got dishes to make clean, and stinking bins to take away, and floors to sweep, what else there is for him to do – he want to fight. He got to show he is a man somehow. So – blame him!" (I.20). Terrible working conditions, thus, imprison people into their work and they cannot even socialise among the staff in the kitchen. As Goyal points out, "The reason for communication gap and lack of warmth in interpersonal relationships is that they are depersonalized. It is a place where men cannot pause to know each other because most of their time they have to pass inside the kitchen, working continuously for long hours. ... The job is more important than the individuals who hold it" (571). In consequence, their psychology is really disturbed by these dehumanising conditions in the kitchen.

The existence of the boss in the restaurant is another factor that raises menace in the kitchen. Peter, an experienced cook there, draws the portrait of Mr. Marango for Kevin, the new cook responsible for fish:

KEVIN. [*to PETER*]: He seems a kind old man.

PETER. You think he is kind? He is a bastard. He talks like that because it is summer now. Not enough staff to serve all his customers, that is why he is kind. You going to stay till winter? Wait till then. You'll see. ... (I.28)

Peter warns Kevin about Mr. Marango not to suppose that he is a kind man, who Mr. Marango only pretends to be so as he needs the personnel to work more because of the missing staff members in the busy season. Nonetheless, all the staff in the kitchen are aware that Mr. Marango can be extremely rude and cruel whenever he wants. In that regard, the personnel know that they do not have any importance for the boss, but they are only like cooking or servicing robots in the kitchen. Peter summarises:

This – this madhouse it's always here. When you go, when I go, when Dimitri go – the kitchen stays. It'll go on when we die, think about that. We work here – eight hours a day, and yet – it's nothing. We take nothing. Here – the kitchen, here – you. You and the kitchen. And the kitchen don't mean nothing to you and you don't mean to the kitchen nothing. (Interlude. 48)

Accordingly, the kitchen always goes on. The staff members do not have any significance individually in the capitalist system, because the workers are nothing other than a kind of slaves. In Marxist terms, the kitchen staff have already been reduced to labour-power. Above all, their work-force has been transformed into commodity. They just come and go in order to move the kitchen on and the commodification of their work-force reduces every worker in the kitchen to an unhappy and alienated machine that always has to work more.

The personnel on this account suffer during the process of production in the kitchen. As Michael Patterson suggests, “In 1960 Wesker pioneered the first major attempt since the Second World War to involve the British working classes more fully in the cultural life enjoyed by the more expensively educated” (30). Kevin, for example, gets shocked as soon as he begins working there. He sees the staff members as bees that fly around. After working till the lunch time, he remarks:

KEVIN. Finished! I’m done! I’m boiled! You can serve me up for supper! ...

RAYMOND. It’s every day the same, my friend.

KEVIN. ... Look at me. I’m soaking. Look at this jacket. I can wring it out. That’s not sweat, no man carries that much water. ... Kevin, you’ll drop dead if you stay. I’m warning you Kevin, take a trip from a friend, hop it! Get out! You’ve got your youth Kevin, keep it! This is no place for a human being – you’ll drop dead, I’m telling you. (Interlude. 47)

Kevin is terribly exhausted due to the hard working conditions. Their work is also not appreciated by the boss. They have to eat stale and smelly food despite cooking fresh food for the customers:

GWEN. What’ve you got for us this morning?

ALFREDO. Curried cats and dogs.

GWEN. Is this cabbage from yesterday?

HANS. It’s all right, it’s all right, eat it, eat.

VIOLET. What are these?

HANS. Very good, very good. Cauliflower and white sauce.

VIOLET. White sauce? It smells.

MOLLY. Got anything good, Hans?

HANS. If you don’t like – go to Chef.

MOLLY. Got any boiled potatoes?

HANS. Not cooked yet, not ready, ach ...

[HANS *moves away in disgust leaving them to serve themselves. ...*] (I.31)

The staff are also not allowed to eat comfortably without rush as some customers continue to come and order food or the boss orders a meal while the staff are having lunch:

MOLLY. Mr. Marango wants a leg of chicken and some sauté.

FRANK. Mr. Marango can go to hell, I'm eating.

MOLLY. [*moves off*]: I'll call for it in five minutes.

FRANK. They don't give you a chance to eat here. (I.37)

In fact, it is the life of workers in general in the post-war period and Wesker stresses that aspect in his play as he "wants to capture real life" (qtd in Patterson 40). According to Patterson, "By showing us actual physical work, and giving it a point, Wesker was again being innovatory. While other writers may talk of work, Wesker actually takes us into the workplace, most notably in *The Kitchen* and later in *The Journalists*" (40). With all the details, Wesker, thus, observes that their job is both physical and psychological as they have to stand the disconcerting effects of working in the kitchen.

Apart from their harsh working conditions, the personnel also have to struggle with the opposition of their boss to them. The staff often work to death and they do not have safety during their working hours, which is just ignored by the boss. Wesker emphasises this problem with the accident Hans has had in the kitchen:

HANS. My face! My face! I burnt my face.

FRANK. What is it Hans?

HANS. Who bloody fool put a pot of hot water on steamer?

PETER. It fell on you?

HANS. ... Bastard house! I never worked before so bad. Never, never... [PETER *takes him away for some first aid.*]

FRANK. He'll live. [*To the crowd*] All right, it's all over, come on. (I.32)

Even pouring hot water on one of the workers' face is not significant for the boss and his representatives Chef and Frank. Work must always go on even when a worker is injured and in pain. As Lacey points out, "These institutions are not simply backdrops to the actions and interactions of characters, but are always determining presences, defining and structuring the action; no matter what is happening between characters, work must go on in the kitchen, basic training must run its course, and the deadening routines of prison life grind remorselessly on" (106). As a result, none of the staff members has any significance for the boss personally since they only exist as the work-force in the kitchen. Their duty is only to continue cooking or serving the food even if somebody gets injured or drops dead next to them. In short, the workers

are expected to be like robots that do not eat or feel anything and that only work without any pause.

In the kitchen, there are many factors bringing about alienation of the workers. According to Marxist criticism, alienation is a consequence of “a certain form of organization of society” where people are separated from “free access to the means of production” and labour (Mandel 20). In other words, products of workers’ hands and minds are extorted from them and these products “turn against their creators and come to dominate their lives” (Novack 7). As George Novack advocates, “[I]nstead of enlarging freedom, these uncontrollable powers increase human servitude” (7). Thus, alienation has been a serious problem for the working class for a long time. The routine of the work the characters of the play have to perform every day and the unpleasant atmosphere of the kitchen are the two of the reasons causing alienation. Lacey writes as follows:

The events of *The Kitchen* are contained within a single day, and are shaped by the cyclical routine of the preparation for the meal and the recovery from it; the stage directions inform us that one of the first tasks to be performed in the morning is the lighting of the ovens, which creates a noise that ‘grows from a small to a loud ferocious roar’ that will ‘stay with us to the end’, acting as a constant reminder of, and metaphoric substitute for, alienated labour. (106)

Furthermore, all of the workers are aware that they do not have any value for the boss and this awareness makes them all unhappy. In such an atmosphere, they are treated like machines that only have to produce as much and quick as possible, which leads to alienation. For example, Kevin, Gaston, Violet and the head waiter talk:

KEVIN. I’ll be taking my leave tonight by Christ.

GASTON. You’ll get used to it. It’s good money. ...

KEVIN. To hell with the money an’ all. I like me pay but not for this. It’s too big here, man, it’s high pressure all the time. An’ the food! Look at the food! I never cooked so bad since I was in the army. An’ no one is after caring much either!

VIOLET. And what about the waitresses, we’re the animals, everybody pushing everybody else out of the way. ... I can remember working in places where you had to move like a ballet dancer, weave in and out of tables with grace. There was room, it was civilized. (II.57-58)

The whole staff, thus, have been alienated from the work they do and they feel unhappy. Violet, for instance, complains about inhumane working conditions as she cannot be glad with her job in this rush and rudeness. According to Goyal, “Wesker is criticizing the meaningless and mechanical life of the contemporary working class people. It is a theatrical representation of the

experience of alienation and frustrations of working class in the capitalist society” (569-570). Until the interlude, a short break for the staff, none of the personnel can “give a thought inside their hearts and speak out their real self” (573). Hence, their feelings are dehumanised as a consequence of their work load (573).

In addition to these harsh and inhumane working conditions, the division of labour among the personnel causes them to deal with only one task in the kitchen. They either have to cook the same type of food or have to do the same task to have a perfect product. As Alex Callinicos argues, the division of labour is the first step of “the emergence of capitalist social relations of production,” including “the separation of the direct producer from the means of production, the consequent transformation of labour power into commodity, and the concentration of the means of production in the hands of the buyer of labour power, the capitalist” (15). Thus, there are several negative impacts of the division of labour on workers along with the characters in the play and alienation is one of them. As Karl-Heinz Stoll writes, “*The Kitchen* presents the hectic rush in the kitchen of a large restaurant as an image of the meaningless, enervating world of a perfectionist division of labor” (422-423). Furthermore, there is a domino effect here and alienation following the division of labour is accompanied by other negative influences. In order to escape from the realities of the present even for a short time Peter wants some of his friends to dream during the interlude. In Goyal’s words, “The dream sequence is the frustrated effort of these people to life themselves beyond their environment, to express their social being and to share their sense of being with their fellowmen. Unable to respond to each other as human beings, they escape into the world of fantasy, the only world where their alienation is temporarily muted” (573). In this respect, the cook and the service staff are in a terrible condition in the kitchen of the Tivoli restaurant because of alienation.

The workers also do not have the chance of cooking tasty food, so they cannot be glad with the food they cook. The number of people eating at the restaurant is huge, approximately two thousand people every day. That is why, the obligation of cooking a large amount of food in a great rush prevents these people from feeling the happiness of producing something. As Goyal notes,

Analyzing alienation in terms of the relation of the worker to his work, to the product of his labour, to fellow workers and to the owner of the means of production, Marx explains the way in which the objects created by man acquire an independent power and rule over him. Work becomes a kind of enslavement and, as a consequence, the worker becomes unhappy and apathetic. (570)

As a result, Kevin and other cooks feel alienated from the food they cook. As Michael and Gaston state:

MICHAEL. ...what's on the menu today? I don't know why I bother – it's always the same. Vegetable soup, minestrone, omolletteeee au jambon – ah well! One day I'll work in a place where I can create masterpieces, master bloody pieces. Beef Stroganoff, Chicken Kiev, and that king of the Greek dishes – Moussaka.

GASTON. Never. You'll never create a Moussaka. Chips you can make – chips with everything. (I.22)

Michael wants to create masterpieces rather than cooking the same ordinary food every day, but Gaston does not believe that Michael will have this chance, because he is conscious that not the quality but the quantity of the food is regarded in this kitchen. In this sense, they want to enjoy cooking as a job and to be glad with their product, but the system of the restaurant, the microcosm of the capitalist system, just turns them into machines producing food. As Lacey suggests, “The kitchen was perceived not only as a metonym or synecdoche for other kitchens, but also as a metaphor for society at large” (107). Hence, the characters work and live in such miserable conditions without any chance to get rid of alienation or improve themselves. The whole country and even the world are full of such places as the kitchen of the Tivoli Restaurant for the working class in the capitalist system. As Goyal points out, “[T]he kitchen stands for the industrial capitalist system and the problem of the cooks is the problem of the whole working class in the system” (575). The staff members in the kitchen are “totally dehumanized and emotionless” as a result of the influences of alienation (575).

Capitalist relations of production affect not only economy but also social relationships of people. Poverty was one of the resistant problems despite the struggles of the government to build a welfare state. The difficulties lower and working class people had for a long time in the harsh circumstances of the post-war period caused them to neglect moral values to some extent. In *The Kitchen*, they lead to deterioration in morality and it is common among the working class. As Patterson remarks, “[B]oth writers, [Osborne and Wesker], informed by a socialist viewpoint, expressed a profound dissatisfaction with the society around them” (27). For instance, there is a love affair between Peter and Monique, one of the staff members in the kitchen, for nearly three years. Yet, it cannot be a new beginning for them. Monique does not divorce her husband as he provides her with better living conditions at home:

MONIQUE. ... Twice [Peter]'s given me a baby, twice I've disappointed him. He wanted them both. Dissolve that. ...

PETER. [*moving to MONIQUE*]: I'm sorry.

MONIQUE. Not an attractive future, is it? Apologizing backwards and forwards. First you, then me ... (II.62)

Monique explains the improbability of a future for them. Even her pregnancies did not convince her to marry Peter. Additionally, she implies its economic reasons later:

PETER. Listen Monique, I love you. Please listen to me that I love you. You said you love me but you don't say to your husband this thing. ... You are not going to leave him are you? You don't really intend to?

MONIQUE. Oh Peter, please?

PETER. What do you want I should do then? ...

MONIQUE. Did I tell you Monty's going to buy me a house? (II.64)

Economic circumstances are everything for these people and determine their future plans. Goyal argues that “Even love is paralyzed by money power in this capitalist society. There is always a feeling of insecurity in workers' hearts about their love” (574). Monique does not want to leave her comfortable living conditions with her husband, so she always has vain promises for Peter. Since she knows that Peter cannot provide her a more comfortable life and buy her a house, she chooses her husband in the end after having an affair with him for a long time. Wesker proves here how the capitalist system causes people to become conformist people like Monique as a consequence of their condemnation to poverty for years. As Rabey puts it, “The war had demanded conformity for a larger purpose, but 1950s Conservatism emphasised the passive goal of ‘affluence’ – the dubious analogy between social progress and the growth of material wealth, extension of leisure and consumerist choice – rather than honourable conflict or release of energy” (30). In that regard, Wesker underlines here the realities and negative effects of the capitalist system on the characteristics of human beings. The material profits overhaul not only moral values and some character traits but also love itself. Therefore, the capitalist system works as the generator of this deterioration in the personality of people. In John Russell Brown's words, “When Wesker had said that for him ‘the world’ was ‘a kitchen’, he continued that in a kitchen: ‘people come and go and cannot stay long enough to understand each other, and friendships, loves and enmities are forgotten as quickly as they are made’” (168). Poverty creates selfish and conformist human kind. Neither emotions nor relationships have a meaning for the working class any more.

The capitalist economic system has also generated self-centredness and hatred for others in human beings. Another staff member, Paul's, experience with his neighbour is a good example for this situation. Whereas Paul supported his neighbour when he had been on strike with other bus drivers for five weeks, his neighbour wants to drop bombs on the peace march:

The next morning he comes up to me and he says ... ‘Did you go on that peace march yesterday?’ So I says Yes, I did go on that peace march yesterday. So then

he turns round to me and he says, ‘You know what? A bomb should have been dropped on the lot of them! It’s a pity,’ he says, ‘that they had children with them cos a bomb should’ve been dropped on the lot! And you know what was upsetting him? The march was holding up the traffic, the buses couldn’t move so fast!

(Interlude. 51)

Paul gets shocked when he sees his neighbour’s reaction against himself and cannot understand him. Instead of support, Paul suddenly faces his neighbour’s selfishness. What is worse here is the hatred in the neighbour’s eyes against people he has never seen. Furthermore, there is the problem of losing moral values and being conformist again. In Patterson’s words, “Wesker betrays anger about the limited vision and cultural deprivation of the uneducated. In a central speech in ..., *The Kitchen*, Paul describes his disillusion about his bus-driver neighbour: ... The prominence given to him in *The Kitchen* implies that this bus-driver’s conduct is not atypical of the British worker” (32). Wesker makes an analysis here to highlight the gap among millions of people as well. Paul states: “And you should’ve seen the hate in his eyes, as if I’d murdered his child. Like an animal he looked. And the horror is this – that there’s a wall, a big wall between me and millions of people like him” (Interlude. 52). Although the working class members should support each other, the capitalist relations of production have transformed them. They have lost their humane features and become selfish individuals who just ignore others’ problems.

In spite of the negative influences of the capitalist relations of production, there are also some other characters rejecting the moral degeneration, like Paul. Peter is another one of them. Moral values are still significant for him, so he cannot ignore injustice and reacts even to Mr. Marango. For instance, Peter cannot accept the Chef’s giving only a tin of soup to Tramp, a war-disabled person who has lost his papers and who has to beg for some food. Peter first reacts to Max and he does not let Tramp drink the tin of soup, so he takes the soup and gives two meat cutlets to him. The first person to react to this attitude is the Chef, the representative of Mr. Marango’s authority:

CHEF. [*quietly*]: What’s that.

PETER. I gave him some cutlets.

CHEF. Mr. Marango told you to give him?

PETER. No but...

CHEF. You heard me say, perhaps?

PETER. No, I..

CHEF. You have authority suddenly?

PETER. [*impatiently*]: So what's a couple of cutlets, we going bankrupt or something?

CHEF. It's four and six that's what, and it's me who's Chef that's what and ...

Don't think we're too busy I can't sack you. Three years is nothing you know, you don't buy the place in three years, you hear me? You got that? Don't go thinking I won't sack you. (II.60)

The Chef not only shows off his authority in the hierarchy of the kitchen but also protects the profits of the boss although two cutlets are indeed nothing financially for the boss' budget. As Lacey puts it, "In *The Kitchen*, the distinctions between different kinds of chef, and between the chefs and the waitresses, is clear—indeed, Wesker draws attention to it in detailed explanatory notes that focus on the precise function of each character in relation to the governing hierarchy" (107). The Chef just neglects the moral values as he always protects the boss' money even though he is just a worker like others. He loves authority, so he devotes himself to the boss in the restaurant and betrays his own fellows. He is more royalist than the king in short. In that regard, he declares to Peter that he is nothing in the kitchen.

Peter, thus, is harshly reprimanded by the Chef for his moral behaviour protecting a needy person. Yet, everything becomes worse when Mr. Marango hears about the event. He accuses Peter of sabotaging his money:

MARANGO. [*softly*]: Sabotage. [*Pause.*] It's sabotage you do to me. ... It's my fortune here and you give it away. [*He moves off muttering 'sabotage'.*]

PETER. But it...

MARANGO. ... Yes, yes, I'm always wrong – of course – yes, yes. (II.61)

Mr. Marango is an extremely ambitious middle-class man only caring about his profits and his word choice reveals "his cunning materialistic attitude" (Goyal 574). As most of the working class members have lost their moral values, Mr. Marango's greedy attitudes are not surprising in the capitalist system in fact. Therefore, it is very hard for Peter to work in such a place in which there is so much injustice and moral degeneration as he still cares about moral values and lives according to them.

In the kitchen of the Tivoli Restaurant, the personnel want to change their harsh working and living conditions. Yet, they cannot change or improve their socio-economic conditions because of their class. As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels write in *The German Ideology*, "The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (42). Thus, there is a close relationship between

life and consciousness of people, but life is the one that is determinant here. As the class of the characters also determines and limits their consciousness, they cannot find a way to go out of this vicious cycle. For example, Kevin does not even have a house to go and rest comfortably after hard and exhausting work:

PETER. Hey Irishman, I thought you didn't like this place. Why don't you go home and sleep?

KEVIN. Me home is a room and a bed and a painting of the Holy Virgin. It'll always be there. (Interlude. 48)

Indeed, this condition is not only peculiar to Kevin and most of the staff share similar poor circumstances. Some of the characters have plans or intentions to change the course of their lives and develop their circumstances because of the tension they experience at work emerging from the inner conflict between what they want to be and what they are doing in the restaurant (Goyal 575). Goyal comments that "They work, work and work only. They are all dissatisfied with their work, their lives, nervous about losing their job and eager to escape the drudgery" (571). Among the staff members planning to change their job and future, there is Hans, who has been injured in the kitchen. He plans to immigrate to America and start a new life there:

HANS. I think I go to America.

KEVIN. America?

HANS. ... I been to New York already. ... When you arrive: The sky-line! The Empire State Buildings! Coney Island! And Broadway, ... Ah ... beautiful city. (I.35)

Hans knows that it is not probable to improve his life in this country, so he would like to move to another country. Moreover, Kevin wants to open a small place to cook good food and earn good money although Peter and Michael do not believe that it is easy under these circumstances:

PETER. You got to turn out food hot and quickly. Quality – pooh! No time!

KEVIN. Even in the small restaurants they're not after caring much.

MICHAEL. ... Why should they! It's this [*rubs thumb and finger together*] that counts, you know that.

KEVIN. Oh, I don't know. You'd've thought it was possible to run a small restaurant that could take pride in its food and made money too.

PETER. Of course it's possible, my friend – but you pay to eat in it. It's money. It's all money. The world chase money so you chase money too. [*Snapping his fingers in a lunatic way.*] Money! Money! Money! (I.36)

They have been working in this sector for a long time, enough to have realised that money talks everywhere, so people often only prefer to earn money. On the other hand, it is not an option Michael, Kevin and Peter would like. They would prefer to serve good food, because they want to be glad with the product they produce. They would like to repair the disrupted relationship between the producer and the product. In this way, they can also get rid of their alienation from the food they cook and they will not feel any more that their labour-force has no value or it is commodified. Hence, some of the staff still firstly aim to cook good food instead of only making more money by serving unqualified food. Nonetheless, it is not always so easy for the working class to have the chance of running after their ideals due to the conditions of the economic system based on capital. This system also draws borders around the working class and limits their actions. Even though they are ready to struggle so as to change their lives, they cannot achieve it on condition that they do not become conscious of the realities of the system and change their means of production.

The kitchen staff are not aware that they can achieve this target if only they change their circumstances with these relations of production firstly. After they become aware of the order of the economic system they live in, they will perceive the world differently, but they are not able to change their way of thinking. In other words, they have accepted defeat in life as the working class is unconscious of the system and cannot imagine having a better job and life. In Goyal's words, "Their personalities have been moulded by the environment they live in. They are also burning from inside as the burning ovens of the kitchen. All the characters seem to be unaware of their own needs. They do not want to be a part of this mad house i.e. *The Kitchen*. But still they are here" (572). For example, Dimitri warns Kevin: "Hey, Irishman, what you grumbling about this place for? Is different anywhere else? People come and people go, big excitement, big noise. ... What for? In the end who do you know?" (Interlude. 47). There is a possibility of not having the chance of finding a better place, so most of them feel an obligation to accept the negative aspects of their working places. Dimitri is experienced in this sector, but also has the knowledge and ability of making a radio. Nevertheless, his "talent goes waste in this capitalist society" and he is hopeless to find a better job in the electronic sector (Goyal 572):

RAYMOND. You made it your own? All those little wires and plugs? Tell me what are you doing here? Why you waste your time with dishes in this place? You can't get a job in a factory?

DIMITRI. A factory? You think I find happiness in a factory? What I make there? ... I tell you, in a factory a man makes a little piece till he becomes a little piece you know what I mean? (I.20)

Wesker highlights that factories also abuse people by making them work to death and make them miserable owing to the existence of the same relations of production for the working class in this economic system. Wesker criticises the system here and the only way to get rid of this vicious circle is to change these relations of production that oppress the working class. Only Paul thinks about the necessity of stopping to work for the working class for a second, but does not go on:

PAUL. And I look around me, at the kitchen, at the factories, at the enormous bloody buildings going up with all those offices and all those people in them, and I think, ... I agree with you Peter – maybe one morning we should wake up and find them all gone. But then I think: I should stop making pastries? The factory worker should stop making trains and cars? The miner should leave the coal where it is? ... (Interlude. 52)

Accordingly, the negative working conditions resulting from the relations of production imprison working class people to their harsh working conditions as they are frightened of jumping out of the frying pan into the fire. They usually cannot imagine improving their circumstances as their consciousness is shaped by the production relations of the capitalist system. It is necessary to take a step to change the relations of production in order to make a change in their lives after getting aware of the realities of the system.

Mr. Marango, whose name is enough for alerting the workers, is “the typical bourgeois proprietor who has made his kitchen synonymous with his existence” (Goyal 574). He nearly lives in his restaurant for his ambition to profit more. In this respect, the kitchen and the service staff as well as their labour-force are his commodities. He often has mechanical visits to the kitchen silently to ensure everyone works at full capacity to deserve their salary. Moreover, he checks the work and all the staff like a silent detective: “Marango walking slowly round the kitchen inspecting everything, placing his hand on the hot-plate to see if it is still working. It is a mechanical movement – sometimes he puts a hand on the cold pastry slab to see if it is still hot – it is a mechanical tour” (I.28). Everyone is aware of his unfriendly and humiliating visits, so they always need to check if Mr. Marango is coming or not. In that regard, Mr. Marango’s authority around means for the workers that they do not have freedom for anything except working and do not want to be caught by him while they are talking or enjoying. Even their little joy of playing the radio is interrupted by Mr. Marango when he enters the dining room, not the kitchen, because it is enough for them to feel his menace:

MONIQUE. Marango’s in the dining-room.

ALL. What!

MONIQUE. Marango's in the dining-room.

[*There is a scramble to restore everything to normal, work is resumed, DIMITRI vanishes into the plate-room with the radio. HANS exits.*] (I.20)

In short, to hear Mr. Marango's name makes everyone alarmed whenever he appears at the door of the kitchen. In Goyal's words, "His life is also full of monotony and sense of alienation. He is an old man without any emotional bondings. ... He is unwilling to understand the plight of the workers" (574). For example, he is extremely rude and treats the workers as if they were his commodity since he pays them:

MARANGO. ... You're the new cook?

KEVIN. [*wiping his brow again*]: Yes, sir.

MARANGO. It's hot eh, son?

KEVIN. Sure, an' a bit more.

MARANGO. Never mind, I pay you well. Just work, that's all, just work well.  
(I.28)

On that account, there is a big gap and so much tension between the boss and the staff because of Mr. Marango's bourgeois mindset. He has commodified not only the labour-force of the workers but also the workers themselves in this kitchen, so he cannot have a humane relationship with any one of them.

Wesker, thus, underlines the limits of bosses' ambitions in the capitalist system in his play. As Rabey points out, "Osborne and Wesker attack 'the deadening effects of prosperity' more frequently than the uncomfortable confines of poverty" (30). The workers are so unworthy for Mr. Marango that he just ignores Hans' injury with boiling water: "He's burnt his face. It's not serious. [*to CHEF*] but it might have been. [*He shakes his head sadly and moves away.*]" (I.32-33). In Goyal's words, "Right through the play, we are kept reminded of the workers' hatred for Marango the 'boss' and of the traditional conflict between workers and the system. His reactions towards any mishappening in the kitchen are very mechanical and emotionless" (574). Hence, Mr. Marango only exists for his own profits and never cares whether the workers are fine and safe or not. Peter emphasises how Mr. Marango's life is only his restaurant:

He is a man? He is a restaurant! I tell you. He goes to market at five thirty in the morning; returns here, reads the mail, goes up to the office and then comes down here to watch the service. Here he stands, sometimes he walks round touching the hot-plate, closing the hot-plate doors, then looking inside this thing and that thing. Till the last customer he stays. Then he has a sleep upstairs in his office. Half an

hour after we come back, he is here again – till nine-thirty, maybe ten at night. Every day, morning to night. What kind of a life is that, in a kitchen! Is that a life I ask you? (I.28-29)

In this sense, Mr. Marango spends his life in the restaurant. It is not dedicating his life to his restaurant, but ambition to live for earning more money. Accordingly, the staff try to avoid any interaction with Mr. Marango as much as possible and when there is an interaction, his humiliating attitudes and sentences make the possibility of the emergence of a strong conflict.

The biggest crisis explodes after Peter argues with Violet and has a nervous breakdown. Mr. Marango flows into a rage this time as all customers have left after the event. He cries at Peter and accuses him again:

You have stopped my whole world. ... Did you get permission from God? Did you? There – is – no – one – else! You know that? No ONE! ... Why does everybody sabotage me, Frank? I give work, I pay well, yes? They eat what they want, don't they? I don't know what more to give a man. He works, he eats, I give him money. This is life, isn't it? I haven't made a mistake, have I? I live in the right world, don't I? [*To PETER*] And you've stopped this world. A shnip! A boy! You've stopped it. Well why? ... [*To the kitchen*] Is there something I don't know? ... [*To PETER*] BLOODY FOOL! [*Rushes round to him.*] What more do you want? What is there more, tell me? ... [*PETER stops, turns in pain and sadness, shakes his head as if to say – 'if you don't know, I cannot explain'. ... MARANGO is left facing his staff, who stands around, almost accusingly, looking at him. And he asks again—*] What is there more? What is there more? What is there more? (II.68-69)

Mr. Marango's life is nothing more than his restaurant and money, so when it stops, his world also stops. He cannot sympathise neither with the workers nor with their feelings or their problems. He treats them as if they were all machines having been created to serve him to death. Innes writes as follows,

[T]he material reality of the kitchen [is] as questionable, replaceable, since it represents a model of industrial capitalism for which they are being asked to substitute a socialist alternative. As the restaurant owner says in response to his employees, frustrated discontent, 'This is life, isn't it?... What is there more?', to which a stage direction in the first version of the play replied 'We have seen that there must be something more'. (110-111)

After all these events, Mr. Marango still cannot understand 'What is there more?' and he cannot comprehend what kind of difficulties the workers has to stand. According to Dan Rebellato, "It is interesting to observe how these plays use theatrical devices to evade making a

direct political case. They characteristically resort to rhetorical questions to express their points, which raise questions that the plays seem unable to answer” (17). Even this crisis is not a start for Mr. Marango, who is not able to understand the workers. Here is there a clear conflict and a gap between the working class and the middle class. Wesker emphasises that there is no hope for the working class in the capitalist system where bosses are always powerful and ambitious. The capitalist system never appreciates the working class providing both the continuation of the production and the system. Thus, the middle and upper class only abuse the labour power of working class people and imprison them in their hard living conditions mercilessly.

Based upon the above analysis in the light of Marxist literary criticism, it appears that there is a conflict between the lower class and the middle class in *The Kitchen*. The staff of the Tivoli Restaurant have to work under the dehumanising conditions and their labour-power is commodified by Mr. Marango, the owner of the production. Thus, they are alienated from their work and products. Moreover, the personnel have to bear the menace emerging from the existence of their boss, who expects them to work like robots, having no needs and feelings. The hard living conditions result in the characters’ losing ethical values and being conformist and consumerist lower class people. In consequence, the lower class characters live in a vicious circle in the restaurant and in their lives due to the economic system preventing them to see beyond and make the necessary changes to have a better life. As the economic means and relations of production determine not only the order of social and economic life but also people’s consciousness, the characters of the play are not able to escape from the order constructed by the economic base and the superstructure around them. In brief, the class conflict of the lower class characters in *The Kitchen* indicates that the socio-economic conditions of the post-war England do not hold out hope for improved living and working circumstances for the lower class.

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**BIO**

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## Performing Democratic Protest: Gary Owen's *Iphigenia in Splott* and David Greig's *The Suppliant Women*

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### ABSTRACT

This essay argues that Gary Owen's *Iphigenia in Splott* (2015) and David Greig's version of Aeschylus' *The Suppliant Women* (2016), directed in its inaugural tour by Ramin Gray, use opposite dramaturgical techniques to advocate for a comparable goal: increased direct democracy and civic responsibility. Owen uses the form of his didactic monologue play to highlight the destructive results of austerity politics. Effie, the play's protagonist, explicitly accuses the audience of being complicit with the destruction of the social safety net—policies which lead to the death of her baby. In contrast to Owen's single actor, Greig and Gray used Choruses of women recruited from each city the show toured to enact a civic collectivity. By having the audience's mothers, wives, sisters, etc. perform the powerful Choral role, the play encourages audiences to identify with refugees and elevates a democratic decision to support asylum seekers.

### KEYWORDS

Adaptation, austerity, British drama, democracy, Greek Chorus, Greek drama, political economics.

## Introduction

In his *Politics*, Aristotle defines both citizenship and the *polis* through responsible cooperation. He writes, “someone who is eligible to participate in deliberative and judicial office is a citizen in this city-state, and that a city-state, simply speaking, is a multitude of such people” (1275<sup>b</sup>.17-19). In other words, what defines a citizen is responsibility to the state, and what defines the state is the conglomeration of citizens. Therefore, the foundation of the *polis* is the mutually constitutive relationship between the individual and the collective; individual citizenship is meaningless without the collective, and the collective of the *polis* is incomprehensible without individual citizens. This relationship may seem straightforward, but getting the balance right is one of the most challenging elements of communal political life in any system intending to function as democratic. Today, democracy is under attack. Many are losing faith in the power of popular rule to achieve goals like social justice, relative economic equality, protection for the most vulnerable, ecological sustainability, or as basic a goal as competent world leadership. These critiques come from both the left and the right—and though the specific complaints are different, it should tell us something when people across the political spectrum echo the same doubts.

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From the fifth to third century BCE, Athenian democracy was a fragile, contested political system opposed both by autocratic enemies outside the city-state and by anti-democratic aristocrats within Athens itself. Clearly, democracy today continues to have its share of enemies. However, Athenian democrats did have substantial tools at their disposal to promote the power of the *demos*, the people. One of the most potent of those tools was the theatre. Aristocratic advocates of democracy—like Pericles and Themistocles—sponsored playwrights whose work incorporated democratic values like rhetorical conflicts and rational judgment, freedom of speech, and direct representations of voting. Theatrical performances at the City Dionysia or the Lenaea were major religious festivals the majority of citizens would attend, so performances played a central role in shaping their worldviews and ideals.

Today theatre is less culturally influential, but contemporary playwrights still write in support of democracy. This paper examines two recent British productions—Gary Owen’s *Iphigenia in Splott* (2015) and David Greig’s version of Aeschylus’ *The Suppliant Women* (2016), directed in its inaugural tour by Ramin Gray—which adapt ancient Greek tragedies to critique the failures of contemporary representative institutions, and advocate for more substantial democratic power allotted to local communities. Though each play’s democratic and communal goals are similar, the artists take diametrically opposite approaches to their protests. In Owen’s monologue play, Effie’s solo performance highlights the cultural and economic

deprivation of neoliberal Britain, which allots resources upward at the expense of the poor. Greig's play and Gray's tour, by contrast, fill the stage with locally recruited amateur Chorus members. This Chorus evokes a cosmopolitan sympathy for the plight of refugees who are suddenly identified with friends, family members, co-workers, etc. Blending textual and performance analysis, this paper argues that, although the two shows take almost opposite approaches to democratic performance, they ultimately seek the same goal: a more localized and responsive democratic system, which will see and value humanity, even in the downtrodden and the disempowered.

Athenian drama was a collective civic ritual—meaning it drew all citizens together, along with a range of non-citizens. The Chorus was a key role in tragedy, representing a collective voice always prepared to remind the protagonists of the larger implications and stakes of their actions. As theatre scholar Margherita Laera puts it, “Through melody and choreography, the chorus stood at the symbolic centre of the collective religious ritual, the City Dionysia, mirroring the audience and symbolically incorporating it into the show” (66). Thus, the texture of Attic tragedy incorporated a reminder that life in the *polis* was always shared, always collective. As part of the City Dionysia, theatre depended for its affective impact on communal experience. This collective aspect was built into the very structure of the Theatre of Dionysus; according to Samuel Shanks, a theatre scholar, “the theatron also organized the spectators spatially in a way that allowed them to easily see the faces of most of the other spectators. The ability to easily perceive the reactions of the rest of the members of the polis...doubtless contributed a great deal of communitarian energy” (47). This communitarian energy channeled back into the shared political life of Athenian democracy, which emphasized the responsibility of citizens to serve the *polis*, to preserve the life and shared good of the city-state.

Many theorists caution us about seeking a democratic model in Attic tragedy, given the mythologized origins of “Western civilization” in ancient Hellas. For instance, Laera warns that:

The emphasis on the ‘democratic’ nature of Greek theatre suggests an appropriation of ‘classical’ tragedy by neoliberal discourses in an attempt to define the West in terms of individual freedom, empowerment and participation, which retrospectively elevate Athenian democracy as a model for our current political system, despite its exclusion of women, foreigners and slaves. (6)

This fear is certainly warranted, as an unbroken democratic thread from Athenian democracy to contemporary liberal democracies is a fundamental cultural myth justifying contemporary representative governments.<sup>1</sup> The differences between Greek and modern democracy are well

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Hanink, Laera, or Cartledge for more information on modern political uses of ancient Greece.

documented—Athens had direct democracy for a limited number of citizens, all free and male, whereas modern nation-states have largely enfranchised populations insulated from actual decision-making power by bureaucratic and representative institutions. However, the myth of Greece as the origin point of a (largely phantasmatic) democratic tradition in the West is alive and well.<sup>2</sup> And we should be wary of any attempt to blind us to the anti-democratic elements of modern institutions.

At the same time, though, the political imaginary of Greek tragedy was more expansive and egalitarian than Attic political life, even at its most open, and we can draw on that imagined equality as an aspirational model. Classicist Edith Hall says that, “in tragedy the Athenians created a public dialogue marked by an egalitarian *form* beyond their imagination in actuality. Tragedy’s multivocal form and heterogenous casts suggest an implicit egalitarian vision whose implementation in the actual society which produced it was absolutely inconceivable” (125, original emphasis). And this is the crucial point. We can imagine a more utopic democracy. We can imagine a system with local popular control exercised through the kind of direct democracy that would empower people within their own communities. We can imagine a political system where power is not insulated from the *demos*, the people, but in which the people’s voice and will are directly expressed in a civic sphere built to acknowledge the equality dreamt of as the foundation for democratic justice. And theatre can play a crucial role in this imagining.

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***Iphigenia Alone: Metatheatre and Austerity in Iphigenia in Splott***

*Iphigenia in Splott* ends with an overt anti-austerity warning. Effie, the lone character in the 75-minute monologue play, ends her narrative describing life in her Cardiff neighborhood:

More and more people packed in this little plot of land,  
 While they cut everything we need to make a life.  
 And we can take it...  
 We can take it cos we’re tough, the lot of us.  
 But here’s the fucking rub.  
 It seems, it’s always places like this  
 And people like us who have to take it,

<sup>2</sup> Hanink argues that this tradition is largely a product of the Cold War, when right-wing Greek leaders played up Athenian democracy to gain support from the US and Britain. As she puts it, “The new Anglo-American ‘democratic’ ideal of classical antiquity was paraded in Greece by leaders [like Constantine Karamanlis] intent on proving to Britain and the United States that it was on the right side of history” (180).

When the time for cutting comes. (60-61)

As some theatre reviewers pointed out, this is an aggressively political ending to the play. In the *New York Times*, Ben Brantley said the play “is a work with a confrontational social conscience, a state of mind that’s rarely conducive to subtlety.”<sup>3</sup> By the play’s end, Owen’s critique of the human cost of austerity politics is abundantly clear as Effie’s final didactic indictment of neoliberal politics—and the audience’s complicity in those politics—follows the tragic loss of the baby she had hoped could bring stability to her life. Instead of focusing primarily on the overt element of *Iphigenia in Splott*’s political conclusion, I argue that the play’s form prefigures its political stance, even before the socio-economic critique. The metatheatrical monologue form helps perform Owen’s critique of economic injustice. By collapsing the Greek Iphigenia story into a one-person show, *Iphigenia in Splott* substitutes the civic collectivity of ancient Athenian theatre for the socio-economic isolation of individual consumers under neoliberal capitalism.

While broadly inspired by Greek mythology, *Iphigenia in Splott* bears only scant resemblance to Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis*, the most direct predecessor for Owen’s play. In essence, all that connects Owen’s loose adaptation with its Euripidean source is the narrative of sacrificing a child for “the greater good.” In Owens’ show, Effie—a tough, street smart chav, played by Sophie Melville in the original Sherman Theatre production—recounts a one night stand with Lee, a one-legged former soldier. Effie is crushed when she finds out that he’s married and she’s pregnant. After initially deciding on an abortion, Effie changes her mind and chooses to keep the baby. She goes into early labor and the hospital doesn’t have enough beds in the special care unit, so they send her to the next town. But when the ambulance crashes and Effie delivers her very premature daughter, the paramedics are unable to save the baby. Devastated, she sues the hospital, but drops the suit after the hospital’s midwife convinces Effie the money she would collect would force the hospital to close more beds and diminish their services further. It is with this guilt that Effie ultimately confronts the audience: “I took this pain, / And saved every one of you, from suffering the same. / Your baby gets sick, she gets well / Because of me” (60). Effie sacrifices herself and her child on the altar of austerity politics.

The reduction of the Greek tragedy—with its Chorus and engagement in Athenian civic life—to a monologue play mirrors the austerity politics Owen critiques, and Effie’s metatheatrical addresses implicate the audience. As Aristotle pointed out, life in the *polis* was a mixture of rights and privileges, duties owed by the citizen and duties owed to the citizen. The *polis* system attempted to balance communal responsibility, distributed amongst the citizens, in

<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Smith writes, “Owen’s ultimate point is a political one and, if it’s unsubtle, it’s because politics is unsubtle.”

order to achieve the most good for the city-state and the people. Today, on the other hand, under neoliberal ideology the notion of the public good or of collective responsibility to society as a whole has been substantially undermined. We see this distinctly in *Iphigenia in Splott*. Effie reflects on the businesses and services that once existed in the neighborhood, all closed now due to budget cuts, job losses, and declines in social support. She linguistically distances herself from this suffering by putting the words in her nan's mouth: "She says we used to live. You could live here and live well. / Now they're stacking us up and we're supposed to just exist" (2). In narrating the night at the club where she met Lee, Effie experiences a profound change. After she has sex with the ex-soldier, she tells us, "Lying there wrapped up in Lee I'm feeling something new. / That something new is – not alone. / I'm not alone. / And it feels like I'm gonna feel not alone, always" (22). This idea of being not alone becomes a refrain throughout the next portion of the play, a phrase Effie clings to even as it becomes increasingly clear that Lee is not going to call her (24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29).

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There are more layers to this not-aloneness than I have page space for, but for this analysis the most important facet is precisely the feeling's ephemerality, not just in the obvious sense that Lee is married to another woman and has no interest in a relationship with Effie, but in the sense that Effie really is alone, alone on a stage where once her Grecian predecessor would have had a Chorus and other actors. In *Iphigenia in Splott* there is virtually nothing on stage to support Effie during her monologue. In the original Sherman Theatre production, the set—designed by Hayley Grindle, with lighting by Rachel Mortimer—had only a few hard plastic chairs as props and a row of horizontal fluorescent light bulbs, some fallen at odd angles, making up the backdrop.<sup>4</sup> This space suggests urban decay in a declining Britain. As reviewer Andrew Haydon wrote in *The Guardian*, "Set in a bleak world of strip-lights evoking everything from nasty nightclubs to run-down hospitals...[the play] is underscored with low rumbles of bass, machines and thunder...so much so that you can almost feel the cuts being made to austerity Britain while you watch." Against this sparse setting Effie tells her story, dances, rages, and weeps. Not only does the set suggest the decimated infrastructure of an austerity-stricken Cardiff, its starkness highlights just how alone Melville is on the stage. Not only does she have no one else to interact with—except the audience—there are almost no physical props to support her performance. Like the deceptive summons for Iphigenia to come marry Achilles in Euripides' play, Effie's feeling of not-aloneness is illusory and destined to lead to sacrifice.

<sup>4</sup> Images from the original performance run are available on the Sherman Theatre's website at <https://www.shermantheatre.co.uk/performance/theatre/iphigenia-in-splott/> under the gallery section.

The notion of sacrifice is, according to Wendy Brown, at the heart of neoliberal austerity politics. In this sense, Effie's story profoundly differs from Iphigenia's, because while Iphigenia was an individual sacrificed under unusual circumstances, Effie sacrifices and is sacrificed (paradoxically at the same time) as part of a political economic theology. As Brown explains:

individuals are required to provide for themselves in the context of powers and contingencies that radically limit their ability to do so. But they are also blamed for the woes of the whole and, more importantly, even when behaving properly, may be legitimately sacrificed for its survival...Instead of being secured or protected, the responsabilized citizen tolerates insecurity, deprivation and extreme exposure to maintain the productivity, growth, fiscal stability, credit rating, or market dominance of the firm or nation (or again, of the nation on the model of the firm). (10)

What this means is that contemporary neoliberal discourses blame the poor, the oppressed, and the dispossessed for not sufficiently investing in themselves as human capital, and these discursive forces are simultaneously always prepared to assign blame for financial instability to the poor, oppressed, and dispossessed, whom it then seeks to sacrifice for "the greater good." These sacrifices come in the form of abolished social programs, decreased funds for education or job training, or, as is evident in *Iphigenia in Splott*, cuts to health care and social services.

As cuts are passed on to the vulnerable, Brown argues, neoliberal ethics demand the poor bear these hardships stoically. She writes, "This citizen releases state, law, and economy from responsibility for and responsiveness to its own conditions and predicaments, and is ready to sacrifice to the cause of economic growth and fiscal constraints" (12). Effie's metatheatrical addresses to the audience are riven by the paradox of the neoliberal subject, at once enjoined to think of itself in purely economic terms of exchange, debt, and capital, and simultaneously to sacrifice itself for the larger economic whole (embodied, of course, in corporations, the wealthy, and stock values). The culture of urban poverty and desperation that has shaped Effie is particularly subject to ideological assault in British media. As Ben Lawrence puts it in his *Telegraph* review of the National Theatre production, "The so-called chav culture has been unremittingly mocked in the media and this attempt to humanize the sort of person sneered at in Channel 5 documentaries is long overdue. Girls such as Effie seem so isolated, so disempowered as to make life choices unimaginable." Denizens of Britain's impoverished, post-industrial urban landscape represent a convenient target for the mockery of neoliberal media/ideology. Lacking both the sophistication of the wealthier upper classes and the imagined idyllic qualities of Olde England-style villages and rural communities, the inner-city dweller is often presented as the cause of their own misery through drink, drugs, and promiscuity. Effie, in the elegant bluntness

of her counter-narrative confronts this tendency to dismiss people like her, demanding that her role in the latter-day *polis* be recognized.

Effie's two most striking metatheatrical moments come at the opening and the closing of the play, and they represent these competing poles. At the beginning of the performance, Effie uses economized language: "you lot, every single one / You're in my debt. / And tonight – boys and girls, ladies and gents – / I've come to collect" (1). She opens, in other words, by conceptualizing the theatre going experience, and her presence before us, as a financial transaction—a paying of debts. This opening prepares us for the Effie who pursues a lawsuit against the hospital after her baby's death. It does not prepare us for the Effie who drops the lawsuit, who follows austerity's sacrifice of her baby with the sacrifice of her own financial security. And make no mistake, this is an economic decision. Effie reflects, "And so. / I drop the case. / I don't, [*sic*] make anyone pay" (59). But is this a gesture of Effie's capitulation to neoliberal austerity? To the cultural imperative that the poor be sacrificed without complaint for the economic health of the corporate nation-state? Of course not. Unlike the subject Brown describes—one battered down to accept their precarious, sacrificial position unquestioned—Effie makes us witnesses to her sacrifice. Both in her renunciation of financial compensation and in her solitude on stage we have the indictment of the neoliberal world order. We have her profound protest against the socioeconomic system that has shaped her world, and that has taken from her the kind of civic collectivity supporting her Grecian predecessor.

Condensing the Iphigenia myth from a performance involving multiple actors, including a Chorus, to a monologue play fundamentally changes the internal economy of the play. Whereas Euripides' characters need only interact with one another—as Attic tragedy includes fairly little audience engagement—Effie has no one with whom to *interact* apart from the audience, and so the play is laced through with metatheatrical challenges, accusations, appeals, and threats. What this means is that the audience is directly implicated in the sacrificial structure of the myth. In *Iphigenia in Aulis*, it is possible to think of ourselves as apart from the ethical causes and consequences of Agamemnon's sacrifice. Agamemnon kills his daughter, the Greeks sail to Troy. Even by the time Euripides' play was staged in 405 BCE, the events were a mythologized history. The audience (then and now) is not to blame. But the immediacy of Effie's accusations makes our guilt inescapable. In the death of her child and her choice to renounce whatever satisfaction would have been gained through a settlement, we as viewers cannot escape the confrontation with our own complicity in the economic system that prioritizes investments over the lives of the impoverished. This direct and unequivocal condemnation is a function of the play's monologic structure which leaves Effie with no one to address but the semi-tangible figure of a theatre audience. This isolation is neither innocent nor incidental, but is deeply rooted in the

very political economy that Effie’s tragedy evokes—the economic violence underpinning neoliberal capitalism. The anti-collective, anti-democratic impulses of neoliberalism erode public support networks, placing overwhelming burdens on the poor, who are isolated further within an ideological system that values their lives less than corporate profit. But, as we’ve begun to see and shall see in more detail below, the poor and oppressed often resist their exploitation.

### *The Chorus as Democratic Crowd in The Suppliant Women*

According to *The World of Athens* by the Joint Association of Classical Teachers, the earliest recorded instance in which a form of the later term *demokratia* appears is in Aeschylus’ *The Suppliant Women*. The Joint Association writes, “The earliest shadow of the term ‘democracy’ comes in Aeschylus’ phrase *dēmou kratousa kheir*, ‘the sovereign hand of the *dēmos*’” (200). In his 2016 adaptation, David Greig translates Aeschylus’ line loosely, so the reference becomes more direct: the Chorus asks, “How did the city make its decision? / How does it work, this thing called ‘democracy?’” (31). Although Cleisthenes’ 508 BCE reforms prepared the way for popular rule, as far as we know, the Greek roots *demos* (meaning, ‘the people’) and *kratos* (meaning ‘power’ or ‘control’) had not come together to name a unique political system by the time *The Suppliant Women* was first performed shortly after 470 BCE, so Aeschylus’ audience likely would not have been struck by the phrasing. But a modern British audience will immediately recognize Greig’s more overt use of the term. This is not incidental. Greig’s word choices in adapting Aeschylus’ language combined with Ramin Gray’s specific production decisions—especially in casting the Chorus—to create a show which advocates cosmopolitan identification with refugees and increased local democratic authority, contra modern representative institutions which insulate citizens from power. The language of the text and the texture of the performance become the media for this message.

Some of the earliest depictions of a democratic political system come from the plays of Aeschylus. The *Oresteia* dramatizes/mythologizes the emergence of the popular courts which were central to Athens’ administration of justice by popular vote. And Classicist Paul Cartledge calls *Persians* a “hymn to democracy and civic-republican freedom” because it links Themistocles—a champion of the emerging democracy—with the Greek victory at Salamis over the autocratic Persian ruler Xerxes (83). But few plays from ancient Athens more directly glorify the collective rule of citizens than *The Suppliant Women*. The play is the first—and only surviving—part of the Danaid Trilogy, and tells the story of a group of Egyptian women who arrive at Argos seeking sanctuary. Fleeing enforced marriage to their cousins, the sons of

Aegyptos, they've returned to the Hellenic homeland of their ancestor, Io, to find protection. While hiding in a sacred grove, the Danaids and their father Danaos are met by King Pelasgos. When they put their case before the king, he says he must consult the Argive citizens council for a decision. Eventually, the council decides in favor of the Danaids, and the Argives defend the women from the Egyptians who come to kidnap and rape them. As Cartledge notes, "the manner in which [Pelasgos] ruled was strikingly, anachronistically democratic" (84-85). The democratic citizens council would not have been an historical feature of archaic Argos, but it would have been recognizable to Aeschylus' contemporary Athenian audience.

It was precisely this democratic ideology that Greig and Gray sought to capitalize on in their production. While Aeschylus' original version contains proto-democratic references, Greig's translation spends more time directly describing and advocating for democratic practices. Pelasgos and Danaos explain the democratic process to the Danaids, who, escaping autocratic Egypt, know only direct monarchic rule. At the end of the play, the Egyptians' anti-democratic attitudes are directly voiced. The Herald, an Egyptian official coming to kidnap the women, tells them, "Forget about voters. / The sons of Aegyptos are your masters now. / Democracy's anarchy" (41). Earlier in the play, the Danaids shared this assumption about monarchical power, pleading with Pelasgos to protect them himself: "You are the city, you are the people, / City and people are one in your name. / One throne, one vote" (22-23). But the king appeals to the will of his citizens, telling the refugees that the Argives must make the decisions themselves: "I've no choice, the city must vote" (23). And vote they do. Leaving the women, Danaos and Pelasgos go to persuade the Argive citizens' council, and when Danaos returns he reports that the citizens voted to offer sanctuary. The Danaids question: "How does it work, this thing called 'democracy'?" and Danaos explains, "The Greeks were unanimous! All in favor! / ... / The air fair fizzed with right hands rising" (31). The raising of right hands was a common voting method in the Athenian *ekklesia* (citizen's assembly) and many other democratic institutions in Greece.<sup>5</sup>

The vote pits the citizens' xenophobic prejudice against Pelasgos' and Danaos' rhetorical skills. Rhetoric was central to Athenian political life. Danaos' and the Danaids' concerns about anti-immigrant prejudice will be discussed in more detail below, but the link between persuasion and democracy is directly evoked in Greig's translation. As he prepares to leave the Danaids for the vote, Pelasgos tells them:

I'll go now and gather the people of Argos,  
 I'll teach Danaos what to say in his speech.  
 I'll prepare ground so the town's sympathetic

<sup>5</sup> The Greeks called this practice *kheirotonia*, or 'extension of hands' (Cartledge 70).

And use all my skill to win you the vote.

May Zeus now give me his powers of persuasion. (28)

In other words, Pelasgos' preparations for the vote are rhetorical. He gathers his persuasive skill, marshals his arguments, and asks the gods for help convincing his citizens. In reporting the outcome of the vote, Danaos recounts, "King Pelasgos spoke with fervour, / ... / Every word dripped with the art of persuasion. / The moment he finished, a forest of hands" (31-32). For the ancient Athenians, this would be politics as usual. Classics scholar Edith Hall claims that, "The multivocal form of tragedy, which allows diverse characters to speak (and, more importantly, to disagree with each other), reflects the contemporary development of rhetoric in democratic Athens, itself a product of the increased importance under the democracy of public debate" (118). Direct democracy was driven by the power of rhetoric to persuade, and those institutions were reflected through the argumentative structures of tragedy. Classicists Ian Storey and Arlene Allen explain that, "The extant dramatic texts, both tragic and comic, reveal their indebtedness to [Athenian] political institutions in the way they employ argument and counter-argument, leading to a decision to move their plots forward" (67). Drama thus served a practical, pedagogical function within the democracy by modeling the agonistic *modus operandi* of the assembly, council, and people's courts. Citizens viewing an agonistic contest in the theatre could exercise their critical judgment in assessing the various arguments made—a kind of training for participation in the political and judicial institutions of Athenian life.

Beyond the text, Gray's performance choices themselves reproduce the democratic elements implicit in Greek tragedy. Greig called the production "a piece of theatrical archaeology...we've decided that the way we want to approach it is to try and understand it as it would have been understood in its place and time" ("Making of The Suppliant Women"). For my purposes here, the most important decision to approaching the play in its ancient time and place was the recruitment of non-professional choruses. For the tour, Gray and Greig hired only three regular actors and two musicians, casting crowds of local volunteers as the Chorus, which is by far the most prominent role in *The Suppliant Women*. By the time Faber & Faber printed the play in 2017, the tour had created local Choruses in seven cities, using over 350 performers. The Choral performers were drawn from each city the play was brought to—Scottish women performing in Edinburgh at the Royal Lyceum, Irish women in Belfast, and women from Southwark and Lambeth at London's Young Vic. Many contemporary theatre makers blend professional theatre with community-engaged theatre, but John Browne—composer for *The Suppliant Women*—notes, "the Greeks invented this. This is how the original was done: there was a community Chorus and there was a couple of professional actors" ("Making of the Suppliant Women"). As Mark Fisher put it in reviewing the Royal Lyceum production, "form

and content combine. The performance is by the people.” This technique ensured that each Chorus belonged, in a real way, to the city where they performed. A sense of ownership, of kinship, was central to the Athenian experience of Choruses, as Classics scholar Peter Wilson argues: “The *choroi* that were at [theatre’s] heart were the *city’s choroi*, and with the involvement of the polis came the culture of publicity characteristic of democratic Athens...The city as a collective entity promoted the proliferation of choral performances” (11, original emphasis). In other words, the choice to recruit and train Choruses of local women, rather than tour with a Chorus of professional actors, rooted each performance irrevocably in its own locale—a local relationship which will be discussed more below.

The other crucial performance element was that Gray put the Chorus at center stage—he not only allowed the Chorus to be the central, collective character (as Aeschylus wrote them), but his dramaturgy depended on that centrality. The women of the Chorus form a solid, living block which dominates the stage space, exuding power even as they seek protection from Pelasgos. In *The Telegraph*, Claire Allfree wrote, “The chorus move together as one, switching in an instant from keening lament to uninhibited celebration and driven ever onwards by an urgency that is both aesthetic and a literal bid for survival.” Production photos, like the ones available at the Royal Lyceum’s website, show the Chorus as a continual presence, even in photos centered on Oscar Batterham (Pelasgos) or Omar Ebrahim (Danaos).<sup>6</sup> The Actors Touring Company trailer gives an even better sense of the Chorus’ powerful presence.<sup>7</sup> The professional actors barely appear, and the video is dominated by the rhythmic stamping of the Chorus rocking back and forth, moving across the stage inexorably closer to the camera (“Suppliant Women Autumn 2017”).

The women of *The Suppliant Women’s* Chorus speak with a powerful, collective voice, providing a living model that teaches the values of a locally rooted democracy. The dominant presence, this collective body of women takes the central role, which struck several reviewers. As Allfree puts it in her review, the Chorus is powerful because “it’s a grass roots gesture that enshrines the spirit of collectivity and communality in Aeschylus’s drama far more effectively than any professional cast could.” Fisher highlights the importance of the Chorus in Gray’s productions, pointing out: “Modern productions tend to scale down numbers and focus on the leads, but it’s no disrespect to [Gemma May, the Chorus Leader], Batterham or Omar Ebrahim’s eloquent Danaos to say that the chorus is the soul of the show.” And his *Guardian* colleague, Susannah Clapp echoes this sentiment: “The brilliant decision is to make the chorus, so often

<sup>6</sup> Photos are available at <https://lyceum.org.uk/whats-on/production/909>.

<sup>7</sup> Viewable on Youtube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TvQ3fFkPfc&list=WL&index=13&t=0s>.

embarrassing, ignored or dismembered in modern-dress productions, the governing voice of the play.” Gray’s dramaturgical decision to center the play on the Chorus as protagonist does, as we shall see more below, have profound democratic implications. But given the contemporary refugee crisis and the ways in which xenophobic anger and fear are challenging democratic institutions in many European and North American nations (not to mention an emerging anti-feminist backlash against the #MeToo movement), it’s equally significant that *The Suppliant Women* casts local women as *this* Chorus.

What I mean by that is that the Danaids are a Chorus of refugee women specifically. In a remarkably prescient ancient foreshadowing of the movements of contemporary refugees, the Danaids flee North Africa and arrive in Greece seeking asylum—the exact route taken by so many fleeing North Africa and the Middle East today. By presenting local women in the roles of strangers seeking aid, *The Suppliant Women* demands a sympathetic and cosmopolitan willingness to welcome refugees. Aeschylus explored, in no uncertain terms, the anxiety Greeks sometimes felt when encountering non-Greeks; the Danaids repeatedly express the fear that xenophobia will lead the Argives to reject them. Pelasgos’ first lines of the play even draw attention to their foreignness: “Who are these women? These strange women? / Rich foreign clothes and their hair so strange, / Not Greek women. Not our women” (17-18). The Danaids answer the king, “We don’t look Greek. We know that’s true. / But that doesn’t mean we don’t belong here” (18). They acknowledge their foreignness, but also put forward a claim to kinship, which will be discussed further momentarily. Throughout the play, the women and Danaos continually mention their foreign clothes, their skin tone, their accents, and their customs, worrying that these manifestations of Otherness will convince the Argives to reject their plea. However, audiences don’t see a group of foreigners on the stage, they see women drawn from their local communities. Certainly, there is some willing suspension of disbelief, but the physical bodies of the Chorus performers are familiar—familiar in the directly etymological sense derived from the Latin *familiaris*, that is, of belonging to the family.

For audience members, seeing the stage filled with their wives, mothers, sisters, co-workers, neighbours, etc. arouses identification with the Chorus as representatives of the community, and arouses sympathy for refugees who are suddenly pictured as intimates. The Danaids strengthen these identifications through continual references to the Argives as family and to Argos as home. Right from the opening Choral ode, the Danaids, descendants of Io, call Argos their homeland.<sup>8</sup> They lay claim to the city-state:

<sup>8</sup> Hera turned Io into a cow and drove her out of Greece after Zeus fell in love with the unfortunate maiden. Hera’s vengeance drove Io to Egypt. Among her lineage were the brothers Danaos and Aegyptos.

These are the fields which fed cow-Io  
This is the pasture from which she was blown  
So if we come here to seek asylum  
We come as her children: this is our home. (13)

The Danaids invoke the right of kinship to justify their asylum claim when Pelasgos arrives. He asks who they are and why Argos should help, and they tell him, “Our story’s simple: we’re the children of Io, / Io of Argos: we’re Greek, like you” (18). Again, for audience members, the actors desperately seeking protection are not actually foreigners, but the most intimate of compatriots. Seeing family members, friends, co-workers, etc. in the position of refugees begins building the psychological structures of empathy that will, in principle, make it easier for audience members to recognize the humanity of refugees arriving from the Middle East, North Africa, and elsewhere. This preparation to empathetically see the humanity of the Other is especially crucial in the era of Brexit.

—123—  
Brexit, it is worth noting, was a democratic referendum. While that’s not ironic in itself, it is ironic that Greig’s and Gray’s antidote to the Small England mentality which drove so much of the Leave vote is, in fact, more direct democracy. As we’ve already seen, the text of Greig’s version emphasizes the direct participatory processes at the heart of Athenian government. But the performative choice to cast local women as the Chorus builds a reflective power into the show—a degree of self-control that enacts the power of a community to determine its own course. As Ramin Gray says, “Theatre works best when you have a city talking to itself, and so if you have a community chorus drawn from that city, you’ve really plumbed [*sic*] the people of the city into the show” (“Making of the Suppliant Women”). This echoes the communitarian role of crowds in ancient theatre, both of spectators and of Choruses, because Athenian Choruses were drawn from the citizenry itself. This shared bond strengthened a collective civic foundation because, as drama scholar Tor-Helge Allern says, “From whatever position, the Athenians shared a common tradition: they had all seen the performances, and most of them had danced as a part of the choir as young men” (159). By drawing Chorus members from local communities, Gray and Greig attempt to reinvigorate theatre as a collective space building a common tradition, a tradition facilitating direct democratic power rooted in the crowd of citizens itself.

### Conclusion

The link between theatre and democracy is an old one. Theatre is a microcosm for democratic politics precisely because it puts people into a communal space where issues are

debated and outcomes assessed. Performance studies theorist Marvin Carlson points out that social relations inhere in the shared space of the theatre: “the act of theatre is a tripartite one, involving yourself, the performer, and the rest of the audience...bringing the experience inevitably into the realm of the political and the social” (198). In other words, the sociality of theatre—experiencing a play with others—can itself be a revolutionary political act, particularly in an age where, as we saw with *Iphigenia in Splott*, much of the dominant cultural imperative is toward isolation. Aristotle, in discussing democracy, points out the importance of communality and the value of a mass of politically engaged citizens: “the many, who are not as individuals excellent men, nevertheless can, when they have come together, be better than the few best people, not individually, but collectively” (1281<sup>a</sup>41-1281<sup>b</sup>.1). That act of being together to enjoy, to judge, to feel, has a positive communal value.

—124— This may especially be true in performances or adaptations of Greek tragedy because in those plays remains the expansive political imaginary of the original democratic performances. While this democratic performance may be more obvious in Greig’s *The Suppliant Women*, with its stage full of local Chorus performers, even a monologue play like *Iphigenia in Splott* continues to represent the openness of the tragedian’s worldview. As Edith Hall puts it, tragedy “does give voice to those debarred by their gender or class from what *we* would call their ‘democratic right’ to free speech. It grants them temporarily in imagination the ‘equality in the right to public speaking’ (*isēgoria*) and the freedom to express opinion (*parrhesia*)” (126, original emphasis). So, while Effie remains isolated on stage, able to interact only with the audience that (for the most part) cannot respond, the very fact that is allowed to speak—despite her gender and class—gestures toward an open public rhetoric. As Ben Lawrence’s review pointed out, women like Effie are more often spoken of mockingly than they speak for themselves.

The stakes are high for democracy today. Faith in democracy as such has been corroded, and the ideology is being challenged from both the right and the left. But rather than abandoning the democratic project, it is time to expand the scope of democratic power, particularly by empowering those who have been denied direct access to decision making authority. Paul Cartledge points out that many political and philosophical thinkers today are looking back to ancient Athens as a model for democratic reform, and that we must be cautious about what lessons we take and what aspects of Attic democracy we ignore (5). Both of the plays examined in this paper are part of this larger trend seeking to revitalize contemporary representative institutions on the model of Greek direct democracy, seeking to empower people within local communities, and seeking to re-establish the mutual relations of responsibility between the citizen and the *polis*. As Ramin Gray puts it in his director’s note for *The Suppliant Women*,

“Given the current crisis of faith in our democratic institutions, in elections and referenda in particular, it’s salutary to revisit the moment when these ideas were conceived and in the simplest of ways to start to renew our commitment to being together in a shared, civic space” (qtd. in Aeschylus n.p.). However, in returning to the earliest form of democratic collectivism—as seen through Aeschylus’ and Euripides’ drama—we should not be content either with the limitations of Athenian democracy or with the limits of modern representative democracy. We should seek the egalitarian ideal.

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**BIO**

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## Travelogues as Memorized Experiences: From Boswell to Boorman/ McGregor

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### ABSTRACT

In this contribution I investigate how James Boswell manages to depart from the so far usual concept of the travelogue in order to introduce new concepts to the genre: exciting tales from flashbulb memories, and the focus on the traveller's special, subjective experiences. This development was supported by the influence of Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* (1768) and Locke's and Rousseau's concepts of subjectivity. This new concept of the travelogue has made Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) a prototype for the contemporary travel report, according to Voßkamp's (1977) Haller's (1993), and Botor's (1999) standards. I will engage in the comparison to *Long Way Down* (2007) by Charley Boorman and Ewan McGregor, the only other pair of travel writers known to me, and examples from other travelogues by, for example, Paul Theroux, Bill Bryson, and Christina Dodwell. All the authors chosen give particularly entertaining additional examples of flashbulb memories presented in the manner of Boswell's prototype.

### KEYWORDS

travel report, flashbulb memory, prototype theory, subjectivity

I sought trains; I found passengers.

(Paul Theroux)

We were approaching the southern tip of Africa and I realised that it wasn't just Ewan and I travelling; we had every fan, every reader, every biker who followed our trail, all on the back of the bikes with us.

(Charley Boorman)

### Introduction

—130— Tales of journeys are nearly as old as mankind (Hulme and Youngs 2), however, nothing new can be discovered on Earth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Books, television, the radio and the internet provide easily obtainable information about every area, if not every village, on this planet. Nevertheless, travelogues are still produced and read with interest, so they must provide some additionally valuable reading experience (Korte, *Travel Writing*, 142-3). According to Fussell (*Beginnings*, 21), the pleasure of modern travel writing consists of “the hazards and joys, the ironies and delights of seeing [what can be seen]”. Batten (96, 117) localizes a change in the 1760s and 1770s travelogues, when many places on Earth had already been described, and local people whom the travellers meet, in addition to the regions travelled, came into the travellers' focus. One example of this new approach is James Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785, afterwards quoted as *Tour*); Boswell's account of his journey through his native Scotland with his friend, the famous Dr. Samuel Johnson, who had always been prejudiced against this part of the United Kingdom. In this contribution, I investigate how the *Tour* influenced the travelogue genre in order to maintain its readability and, doing so, prepared the contemporary travel report. To explain the high appeal the *Tour* continues to exert nowadays I use the psychological concept of flashbulb memories, which provide suitable material to create exciting travel stories. In addition, I apply Botor's (1999) approach about the prototype status of *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1795) to the *Tour*. I also compare the *Tour* to the contemporary *Long Way Down* (2007) by Charley Boorman and Ewan McGregor about a motorbike ride from John O'Groats in Scotland to Cape Agulhas in South Africa. Boorman and famous actor McEwan share a passion for riding big bikes on grand tours, so this ride as far south as possible from

Scotland on motorbikes was a dream of theirs which came true, like Johnson's visit to Scotland, his home, was for Boswell. *Long Way Down* is, to my knowledge, the only travelogue which was written by two travellers together (see also Schaff, 232). Although Boswell and Johnson did not publish the accounts of their journey in one work like Boorman and McGregor, both works have been printed in one volume, and one rarely finds scholarly work on one which does not consider the other. Furthermore, both the *Tour* and *Long Way* comment on the situation of the travelling party and the sights encountered. This makes both works especially suitable for comparison. In addition, both not only reflect the journey as such but also the friendship between the travellers. "He who travels furthest travels alone, to be sure, but he who travels best travels with a companion" (Fussell, *Abroad*, 117). Apart from these two central texts, I include other travelogues as sources for especially poignant examples of the way they present their authors' experiences as flashbulb memories (see below). Furthermore, the examples will highlight how Boswell's prototypical work has influence on travel writing until today.

Defining the term travelogue seems easier than it is because the travelogue is closely connected with many other genres. "One consequence of this heterogeneity and hybridity is that it is often hard to define where 'travel writing' ends and other genres begin, such as autobiography [...]" (Thompson 12). Therefore, I will refer to what Thompson calls the "*modern* or *literary* travel book" (17, emphasis original), which is "the first-person narrative of travel which claims to be a true record of the author's own experience" (Thompson 27). This includes the notion that the author has to sign what Philippe Lejeune has called *le pacte autobiographique*, according to which the narrator, who speaks in the first person singular, has the same name as the author identified on the title page of the work in question (29-30). According to Lejeune, in an autobiographical text, the author and narrator are, exceptionally, identical.

Korte (*Travel Writing*, 180) emphasizes that the authentic journey is the travelogue's narrative core. This is not the place to prove that the travelogues I use are based on genuine experience; it may suffice to accept their authors' words in willing suspension of disbelief. "[A] reader's sense of reality only lies in his or her *assumption* that the text is based on travel fact, on an authentic journey, and this assumption can only be tested beyond the text itself" (Korte, *Travel Writing*, 10, emphasis original).<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, one can assume that the law of perseverance (Stanzel 66) can be transferred to travelogues: Once a reader has achieved a certain attitude towards a genre, this attitude will be preserved until an obvious signal in a text forces change.

### After Rousseau and Sterne: The Introduction of Subjectivity

According to Fussell, “[t]ravel books are a sub-species of memoir in which the autobiographic narrative arises from the speaker’s encounter with distant or unfamiliar data” (*Abroad*, 203). However, in contrast to exploring parties, who presented their “unfamiliar data” for the first time, Boswell belongs to a new generation of writers who had their respective predecessors: Boswell’s *Tour* had Johnson’s *Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland* (1775) and Pennant’s *Tour in Scotland* (1771, publ. 1774) as its predecessors (see Possin 90 and Martin 303). This liberated him from the need to introduce Scottish landscapes and typical Scottish qualities to his readers.

Similarly, Boorman/McGregor can rely on their readers having seen photos of, if not visited themselves, the Egyptian pyramids, for example, or something similar to the Roman ruins in Libya. Therefore, both could concentrate on other aspects of their journey and, like their contemporary successors, rather narrate their adventures than describe their discoveries:

The development from a merely factual towards a subjective approach to reality became apparent in mid-18<sup>th</sup> century English travelogues. [...] This movement of meaning from collecting factual data to subjective experience is part of a process which generally happened in English literature in the middle of the century. It was meant to support the investigation and emphasis of individuality (Kuczinsky 35).<sup>2</sup>

In the traveling genre(s), this trend has continued until today:

The contemporary travelogue is characterized by [...] devaluing description in favour of characteristics of autobiographical and fictional literature. Nowadays, travelogues have no descriptive ambition; rather, they reconstruct past events as impressive happenings and countries travelled as literary landscapes which are

<sup>1</sup> Since ‘[m]uch contemporary travel writing has been written by journalists who have a deep investment in maintaining their credibility’ (Hulme and Youngs, 10, see also Korte, “Reisebericht”, 364), a report or a TV programme accompanying the book will prove its validity.

<sup>2</sup> Der Wechsel von rein sachbezogener zu subjektbezogener Aneignung von Wirklichkeit begann sich in der englischen Reiseliteratur um die Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts abzuzeichnen. [...] Die Verschiebung des Gewichts von der reinen Faktensammlung auf das subjektive Erlebnis ist als Teil eines Prozesses zu sehen, der sich in der englischen Literatur und Ästhetik um die Jahrhundertmitte allgemein vollzog. Er richtete sich auf die Erkundung und Beförderung von Individualität

especially expressive even though the journey was experienced as chaotic and governed by chance (Kohl 150).<sup>3</sup>

The fact that the individual narrative points of view of recent travel events have to be re-created in written retrospective gives the authors enormous literary possibilities for creating such literary landscapes: With regard to the interview form of the *Life*, Botor (36) emphasizes that “Conversational biographies [like Boswell’s] are literary works addressed to a broad range of readers; therefore, they had to be composed in a reader-friendly manner”.<sup>4</sup> This, according to Botor, necessarily leads to “a subjective transformation by the author [...] to guarantee the contents being transmitted understandably” (36, 39).<sup>5</sup> In the travelogue, this becomes apparent mainly by the ordering effect which Kohl mentions and by the way the single episodes are constructed.

Furthermore, Boswell’s *Tour* corresponds to Rousseau’s concept of memory, which was based on Locke’s and Hume’s characterization of the Self through remembering: memories kept in the mind are meaningful and vividly relived, and in combination with imagination they provide access to the narrators’ inner thoughts and assist in structuring their life experience (Whitehead 66, see also Huisman 155). Therefore, while hard facts such as date, place and acquaintances may be given correctly, personal emotions or perceptions leave room for later interpretation. In addition, Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey* (1768), though not a travel report according to the definition I use,<sup>6</sup> introduced personal emotions and opinions to the travelogue, which had previously been concerned mainly with empirical facts or practical information. In this context, Forster’s confession of subjectivity is of importance: “[T]wo travellers seldom saw the same object in the same manner, and each reported the fact differently, according to his sensations, and his peculiar mode of thinking” (Forster 9, see also Korte, *Travel Writing*, 61). Subjectivity, in combination with a Sterne-like emotional involvement of the traveller/narrator, reduces the didactical element of travel reports and increases their readers’ participation. The

<sup>3</sup>Was den *travelogue* der heutigen Zeit auszeichnet, ist eine ihm eigene Relation [...], die das Deskriptive abwertet und die den Kennzeichen von autobiographischer und fiktionaler Literatur größere Prägekraft einräumt. Zeitgenössische Travelogues haben keinen deskriptiven Ehrgeiz, vielmehr rekonstruieren sie vergangene Begebenheiten zu prägnanten Erlebnissen und durchreiste Welten zu literarischen Landschaften mit besonderer Aussagekraft, auch wenn die tatsächlichen Erfahrungen der Reise als chaotisch und zufallsbestimmt erlebt werden.

<sup>4</sup>“dass es sich bei Gesprächswerken [wie Boswells] um literarische Werke [handelt], die sich an einen breiteren Leserkreis wenden wollen und dementsprechend ihre Gesprächswiedergaben lektürefreundlich gestalten müssen” Botor refers to Eckermann’s book here; the transfer of the statement to Boswell’s work was authorized by him in a phone call on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

<sup>5</sup>“eine[r] subjektive[n] Überformung durch den Autor”, which, however, is not meant to falsify but “um eine inhaltlich verständliche Wiedergabe zu gewährleisten”.

<sup>6</sup>While Sterne’s influence on travel writing cannot possibly be denied, I am reluctant to subsume the *Sentimental Journey* under my definition of travel writing. Sterne, who deliberately calls his narrator “Mr Yorik”, not “Mr. Sterne”, and who does not give the exact details of the dates of his journey, cannot claim the accuracy of the

story of an adventure is much more engaging than the description of a landscape, no matter how beautiful it may be. Boswell, who very likely knew both Sterne's and Forster's works, was certainly influenced by them, even though he does not admit this.<sup>7</sup> In addition, subjectivity can be regarded as the reason for smaller discrepancies between two narrators' different perceptions of events during the same journey. For example, Johnson concentrates on what he perceives "in an accepted, almost classical form" (Levi 13); choosing his personal perspective to judge what he sees (Kalb 82). In contrast to this, Boswell, who is interested both in Johnson and in Scotland, describes both Scotland and Johnson's reactions to the country:

At our inn [in Montrose] we did not find a reception such as we thought proportionate to the commercial opulence of the place; but Mr Boswell desired me to observe that the innkeeper was an Englishman, and I defended him as well as I could (Johnson 41).

About eleven at night we arrived at Montrose. We found but a sorry inn, where I myself saw another waiter put a lump of sugar with his fingers into Dr. Johnson's lemonade, for which he called him "Rascal!" It put me in great glee that our landlord was an Englishman. I rallied the Doctor upon this, and he grew quiet (Boswell 195).

With Johnson's arrival at Edinburgh in mind, Boswell has a chance to pay Johnson back for his ill opinion of Scottish cleanliness. Similarly, Boorman is an expert in off-road riding while McGregor does not like it. Therefore, he suffers from the "fesh fesh"<sup>8</sup> (McGregor 163) in Sudan and regards some parts of the journey as much less pleasurable than Boorman does. Indeed, this last point enables the readers to come across different views about the same journey whenever there are two or more companions travelling: "Sometimes it suffices just to lock two authors together, given that they are sufficiently different" (Esch 412).<sup>9</sup> The resulting different reports need not be regarded as contradictions but, rather, as completions of each other, so that the image of the journey becomes even richer.

journalistic travelogue as I define it. Furthermore, Sterne does not sign the autobiographical pact according to Lejeune (see esp. 19-35), which is one condition on which I base my concept of a travel report. Neither was this Sterne's interest; his "fictional travelogue" (Goring xi; see also Cuddon 65) was primarily meant to satirize Smollett's travelogue (Goring xviii-ix). Rather than the works discussed here, Bruce Chatwin's *In Patagonia* (1977) can claim true succession of Sterne's work.

<sup>7</sup> Botor (36-7, 95) investigates Eckermann's confession of subjectivity in the latter's "Vorrede" [preface], which discusses this even further. Although Boswell does not yet subscribe to this point of view, it is valid also for his work as well.

<sup>8</sup> This is sand which is "like red talcum powder, so loose it was almost like riding on liquid" (Boorman 239).

<sup>9</sup> Es genügt bisweilen, nur zwei Autoren zusammenzusperrern, wenn sie nur verschieden genug sind.

### Flashbulb Memories and the Exciting Story of Travel

Subjectivity also influences the material from which travel reports are created. The narrators report their encounters from memory and claim validity because they vividly remember what happened. Vivid memories thrown into relief by temporal distance often correspond to so-called “flashbulb memories”, defined as

virtually literal representations of the what, how, and where of the original event. In theory, when an event of great emotional impact and importance occurs, the system immediately encodes it as it occurred with great detail and vividness. The implication of this [...] is that the flashbulb memories created will be subjectively strong (Schwartz 206).

The principal two determinants appear to be a high level of surprise, a high level of consequentiality, or perhaps emotional arousal [...] If they do attain high levels, they seem, most directly, to affect the frequency of rehearsal, covert and overt, which, in turn, affects the degree of elaboration in the narrative of the memory that can be elicited experimentally (Brown and Kulik 73).

Although flashbulb memories tend to be subjected to the same processes of future distortion as other memories, “there is, indeed, a higher degree of accuracy for flashbulb memories than normal memories if one looks [...] at the specific memories *of personal context*” (Schwartz 203, emphasis added). One can assume that, for both Boswell/Johnson and Boorman/McGregor, the journeys were highly emotionally charged, so it is very likely that they produced many flashbulb memories.

It can only be expected that flashbulb memories remain present in the travellers’ memories, and it is obvious that these will likely be more elaborated in the narration: “You remember the events vividly, and you feel strongly that your memories are accurate” (Schwartz 202). Vivid remembering and emotional arousal make flashbulbs excellent material for stories to tell those who have stayed at home: “he or she who travelled has stories to tell,” as the German proverb says.<sup>10</sup>

An anecdote from Christina Dodwell’s *A Traveller in China* may serve as an example:

<sup>10</sup> Wenn einer eine Reise tut, dann kann er was erzählen!

The public security bureau was on my list of places to find, in order to apply for a special permit. When I located it I parked my bicycle at the end of a row of policemen's bikes. Unfortunately, my bike fell over and hit the bike next to it, which hit another and another; I watched with dismay as slowly the motion rippled along knocking every bike flat into the dust. I didn't get my permit. Decided to try again the following day (Dodwell 23).

This game of bicycle-domino may not be a disaster of biblical proportions, but for Dodwell it meant the loss of the much-desired permit, at least for the moment. Furthermore, as generally is the case with accidents, one can assume that she was shocked by the event as well as frightened of possible damage to the policemen's bikes. Therefore, all three levels of surprise, consequentiality and emotional arousal were high for Dodwell. It is not likely that such an experience is easily forgotten. Nevertheless, after her return from China (and after having received her special permit!) this event in Dodwell's mind made an anecdote worthy of being included in her report. With the actual arousal of an experience of the past, she may have even enjoyed recreating the event, emotional tension included, for her readers.

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Even though some details of flashbulbs may decay like other memories, both travelling parties had records of hard facts as evidence to check against the workings of their brains. Boswell had both Johnson's *Journey* and his own journal, Boorman and McGregor had both the filmed material and their travel logs. So, one can assume that most descriptions are reasonably accurate, while the emotions expressed may be both part of the memory and products of later reflection. "A[nother] explanation of the high accuracy level [...] can be given in terms of rehearsal: people who narrowly escape drowning or are present at a major earthquake are likely to have told the story of their experiences many times" (Neisser and Libby 318), or as Aleida Assmann says, "[w]e remember many things according to the number of chances which we have to talk about them" (103).<sup>11</sup>

"Specific colourful phrases may escape some of [the usual] limitations [of memory]" (Neisser and Libby 320). So do phrases with "high interactional content" (ibid). Therefore, many of Johnson's statements, especially such catchphrases as his "I smell you in the dark!" (Boswell 167), as well as McGregor's "I mean; what have the Romans ever done for us?" (first section of photos; n. pag.) can be accepted as accurate.

One other likely event to create flashbulb memories, which is not mentioned in my sources

<sup>11</sup> "Wir erinnern uns an vieles in dem Maße, wie wir Anlässe finden, davon zu erzählen." See also Bruner, and Erll and Nünning, 18.

however, is recognition: when one gains an explanation of a phenomenon one has long wondered about or realizes that, for example, a building is not really as grand as it has always appeared in photographs, this recognition can be emotional enough to create a flashbulb memory. The newly gained knowledge will likely become part of the story constructed from the memory.

Written in retrospect with the whole journey in mind, single memories, including flashbulb memories of especially exciting events such as meeting famous or particularly interesting people, are set in a continuous order and retold as lively anecdotes. Such reports not only correspond to the narrative methods used by Boswell but also to those of the contemporary travel report. So, while Boswell still “collected celebrities” on his Grand Tour (Schaff, 236), travelling through Scotland, he collected Flashbulb memories, and so did Boorman and McGregor in Africa.

### **Boswell’s Flashbulb Tales as the Prototype of the Contemporary Travel Report**

Boswell’s modernity has often been commented on. Brody’s (549) statement may be one of the most succinct:

In several ways Boswell closely resembles a celebrated modern writer. Like Boswell this writer is much concerned with his public image; like *Boswell* he is a superb journalist; and both disport themselves in newsprint as naturally as fish in the sea (emphasis added).

Ogu also speaks of “the new type of biography Boswell was writing” (59), and Kalb considers Boswell’s *Tour* as a “literary travelogue in the genre’s first phase” (13).<sup>12</sup>

To turn a flashbulb memory into a part of an entertaining as well as informative travelogue, it has to be verbalized, and the single flashbulbs of one journey have to be ordered. In this respect, Boswell introduces new, journalistic strategies to the established genre. According to Botor (95), his confirmation of describing objective reality in his *Life* (for which the *Tour* often is considered to be a predecessor) was extremely convincing. In order to prove that Boswell’s *Life of Samuel Johnson* is a literary prototype, Botor claims qualities which link it to the products of modern journalism, especially the interview and the documentary. Botor refers to Voßkamp’s definition of a literary prototype:

<sup>12</sup> ein literarischer Reisebericht in seiner ersten Phase

A historic investigation into the matter shows that the history of genres, on the one hand, is determined by norm-creating works (prototypes) and, on the other hand, is formed by the complementary forces of *reader expectations* and *literary responses* (Oppermann 613, emphasis original).<sup>13</sup>

By saying that “Boswell’s [*Tour*] takes a rather original form”, Levi (13), like Ogu, Brody and Kalb, recognizes that Boswell deviates from the norm of travel literature, however, a sub-genre to which the *Tour* may belong has not yet been identified. Boswell’s *Tour* exceeds the *Life* because it can make use of even more journalistic qualities than the *Life* which focuses on the interview (Botor 33-37). Therefore, I should like to continue Botor’s line of thought by exploring how Boswell’s *Tour* may be regarded as prototypical text of another journalistic genre, the report or, more exactly, the travel report.

In his *Handbook for Journalists*, Michael Haller (17, emphasis original) comments on the report that it

is a form of representation closely connected with contemporary journalism, the core of which is the report of an eye-witness. If “report” means a certain *form of communication*, however, then it represents an ancient genre of narration – and for a culture of listening (which sometimes is missed in our days). The audience of readers or listeners necessarily closely connected with the narrator.<sup>14</sup>

Haller sees the travelogue as the *fundamentum* on which the contemporary report was built. The term is based on the meaning of the Latin verb *reportare*, “to bring together/to carry back”. Haller defines the report’s task as follows: “The narrator had left home, discovered and adopted things abroad, and now he presents them to the eyes and ears of those at home” (Haller 19).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> “Der historische Befund literarischer Gattungen zeigt, daß ihre Geschichte einerseits entscheidend bestimmt wird durch normbildende Werke (Prototypen) und andererseits geprägt ist durch die wechselseitige Komplementarität von *Gattungserwartungen* und *Werkantworten*” (Voßkamp 30, emphasis original).

<sup>14</sup> ist eine mit dem modernen Journalismus verbundene und durch ihn verbreitete Darstellungsform, deren Kern der Augenzeugenbericht ausmacht. Meint man aber mit ‘Reportage’ eine bestimmte *Kommunikationsform*, dann steht sie für ein uraltes literarisches Genre des Erzählens – und so auch für eine (in unseren Tagen schon manchmal vermißte) Kultur des Zuhörens. Denn zum Erzähler gehört das Publikum der Hörer bzw. Leser. (emphasis original)

<sup>15</sup> Der Erzähler war ausgezogen von zuhause, hatte in der Fremde Dinge entdeckt und aufgenommen, hatte sie mitgebracht – und jetzt breitet er sie vor den Augen und Ohren der Daheimgebliebenen aus.

His interest makes the reader wish to participate; he becomes curious. [...] the narrator tells his story so that the listeners, while listening, can follow the events encountered in their imagination; as if they were travelling now. The past should be made present for them, by immediacy of language and the sensuality of description (Haller 20, emphasis original).<sup>16</sup>

Thus, Haller develops the following criteria as characteristics of a contemporary report:

kind of topic	authentic, singular happenings at the scene
kind of text	descriptive, narrative, reporting
effort of transfer	social and/or local distances, and institutional and/or psychological barriers are overcome, so that ...
main function	... the reading audience is invited to participate (Haller 35, 93). <sup>17</sup>

—139— One of the differences between the report and the travelogue is that reporters do not necessarily travel while they investigate the subject of their future work. In general, they remain static once they have reached the subject's location and concentrate on it during their stay. Therefore, concerning the journalistic craft, *Dokumentation* [factuality; meaning research], *Authenticität* [sic!] [authenticity; meaning that the narrator is an eye-witness], *Glaubwürdigkeit* [credibility; meaning that the facts given can be verified], *Unmittelbarkeit* [immediacy; meaning the reporter's sensual, direct perception], and *Redlichkeit* [honesty; meaning that the narrator is less important than the situation] are required (Haller 26). Furthermore, Haller (20) emphasizes that reports are written in the present tense.

<sup>16</sup> Mit dem Interesse tritt beim Zuhörer [...] auch der Wunsch hervor, mit dabei zu sein, also seine *Neugier*. [...] Der Erzähler [...] erzählt so, daß die Zuhörer im Augenblick des Zu- und Hinhörens die Erlebnisse in ihrer Vorstellung nachvollziehen können, so, wie wenn sie erst jetzt auf Reisen gingen. Das Vergangene soll für sie gegenwärtig werden, durch die Unmittelbarkeit der Sprache und die Sinnlichkeit der Schilderung.

<sup>17</sup>

Art des Themas:	authentische und einmalige Ereignisse und Erlebnisse vor Ort
Art des Textes:	schildernd, erzählend, beschreibend
Vermittlungsleistung:	Soziale und/oder räumliche Distanzen sowie institutionelle und/oder psychologische Barrieren überwinden, um ...
Hauptfunktion:	... die Leserschaft teilhaben zu lassen.

Deeg (163) defines one central question at the base of travel writing as follows: “How can I, as an author, show the worlds abroad to a reader who shares my culture, my point of view, my tradition and my norms?”<sup>18</sup> The world image so constructed must necessarily be that of *their* world: “A traveller’s perception can never be objective; it is always subject to certain conditions” (Deeg 166).<sup>19</sup> Not only do these requirements correspond to Haller’s description of the report, they also fit well into the flashbulb memory discussed before. Especially the narrator’s eye-witness status and setting his experience above his importance as witness suit well here.

With regard to its narrative tense and the marginal position of the reporter, however, the travelogue diverges from Haller’s norm of other reports. Whereas a genuine report is concerned mainly with the subject of its investigation and, therefore, concentrates rather on this subject than its author’s experience, in the travel report, this author’s experience *is* the subject of the report, so that travel report authors can step back from the centre of interest only to a limited degree. One can describe the interior of a hut or a tent or create the image of a train station in the early hours without reference to oneself, one can give certain facts about places, buildings or people, but otherwise, the travel reporter’s subjective experience remains central.

—140— For the same reason, the use of the present tense in a travel report is problematic because its topics are events which may have a commonly valid character but were experienced only once, before they are narrated. Thus, the use of the past tense is the genre’s commonly accepted tense. In this respect, the travelogue reveals its close relationship to the memoir, which, in the German tradition,<sup>20</sup> serves to connect a person’s life to the socio-political situation at the time rather than solely constructing this person’s personal

<sup>18</sup> Wie kann ich als Autor dem Leser, der meinem Kulturkreis angehört und mein Weltbild, meine Normen und Traditionen teilt, die fremde Welt vermitteln?

<sup>19</sup> Die Wahrnehmung des Reisenden kann nie objektiv sein, ist immer gewissen Bedingungen unterworfen.

<sup>20</sup> For this statement, I have compared Schwalm’s definition in the *Metzler Literatur Lexikon* (2007), which is the most important literary dictionary in Germany, to the one in Cuddon’s *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1999), which has a corresponding position in the English-speaking academia. Whereas Cuddon’s definition of memoir only refers to the articles “autobiography” and “Diaries and Journals” (504, see also 63-7 and 220-2, Schwalm emphasizes the differences and

the location of an individual biography within the greater context of public and historical meaning; memories are about a person’s participation in corresponding events, not about reconstructing an individual development (Schwalm 489).

[[d]ie Einordnung der individuellen Lebensgeschichte in größere Zusammenhänge von öffentlicher oder geschichtlicher Tragweite; es geht um die Darstellung der Teilhabe eines Einzelnen [...] an solchen Ereignissen, nicht um die Rekonstruktion einer individuellen Entwicklungsgeschichte.]

Furthermore, according to Schwalm, a memoir could be written by another person (ibid).

Therefore, this genre is closer to the requirements of the journalistic genres than the autobiographical genres are in general.

development. In contrast to this, reporters' lives are not necessarily present in their works although their status as eye-witnesses supports this. Therefore, one could say that contemporary (travel) reports connect the journalistic genre to the autobiographical by intermingling points of view.

In this respect, Boswell's work corresponds to all points made by Haller: Boswell tells his *Tour* in an entertaining, vivid and sensual manner which involves his readers even after more than 200 years. He was an eye-witness to all the situations he recalls, and the information which he gives is embedded in the situation – and, therefore, necessary – and it is often based on his and Johnson's experiences. It is, however, not didactical in the sense that Boswell wants to teach his new discoveries or insights to his readers. Rather, his descriptions are *exempla* which allow the readers to recognize the general situation. Nevertheless, the readers are intrigued by the experience of such adventures, even if these are only second-hand experiences.

The encounters with locals may serve as an example. Boswell and Johnson visit an old Highland lady at her home:

—141—  
When we had advanced a good way by the side of Lochness, I perceived a little hut, with an old looking woman at the door of it. [...] It was a wretched little hovel of earth only, I think, and for a window only had a small hole [...] In the middle of the room [...] was a fire of peat, the smoke going out at a hole in the roof. She had a pot upon it, with goat's flesh, boiling. [...]

Dr. Johnson was curious where she slept [but] would not hurt her delicacy [...] I [...] went into the place where the bed was. There was a little partition of wicker [...], and close by the wall was a kind of bedstead of wood with heath upon it [...] The woman's name was Fraser [...] They had five children, the eldest only thirteen [, sixty goats and] a few foals. We were informed that they lived all spring without meal, upon milk and curds and whey alone. What they *get* for their goats, kids, and fowls, *maintains* them during the rest of the year (Boswell 231-2, emphasis added).

The information which Boswell gives about the Fraser family is, in part, in the present tense, and what appears as past tense can also be read as reported speech. Another interpretation is to regard the present as general information or atemporal truth whereas the remains of the passage is a general report with the "I think" in the first paragraph as a sign of doubt at the time of writing. Although Boswell acts in the scene, the Fraser family is central, so that this passage fulfils the requirements of Haller's description. Their way of life is reported for the middle and

upper class members of literary London's and Edinburgh's circles; so the travelogues' function of Haller's overcoming social and local barriers by transferring knowledge is fulfilled, too. The anecdote is lively; especially Dr Johnson's being taken for a scoundrel (very likely one of Boswell's flashbulb memories) adds to this effect.

Having entered the travellers' focus in the pre-Romantic 1760s, a process in which Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* certainly had its share, too (see Bell 153), accounts of people met along the way are an essential part of travelogues, even nowadays. The locals are approached by the travellers themselves, and these meetings generally are unique. Boswell tells his readers who he and Johnson, specifically, met with, and what impression they received from what they saw. His descriptions no longer serve to collect data methodically, but as *exempla* to reveal to the readers, for example, what kinds of habitation the travellers visited. "Boswell [...] was a connoisseur of situations. Here was the prospect of a whole series of situations of hitherto undreamed-of picturesqueness" (Krutch 413). Furthermore, the information given is meant to inspire imagination. Boswell manages to transport his gentile London and Edinburgh readers to a small Highland family dwelling. Therefore, he writes according to principles established in today's reports. Surprisingly, this connection of a sentimental journey to contemporary journalism is hardly alluded to in literary studies on the subject.

Boorman and McGregor work similarly:

We wanted to see where the kids lived and came across [...] a cluster of huts [...]. these were pole-walled, the gaps filled with wattle and daub and the roofs thatched. [Ruby's] family invited us for breakfast. There were two women, [...] and a guy in a blue jacket, wellies and a scarf. [...] There was a little fire going, the circular room dark, though with the door open and the windows there was enough light to make out a zigzag pattern on the walls and hand prints made by the children. Shelves had been cut and held various pots. [...]

The tea was superb, [...] with the bread and spicy paste it was a good breakfast. A family in Ethiopia: this was why we were here, to meet the people, see how they lived and share a meal with them (McGregor 197-8).

Again, the hut, the family's invitation, and the breakfast serve as *exempla* of the typical African hospitality the team encountered. Dodwell's descriptions of Kirghiz and Kazakh yurts (Dodwell 35-6, 102-3) resemble the descriptions by Boswell and McGregor, so one can say that such descriptions have become a well-established element of contemporary travelogues. Likewise, the different persons presented in the reports of Boorman's and McGregor's UNICEF

visits represent the whole group the visit is concerned with. In this respect, Boswell has set a Voßkamp prototype to which Boorman and McGregor react. Similar examples may be found in the works of Paul Theroux (e.g. 178, 321-3), Bill Bryson (150-1) and Christina Dodwell (e.g. 31, 66, 79-80, 91-2). Here is another example from the *Traveller in China* which works similarly to the one from the *Tour* given above:

My walks were also the only opportunities I got for washing my face and hands, a custom that my hosts didn't seem to use. I could see why Wang [who had given me a lift] had said that Tibetans are dirty people. The cold is not the only reason why they seldom wash. Some believe that not washing saves them from being turned into fishes after their death, or that spring water contains evil spirits because it comes from inside the earth where the female principle rules. The water only becomes good if it is exposed to sun and air, part of the male upper world. There's probably a logical reason for this belief. Actually the problem of smell is not so bad in winter when the weather freezes and the rancid butterfat [sic] in their clothes helps to keep the people warm (Dodwell 105).

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Dodwell first narrates her personal experience and then adds an explanatory comment which serves to transform her personal experience into general knowledge and to transport some of her newly acquired knowledge to her readers. As a journalist, Dodwell is more aware of this generic requirement than are Boorman and McGregor; we must not forget that they most likely intended to write an adventure tale rather than compose an educational report. In Boswell's case one can assume that the difference between a Scottish peasant family and an English one was not so vast that he had to overcome high levels of newness with his descriptions and anecdotes.

Theroux follows the same principles as Dodwell, which is, however, not so obvious:

The trains in any country contain the essential paraphernalia of the culture: Thai trains have the shower jar with the glazed dragon on its side, Ceylonese ones the car reserved for Buddhist monks, Indian ones a vegetarian kitchen and six classes, Iranian ones prayer mats, Malaysian ones a noodle stall, Vietnamese ones bulletproof glass on the locomotive, and on every carriage of a Russian train there is a samowar. The railway bazaar, with its gadgets and passengers, represented the society so completely that to board it was to be challenged by the national character (Theroux 209).

Theroux also experienced the peculiarities of the trains in every country which he visited because he used these trains. Therefore he, too, generalizes from his own experience but because his generalization is taken out of the context of the actual travelling experience, the information-carrying character of this passage loses its connection to the experienced events.

### Conclusion

With the freedom of choosing which information to give, both Boswell and Boorman/McGregor have the opportunity to create emotional impressions. Be it “[t]o see Dr Samuel Johnson, the great champion of the English Tories, salute Miss Flora Macdonald in the isle of Sky” (Boswell 265) or “Charley Boorman [on his motorbike] and behind him a fucking pyramid” (McGregor 129); the readers are impressed to be witnesses to such an improbability. However, although both authors may have been aware of this, they still had to concentrate on the situation. Neither could Boswell drop out of the conversation with reverence nor could McGregor risk a road accident. Therefore, these reports were likely reformed during the writing process with the use of memories thrown into relief by the temporal distance to the original scene. This does not only correspond to what the authors experienced as true while writing, it also increases the readers’ excitement while they imagine being there with the travellers.

To sum up, the results of my investigation are the following:

Boswell’s *Tour* was composed on the foundation of three factors which are necessary conditions for the travelogue to transform towards the contemporary travel report: First; with descriptive predecessors given, a focus on the events of the actual journey was possible, second; Locke’s, Hume’s, and especially Rousseau’s Romantic concepts of memory increased the importance of memories as structuring elements, and third; Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey* introduced both subjectivity and emotional involvement to the travelogue. Boswell uses techniques which have become typical of contemporary journalistic travelogues, such as interviews with locals, the inclusion of descriptions only in order to highlight the situation described, references to the journey as such, the mood among the companions, accommodation, food, means of travel, etc. These techniques correspond to Haller’s requirements of a journalistic report, from which the travelogue only diverges by the use of the past tense and the reporter’s more central position. This makes Boswell’s *Tour* a prototype for later travelogues such as *The Great Railway Bazaar*, *A Traveller in China*, *Down Under* or *Long Way Down*.

Furthermore, many events described in these travelogues owe their vividness and suitability for narration to flashbulb memories, which are transformed into sentimental journeys with their highly emotional impact and strong recollection when remembered. These characteristics make

flashbulb memories excellent material for exciting stories which, in accordance with the (reading) audience of the report, enable Boswell's and Boorman/McGregor's readers to mentally (intellectually and emotionally) participate in the journey about which they read.

Another influence on the narration of these events is that they likely are once recorded (diary, voice recorder, film, etc.), and often repeated orally, so that they have been rehearsed into a verbal pattern even before they are written down for publication. Because travel accounts are based on the respective journeys it will be relatively easy to guarantee a certain accuracy as to the narratives' when, who, and where while the travellers' subjective memory, albeit often tending towards accuracy, can – and should – not be questioned in terms of truth; because they are often highly emotional for the narrators, they have a certain truth value as experiences of the journey.

Since I deliberately limited my approach to the investigation of well reflected memories in accounts written from a certain distance to the respective journeys, I had to omit such contemporary forms of travelogue as the internet travel blog, which generally gives its account of experiences only shortly after their occurrence. However, it would be interesting in which ways, especially with regard to emotions, experiences likely to turn into flashbulbs later are presented, especially enlightening would be the comparison of a travel blog and a written account published some time afterwards. Not only would such a study enrich the theoretical work on travel literature, it would also add to the psychological investigation of literature and memory in general.

Even Assmann (107) cannot answer unambiguously whether personal memories are true or not. On the one hand, given the psychological results discussed, we can assume, however, that they have a truth value, which is subjective, nevertheless. On the other hand, one may question if such travelogues need to be completely accurate, with information so easily obtainable from somewhere else. As long as there are entertaining stories and they transport no crass errors concerning geography, ethnicity, etc., one should accept travel reports at face value. This includes strong propositions like Boorman's concerning the supposed dangers in Africa and the warnings they had received in advance: "All that is bullshit" (McGregor 234, Boorman 320). Such statements are based on experience, and this should suffice as proof of their truth.

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**BIO**

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## *Awkward one-armed babas: Ūrdhvabāhu* Hindu Ascetics in Western Imagination

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines representations of Hindu *ūrdhvabāhu* ascetics in Western writings, through close readings of fiction and non-fictional writings from the pre-colonial period to the present times. These *ūrdhvabāhu* ascetics keep one or both of their arms held perpetually aloft as part of their austerity. They thereby maim themselves in the process. Most Western writers not only mock this ascetic practice but also represent it as something evil. Yet Western imagination manifests a strange preoccupation with it, since Western writers return to this topic again and again. If this type of Hindu austerity is indeed irrational and iniquitous, why do Western writers frequently return to this topic? Why were *ūrdhvabāhu* ascetics stereotyped as evil in pre-colonial and colonial texts? Why is it chosen over other types of equally severe Hindu austerities to represent the Indians' need for Western enlightenment? This article tries to suggest answers to these questions

### KEYWORDS

Hindu, *sadhus*, *tapasya*, *ūrdhvabāhu*, spike-lying, negative stereotyping, Western representation.

I begin with an example from the not-too-distant past. On 18 July 2017, the e-zine *Freak Lore* published a report on the Hindu ascetic or *sadhu* Amar Bharati. This *saiva sadhu*<sup>1</sup> has managed to keep his right hand raised perpetually aloft in a fixed position for a span of 43 years (Larch n.p.).<sup>2</sup> Such an incredible feat naturally attracts attention, and one finds that the Anglo-American media has continued to focus on Amar Bharati for some time now. He was mentioned as early as in 2001, in a report by Luke Harding in *The Guardian*. Harding was the first to use the word “awkward” in connection with his peculiar ascetic practice (Harding n.p.). Since 2001, Western<sup>3</sup> interest in Amar Bharati’s peculiar ascetic practice has remained undiminished. Thus one finds that the *Yahoo! News Australia* had published a feature on him on 19 September 2011. It was followed by James Plafke’s article on the same topic in the online entertainment news site *Mary Sue* on the very next day. Today, one comes across dozens of reports on this “one-armed baba<sup>4</sup>” and his ‘peculiar’ austerity on the internet.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, most of these are Anglo-American in origin.

Nothing seems surprising in Western fascination with such an extraordinary feat of austerity. However, one should not lose sight of two facts. First, Western media reports on Amar Bharati’s austerity are generally sardonic in tone - if not outright disparaging.<sup>6</sup> For instance, the journalist Luke Harding likens *sadhu* Amar Bharati to “a schoolboy with a persistent and awkward query” (Harding n.p.). Subsequent Western writers have readily appropriated Harding’s cynical simile. Plafke, for one, imagines these “one-armed babas” as schoolboys “forever asking for permission to speak in class” (Plafke n.p.). It may be argued that in comparing “one-armed” *sadhus* with schoolboys, the writers merely intended to be amusing rather than sarcastic. But one needs to remember that Western colonial powers had widely employed the strategy of infantilizing racial *others* in the preceding centuries (see for instance, Greenberger 42). Consequently, such comparisons are bound to reinforce the stereotype of the infantile Hindu Indians in Western minds.<sup>7</sup> As Stuart Hall insightfully observed, “meanings ‘float’” but

<sup>1</sup> A *saiva* or *shaiva* is a Hindu devoted to Lord Shiva. A *sadhu* is an ascetic (translated by the author).

<sup>2</sup> *Sadhu* Amar Bharati has maintained in his various interviews that he has kept his right hand raised aloft since 1973 (“Man Raises Arm” n.p.; Larch n.p.).

<sup>3</sup> In this paper, “the West” stands for a discursive construct. It has less to do with geography. Today, the West has come to stand for the ‘developed’ nations as distinguished from the ‘underdeveloped’ ones.

<sup>4</sup> Etymologically, the word *baba* is a word of Persian origin. Among other things, it means “a holy man” (*Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* 94). The term is used as honorific for Hindu, Muslim and Sikh ascetics in South Asia.

<sup>5</sup> In this article I have mentioned just a few of these reports on *sadhu* Amar Bharati to illustrate my point.

<sup>6</sup> One may contrast such reports with those appearing in Indian news sites. For instance, one may consider the report by Sanchari Bhattacharya and Reuben N V published on 6 April 2010 in Rediff.com.

<sup>7</sup> Incidentally, Indian journalists covering the same topic eschew such comparisons. One may think for instance of the report in Rediff.com by Sanchari Bhattacharya and Reuben N V, published in 6 April 2010. In all likelihood, Indian journalists more readily notice the negative stereotyping implicit in such comparisons. Or, are they simply mindful of their readers’ sentiments?

“representational practices” attempt to privilege one over the others (Hall 228). There is another fact that needs to be taken into consideration here. Amar Bharati is certainly not the only Hindu ascetic to practice this form of austerity. Known as *ūrdhvacāhu*,<sup>8</sup> Hindu ascetics in India have practiced it since time immemorial. Nor is Amar Bharati the first one to be known in the West for practicing such severe austerity. This article will show that the West had known about this practice at least from the seventeenth century, if not earlier. It was described in several nineteenth and twentieth century colonial texts. The continued focus on *ūrdhvacāhu* at this later date therefore puzzles us. Why do Western writers keep returning to this particular type of austerity, when they evidently fail to see its significance? More importantly, why do these writers focus on *this* particular type of austerity when Hindu ascetics are known to practice other equally severe ones? In short, why does the West find *ūrdhvacāhu* so appealing or appalling? This article seeks to suggest answers to these questions.

In this article I examine how Western writers have imagined *ūrdhvacāhu* since the seventeenth century.<sup>9</sup> While some scholars like Benita Parry and Rianne Siebenga have previously focused on negative stereotyping of Indian ascetics<sup>10</sup> in general, no specific attention has ever been paid to popular Western representations of Hindu ascetic practices. This is strange, as Hindu austerities, particularly the more severe ones, continue to attract attention abroad. Specifically, as discussed earlier, *ūrdhvacāhu* continues to intrigue Western writers even in our age. Though Hindu ascetics practice other types of austerities, this and ‘spike lying’ has received the most attention in the West so far. Recognizing that a knowledge gap exists in this field, the article tries to examine and account for the negative stereotyping of *ūrdhvacāhu* ascetics in Western writings.

This article traces the roots of contemporary Western writers’ obsession with this form of Hindu austerity, usually perceived outside India as shocking and horrific. To do this, it examines Western accounts of *ūrdhvacāhu* ascetics from the pre-colonial and the colonial era. In the process it tries to explain why some Western writers remain so engrossed with this type of austerity, when it is only one of the several forms of corporeal mortifications practiced by Hindu holy men and women. It is my contention that representations of *ūrdhvacāhu* as an ascetic practice in Western writings are not free of ideological underpinnings. As I see it, it is reductive to understand the stock Western response to *ūrdhvacāhu* as having its foundation *solely* in religious prejudices. While such prejudices may have sometimes coloured Western perception of

<sup>8</sup> From Sanskrit *urdhva* meaning “upper” and *bahu* meaning “hand/arm” (translated by the author).

<sup>9</sup> To the best of my knowledge, descriptions of *ūrdhvacāhu sadhus* do not appear in Western writings before the seventeenth century. However, as this article goes on to show, Indian ascetics had captivated Western imagination at least from the time of Alexander the Great.

<sup>10</sup> Both Hindu *sadhus* and Muslim *fakirs*.

Hindu ascetic practices, it is also to be kept in mind that Western missionaries and preachers in India have now and again adopted the guise of Hindu ascetics to spread their religion. For instance, one may recall the story of the seventeenth century missionary Roberto de Nobili (1577 – 1656). He lived like a Hindu ascetic and became famous as the “Italian Brahmin” (Pillai 3 - 6). It is no small matter that even Pope Gregory XV sanctioned de Nobili’s practice in 1623. But, as Pillai points out, his opponents inside the church felt that “conversion meant conversion into a European frame” and ultimately managed to frustrate his strategy (Pillai 6). Pillai thus shows that what many Western missionaries sought to preach in India was not simply Christianity, but *Western Christianity*. This again reflects that prejudices, stemming from a superiority complex, often became more important than religious considerations. Nobili was not the only Western preacher to pose as a Hindu ascetic. The nineteenth century author G. O. Trevelyan has written about German Lutheran missionaries who lived unostentatiously like ascetics amidst the rural Indians to gain converts (Trevelyan 386). Peter van der Veer informs that Frederick Booth-Tucker, who ushered the Salvation Army in India in 1882, also posed as a Hindu *sadhu* (van der Veer 153 – 54).<sup>11</sup> These are just a few examples. But they do show that religious prejudice could not have been the only determining factor behind negative stereotyping of Hindu ascetic practices in Western writings. It cannot be denied that the Christian missionaries and preachers mentioned above were unsympathetic to Hinduism.<sup>12</sup> However, they clearly did not see the *sadhus*, and their way of life, as evil. Otherwise, they would not have posed as Hindu *sadhus* even for the sake of gaining converts. By posing as *sadhus* they seem to have tacitly acknowledged their devotion; although they could not, as Christian missionaries, have approved of the objects of that devotion. Keeping all these considerations in mind, I read in Western writers’ repeated return to *urdhvabhu* a conscious strategy of highlighting otherness. To put it simply, *urdhvabāhu*, as many Western writers’ treat it, becomes a marker of alterity that serves to distinguish the ‘developed’ Western countries from the ‘underdeveloped’ ones.<sup>13</sup> To prove this point, this article will proceed to concentrate on representations of *urdhvabāhu* ascetics in some nineteenth and early twentieth century fictions by European authors. Literary works are chosen because writers of fiction are usually mindful of their readers’ expectations to ensure commercial success of their works. Consequently, they often straightforwardly reflect popular prejudices. The article will go on to consider another stock image of severe Hindu austerity in colonial

<sup>11</sup> Peter van der Veer points out that the Salvation Army “irritated respectable colonial officialdom” and was regarded as “a racial embarrassment in India” by the British colonizers (van der Veer 154-55). Again, it was their ‘turning native’, and forsaking the Western way of life, that the colonizers resented.

<sup>12</sup> Roberto de Nobili, for instance, condemned the *Vedas* as “ridiculous legends and stories” (Pillai 5).

<sup>13</sup> India, in this particular case.

literature, namely *śaṅkuṣī*<sup>14</sup> or lying/sitting on a bed of nails. By showing how these two types of austerities received dissimilar treatments in Western writings, the article will highlight that religious differences were never the main considerations of European writers when they condemned *ūrdhvaḥu* ascetics. Otherwise, *śaṅkuṣī* would have drawn the same criticism from Western writers as *ūrdhvaḥu*. Finally, the article will try to answer why, even today, Western writers continue to disparage *ūrdhvaḥu* as an ascetic practice even when they are not apparently compelled to defend and justify Western colonialism like their nineteenth and twentieth century predecessors.

A brief insight into Hindu ascetic practices will help us understand this matter more clearly. The Sanskrit word for austerity is *tapas* or *tapasya*. One who practices austerity is a *tapasvin* (Walker 79). The word comes from the root *tap*, which denotes “heat”. It refers to the heat generated by austerities (Walker 79; Kaelber 343).<sup>15</sup> Benjamin Walker correctly understands *tapas* as an active effort to acquire merit or spiritual power (Walker 79). He distinguishes it from its passive counterpart *tyāga*, which signifies renunciation (Walker 78-79).<sup>16</sup> *Tapasya* is therefore not to be confused with the idea of penance for sin, though the word is often mistranslated as “penance” in English.<sup>17</sup> To accrue merit or gain spiritual powers, the ascetics or *tapasvins* perform different types of difficult austerities. Sometimes, these involve corporeal mortifications.<sup>18</sup> One particularly difficult *tapasya* is *ūrdhvaḥu* which involves keeping one or both hands perpetually lifted aloft. As might be imagined, this practice is very painful in its initial stages. Moreover, the raised limb gradually loses its functionality through muscle atrophy. In short, this can be seen as a type of self-maiming. Likewise, *śaṅkuṣī* is another difficult *tapasya* where the practitioner is required to lie or sit on a bed of spikes. But these are not the only severe austerities practiced by Hindu holy men. Besides *ūrdhvaḥu* and *śaṅkuṣī*, one comes across other kinds of severe austerities - like being immersed in water for days or weeks; standing or sitting in one spot for years; standing permanently upright, while leaning on a staff; or keeping the fists permanently closed till the nails grow into the flesh (Walker 79-80).<sup>19</sup> Thus, one may easily see that *tapasya*, as a process of acquiring merit or spiritual powers, finds no parallel in the

<sup>14</sup> *Śaṅkuṣī* means “spike-lying” (Walker 79).

<sup>15</sup> The word *tapas*, however, has a lot of other connotations in Vedic literature. For a detailed discussion, see Kaelber.

<sup>16</sup> Kaelber also stresses on the active, voluntary nature of asceticism denoted by the word *tapas* (Kaelber 344).

<sup>17</sup> For instance, the colonial officer Jonathan Duncan translates it as ‘penance’ (Duncan *sic passim*).

<sup>18</sup> It is necessary to understand that *tapasya* does not necessarily involve self-mortification or self-mutilation. For instance, *tapasvins* known as *munis* merely take the vow of perpetual silence. Then there are itinerant ascetics whose austerity lies in bathing in as many sacred bathing places as possible (Walker 79).

<sup>19</sup> The eighteenth century ascetic Pran Puri had mentioned eighteen types of *tapasya*, when interviewed by Jonathan Duncan (“The Travels of Pran-Puri” 263-64). Walker’s account fairly corresponds with his.

West. It is indeed true that some forms of severe self-mortification like self-flagellation have historically existed, and still exist, among some Christian sects (Courtney 754-55).<sup>20</sup> However, the difference lies in the perceived ends of such exercises. While atonement for sins and “the impetration of divine graces and favours” form the usual motives behind self-flagellation (Courtney 755), for *tapasya* the intentions are generally accruing merit or gaining spiritual/magical powers (Walker 79).<sup>21</sup>

The unfamiliar nature of Hindu *tapasya* understandably makes it an object of curiosity for the inhabitants of Europe and America. However, what strikes one is the tone of derision in most contemporary Western accounts of Hindu ascetic practices. Of course, it is generally difficult to understand the rationale behind self-mutilation. But one may also reflect that a degree of self-mutilation exists even in modern Western popular culture, if only as ‘harmless’ body piercing or tattooing. It is germane to note here that Western response to Indian asceticism<sup>22</sup> was not as censorious in ancient times as it is today. Since Alexander’s invasion of the North-Western part of the subcontinent, *gymnosophists* or naked philosophers of India become well known in the West (Oman 85). These “philosophers” must have undoubtedly been Indian ascetics or *sadhus*.<sup>23</sup> Alexander himself reportedly honoured and conversed with them (Parmar 144). Certainly, to the Greeks, who had their own self-mortifying philosophers like Diogenes, Indian asceticism did not appear very unseemly. Strabo, the Greek Geographer, approved Indian austerities as a way of practicing endurance (Parmar 151). Even the early Medieval Europe was fascinated by tales of Indian ascetics and their austerities. Bhagban Prakash believes that the word *Rahman*, which implies an austere Christian in Ukranian and Russian, is a corruption of the Sanskrit word *Brahmana*<sup>24</sup> (Prakash 7). This assumption may or may not be correct. But it is certain that

<sup>20</sup> I am aware that the idea of self-conquest is implicit in both Christian and Hindu practices of self-mortification. Thus Christian and Hindu austerities may have more in common than is immediately apparent. Authors like John Campbell Oman detect some similarities between Christian and Hindu ideals of self-mortification (Oman 24). But this is a different area of investigation, and entirely beyond the scope of the present paper.

<sup>21</sup> The *tapasvins* themselves give different reasons for their *tapasya*. Pran Puri observes, “As to the fruits or consequences, God alone is thoroughly acquainted therewith” (“The Travels of Pran-Puri” 264). Amar Bharati mentioned “world peace” as his goal (Bhattacharya and Reuben n.p.). But Walker, who bases his understanding on the scriptures themselves, is not wrong when he writes that *tapasyas* are often performed to accrue merit or gain spiritual/psychic powers.

<sup>22</sup> I prefer to use the term “Indian asceticism” as opposed to “Hindu asceticism” here. For one thing, Hindu, as a term of self-identification, may not have been in use at that period. David Lorenzen believes that Hindu identity formed between 1200 and 1500 (see, Lorenzen, “Who Invented Hinduism”, 631). Secondly, the ascetics whom the Greeks had met may have included Hindus, Jains and Buddhists. So it is improper to use the word ‘Hindu’ here.

<sup>23</sup> As Oman points out, Greek and Roman accounts reveal that the self-mortifications practiced by the ancient Indian *gymnosophists* were “very similar to, though probably not as severe as, those practiced in India at later periods” (Oman 85).

<sup>24</sup> Frequently anglicised as Brahmin. The Brahmins are a Hindu class who specialize as priests and educators. While a Hindu ascetic need not necessarily be a Brahmin by birth, Brahmins are enjoined by scriptures to practice austerity as spiritual preceptors.

medieval European texts do reflect a certain regard for the simple life of Indian ascetics.

Western views on Hindu asceticism began to change with increasing familiarity. As European visitors and fortune-seekers began to pour in the Indian subcontinent in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, the West had the opportunity to study Hindu ascetics and their austerities first hand. Strangely, greater familiarity did not breed unbiased views. While a few old misconceptions were certainly discarded, new prejudices developed in their place. Oman tries to make light of this matter by observing, “Distortion arising from ignorance and prejudices is unavoidably present in all pictures of an alien civilization drawn by visitors coming from countries remote both geographically and intellectually” (Oman 84). However, in case of countries like India, we now know that such ‘distortions’ were also strategically constructed and articulated. The aim was to construct Western self-identity by distinguishing the ‘progressive’ Europeans (and later the Americans) from the so called ‘backward’ Asians. As Ronald Inden points out, “India has played a part in the making of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe (and America)” by serving as a receptacle for all those negative traits which the Euro-Americans wanted to externalize from themselves (Inden 3). Seventeenth century writings of early European expatriates in India provide ample evidences in support of this fact. Such works are usually prejudiced against Hindu *sadhus*, who are represented as evil and licentious. Their ascetic practices are treated as signs of their depravity and otherness. For instance, the seventeenth century gem trader and traveller Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605-1689) portrays the Hindu ascetics as evil libertines.<sup>25</sup> He writes, “For being revered as saints, they had abundant opportunities of doing whatsoever evil they wished” (Tavernier, vol. II, 198). The gem trader even suggests that the Hindu ascetics took advantage of the believers’ credulity to seduce their wives behind their backs (Tavernier, vol. II, 201-202). This will become a recurring anecdote in subsequent European and American polemics against Hindu *sadhus*. Tavernier does express some wonder at the severity of the *fakirs*’ austerities, declaring that these “amount to prodigies” (Tavernier, vol. II, 195).<sup>26</sup> But he also points out that the ascetics perform their “horrible penances” in the hope of obtaining an exalted rebirth (Tavernier, vol. II, 204). Thus, in his view, Hindu ascetics are both evil and irrational. Interestingly, the author describes the ascetics in *urdhvabāhu* posture more than those performing other kinds of austerities (Tavernier, vol. II, 200-201). It thus seems to top

<sup>25</sup> Very curiously, Tavernier identifies Hindu ascetics as followers of Ravana (Tavernier, vol. II, 196). Ravana was the demon king of Lanka and the main antagonist in the epic *Ramayana*. One can only guess how Tavernier came to this weird conclusion. But given Ravana’s ill-repute in most parts of India, Tavernier’s linking the ascetics with him is indeed suggestive.

<sup>26</sup> A *fakir* or *faqir* is a Muslim ascetic (translated by the author). However, the Europeans seldom made a distinction between Hindu *sadhus* and Muslim *fakirs* and instead use the word *fakir* as a generic term for all ascetics in the sub-continent.

Tavernier's list of "horrible penances". This is probably because he sees it as the most difficult type - "one of the greatest torments which the human body can suffer" (Tavernier, vol. II, 201).

Tavernier's polemic against Hindu ascetics appears much mellowed when compared with that of his contemporary and compatriot Francois Bernier's (1620-1688). Bernier was a physician and a traveller who first served the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh and then the court of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. As Zubrzycki recognizes, Bernier's reaction was one of open disgust (Zubrzycki 125). He finds the ascetics, or *fakires*<sup>27</sup> as he calls them, "vegetative rather than rational beings", "destitute of piety", and full of "brutality and ignorance" (Bernier 236). Again, it is the practice of *ūrdhvaḥhu* that draws his strongest condemnation. Bernier writes,

No *Fury* (sic) in the infernal regions can be conceived more horrible than the *Jauguis*<sup>28</sup>, with their naked and black skin, long hair, spindle arms, long twisted nails, and fixed in the posture which I have mentioned (Bernier 235).

It might appear that Bernier's animosity towards Hindu ascetics stems solely from his religious prejudices. But we need to keep in mind that Indian ascetics were not the only ones to come under Bernier's criticism. His narratives were dedicated to his patrons, the French king and nobility. Therefore, one of Bernier's concerns was to present India in a poorer light when compared to France. Though visiting India during the height of Mughal prosperity, he tries to dismiss the reports of the emperor's affluence through ingenious arguments (Bernier *sic passim*). His polemics against Hindu ascetics therefore can be seen as an extension of his attacks against the Indians in general. However, the most interesting fact is that both Tavernier and Bernier single out *ūrdhvaḥhu* as the severest form of austerity, even when they describe other equally difficult ascetic practices in their works. In fact, Bernier clearly associates *ūrdhvaḥhu* with evil, as his comparison of *ūrdhvaḥhu* ascetics with furies "in the infernal region" shows. This article will go on to demonstrate that subsequent colonial writers of fiction followed him in equating *ūrdhvaḥhu* with evil. It will also try to explain why *ūrdhvaḥhu* has come to acquire such ill repute in contemporary Western eyes.

It may be argued here that whatever other reasons Tavernier and Bernier might have had for criticizing Hindu beliefs, Western imperialist ideology could not have been one of them. One may recall that these European travellers had visited India at a time when the Mughal power was at its zenith. Seeing the splendour of the court of Aurangzeb, no seventeenth century observer could have guessed that India would bow to European supremacy just a century later. But it is also to be kept in mind that European conquest of foreign territories had already begun two

<sup>27</sup> Evidently a corruption of *fakir*. But Bernier has in mind the Hindu ascetics.

<sup>28</sup> A corruption of *yogi*. A *yogi* is a practitioner of *yoga* (translated by the author). Here, Bernier uses it as a generic term for all Hindu ascetics.

centuries earlier. Both Tavernier and Bernier were convinced of European military superiority. Thus, even when the Mughal power was at its height, Bernier could reflect:

I could never see these soldiers [in Indian armies], destitute of order, and marching with the irregularity of a herd of animals, without reflecting upon the ease with which five-and-twenty thousand of our veterans from the army in *Flanders*, commanded by *Prince Conde* or *Marshal Turenne*, would overcome these armies, however numerous (Bernier 43).

And Tavernier in his memoir recounts the fantastic story of browbeating the Mughal governor Shaista Khan with threat of a French naval invasion if the governor refused to pay off his debt to him (Tavernier, vol. I, 310). Whether this tale is true or not is a different matter. The point is that both these French authors were conscious of European military strength which allowed them to be chauvinistic even at that early period. Though colonialism was yet to take its root in India, a sense of superiority prevailed among the European expatriates during that time - as the writings of these two authors show.

—158— Tavernier and Bernier were not the only early European writers who have described the *ūrdhvaḥāhu* ascetics in their works. Eighteenth and nineteenth century English writers like James Forbes, William Ward, and Bishop Reginald Heber have also described these ascetics in their writings. As Oman has shown, their attitude towards this type of ascetic practice was always scornful and dismissive (Oman 91-95). However, as Zubrzycki correctly points out, it was Jonathan Duncan's accounts of the ascetics Prakashnand and Pran Puri which shaped "Western perceptions of India's ascetics for decades to come" (Zubrzycki 119-120).<sup>29</sup> While Prakashnand practiced lying on a bed of nails, Pran Puri kept both his arms raised up perpetually over his head. Jonathan Duncan was the British Resident at Benares when he met these two ascetics in 1792. He noted down their stories, which he later published in *Asiatic Researches* in 1799. A more elaborate account of Pran Puri's story was published anonymously by Duncan in *The European Magazine* in two instalments in April-May 1810.<sup>30</sup> These accounts are important because these allow two Hindu ascetics to narrate their own stories for the first time. However, one must also recognize that Duncan's translations filter these testimonies before they reach us. Of these two, the account in *Asiatic Researches* is remarkable in being free of value judgement. Duncan does ask Prakashnand if his 'penance' was for the atonement of any crime (Duncan 51), thereby showing that he failed to understand the idea of *tapasya*. But he criticizes neither Pran Puri nor Prakashnand in this account. On the contrary, he seems to express some wonderment at

<sup>29</sup> Duncan renders the names as "Praun Poory" and "Perkasanund" (Duncan *sic passim*). In this work, I have used contemporary spellings for the sake of clarity.

<sup>30</sup> I am indebted to Zubrzycki for the data (Zubrzycki 119-122).

Prakashnand's endurance and fortitude. He observes that despite practicing such a difficult austerity, the ascetic seems contented and enjoys "good health and spirits" (Duncan 49). However, Duncan's attitude to Pran Puri and his ascetic practice is more ambivalent. In *Asiatic Researches* he describes Pran Puri approvingly as being the more intelligent and well informed of the two (Duncan 46). On the other hand, the account of Pran Puri in *The European Magazine* contains a long interesting footnote which implicitly condemns Hindu asceticism. The whole passage may be cited:

That men can voluntarily devote themselves to such penances is very extraordinary, and shews into what extravagance human nature, stimulated by enthusiasm, will diverge.

The Indian casts (sic) fought for the truth

Of th' Liliput and Monkey's tooth.

But still these inane controversies were not, philosophically speaking, so absurd as the personal inflictions of which the wide extended regions of Hindostan afford, alas! too many instances. Among the most prominent is the one that we are contemplating, in which the *sufferer* (sic), who should be termed *the patient* (sic), thinks that the most meritorious service he can, in the eyes of the divine Providence, perform is to keep his arms over his head in the position which the cut will explain ("The Travels of Pran-Puri" 262-63).

Here the *ūrdhva* Indian ascetic is clearly scoffed at. His austerity is seen as a kind of disease, as the word "patient" indicates. Significantly, the footnote ends with a curious appeal to the British East India Company. The writer states:

We know how difficult it is to combat religious prejudices; but surely where the relief of our fellow creatures is at stake, the attempt would be worthy of the enlightened policy and pure benevolence of the East India Company ("The Travels of Pran-Puri" 263).

This is characteristically taking on 'the colonial burden', which involves 'saving' the colonized people from themselves against their will. Here we witness how Western colonizers invoked the ascetic practices of Hindu holy men to justify the colonial mission of 'civilizing' the natives. Incidentally, it was again *ūrdhva* which was chosen over all other types of austerities to highlight the colonized people's 'benighted state' and their need for (Western) enlightenment.

Animosity towards Indian ascetics in general began to increase as British rule expanded in the Indian subcontinent. There are several reasons behind this. The British authorities feared that the itinerant Hindu and Muslim ascetics could work as political spies and spread disaffection

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against British rule (Zubrzycki 161-62). As peripatetic groups, Indian ascetics were difficult to govern or control. Also, groups of Hindu and Muslim ascetics sometimes worked as mercenary soldiers. David Lorenzen shows that these “warrior ascetics” became “a significant presence” in North India by the fifteenth century. The British colonizers feared them, as they could be, and indeed were, used by the Indian rulers to fight against the British (Lorenzen, “Warrior Ascetics”, 61-71). Hindu and Muslim ascetics had actually challenged British rule in Bengal during the so called Fakir and Sannyasi Rebellion (1763-1800). The colonizers had to crush the joint resistance of these ascetics after heavy fighting. Hence, throughout the colonial rule, Indian ascetics were seen as threats to law and order. It was believed that they were in league with all classes of criminals. But above all, the Hindu ascetics were seen as impediments to the Anglicization of the (Hindu) Indians. In *The Competition Wallah* (1864) the author G. O. Trevelyan laments, “What can you do with people who see virtue and merit in the performances of a fakeer?” (Trevelyan 383). Interestingly, Trevelyan did not simply desire the conversion of the Hindu Indians to Christianity. Instead, he longed for their conversion to *Anglican Christianity*. The success of the Roman Catholic Church in India irked Trevelyan, who saw it as being similar to the indigenous non-Christian religions in some of its practices (Trevelyan 380-81). His chauvinism manifests itself in the surprising observation, “[T]here is, perhaps, no country in the world where the devout Roman Catholics are superior in intelligence to the devout Protestants” (Trevelyan 379). It thus becomes evident that, to at least a section of British colonizers, proselytization was not the only goal to achieve. Instead, what they sought was the complete acculturation of the Indian populace. Naturally, these colonizers were inimical to Hindu priests and ascetics whom they saw as obstructions in their way.

British animosity towards Hindu ascetics ensured their negative stereotyping in colonial literature. While scholars like Benita Parry have noted this in passing (Parry 70-76), very few full length studies have been conducted on this topic till now. Interestingly, it is the *ūrdhvbāhu* ascetics who have always served as scapegoats in colonial literature. Parry herself draws our attention to F. E. Penny’s novel *The Swami’s Curse* where an *ūrdhvbāhu* ascetic is presented as the villain (Parry 71-72). There are likewise several other colonial works which villainize the *ūrdhvbāhu sadhus*.

To demonstrate how colonial imagination demonized *ūrdhvbāhu* Hindu ascetics, this article focuses on their representations in three literary works. The texts are chosen as random samples from three different periods. The aim is to show that the negative stereotyping of *ūrdhvbāhu sadhus* in colonial literature did not change with time. Fictional works, as opposed to scholarly writings, are chosen because they readily serve as guides to popular prejudices. Allen Greenberger points out that since these authors were “only vocal members of the public

rather than full-fledged intellectuals, they give a broad picture of how people in general were thinking at a given time” (Greenberger 2). Moreover, one needs to remember that these works were primarily written to make money. Consequently, these had to cater to public expectations to ensure commercial success. As Greenberger observes, “the Indian reality” never influenced the presentation of India and the Indians in these works (Greenberger 6). It is not surprising that such works always present *ūrdhvaḥhu* austerity as something sinister, and often associate it with evil, vice or criminality.

William Browne Hockley’s (1792 - 1860) *Pandurang Hari, or the Memoirs of a Hindoo* is doubtlessly the first novel to depict an *ūrdhvaḥhu* Hindu ascetic. Published in 1826, it is one of the earliest novels written by an expatriate British author in India. Hockley nurtured a rabid hatred against the Indians in general and the Hindus in particular. He never tried to cloak this feeling. In the “Introduction” to the first edition of the novel, he declares, “From the rajah<sup>31</sup> to the ryot<sup>32</sup>, with the intermediate grades, they are ungrateful, insidious, cowardly, unfaithful, and revengeful” (Hockley 22). From Hockley’s words it becomes clear that one cannot expect to find any sympathetic treatment of Indian characters in this novel. Particularly, Hindu ascetics become the main targets of his virulent criticism here. The main antagonist in this novel is Gabbage Gousla, alias Gunput Rao. He poses as an ascetic to spin his webs of intrigue against the eponymous hero and his beloved Sagoonah. However, the author’s malice towards Indian ascetics finds its most bitter expression in his description of the *ūrdhvaḥhu* ascetic. The very description is calculated to evoke a feeling of repugnance:

He seemed a living skeleton, without teeth, and bent double from age and hardship; his hair was long, matted together, and stained purposely of a dirty-brown colour; his nails were as the talons of a bird of prey, and his toes were bowed inwards, while their nails furrowed the earth deeply at every step he took. One hand and arm remained erect over his head ... Pointed upwards from the shoulder to which it belonged, with its shrivelled look, it had the effect of giving its owner a character not belonging to the race of men – strange and supernatural (Hockley 190).

As if this description of his “cadaverous hideousness” was not enough (Hockley 193), the author attempts to further heighten his readers’ aversion by highlighting the mental depravity of this *ūrdhvaḥhu* ascetic. The *sannyasi*<sup>33</sup> makes Gabbage and his son Mahadeo undergo a revolting magic ritual which involves taking mouthfuls of blood and spitting it on the image of Lord Shiva. They were then made to wear sacred threads consecrated with blood (Hockley 190-

<sup>31</sup> *Rajah* or *Raja* means a king (translated by the author).

<sup>32</sup> A *ryot* is a peasant (translated by the author).

<sup>33</sup> *Sannyasi* is another term for a Hindu ascetic (translated by the author).

94). One may easily see that this ritual has its existence only in the febrile imagination of Hockley. No Hindu ascetic will dare to desecrate the image of his/her God in this manner. Through the description of this bogus ritual, Hockley tries to inspire in his (British) readers a feeling of revulsion towards Hinduism. The thing to note is that, it is an *ūrdhvaḥu* ascetic who is used by Hockley to achieve this end. One finds that subsequent writers follow him in negatively stereotyping these ascetics.

It is not the case that *ūrdhvaḥu* ascetics are depicted only in British colonial literature. One may find them even in European fictions, like Emilio Salgari's (1862 – 1911) Italian novel *I misteri della jungla nera* (1895). This work has been translated into English as *The Mystery of the Black Jungle*. Set in colonial India, the novel describes the adventures of the Bengali hunter Tremal-Naik and his Maratha servant Kammamuri who fight the Thugs led by Suyodhana to rescue Tremal's lady love Ada Corishant from their clutches. Salgari is often hailed for his liberal anti-colonial stance, particularly because he depicts interracial romances in his works. However, Francesca Orsini draws our attention to the presence of abundant orientalist clichés in his novels. In her opinion, Salgari "was not, could not be, outside the episteme of his times, which viewed Europe as more advanced than Asia" (Orsini 16). The truth in Orsini's assertion becomes apparent to us once we consider his treatment of the *ūrdhvaḥu* ascetic Nimpur in *The Mystery of the Black Jungle*. The gruesome appearance of Nimpur even shocks the dauntless hunter Tremal-Naik. Salgari writes:

... it was the man's left arm that had made him [Tremal-Naik] shudder. The fakir had held it erect so long the skin and flesh had withered to little more than coloured bone. His hand had been bound shut with leather straps and the hollow filled with dirt to serve as a pot for a small sacred myrtle seedling. Left unattended, his fingernails had pierced through his palm and grew out the back of his hand like dark twisted talons (Salgari 197).

Here Salgari makes use of one of the favourite devices of colonial writers, namely ventriloquism. Instead of censuring the Hindu ascetic himself, he shows the readers the Bengali Tremal-Naik's reaction. He thereby has the ascetic implicitly criticized by his own countryman. But it is not only Nimpur's appearance which Salgari deplors. It transpires that this ascetic is in league with the dreaded Thugs of India<sup>34</sup> and acts as their informer and henchman. Following his predecessors, Salgari thus makes an association between *ūrdhvaḥu* and evil. Also, in keeping

<sup>34</sup> The Thugs, as the British colonizers imagined them, were a cross between highway bandits and murderous cultists whose practitioners supposedly worshipped Goddess Kali and strangled and robbed travellers to please her.

However, contemporary researchers question British construction of Thuggee. For an overview of Thuggee and Salgari's treatment of the Thugs in his novels, one may see " 'Providential' Campaigns" by Ayusman Chakraborty.

<sup>35</sup> Sleeman writes, "Three-fourths of these religious mendicants, whether Hindoos or Mahommudans, rob and steal,

with British colonial officers like Sir William Henry Sleeman<sup>35</sup>, Salgari criminalizes Hindu ascetics en masse on little evidence. His novel shows that Hindu ascetics were often negatively stereotyped in late nineteenth century, even outside the limits of the British Empire.

Finally, one may consider the treatment of *ūrdhva* ascetics in Alice Perrin's (1867-1934) short story "The Fakirs' Island". The story appears in her collection of short stories entitled *East of Suez* (1901). In this story, the obstinate English beauty Mona Selwyn visits 'the fakirs' island' during the "Khood Mela"<sup>36</sup>. She is cursed by an *ūrdhva* ascetic for expressing her contempt at the religious mendicants. The ascetic curses her, "before ten suns have set thy beauty will be gone" (Perrin 137). She is stricken with small pox soon after, possibly infected through her contact with the mendicants on the island. Mona loses her beauty as a result, just as the ascetic had cursed her. As Benita Parry explains, "Physically she had not been touched [by the ascetic] but the very demeanour of the priest was an assault and the malediction of the fakir a violation on this pure young Englishwoman" (Parry 75). Parry further suggests that covert threats of sexual violation surfaces in works where Englishwomen are threatened by nude or semi-nude Hindu ascetics (Parry 76). While her deduction is based on good reasoning, it is to be kept in mind that it is again an *ūrdhva* ascetic who is associated with evil in this tale. The story also describes other ascetics in the island, practicing their own varieties of severe austerities. For instance, Perrin describes ascetics sitting on bed of nails, ascetics swinging on ropes with their faces downwards, and ascetics burying themselves to the chin. And yet, it is the ascetic "with one arm held high in the air, withered to a stick" who curses Mona Selwyn (Perrin 136). Is this merely a coincidence? Or was Perrin following the established Western practice of demonizing *ūrdhva* Hindu ascetics? In light of the information provided earlier, the latter seems more probable.

Survey of Western literary and non-literary works thus demonstrates that *ūrdhva*, as an ascetic practice, has been condemned as evil in the West at least from the seventeenth century. It remains to be explained why it was singled out of all Hindu ascetic practices for such negative stereotyping. To my mind, the best way to answer this is by comparing the treatment of *śāṅkuṣī* in Western writings with that of *ūrdhva*. It becomes apparent that while 'spike lying' is sometimes satirized in Western literature, it is rarely seen as positive evil. One may think of one Mr Cambridge's satirical verse cited in the American missionary William Butler's *The Land of the Veda* (1895). It describes the plight of a 'spike lying' *tapasvin* who is persuaded by a "kind-

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and a very great portion of them murder their victims before they rob them" (Sleeman 11). It cannot be denied that criminals often don the garb of holy men. But to criminalize three fourth of Indian ascetics on little evidence seems unfair. One might also wonder why a criminal should maim himself to his own disadvantage.

<sup>36</sup> Without doubt the reference is to Kumbh Mela, a major festive gathering of the Hindus which involves ritual bath in sacred rivers.

hearted” Indian to give up his “madness”. However, the ascetic soon begins to miss the attention he had earlier enjoyed for his difficult austerity:

To live *undistinguished* to him was the pain,  
 An existence unnoticed he could not sustain  
 In retirement he sighed for the fame-giving chair,  
 For the crowd to admire him, to reverence and stare  
 No endearments of pleasure and ease could prevail,  
 He the saintship resumed, and new-larded his tail (cited in Butler 197).

The poet’s message is clear. He insinuates that Hindu ascetics suffer self-inflicted tortures merely to gain fame. However, despite the poet’s prejudiced outlook, he does not present this Indian ascetic as an evil person. He merely ridicules him for his vanity. Likewise, in Perrin’s “The Fakirs’ Island” the only ascetic who raises the wonder of Mona Selwyn and her companion Kerr is the man on the ‘nail bed’. Though Kerr almost dehumanizes him by comparing the thickness of his “hide” to that of a rhinoceros, this comparison also indirectly acknowledges the superhuman endurance of the ascetic (Perrin 136). There is obviously something prodigious and fantastic in tolerating a bed or seat of nails. Rianne Siebenga points out that “[T]he fakir on a bed of spikes possibly topped the list of interesting fakir sights” (Siebenga 445). While she ably demonstrates that the apologists of colonial rule strategically used photographs of self-mortifying Hindu ascetics in postcards and magic-lantern-shows to stress on the need of perpetuating British rule in India, she fails to recognize the dissimilar treatments accorded to different groups of ascetics. As my reading shows, Western imagination has always treated *ūrdhvbāhu* ascetics as positively evil. On the other hand, ‘spike lying’ ascetics are seen as suffering from delusion at worst.

If *ūrdhvbāhu* and *śaṅkuṣī* are both different forms of self-mortifications held totally incommensurate with Christian worldview, why does Western imagination treat them differently? It follows that religious bigotry cannot be seen as the sole reason for villainizing *ūrdhvbāhu* ascetics. Otherwise, ‘spike lying’ ascetics would have been villainized too. Nor can we think of this as the function of anapirophobia or a fear of cripples. As I see it, it is the *ūrdhvbāhu* ascetic’s voluntary disfiguration of his body that the contemporary West finds most disturbing. One may understand that while ‘spike lying’ or *śaṅkuṣī* does not involve *visible* physical disfiguration, it always attends *ūrdhvbāhu*. Even if *śaṅkuṣī* ultimately deforms the practitioner’s back and hips, these covered areas of a man’s body cannot be very prominently

visible.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, tolerating a bed of nails bespeaks of an almost superhuman fortitude. One may ridicule the act as excessive. But one is also forced to wonder at the practitioner's power of endurance. On the other hand, the withered and deformed arm of an *ūrdhvaḥāhu* ascetic is obviously the first thing that draws one's attention. Unlike *śaṅkuṣī*, it is very akin to self-maiming – the voluntary sacrifice of one's limbs. Such an act of self-maiming is sure to appear intriguing and unproductive to post-Enlightenment Western worldview which usually emphasizes utility, productivity and rationality as guiding principles of life.<sup>38</sup> As Henry Louis Gates Junior has observed in a different context, the Enlightenment “used the absence and presence of ‘reason’ to delimit and circumscribe the very humanity of the cultures and people of color” (Gates 54). The *ūrdhvaḥāhu sadhu*'s self-maiming no doubt appears irrational, and therefore inhuman, to Western eyes. Failing to make sense of it, the post-Enlightenment West perceives it as evil. It is for this reason that it became one of the markers of the Indians' absolute otherness in Western imagination.

Returning to the present, one may now perhaps understand why the *ūrdhvaḥāhu* ascetic's “question” appears so “awkward” to Western minds. It is clear that *ūrdhvaḥāhu* Hindu *sadhus* neither ask questions nor seek permissions to have their voices heard (in the West). Whatever the goals of their *tapasya* might be, these ascetics have already chosen their path. It is the West that has the unanswered question – why the *tapasvin* does what he does (that is, maims himself)? Western writers generally find it difficult to answer this question, since it involves recognizing a different type of rationality and a different worldview. Such recognition remains particularly problematic for the West, since it has sought to impose its own worldview upon others since the Renaissance. *Ūrdhvaḥāhu*, as a practice, therefore remains an enigma which is difficult to solve for the West. It remains enticing to Western writers for that very reason. Probably that is why they continue to return to this topic even in our own postcolonial<sup>39</sup> times, finding it both appealing as well as appalling.

<sup>37</sup> I do not know of any medical study that examines the long term effects of *śaṅkuṣī* on a person's body. So it is difficult to say whether it at all leads to eventual deformity or not.

<sup>38</sup> By giving up the use of one or both arms, the ascetic becomes dependent on others. This might also appear intriguing to contemporary Western minds which value individualism. For an analysis of ‘rugged Western individualism’ - the product of “a mercilessly competitive economic system” where one tries to remain as little dependent on others as possible - one can see Samuel Mencher (Mencher *sic passim*).

<sup>39</sup> To be understood both in the sense of “after colonial” and “beyond colonial”.

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**BIO**

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***Sensory experiments; Psychophysics, Race, and the Aesthetics of feeling,***  
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## **Book Review**

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In *Sensory experiments; Psychophysics, Race, and the Aesthetics of feeling*, Erica Fretwell employs the science of psychophysics and its theorizations of sensation in order to shed light to the cultural landscape of affect in the United States during the nineteenth century. She touches upon the concerns of scholars of American literary studies in terms of affect and feeling and also with their entanglement with histories of racialization. Fretwell critically engages with the disciplines of post-humanism, aesthetics, affect theory and new materialism. She employs in her analysis different medical case studies, music, perfumes and recipes in order to highlight how our five senses turned into indispensable elements of pointing out human difference along the continuum of race, gender and ability. *Sensory experiments* consists of five chapters, each of which deals with one of our five senses and also by short intervals on the synthesis of different senses. The structuring of the narrative is innovative as different literary genres are employed to subvert the nineteenth century hierarchy of senses.

Fretwell demonstrates how psychophysics, an epistemology which derives from Germany, can be viewed as the locus in which feelings can be understood, eventually opening up the phenomenological terrain of lived experience. Psychophysics of the nineteenth century is largely included in contemporary theories of affect, more specifically in the US which tends to study affecting theory through the lens of sentiment. This is reasonable because psychophysics is the predominant ideology- epistemology in that era however due to this very dominance, sentiment has occluded other theories of feeling that took course in that era. A major question

posed by the psychophysical archive is what does affect look like apart from sentiment? What does sentiment look like when it sears away from sentimentality? Psychophysics is a science which lies on the border of physiology and philosophy and it is the science that gave ground to experimental psychology. It used laboratory methods to answer philosophical problems, isolating and measuring responses to stimuli further exploring the relation between matter and mind.

The idea that matter and mind are interrelated but not causally related needs to be further explored. In effect, consciousness is understood as interior but not mechanistic. This replaces god as a universal ordering principal and puts forward theories of organic unity with more scientific materialism. Fretwell suggests that the discipline of psychophysics deconstructs the idea of an existing a priori unity with a more robust scientific materialism. Psychophysics has a central role in the field of biopolitics as it is the means through which social difference becomes apparent. This has led to the racialization of aesthetics and more importantly it has opened up the possibility for an alternative way of existence.

Psychophysics registers the early perceptible transmissions between self and the world. The discipline subjects are offering new conventions or genres for navigating the experience of an acutely vertiginous social landscape. Sensory configurations of citizenship have led to the emergence of real tension between inner feeling and outer difference, subjective perception and population management and have pointed towards the crucial question of what synesthesia is. Fretwell perceives synesthesia as a subjective experience which is related to bio-political maturity. A recurring question throughout the narrative is ‘how does it feel to be a problem’? If that question is addressed sumptuously rather than idiomatically, the description of racial invasion has the sensation of shifting the ground of discipline from the corporeal to the individual. W.E.B. Du Bois’s theorization of double consciousness comes to the forefront at this point as it reflects this intricate connection among body and mind. He defines double consciousness as “a peculiar sensation [...] the sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in an amused contempt and pity. One feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings” (Du Bois 364). Du Bois’s conceptualization of double consciousness is intricately connected to psychophysics, the science of measuring the soul. Psychophysics laid the groundwork for narrating the inner life of external structures of power. We tend to focus on the fact that sense is always looking one’s self through the eyes of others. However, if one keeps moving his eyes to measuring one’s self by the tip of a white world something new comes into view; the need to challenge racial difference.

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One of the challenges that Fretwell faces in her book is defining the terms soul, spirit, consciousness, psyche which are used largely interchangeably in the twenty first century but have not been used interchangeably during the nineteenth century. There is a distinction between the mind as a physiological entity versus consciousness, a domain of feeling and experience. Psychophysics has this idealism that affirms the soul's autonomy but that autonomy arrives imminently; this autonomy is embedded to reality itself and the natural world. The propagation of such terms during the twenty-first century that closely resemble each other, reflects the struggle during the present as it is extremely difficult to determine the bounds of the body-mind relationship. According to the psychophysical vocabulary circulating during the nineteenth century, it is the soul that derives imminently through the body. Consciousness as a term is now empty, therefore one shall be extremely careful when it comes to its employment. Employing the term consciousness is an attempt to join scientific materialism to idealist models that prioritize a transcendent principle ordering the world as well as the idea that laws of nature can explain the mind but cannot fully explain the nature of consciousness. Psychophysics conduces to addressing the mind body conundrum, affirming the reality of racialization and of racial experience without it being reduced to its biological essence or to fiction. The body mind correlation is necessarily a reality representation, a correlation between fiction and reality. Fretwell points out that these experiences of fictions are embedded in a particular context therefore psychophysics is not a temporary vacuous thing as it has a constitutive force in people's lives. It has a durability that needs to be thought. For example, in the case of race, race has a durability that is attached to any kind of empirical reality and also for those who experience it which cannot be overlooked. In this case this refers to all modern subjects therefore it is something that is consequential, it exists irrespectively of whether it is empirically or morally correct.

Two key psychophysical concepts that Fretwell employs and need to be addressed are "perceptual sensitivity" and "psychophysical aesthesis". "Perceptual sensitivity" is an individual's capacity to perceive finer feelings and "psychophysical aesthesis", an aesthetic sensibility in order to register the affect of shock that registers the change in sensory intensity, its irresponsiveness to fine grained differences in the world. Through attention to slight gradations in sensory experiences that acquired significant social meaning, it is obvious that theory is relational. These concepts "perceptual sensitivity" and "psychophysical aesthesis" had been pulled in cultural discourses in which our sensory experience is material but also symbolic. Through tracking the migration of psychophysical theories and vocabularies in the United States, Fretwell exposes the gravitation of American authors of the nineteenth century in perceiving social order as increasingly biologized. Even when sensitivity became folded in racial projects, psychophysical models inculcate a form of interiority that is material but not strictly biological.

The senses come to articulating this experience of variation or difference where consciousness which is understood as embodied and yet animate comes to displace the nerves and the blood in terms of racial configurations. The senses are understood to mediate rather than mirror racial configurations, they start making historical moments legible to subjects' easily perceptible transactions. Through a cultural project called psychophysical aesthesis writers extended the psychophysical relation between mental life and material life to social life. Each sense becomes a feeling embodying conventions that mediate the affect of relation between self and the world.

Through her work, Fretwell prompts us to reconsider the epistemology of psychophysics in the context of racial capitalism. She disrupts the dominant assumption that sensation and emotion were synonymous during the nineteenth century. She situates herself in the wider spectrum of thinkers of race theory and scholars, who critically engage with psychophysics, affect theory and phenomenology. She goes on an exploration of how science and literature challenge racial boundaries. Fretwell's contribution is significant as she focuses on how psychophysics which has been neglected as a science and often problematized, is central in the way that affect, power and aesthetics are theorized. What is innovative about Fretwell's project is that she employs psychophysics to explain why and how feelings material yet ineffable came to acquire social meanings in the twenty-first century, in a way that they had not before.

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**BIO**

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