WASHINGTON COLLEGE REVIEW
The Washington College Review is a liberal arts journal that seeks to recognize the best of undergraduate student writing from all disciplines of the College and to publish work deserving of wider availability to readers in the college community and beyond.

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Special thanks to the Maureen Jacoby Endowment in Editing and Publishing for funding the Washington College Review's Student Editor Position.
The sun is shining on a peaceful summer day on the Chesapeake Bay. I settled in to read the almost-final-draft of the 2012 Washington College Review, with a cup of fresh brewed coffee, and experienced, briefly, pure bliss. But I was far from bliss. Things were hot, both literally and symbolically, because 2012 has been a very heated political year; many countries will change or have changed their governments with or without democracy. Thus, we should not be surprised if national and international politics are at the core of this issue.

From the founding of USA to Latin America, from France and the Czech Republic to Mali and Australia, our contributors have made clear that we need to be in dialogue with both the national and the international worlds. The most obvious way to engage in this discourse is through politics. John Marshall explores the role of politics in literature when he explains totalitarianism in the works of Kundera and Beckett. Michael Festa seeks to unveil the role of politics in film when addressing generational conflicts and dictatorship in Malian cinema. And Emily Scherer explores the politics of cartography when dissecting what is considered legitimate mapping in the eyes of the Western world.

Our twentieth issue shows concerns that transcend politics into violence, both subtle and overt. Charles Weisenberger revisits the subject of slavery as it was entrenched in the founding of the United States and in the life of our patron, George Washington. Nicolás Campisi analyzes the role of barbarism in the making of colonial Latin America. Emily Blackner contemplates the role of religious dominance at the dawn of our country. And Jasmine Bibbs proposes to dissolve the subtle yet pervasive perception of what is ugly and beautiful amid African Americans in a post-racial nation.
Next to these deep reflections are similarly profound and utterly radical stances on compassion. There is the compassion of a daughter in Kristine Sloan’s “Watercolors,” the compassion toward Grandma in Maegan Clearwood’s “On Bathing Your Grandmother,” or the compassion to a couple of distressed lovers in “The Clerk” by Kathryn Manion, our 2012 Sophie Kerr Prize Winner. Compassion, not pity, is clear in Carolyn Bevans’s analysis of Emerson’s synching with nature, and in Bond Richards’s thrust to Dora Malech’s poems in the face of uncertainty.

The conflict and resolution entrenched in this issue made my coffee ultimately taste like a balmy summer breeze. Hopefully outside our campus, people may understand, as Washington College students do, that one does not go without the other. We in the Review aim to foster the latter with regards to our contributors and readers. This is the reason why our editorial team — Jehanne Dubrow, Jennifer Hopper, Mathew McCabe, Moriah Purdy, Mindy Reynolds, Richard Sears, and Student Editor Alissa Vecchio — have carefully worked with students and us to perfect their works and the edition.

A final word must be sent to Michele Volansky, who has been editor of the Review for many years. She solidified this beautiful tradition of showcasing the excellent writing of Washington College students and spreading it beyond our community. Our special thanks to her for her guidance on this issue and yonder. We take the relay from here knowing how hard it will be to fill her shoes.

Professors Bridget Bunten and Elena Deanda, Co-Editors
Chestertown, Maryland
Summer 2012
Over the past year I explored various techniques to express economic, social and political issues. The inspiration for my projects derive from graphs and statistical data found in newspapers, primarily the *Wall Street Journal*. I think of my work as another form of visual analysis, possibly in response to the unease I feel graduating a double major in Business and Studio Art. While I use a variety of materials in each project, the themes of fire—a metaphor for the volatility of the global economy—and destruction continually recur.

In my latest project *Distress*, I examine three economic issues on state, national and global scales. Specifically, residential foreclosures in Maryland, declining value in housing markets across the United States, and national debt. The primary materials used include luan or plywood, plaster, matches, rope, and paint. The use of fire causes the lines in the graph to become physical, making the often cold, impersonal numbers of data become personal and threatening. This, in turn reflects the volatility of current economic issues. My data sources are intentionally omitted to allow viewers to imagine explanations for the visual information.

Studying works by great artists introduced new questions, ideas, and methods into my work. One artist I greatly admire is Dorothea Lange, a photojournalist who documented the long-standing consequences resulting from the Great Depression and post-war era. I am also inspired by Valerie Hegarty, who notes that the joy of her work lies in its destruction more so than its making. As in my *Distress*, she too uses fire as a medium in her work. Lastly, I greatly admire Andy Warhol and have been deeply influenced by his media-inspired work recently exhibited in *Warhol Headlines* at the National Gallery of Art, which similarly mined national headlines to inspire that body of work.
As commander of the continental line, and inaugural president of the nation, George Washington served early America through many different roles. However, few Americans ever consider his most controversial role: slave master. As a plantation owner in Virginia, Washington depended on slaves to maintain his property and generate a profit. Contributing toward his business and homestead, Washington’s slaves formed a crucial aspect of his livelihood, and followed him into the presidential office. During his second term as president, Washington’s trusted slave, and Martha Washington’s beloved servant, Ona Judge selected to escape the presidential mansion in favor of living freely. By running away, Ona devastated her life-long matriarch, agitated the first President, and abandoned a privileged life for nothing more than the satisfaction of freedom. Her story conveys the impact slaves had on their masters, and her decision demonstrates that slavery at its best still showed the human condition at its worst: even the best slavery was never any good.

Modern Americans cling tightly to the image of a poorly clothed, poorly fed, black slave toiling away in cotton fields. They think of a slave held down in chains, whose actions are dictated by the crack of an abusive overseer’s whip. These slaves did regrettably exist, and were almost always the field slaves. However, not all slaves endured such a miserable existence and many actually lived luxuriously: even better than the freemen. Specifically, the house servants worked and interacted directly with the masters and had less arduous jobs, with often more privileges. Ona Judge never planted wheat at Mount Vernon, or worked inside Washington’s threshing barn; she was a house servant.
Anyone can understand the motivation behind a field slave running away from a plantation. They encountered abuse, complemented by strenuous work. Conversely, a house servant worked for the elite, and often lived like the elite. By staying on the plantation, a house servant secured themselves a stable food supply, a quality shelter, and the finest clothing. They had comfortable living conditions, and by venturing off to find freedom they jeopardized those conditions. From birth, and exclusively because of her birth, was ordained a special position within the Washington household. She ran away from this special status, because she yearned for something more: the joy of freedom.

Ona’s mother was Mulatto Betty, Martha Washington’s seamstress and personal servant. As Betty’s daughter, Ona instantly garnered Martha’s preferential attention, and both Martha and Betty tailored Ona to assume her mother’s position. Under their tutelage, Ona would learn how to sow the Washington’s clothing, sheets, bedding, and slave clothes. In a letter addressed to Oliver Walcott, the Secretary of the Treasury, George Washington wrote that Ona had been “the particular attendant on Mrs. Washington since she was ten years old” and that she “was brought up and treated more like a child than a servant.” During Washington’s term in Philadelphia, Ona enjoyed the privilege of not only attending several plays with Martha, but also getting to sit with Martha and George in the President’s stage box of the South Street Theater. Ona grew so close to Martha that she even had the tasks of dressing Martha in the morning, undressing her at night, and participating in Martha’s nightly religious rituals of singing and praying. In Philadelphia, Martha felt an even stronger connection with Ona, because Betty had stayed back at Mount Vernon. Without any other parental figure, Martha filled the void and developed a maternal bond with Ona.

Strengthening that bond, the two had almost the same racial background. Ona’s mother was a mulatto, half black and half white, and her father was a full-blooded Irishman, who worked as a carpenter at Mount Vernon for seven years fulfilling an indentured servitude contract. Therefore, Ona had only a fraction of African blood in her ancestry, and was mostly white. A lighter complexion most likely created a more friendly connection with the racially prejudiced Martha Washington. Not many primary sources exist that can fully reveal personal insights about Martha, however in one letter she wrote to her niece she stated “Black children are liable to so many accidents and complaints that one is heedly sure of keeping them I hope you will not find in him much loss the blacks are so bad in their nature that they have not the least gratitude for the kindness that may be shewed to them.” Martha may have affectionately cared for Ona, but she simultaneously held racial prejudices. Excluding the influence of her mother, Ona still would have enjoyed a better enslavement than most because of her predominantly white racial background.

When Ona ran away she hurt Martha emotionally and practically. Having worked with Martha personally for years, Ona knew all of Martha’s concerns and preferences. She knew exactly what Mrs. Washington wanted, when she wanted it, and how she wanted it done. She had also managed to forge a substantial level of trust with Martha; a trust which only time can produce. Martha placed particular emphasis on trustworthiness, writing in a letter to Elizabeth Powell “to be trustworthy-careful of what is committed to him-sober and attentive, are essential requisite in any large family, and more so among blacks, many of whom will impose when they can do it.” With Ona’s departure, the Washingtons had to find a replacement that they could trust to work competently, a difficult task which plagued them during George’s first term in New York. Adding to the situation, masters everywhere trusted their slaves less because of a recent violent slave revolt in Haiti; details had surfaced about slaves viciously decapitating their masters. Masters always feared the prospects of their slaves rebelling, and the incident in Haiti confirmed their trepidation. By bringing new, untrustworthy, slaves into their midst, the Washingtons could have made a violent mistake. Ona’s escape especially hurt Martha because she placed a tremendous emphasis on the quality of her house servants, demanding optimal efficiency and devotion similar to the expectations her husband had of his soldiers. Washington even cites Martha’s influence in his letter to the Secretary of the Treasury as he writes “(and Mrs. Washington’s desire to recover her) ought not to escape with impunity if it can be avoided.” Ona’s escape incurred the wrath of the first lady and her husband, Mr. President.

Ona’s decision hurt Martha, but it annoyed George. As President of the United States, Washington already had several vexing and far more crucial conflicts to resolve. In the months leading up to his letter to Oliver Walcott, Washington grappled with such issues as: Pinckney’s Treaty, Jay’s Treaty, relations with the Cherokee Nation, and the Flying Fish fiasco (French privateers seizing American vessels destined for Britain). Domestically, Washington also began to absorb far more criticism during his second term. He
incurred criticism from the increasingly anti-slave north simply for owning slaves. This criticism especially increased with the capital moving to Philadelphia, a hotbed of abolitionist Quaker activity. Ona’s mere presence in the capital caused him problems, but by leaving, Ona prompted Washington to make even more costly actions.

Democrats began to accuse him of political and financial corruption, and some critics (such as his former revolutionary ally Thomas Paine) even went so far as comparing him to the monarch he defeated, King George. These criticisms reflect the primary political concern of the time: the question of centralized government. Thousands of Washington’s comrades on the Continental Line gave their lives fighting against the centralized government in Britain. America’s first government, the Articles of Confederation, gave power almost exclusively to the states and provided only a minimal amount of centralized governmental activity. Its replacement the Constitution became controversial because it reserved too much power for the national government; the framers had to add the Bill of rights to ensure the new centralized government would not become oppressive. Considering the context surrounding his administration, Washington held a divisive and tenuous position. He was the first person to assume authority of this controversial power; he had the challenge of not only ensuring the new government’s survival, but also of developing the example by which his predecessors would follow. Washington knew this; he had concerned himself with his image since his adolescent years when he memorized the Rules of Civility. He certainly felt the controversy surrounding his position, and undoubtedly comprehended the importance of his legacy. Leading up to the Ona Judge incident, Washington had already taken a major step toward establishing his legacy, by drafting his farewell address in May, 1796.

Ona’s decision to escape intensified the pressure on a man who already carried an entire country and political philosophy on his shoulders. By fleeing as far as New Hampshire, Ona forced Washington to enlist secretly the services of the Secretary of the Treasury, Oliver Walcott, to retrieve her. Washington used an official government employee, a servant of the public, to obtain Washington’s private property, the slave Ona Judge. Washington essentially exploited his position for his own means: an example of centralized tyrannical government behavior. With this action, Washington jeopardized everything: the credibility of his office, and the legacy of his government, for a slave.

Washington’s presidential office hampered his planter occupation. With the Federal City (Washington D.C.) still under construction, Washington spent his second term as president in Philadelphia. Problematically, Pennsylvania passed a statute which guaranteed slaves their freedom after only six months of residency in the state. Washington built his household infrastructure on slave labor. Losing slaves would mean losing experienced workers, but it would also equate to losing more money, as Washington would have to pay servants to fill the labor void. Washington simply could not afford to lose his slaves. He formulated the solution of rotating slaves back and forth between the capital and Mount Vernon, in Virginia, so that they would never obtain their six months of residency in Pennsylvania. Washington could not risk resistance from the slaves or additional negative publicity, so he wanted the plan to be carried out in secret, as he wrote in a letter to Tobias Lear “I wish to have it accomplished under pretext that may deceive both them and the public.” His scheme failed.

Ona’s connection to Martha provided her with contact to those outside of the presidential mansion. Most likely with aid from members of Philadelphia’s extensive freed slave population, one night she slipped out and boarded a boat en route to New England. Beyond the annoyance and risk of recovering her, Washington faced the obstacle of compensating for her. Technically, neither George nor Martha owned her; she was a dower slave. After George and Martha died, ownership of Ona would transfer to a member of the Custis family, Martha’s heirs. Given the strictness of inheritance laws during the Eighteenth Century, Washington had the obligation of providing the Custis heirs with some form of compensation, most likely money. Ona’s departure threatened Washington’s legacy and cost him cash.

Washington did not pursue Ona solely because of his wife’s influence or because of Ona’s financial cost; Washington pursued her out of principle. Ironically, when Ona departed Washington had already begun considering emancipating his slaves. As early as 1789, seven years before his letter to Walcott, Washington indicated to his close confident and first biographer David Humphreys his inclination toward emancipating his slaves. Washington had recognized the immorality of slavery, but still attempted to bring Ona back into bondage. This contradiction arose from the fact that although Washington viewed slavery differently, he did not view his role as master differently. He still held authority: his servants listened to him. Washington spent the majority of his life in charge, either in the military or
politics. He had always ruled the plantation, and as the master demanded loyalty from his slaves. By escaping, Ona demonstrated to Washington an absence of loyalty." Washington had not authorized her departure; she defied the chain of command. By leaving the Washington household, Ona abandoned her duty. Washington, a man once tasked with commanding an entire military, could never ignore such disobedience. In a letter to Joseph Whipple, Washington evidenced this mindset by stating "For however well disposed I might be to a gradual emancipation, or even to an entire emancipation of that description of people (if the latter was in itself practicable at this moment) it would neither be politic or just to reward unfaithfulness with a premature preference." Washington believed in freeing slaves, but at this moment it would neither be politic or just to reward unfaithfulness with a premature preference. Washington had not authorized her departure; she defied the chain of command. By leaving the Washington household, Ona would be left to Martha's whimsical granddaughter Eliza Custis.

Due to the inheritance obligations, Washington could not at that point promise freedom to Ona. Even if he could make the promise, Washington the master would never stoop to the level of bartering with a slave, his own property. Promising Ona freedom might force Washington to promise other slaves freedom. It opened up a loophole in the power structure that could dismantle the entire system his household depended on; slaves could manipulate the master for their own benefit. By haggling with Washington, Ona put herself on the same level as Washington, something a slave could never do.

Runaway slaves always faced dangerous prospects. In March of 1793, Washington signed into law the Fugitive Slave Act, which forced state governments to assume the responsibility of returning escaped slaves. This meant that even in states where slavery did not legally exist, slaves could still find themselves back under their master's control. For an escaped slave, nowhere was safe; anywhere someone could identify them and return them for profit. For Ona those prospects quadrupled with the Commander and Chief of the entire nation on her tail. Not only did she deal with an angry president, she also contended with the high probability of detection. As Martha's personal attendant, Ona made many appearances alongside her mistress. Having a public figure for a mistress made Ona an identifiable slave. Many important and influential people knew Martha, and therefore many powerful people could recognize Ona even if they did not know her name. That dynamic cost Ona, and ultimately uncovered her. Upon entering New Hampshire, Ona was immediately greeted by a familiar acquaintance in an unfamiliar place. Mrs. Langdon, a friend of Martha's, instantly recognized the young slave and inquired on the purpose of her presence in a place without her master or mistress.

Langdon questioned Ona as to why she would want to leave such a nice place, and Ona simply responded "Yes I know but I wanted to be free miss; wanted to learn to read and write." Later in 1847 during an interview with the Liberator (the most famous abolitionist newspaper of the nineteenth century), Ona revealed that "She never received the least mental or moral instruction of any kind while she remained in Washington's family." Unlike his contemporary Thomas Jefferson, Washington did not provide his slaves with any formal education, and even the close house servants remained illiterate. This fact would create a distinct separation between the Washingtons and their slaves. Washington took pains to enroll his niece Maria Washington into a Moravian school in Pennsylvania, while he left his wife's personal servant uneducated. No matter how much Martha saw herself as Ona's surrogate mother, the barrier between master and slave still clearly existed in the realm of education. Ona never viewed herself as Martha's kin; if she was Martha's daughter she would be at William and Mary with Jacky and Patsy, not at the President's mansion sewing Martha's clothes. Washington's actions fell in line with the common practices of the time; plantation masters mostly prohibited their slaves from receiving an education, and most states actually created laws to support them. Education would empower the slaves, something the masters did not want. However culturally acceptable the practice was, the slaves still certainly identified the injustice, and desired something different. Ona, a slave exposed to fine culture, would certainly
envy the opportunity to become educated. Only a slave could understand that no amenities associated with living with a president could ever outweigh the importance of academic enlightenment: or even the simple satisfaction of spelling her own name.

The other reason Ona abandoned a privileged life: pure freedom. She wanted the ability to make her own decisions and conduct her own actions; she wanted her own life, not the life her birth gave her. She wanted to be her own person, with her own concerns, and not function solely to serve Martha’s best interests. While at Mount Vernon, she would always be just another worker, but with freedom her life would revolve around the passions of Ona Judge not the whims of Martha Washington: she would live as her own person. The quality of her life had nothing to do with her decision, because she only cared about the status of her independence. Slavery gave her a better life, but freedom offered her a better existence; with freedom she could accomplish fulfillment unattainable under the natural stagnation of slavery. She understood this, and acted accordingly.

Ona started her new life by quickly marrying a mulatto sailor, as early as January of 1797, not even a year after she vanished. He died three years later, leaving behind a destitute widow with three children to feed. Ona spent the rest of her life in poverty, experiencing the horror of outliving all of her children, and depending on charity for sustenance. Despite the adversity, Ona indicated in her interview with the Liberator that she never regretted her decision for one moment. The slave-owning Washingtons could not comprehend this, and Martha never understood why Ona rejected a luxurious life in bondage for an impoverished life of freedom. They refused to accept that freedom could lure away a spoiled slave to live a decrepit life, and invented an asinine explanation for her departure: a Frenchman seduced her to leave. Washington writes to Whipple “for whatever she may have asserted to the contrary, there is no doubt in this family of her having been seduced, and enticed off by a Frenchman.” He wrote this despite Whipple already confirming in the previous letter that Ona’s only motive was freedom; Whipple wrote “a thirst for complete freedom which she was informed would take place on her arrival here in Boston had been her only motive for absconding.” Washington stubbornly ignored Whipple’s statement and persisted with accusations of seduction.

He had to in order to live with himself. He along with his fellow Virginians George Mason and Thomas Jefferson represented the rare cases of slave owners who wanted to end slavery. He did not accept slavery, yet he owned slaves. To deal with this unavoidable contradiction, Washington convinced himself that his slaves lived differently, and even better, than slaves on other plantations. Washington did maintain some unusually humane practices toward his slaves: he did not encourage whipping, he did not sell slaves without their consent, and he did not break up families. However, Ona forced Washington to confront the truth: although Washington was a fair slave master, he was still a slave master. Ona exposed the fact that even the best slavery could never approach the splendor of the worst freedom.

Her story made Washington confront himself, and should make Americans uneasy about their history. For decades, before and after emancipation, proponents and apologists of slavery pointed to situations in which slaves led comfortable lives, or they cite the difficulty slaves would find if they attempted to live freely without any preparation. Ona’s story coincides with those arguments: she had an easy life under Washington, and struggled while free. However, her story defeats their theses with one crucial point: she preferred the impoverished freedom over the wealthy enslavement. Not only did she select to surrender the luxury, but she also did not regret the misfortune that accompanied her liberty. Her story further exposes the deep cycle of dependence slavery fostered between master and slave: not only did Ona Judge jeopardize her lifestyle to escape slavery, but her master George Washington risked his credibility and political career to recover her. The system devastated everyone involved: masters, servants, and presidents. Displaying Washington at his worst, Ona’s story demonstrates the truth about the peculiar institution: even its prettiest face still had an ugly soul.
ENDNOTES

2. Bryan, p. 270.
22. Ellis, p. 260.
24. Hirshfeld, p. 112.
34. Bryan, p. 386.
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African American Women and the Quest for “Good Hair”

JASMINE BIBBS

The Origins of “Good Hair” and “Bad Hair”

Since the beginning of the Eighteenth Century, African American women have largely shaped their hair and beauty ideals on the normative standards of European, and Caucasian women. Finding its roots in the naissance of slavery, the debate over “good hair” and “bad hair” has plagued the African American community for centuries. “Good hair” refers to long hair with a straight or fine texture, similar to the hair associated with the Caucasian race. In contrast, “bad hair” is used to describe African Americans whose hair is not necessarily short, but kinkier and wavier in nature. Furthermore, the importance of hair among the African American culture can be linked to the early socialization, during the time of slavery, of African American women to alter their hair from its natural state. African American women with longer lengths and finer textures of hair were regarded as more beautiful and more valuable individuals. Today this long, straight haired standard of beauty is so pervasive, and so embedded within current society that most African American women find altering their natural hair as second nature. In consequence, straightening one’s kinkier, thicker hair has become somewhat of an unspoken tradition that is passed down from generation to generation within the African American culture. With little to no understanding of the foundation behind the “good hair” and “bad hair” phenomenon, African American women perpetuate the denigration of their natural hair. That being said, African American women cannot begin to fathom the beauty in their natural hair if they do not understand the history of how it became taboo.

From the mark of the slavery era, the bodies of African Americans were seen as inferior. Slave owners required their slaves to perform mutilating amounts of labor in harsh conditions. Many if not all slaves were brutally beaten, branded, and even had their heads shaved as a sign of the master’s
conditions left little time for the slaves to maintain their hair, leaving it bushy.

In general, hair is considered to be an individual’s pride. “Happy” animal. African American slaves were socialized not to like or take pride in their hair as a canvas in which the arrangements of it expressed various cultural and personal messages (White and White 1995). “The hair of one’s head is never a straightforward biological ‘fact,’ for it will ‘almost always [be]… worked upon by human hands.’ Such procedures ‘socialize hair,’ making it the medium of significant ‘statements’ about self and society…(White and White 1995:53).” However, the long, grueling hours and appalling working conditions left little time for the slaves to maintain their hair, leaving it bushy and unkempt in appearance (Thompson 2009). At this point, an African American’s hair was an indicator of their lack of status and importance.

The racist ideologies which peaked in eighteenth and nineteenth century America not only targeted the intelligence, bodily structure, and skin tone of African Americans, but it victimized their hair as well. Caucasians considered the hair of African Americans to be like wool, a negative comparison not only to the texture of African American hair, but also to signify an association with animals (White & White 1995). In other words, African Americans were essentially dehumanized and were considered to be as significant as an animal. African American slaves were socialized not to like or take pride in their hair. In general, hair is considered to be an individual’s pride. “Nappy” hair was to be shamed. Thus those who could manage their hair and had straight hair were essentially better, more important persons. By the end of the eighteenth century, the hair of slaves began to be described on the basis of the abundance and length of hair. At the market when slaves would be sold, their value was dependent on their physical strength, and hair (White and White 1995). Slaves were the property of their masters, not human beings with rights and feelings. However, the less “nappy” an African American’s hair was, the more Caucasian-like they were, and thus the more human they became in the eyes of the hegemony.

Miscegenation among slave owners and female slaves began to increase. Female slaves were often raped and assaulted by the hands of their masters, much to the disdain of the masters’ wives. These sexual offenses against female slaves resulted in female progeny whose hair was straighter and softer in texture and appearance. Slaves with lighter skin tones, who possessed European-like features and finer textures of hair, were more likely to perform slave duties in the house. On the other hand, darker toned slaves with kinky hair and more robust African features tended to work in the fields (Patton 2006).

This segregation of house slaves and field slaves created a spectrum of respect and dignity among African Americans. In essence, slaves that worked in the fields with darker skin tones were more dehumanized and animalistic compared to the house slaves with Caucasian-like features that were considered to be more human and thus possessed more value and liberties. It was not uncommon for field slaves to wear scarves and bandanas to cover their shorn, uncombed, disheveled hair. In addition, it was mandatory for house slaves to groom, and maintain their hair for a neat and clean appearance (Patton 2006). Furthermore, house slaves frequently ironed their hair to achieve a look which was as Caucasian/European as possible. Within the slave community, African Americans with straight, fine hair found it easier to be able to pass as free individuals, or as members of the privileged class (Patton 2006). Other advantages light-skinned, straight-haired slaves received were the benefit of clothes, food, education, and the promise of freedom (Patton 2006). Racism as enforced by slave owners perpetuated the idea that those who appeared to be the most Caucasian were also the most beautiful and sought after. Unfortunately, the residue left from the discriminatory slave hierarchy distinguishing light-skinned African Americans with straight hair from dark-skinned African Americans with tightly coiled hair continues to exist today.

After the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century, Thompson states, “The goal of grooming the hair had morphed from the elaborate and symbolic designs of Africa into an imitation of White styles adapted to Black kinks and curls…[There existed neither a public nor private forum where Black hair was celebrated (2009:834)].” By this time, the theory that possessing Caucasian-like features, such as straight hair, were superior had already been engrained into the minds of the majority of African Americans.

The praised and celebrated “good hair,” is not naturally found among most African Americans. However, many hair care products have been designed to help African American women attain straight hair. The innovative technique of using an iron to straighten one’s hair, led to the later development of a tool designed specifically for removing the kinks and coarseness of natural African American hair. Madame C.J. Walker was one of the main pioneers in the development of African American hair care products. She attempted to challenge the principle that African American hair was unattractive when she released a hair softener that complemented a hair straightening comb, also known as a hot comb. Use of Walker’s product transformed the naturally kinky hair of African American women into soft, straight tresses. The results of the 1905 hot comb invention are comparable to the effects of many modern day flat irons (Patton 2006; Weitz 2004). Madame C.J. Walker, an African American woman herself saw the hair of African Americans as less than the ideal beauty standard. Furthermore, the concept of an
African American woman creating a product to transform African American hair into straight, kink-less hair, or in other words something beautiful, reinforces the self-disparagement that is rampant among the culture today.

The development of the hot comb spurred uproar among those who saw the straightening of African American hair as deplorable. Many leaders in the African American community opposed Madame C.J. Walker’s invention as well as the process of straightening one’s hair. Patton argues that, influential African American men such as, W.E.B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington argued that hair straightening was, “a pitiful attempt to emulate Whites (2006:29).” Furthermore, those who resisted the twentieth century hair straightening movement, “equated hair straightening with self hatred (Patton 2006:29).” Malcolm X, who supported the “Black is Beautiful” political faction of the 1960’s and 1970’s, also defied the process of hair straightening. Malcolm X reiterated the attitude that straightening the hair was a way of shaming the natural kink of African American hair, as well as a way of encouraging the idea that Caucasian-like hair is superior (Patton 2006; Sennott 1987). Even more daunting is that the outrage from these famed political leaders still had no power in quelling the acts of self-hatred among African American women and their hair.

In the twentieth century especially, the media began to reinforce and perpetuate the ideal beauty and hair standards for African American women. African American actresses such as Dorothy Dandridge, Lena Horne, Butterfly McQueen, and Ethel Waters took roles that illustrated the consequences of having either “good hair” or “bad hair.” Dorothy and Lena who both had lighter skin tones and relatively long, finer textures of hair, were conveyed as beautiful, sexual beings in their films (Weitz 2004). In contrast, Butterfly and Ethel were depicted as characters that were poor and unattractive. Their costumes usually consisted of raggedy clothing and it was expected for them to have “bad,” short, kinky hair (Weitz 2004). The media has insidious effects on the minds of society. By depicting African American stereotypes, the media provided fuel to the battle between African American and their hair. African American women saw the praise actresses such as Dorothy Dandridge received for their beauty, and thus desired to emulate their more Caucasian-like appearance.

**Existing Methods of Achieving “Good Hair”**

Hair care manufacturers make up a billion dollar industry. African American women in particular spend three times as much as Caucasian women on hair products and the maintenance of their hair. Popular methods of achieving the appearance of straight, soft, and long hair include chemical hair relaxation, and the use of synthetic or human hair in wigs and weaves. Weitz states that about two-thirds of African American women chemically straighten their hair (2004). The average age in which an African American woman receives a chemical relaxer is seven. The use of chemical relaxers can be extremely hazardous to the scalp, and can also potentially cause hair breakage and stunt future hair growth. Nonetheless, with proper use, chemical relaxers remove the kinks and tight coils in African American hair and temporarily leave it soft (Bellinger 2007).

African American women have the choice of wearing either wigs, weaves, or numerous braids to give the appearance of “good hair.” Wigs, weaves, and braids can make the hair seem to be fuller, straight, and long. It is common for the hair used to make wigs, and weaves to come from places outside the United States such as India (Weitz 2004). Wigs, which vary in length, texture, and color can easily be washed, styled, and removed at the end of the day. They provide high functionality as well as practicality. On the other hand, weaves are basically sewn or glued to the root of the hair. Weaves can be particularly expensive depending on the desired style and length of hair (Weitz 2004). African American women who wear braids also have a large quantity of purchased hair mixed with their natural hair and then styled into different braided arrangements. The use of these hair extensions can be costly and damaging to the hair (Weitz 2004). The use of hair extensions enable African American women to give the impression of having “good hair” while also making the hair easier to manage and style.

In addition to the different methods of temporarily and permanently straightening the hair, African American women have also taken to dying their hair. The hair found among African Americans is not very diverse when it comes to hair hues. It is popular for African American women to dye their hair different shades of light brown, red, and blond (Weitz 2004). The reasons African American women choose to dye their hair are not explicit, but it may be understood that it is either to be in fashion or to look more European/Caucasian (Weitz 2004). In comparison to the hair of African Americans, there is an assortment of hair colors naturally found among the Caucasian race. It is less controversial for a Caucasian woman with natural brunette hair to dye her hair blond, than it is for a African American woman to dye her hair a shade of blond.
Contemporary Studies Investigating African American Women and Their Hair

The quest for what is considered “good hair” has played an instrumental role in ascribing one’s socio-economic status, defining and establishing personal relationships, and most importantly forming models of beauty, attractiveness, and the self-worth of African American women (Patton 2006).

Thompson conducted an interview on several African American women to explore how the Eurocentric standard of beauty affects African American women’s perceptions of their attractiveness, their self-esteem and identity, and their social interactions (2009). For example, Vanessa one the women interviewed in Thompson’s study recalls, “…some female artist was…perming her hair and she found that boyfriends were leaving her for the more European look so she started weaving her hair and dying it blonde or light brown…to try and fit in (Thompson 2009:850).” Having straight hair that was softer in texture became a signifier that an African American woman was from middle class status (Weitz 2004). Straightening the hair symbolized cleanliness, leisure, and dignity, things many African American men and women desired to become (Weitz 2004). Bellinger adds that, affluent African American women normally wear their hair straightened, refraining from natural styles. African American women who wear straight hair are also perceived to be more professional and economically established (Bellinger 2007).

The idea of having “good,” or “bad” hair affects many aspects of the African American woman’s life. The African American woman’s social status, employment opportunities, marital prospects, general acceptance by society, and level of beauty and attractiveness is influenced largely by the look and style of her hair. Smith, Burlew, and Lundgren provide valuable insight on how the self-esteem of African American female college students is directly related to their satisfaction with their physical appearance. The study considered skin color, nose width, lip size, and hair length and texture when examining the African American young women. The authors state, “One could imagine that, given a White standard of beauty, self-esteem might affect the level of satisfaction with physical appearance an African American woman maintains (Smith, Burlew, and Lundgren 1991:270).” The study also discovered that typically, African American women are uncertain of the attractiveness of their possibly more pronounced African features (Smith et al. 1991). These physical traits such as skin tone, lip size, and nose width assessed in the study, are directly linked to what determined the beauty and value of slaves in the eighteenth century. The influence of the slavery era on African Americans continues to express itself through the lack of pride in the physical appearance of African American women.

Nonetheless, Smith et al.’s study reinforced the need of having a healthy African American consciousness, an awareness and pride in being African American. African American consciousness also includes finding African American physical features beautiful. The results of the research illustrate that African American women studying at predominately Caucasian institutions had lower self-esteem and were less content with their physical appearance in comparison to African American women studying at mainly African American institutions (Smith et al. 1991). With their investigation, Smith et al., have exemplified the pressure African American women, as well as other ethnic women, receive to fit within the Caucasian beauty ideal. Being surrounded by the normative beauty standard: Caucasian women with naturally straight hair, strengthens the argument that African American women desire “good hair” to feel more comfortable with themselves, raise their self-esteem, and thus be able to be considered beautiful. In a sense, modern day African American women are experiencing the same struggle African American women faced in the slavery era with their physical beauty. Just like in the times of slavery, African American women are constantly pressured to fit within the Eurocentric mold of beauty. This Eurocentric standard does not naturally accommodate the biological genes of African Americans. It is even more significant, that the slavery spectrum that assigned more value and rights to African Americans with more Caucasian features compared to African Americans with more African features, is still applicable to African American culture today.

Bellinger also conducted an interview study to investigate why African American women are motivated to alter their hair from its natural state. Bellinger notes, the majority of African American women are raised and socialized to straighten their hair. She also raises an interesting line of reasoning in which she affirms, “…younger African American women say that they no longer follow historical norms of wanting to appear White in appearance, but claim that they change their hair’s chemical make-up and naturalness for time, ease of styling, and the creation and perpetuation of healthy hair (Bellinger 2007:63).” Surprisingly, Bellinger fails to address the undertone postulation that natural African American hair is not healthy hair.

Bellinger asked representative African American women with ages ranging from 16 to 18 about good hair, and how hair affects their lives. One respondent claims that, “Good hair is dictated by society. It seems right
now that “good hair” is typically associated with non-black hair (Bellinger 2007:67).” It would be fair to say that “good hair” is the hair of the hegemony. When questioned on why she chemically relaxes her hair, Amy replied, “I think it looks better, but reflecting on my decision, I guess I have learned that ideal of beauty from the Whites I interact with so frequently (Bellinger 2007:67).” Amy’s statement also supports the findings discussed in Smith et al.’s (1991) study. Many of the women interviewed stated that for them, “good hair” is not necessarily having Caucasian-like hair. Jaime explains, “I really dislike the idea that ‘good hair’ is hair that is as close as possible to Caucasian hair, you could compliment a women on the fact that her hair is so easily managed or looks good long, but hair is not good based on texture alone (Bellinger 2007:68).” However, hair that is long and is easily managed is still associated with the hair of non-ethnic backgrounds. An alarming issue raised by Bellinger’s respondents is that they all base their opinions concerning their hair off of the appearance of Caucasian individuals. It appears that African American women are not taking ownership of what they decide to do with their hair, but are continuing to blindly assimilate themselves to a far-fetched ideal.

Thompson’s interview style analysis also demonstrated significant experiences regarding African American women and their hair. For example, LaToya illustrates the emphasis of having long, straight hair to be considered attractive. She describes, “I’ve had guy friends who have clearly said to me that what they like is long flowing hair...” she adds, “I’m finding that I’m getting more favorable responses from men with fake hair in my head than I did when I had my natural hair...” (Thompson 2009:851).” LaToya’s account epitomizes how society celebrates and encourages “good hair” through any means necessary.

Thompson illuminates how hair affects the African American woman’s employment prospects. Wearing one’s hair naturally in the workplace may be considered to be unprofessional and inappropriate. Jackie explains, One day when I’m more established in my career I would like to get dreadlocks...I can’t do it now...I want to be in corporate Canada and... if I’m going to show up with my hair in dreadlocks in the first year [when they are very short] they would not think I fit a corporate ideal and for sure I wouldn’t get the job (Thompson 2009:853).

Other respondents agreed and noted that you have to look a certain way in order to have career opportunities and be hired (Thompson 2009). Unfortunately, even African American women who want to wear their natural hair face discrimination from society as a whole. Although the “good hair” debate is principally an African American culture concern, the argument about “good hair” is fueled by the usually tacit expectations of those in supremacy.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Hair affects the lives of all women in general but within the African American community, hair plays double the significance. Even more so, achieving the normative standard of beauty requires African American women to completely discount and manipulate their natural hair. Research has provided valuable knowledge on understanding the African American woman’s desire to have “good hair,” and the emphasis on attaining “good hair.”

Within their arguments, the authors focused on how natural hair styles are considered to be of low status and are un-fashionable. Yet they failed to elaborate on the increase of African American women who are wearing their hair naturally. Patton challenges the idea that hair straightening is related to wanting to emulate Caucasians. Patton claims, “Not every woman who decides to straighten her hair...believes that beauty is synonymous with Whiteness....Trying on a new look, even one often associated with Europeans, does not automatically imply self-hatred...” (2006:29).”

If more celebrities and influential African Americans encouraged and accepted natural African American hair, it would be a big step in combating the “good hair” versus “bad hair” debate. The natural hair of African Americans must first be loved and respected among African Americans before society as a whole can learn to accept it. For example, mothers of African American daughters must stop perpetuating that straight hair is necessary for success and acceptance. Straight, long hair is not, and should not be a requirement for success, beauty, or happiness. Positive African American role models who do not emphasize the need to have straight hair can begin to change the way future generations view their hair.

The debate about hair may continue to haunt the African American community for a few reasons. It seems that we are still at odds with equality in the sense of normative beauty. It can also be related to the fact that the hegemony’s beauty ideal rules, and African American hair does not fit within the criteria. The hair debate began with slavery and although the slavery era has passed, African American people continue to enable the normative hair ideal to control the construction their physical beings. African Americans must rise above the pressure to have “good hair”, and begin to make more
informed, decisive decisions concerning the altering of their natural hair. In order to do this, African American women in particular must be aware of the history of how “good hair” and “bad hair” came to be. Beauty comes in all different skin tones, sizes, and variations of hair, realizing this is the way to defeat the issue of “good” and “bad” hair.

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Freud describes his friend’s son’s game of fort/da (gone/there), “These efforts might be put down to an instinct for mastery that was acting independently of whether the memory was in itself pleasurable or not,” (Freud 14-17). Like the child throwing away his toys and retrieving them to control the recreation of a scenario over which he has absolutely no control (the coming and going of his mother), modernist writers Samuel Beckett and Milan Kundera use their absolute power over the universes they create within the novel to combat moments in history and in their own lives over which they had absolutely no control. Freud also writes, “Throwing away the object so that it was ‘gone’ might satisfy an impulse of the child’s [...] to revenge himself on his mother for going away from him,” (14-17). Beckett and Kundera also use the form of the novel to revenge themselves on the totalitarian worlds created by the Nazi invasion of France and the Communist take over of Czechoslovakia, respectively. To create the worlds over which they have complete mastery, both novelists use elements of modern history, both often employ comedy to approach the tragic situations befalling their characters, and both draw on other historical works of art – with Beckett drawing on Homer’s Odyssey, in Molloy and Kundera drawing on Beethoven’s sonatas and variation in The Book of Laughter and Forgetting.

Molloy’s wanderings throughout the unnamed country in Molloy and his long and convoluted search for home reflect both Homer’s Odyssey and Beckett’s own journey through France and ultimate hiding in Roussillon in the south of France (Perloff 76-103). The strange towns and characters Molloy encounters on his journey are also reminiscent of The Odyssey; one could see Molloy’s entrapment by Lousse as an evocation of Odysseus’ stays with Cire and Calypso, for example. Beckett uses the blueprint of Homer’s work
in the construction of his own fictional realm that, while evoking Freud’s interpretation of fort/da, he uses to revenge himself upon the Nazi occupation of France. Beckett’s use of recent history in Molloy is much more subtle than Kundera’s work, but he illustrates his message nonetheless by incorporating ideas of undesirable persons, the pursuit of those undesirable, and the paranoia/fear of associating with suspicious persons in Molloy.

Molloy says of his mother, “I know she did all she could not to have me, except of course the one thing, and if she never succeeded in getting me unstuck, it was that fate had earmarked me for less compassionate sewers,” (14). Molloy should have been aborted, it was fated from his very conception he was destined to be at the bottom of society, in the sewer and receive little compassion. Molloy is an ‘undesirable’ so to speak – he has no place. The ideal Nazi society was fundamentally one in which all human beings would be carefully categorized and those with no place, i.e., any non Anglo-Saxon person became worthless and disposable. Beckett himself spent time as an undesirable, “Beckett had to avoid Nazi patrols coming through the area, by hiding, sometimes for days at a time, in the fields and woods on the outskirts of Roussillon,” (Perloff 76-103). Molloy, a man without a place spends much of his journey wandering through the forest with his eyes closed, and Moran later also finds himself abandoned there. The individuals both characters come into contact with in the forest are also clearly undesirable. The old, ‘charcoal-burner’ that Molloy encounters is obviously deranged, like Molloy he is an outcast. The old man with the club that Moran encounters in the forest is also represented as not being a conventional member of society. The disposable nature of undesirables is illustrated vividly in Molloy’s murder of the charcoal-burner, and Moran’s murder of the man in the blue suit, with neither legal nor moral consequence following either murder. Beckett again plays his game of fort/da with his experiences by recreating his own forest for undesirables, but in a world over which he has total autonomy. Like Nazi society, the society of Beckett’s world in Molloy does not merely allow undesirables to go about their lives on the ‘gutter-rung’ of the social ladder, but is in pursuit of them.

Beckett said of his time fleeing to the south of France, “I can remember waiting in a barn (there were ten of us) until it got dark, then being led by a passeur over streams; we could see a German sentinel in the moonlight,” (Perloff 76-103). Beckett’s experience of being pursued by the Nazi’s and the Nazi practice of pursuing Jews and any other person they deemed undesirable surface in Molloy. Early in the novel, the police stop Molloy and demand to see his “papers” – which brings to mind the Nazi practice of demanding to see a person’s identification papers to determine whether or not they were considered an acceptable form of human being. Molly describes his crime thus, “at rest, astride my bicycle, my arms on the handlebars, my head on my arms, was a violation of I don’t know what, public order, public decency,” (Beckett 16). The idea of authorities finding any excuse to inspect a person they deem suspicious is clearly reminiscent of occupied France. Beckett also exposes this idea in the second part of the work, with Moran’s task to pursue and find Molloy. Moran is never told explicitly why he must find Molloy, only that he must find him. It would seem the only reason Molloy needs finding is simply because he is Molloy. Nazis pursued and persecuted people simply because of who they were, readers receive the same idea in Beckett’s novel. The world of occupied France was one of distrust and paranoia and these aspects were not left out of Beckett’s universe in Molloy.

“The uniqueness of the French war experience [. . .] was that there was no sure way of differentiating between friend and enemy. Collaborator and Resistance fighter, after all, looked alike,” (Perloff 76-103). Beckett’s experience in a world in which it was almost impossible to know who to trust, and where people could turn on one another or deny one another at a moment’s notice surfaces in Molloy. A depiction of the paranoia and fear of associating with undesirable individuals can be seen in the second part of the novel when Gaber finds his colleague, Moran abandoned, sick and injured in the forest (the land of undesirables):

He [Gaber] read, Moran, Jacques, home, instanter. [. . .] I cried to him that I could not move, that I was sick, that I should have to be carried, that my son had abandoned me, that I could bear no more. He examined me laboriously from head to foot. [. . .] He opened his notebook again, [. . .] and said, Moran, home, instanter (157).

Gaber does not acknowledge that he knows Moran whatsoever. His treatment of Moran is very cold, and Gaber offers him no help and despite how pathetic and horrible Moran looks, Gaber does not ask him how he is
doing. Gaber does not even ask him about the assignment. Moran is crippled, he is sick, most importantly Moran is in the forest – he is undesirable and any association with him could only be dangerous for Gaber.

The woman whose dog Molloy kills, Louise, is the only character in the novel that ever really attempts to help him. Though she claims to have his best interest in mind, she is very mindful of his whereabouts, is very observant of his sleeping and eating, and does not want him to go out of the house. Louise seems reminiscent of a kind of safe-house operator in the novel, which would imply that she truly was helping Molloy, although there are also indications to the contrary. Molloy suspects she may be poisoning his food (though he does not care), but tells readers, “That celebrated whiff of almonds, for example would never have taken away my appetite,” (49). Though presented in a very comical way, the sentence has serious implications. The poison known for smelling like almonds is cyanide, which, in gaseous form, was also the preferred chemical used by Nazi’s in the gas chambers. By incorporating the ideas of distrust and disloyalty, the necessity to hide undesirable, and the passing mention of cyanide Beckett again is seen using his mastery over his fictional realm to revenge himself on the most harrowing time in both his life and the history of Europe.

Despite the clear presence of motifs of and allusions to Nazi-occupied France, Beckett’s universe in Molloy, of course, was not created as a means merely to relive history. He explores many of the themes of that time period in order to finally have complete control over them. It is his universe and only his and Beckett reminds his readers of that fact the way any good Irish writer would – with humor. Humor pervades Molloy and it is one of the funniest novels a reader could hope to be exposed to. Molloy’s description of his testicles, the descriptions of his sexual experiences and his obsession with his sixteen sucking-stones represent a few of the more comical moments in the first part of the novel.

In the second part, readers are exposed to Moran’s highly comical habit of praising his son in his head, but then putting him down verbally, “I had to admit it must once have been quite a good bicycle. [. . .] to his son] And you call that a bicycle?” (149). Moran’s theological questions (160-162) are also highly comical. To describe all the comedic moments in Molloy would render this essay a book in itself, and indeed the quoting of many of them would make the essayist blush, but one can be sure that while traveling with Beckett through occupied France was arduous, there was never a want of humor. Beckett infuses the story with comedy because it is his story, only and completely his, and there is no better way for him to more effectively revenge himself on those who tried to take away his life and humor than through laughter.

Like Beckett, Milan Kundera plays his own game of fort/da in The Book of Laughter and Forgetting (hereafter referred to as Laughter in this paper). He creates a fictional domain over which he has absolute power, a world where the past can be erased in an instant and a world in which his characters are trapped, in order to revenge himself on similar real-world conditions he lived through and the people who were responsible for those conditions. As Beckett used the blueprint of The Odyssey for his work, so too does Kundera use the blueprint of a historical work of art, that of Beethoven’s sonatas and the composer’s use of variation. Using the framework of classical music and variation, Kundera builds his novel (plays his game of fort/da) using seven variations (parts) on themes of the delicate nature of the past, and the nature of exile/being trapped on one side of a border or another.

Kundera opens his novel with a very powerful and moving example of the very malleable quality history can possess when manipulated by those in power. Clementis, a close comrade of Gottwald, gives Gottwald his fur hat to keep his head warm and shortly thereafter a photo is taken. Four years later, Clementis was tried and convicted of treason and the iconic photograph forever altered to remove his likeness. As Kundera puts it, “Nothing remains of Clementis but the fur hat on Gottwald’s head,” (4). The notion that the past, both political in the case of Clementis, and personal – in the case of Tamina, one of the books most memorable characters and to whom apparently the book is written about and for pervades Kundera’s novel. Tamina escaped communist Bohemia with her husband only for him to die not long thereafter. As she begins to forget their time together, for instance their vacations, she tries desperately to retrieve her notebooks of letters and diary writing from home, to no avail. “She wants to have her notebooks so that the flimsy framework of events, as she has constructed them in her school notebook, will be provided with walls and become a house she can live in,” (119). Her past is not under her control, but locked away in a drawer she cannot access, to Tamina like many other characters in Laughter, the past is just out of reach.

Kundera also exposes readers to the delicate nature of the past in the experiences of Mirek in the first section (variation) and in the relationship of
Kundera and his father in the sixth section (variation). Mirek’s designs on the past are different than Tamina’s in that she wants to breathe life into her past, he wants aspects of his past, like the love letters he wrote to the ugly Zdena, and his past public statements against the Czech Communist Party, erased from memory. Like Tamina, Mirek’s past is in the control of others. Zdena will not let go of the love letters he wrote her, and the Party will never let go of their evidence against him. Kundera’s personal relationship with the delicate nature of the past comes from a failure to create an adequate one with his father:

When Papa could speak normally, I had asked him very few questions. Now I wanted to make up for lost time. So we talked about music, but it was a strange conversation, between someone who knew nothing but a great many words and one who knew everything but not a single word (220).

Thus Kundera plays his own game of fort/da, using the accounts of his characters and the account of his own life, to create a world similar to his own in that the past is fleeting and often in danger, or in the hands of the powers-that-be, but quite different in that through his autonomous power as a novelist, he is the power. Drawing inspiration from another great creator of artistic worlds, Beethoven, Kundera uses the idea of theme and variation to explore himself and his characters.

“Beethoven thus discovered in variations another area to be explored. [. . .] Variation form is the form in which concentration is brought to its maximum; it enables the composer [. . .] to go straight to the core of the matter,” (226). The seven parts of the novel represent Kundera’s seven variations on theme. By Kundera’s description of variation as becoming more focused on the theme as they go along until reaching, “the interior of a thought, the interior of a single, unique situation,” (227) it can be understood that the central themes of the book become more apparent as the book progresses. As Laughter unfolds, the narrative moves through variations on the themes of entrapment, forgetting, attempting to free oneself, to know oneself – all of which are set against the backdrop of the great battle between the two laughers, the laughter of the devils and the laughter of the angels. While the devil laughs at the absurdity of things, at the pitfalls and injurious mistakes of mankind, the angel laughs to, “rejoice over how well ordered, wisely conceived, good, and meaningful everything here below was,” (87).

The distinction between the two laughers is most clearly demonstrated in the third variation in the novel, via the anecdote of the two American students Gabrielle and Michelle. After discussing a play in which the use of a Rhinoceros horn confuses the two young women, they discover that the horn is meant as a phallic symbol, used for comedic effect. After explaining that the nature of good laughter, angel laughter is to proclaim that, “We’re happy, we’re glad to be in this world,” (81) – Kundera says of the laughter the two students shared upon their discovery, “Michelle and Gabrielle’s laughter is precisely that kind of laughter,” (81).

Gabrielle and Michelle are also used to demonstrate the devil’s laughter when they present their findings to their classmates. The two girls are giving their presentation while wearing Rhinoceros horns, and while they are speaking another girl sneaks behind them and kicks them both strongly in the “behind”. “For a moment there was absolute silence. Then Michelle’s tears began to flow, and a moment later Gabrielle’s” (102). The devil’s laughter is mockery, it is exclusion, and most of all the devil’s laughter is about creating a border between people. As Kundera leads readers through his seven variations, it becomes clearer that the idea of borders, of being stuck on one side or the other, is the “interior” of his thought, the “interior” of his “single, unique situation.”

The theme of borders and splitting up people from their past or from other people is a pervasive one in the novel and, as Kundera suggests through use of variation, one that becomes more succinct as readers advance through the variations. Early in the novel Mirek is on the outside of the Party, he is no longer within the borders of a relationship with Zdena, and is ultimately barred from enjoying the comfort of being within the borders of his own family when sent to prison. It is Tamina, the novel’s alleged protagonist that experiences the most difficulty with borders. She is separated from her family and her past by a literal national border. She is separated from her husband by the border between life and death, and perhaps most vividly – she is separated from the children on the island she eventually inhabits by her age and her sexual maturity. “Her misfortune is not that the children...
are bad but that she is beyond their world’s border. Humans do not revolt against the killing of calves in slaughterhouses. [. . .] Tamina is outside the children’s law,” (255). Tamina’s ‘otherness’ in the children’s world, the great border between them is also movingly, and rather disturbingly portrayed in the scene in which she dies. The five children in the boat stare at her eagerly as she drowns, “no one was offering an oar, or a hand, no one was trying to save her,” (262). With her death ends the penultimate variation of Kundera’s work.

Kundera’s seventh and final variation concerns Jan, a young man who is about to move to the United States from an unspecified European country. In many ways Jan closes the novel as a character finally able to move beyond borders and not be overcome by them. By not sleeping with Edgewise the first time because he is tired he gains control over the border between them and is not a victim of it. He overcomes a border between himself and his desire to experiment sexually by attending Barbara’s orgy, during which he instigates a wild chorus of ‘angel laughter’ with the group. While the novel ends while he is on a final vacation with Edgewise, it is implied that Jan does actually succeed in moving to the United States. By moving to the United States Jan overcomes what is one of the most powerful borders in the novel, and from what Kundera has been revenging himself on throughout the work, the inspiration for his game of fort/da: the totalitarian governments of Eastern Europe.

The modernist writer, without needing to adhere to form or narrative structure, has absolute and total power over the worlds he chooses to create. This paper has sought to argue, using Freud’s psychological theories as presented in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” as a guide, that Samuel Beckett and Milan Kundera chose to use their autonomous power to reenact moments from their lives and from mid-twentieth century Europe over which they had no control. Through these recreations, and the complete shift of power to the novelist, they revenge themselves on the people and the world that oppressed them. While both are rooted in recent history, both incorporate elements of comedy into their styles, and both draw on other historical works of art to create their narrative worlds, the works remain entirely unique from one another stylistically, structurally, and thematically – further illustrating the immense power of the autonomous creative power of the modernist writer.

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Yeelen: Revealing Governmental Corruption through Malian Mythology

MICHAEL FESTA

Souleymane Cissé’s mythological tale, Yeelen, centers around a conflict between father and son in the ancient society of Mali. In a society of obedience to elders and loyalty to tradition, the leaders have become corrupt. The main themes of corruption and abuse of power manifest themselves quite frequently throughout the film. These themes are allegorical connections to the modern-day governmental corruption in Mali during the time in which Cissé created Yeelen. Although this is hidden behind the façade of a mythic saga, “African audiences recognize serious contemporary issues in the narrative and perceive the direct relationship of the film to their own social and political problems” (MacRae 57). The societal leaders of ancient Mali, similarly to the undemocratic rule of Moussa Traoré in modern Mali, have been corrupted by power. Although Cissé is deeply critical of the ruling generation, he is also critical of the youth. This is depicted through Nianancoro’s premature attempt to gain the powers of the Komo sorcerer society. Cissé aims at persuading the government to return back to its ethical traditions by simplifying and condensing this “complex material [to] its basic principles metaphorically to indict abuse of power by the current rulers of Mali” (MacRae 58). Director Souleymane Cissé utilizes the main themes and events of this Malian mythological tale in the film Yeelen to reveal the governmental corruption and insist on a return to the traditional society based on tradition, respect, and loyalty.

The elder leaders of the Mande people and the ancient Komo sorcerers abusing their power is an allegorical connection to the undemocratic reign of Malian President General Moussa Traoré in the late 1970’s and the 1980’s. Throughout the film Cissé furthers this political point by indicting “the corrupt and violent regime of President Moussa Traoré, who came to power through the 1968 military coup which ousted the first president of
The corrupt leaders have adulterated the honorable initiation process. This breakdown of tradition in the Mande life is the reason Nianancoro has sought power too early.

Souleymane Cissé is also critical of the youth in modern-day Mali, as Nianancoro's premature attempt to gain powers is an allegory to the youthful revolts against Traoré's undemocratic regime. In opposition of the corrupt and dictatorial regime of Traoré, many young students organized a series of peaceful demonstrations to protest the autocratic government and demand free multiparty elections (“Movements” 1). These modern revolts in Mali are the connection to Nianancoro's improper actions towards his father and the Komo traditions. In the Mande society, the youth are supposed to be respectful to the elders. Although his father wishes to kill him, Nianancoro greets his father respectfully based on their traditions right before their final duel. This is a ploy utilized by Cissé to insist that, even though the elders may be out of line in their decision-making, the youth must maintain the traditional standards. Cissé employs a two shot at the beginning of the film with Nianankoro's mother larger than him in the frame. This symbolizes that elders should be respected in the Mande society. Nianancoro must take his ancestral fetishes and moved up through the society without permission of the elders. This is why Soma is tracking him throughout the film. Cissé wants to instill traditions of respect back in the youth of modern-day Mali by showing an example of how these cultural values are beneficial.

Because the smiths exercise such extensive power in all vital areas of Mande life, it is imperative that they practice the highest ethical standards, and renounce tyranny, vengeance, and self-aggrandizement. When they do not, injustice and suffering reign. Cissé measures the performance of the Komo association in the film against this ancient moral benchmark. The struggle between those who exercise ethical stewardship of the Koré and those who abuse their occult knowledge is the central conflict of Yeelen (MacRae 61).
Yeelen is a political parable that attempts to persuade the government to bring back the beneficial traditions by showing the historical consequences of past transgressions. “Yeelen demands a return to the traditional ideals of beneficent governance [and] Cissé hopes that his film will arouse the ethical integrity of the ancestral Mali commonwealth” before the corrupt government leads the country down an increasingly dark road (MacRae 58). It is inferred in the film that the corruption of the Komo people will bring European slavery upon the African tribes. This is a 13th century tale; however, colonizers bring slavery to Mali when tribes turn their backs on one another by selling enemies to the Portuguese and Spanish. This is the punishment that Djigi alludes to when Nianankoro reaches the end of his journey by meeting his uncle and uniting the last amulet with the Wing of Koré. The modern-day government in Mali ultimately was punished for its corruption and abuse of power as well:

Yeelen can be judged as a premonitory about the vulnerability of corrupt government in light of events which occurred about four years after its release. In March 1991 peaceful strikes and protests against the Traoré government were violently suppressed, and as many as 200 unarmed protestors died at the hands of government troops. Shortly thereafter, Traoré was arrested and jailed and some of his officials were killed (MacRae 65).

Power ultimately corrupts and becomes destructive, as made evident by Traoré’s end and the mutual destruction of Soma and Nianancoro. This real life example and the fictional example both act as vehicles to augment Cissé’s insistence that the beneficial traditions of Mali should be restored for the betterment of all people.

Yeelen and Cissé are successful in revealing governmental corruption in Mali. This fact, disguised behind myth and fiction, was revealed by Cissé in order to awaken the Malian people. Cissé’s insistence on a return to traditional society must be heeded in order the better Mali. The corruption of the Komo leaders throughout the film is directly allegorical to what was occurring in Mali. This film leaves hope for future Malians, as respect, tradition, and loyalty must reign over corruption and abuse of power.

WORKS CITED


Downtown Perspective  
NICHOLAS LONGWORTH

Self-Creation Myth  
KRISTINE SLOAN

I don’t believe a world can be created in six days.  
A maker’s methodology

of division: light because of darkness, land because of air, water—  
a spirit meant to christen

skin as earth in substance which flows unified, connecting bodies  
of land by bodies of water.

But now, borders and shorelines, so many of them drawn  
naturally. An intent that means

accident. Opposites: one lives because another chooses  
distance. I can only ask

how to define the landscape between us.
A drawing of the “Evergrain Bakery” building and its neighbors in Downtown Chester-town. All signs of life (cars, company signs, etc.) have been taken out to focus on the life of the buildings and their beauty.

**Watercolors**

**KRISTINE SLOAN**

I am the brush that dives into water like birth, bathed in blood and stain upon the page. Painting a daughter starts with a wash. Shades of baptism offer a cerulean context that spills into frame, pictures a family flooding like water.

Bristles are islands that gather, then farther a mainland stroking language into pain. Balikbayan, don’t abandon your daughter who stabs at the palette desperate for color, yet allows salt to burn traces of white. Rain’s season is begging – can’t sink into water for strangers, for family (made blessing), an altar of change. Sacrificing location on a plane, destination – home? A different daughter doesn’t know how to deal with borders. Takes her restlessness to wandering. One city can’t sustain. I am the brush, the art, and the water, I am the embrace that releases a daughter.
The heifer woman is back. Calvin can hear her exaggerated chewing sounds long before she reaches his checkout and when she does, he is assaulted with the scent of her spearmint gum. Today he refuses to accept her expired coupon so she can get 20% off the pastel muumuu she’s holding. It’s already marked down to $6.99. She engages in this same tug-of-war on a weekly basis, usually until whichever unfortunate cashier helping her ultimately concedes. Having already reached his quota of customer-frustration earlier in the day, Calvin sighs heavily and takes the coupon.

“I’ll let you use this just this once. Next time remember these come with an expiration date.” The woman impatiently during his rehearsed statement. “There you go,” Calvin says as she takes her receipt, cracking her gum and smiling triumphantly. “Oh, and if it’s too big for your table, feel free to bring it back for a smaller one.” Receiving no response, Calvin watches as she plods off.

Calvin works Checkout Four at Claudette’s, a family-owned, knock-off brand department store. Four checkout registers, each bearing resemblance to a different model paper processor from the 1980s, are lined up across an eggshell-white counter. Under the halogen glow of Checkout One’s bulbous numerical identifier, retired dental assistant Edith-Marie diligently counts each customer’s load to make sure it does not exceed the limit of “10 items or fewer,” as posted above her station. Her arthritic hands prevent her from picking money up from the counter, so her station also bears the label “credit only.”

The next customer who approaches Calvin’s station, a waif of a girl, hands him a magazine with a heroin-chic model on the cover, as well as a couple of moist bills and sixty-seven pennies to pay for it. She scratches her head and Calvin hears an audible grating of nails on flesh as he counts the
change. Before giving her a receipt, Calvin asks her, “Would you like to buy a candy bar for a dollar? The proceeds go to the music and arts program over at the middle school.” He gestures to the large bars of chocolate near his register. The girl stares at them for a moment before hurrying away, clutching the magazine to her chest.

Jade Polinsky, of Checkout Two, sits at her register, idly flipping through magazines and munching Bugles that she has pulled off the shelf.

“Jade, those are for the customers,” Calvin overhears Paula of Checkout Three say. The girl responds with a glare and a swig from a sixteen ounce canned energy drink.

“Mama wouldn’t mind,” Jade replies, as she retrieves a pack of cigarettes from her cleavage. She leaves for her break. Calvin glances up behind the registers at the over-hanging portrait of the store’s namesake, Claudette Polinsky, and wonders how a girl like Jade could be the progeny of such a smart-looking woman.

Hearing an audible huffing sound, Calvin turns to see Paula struggling to turn off the switch for Jade’s checkout light. Paula is of diminutive stature, and while she claims she is not a “little” little person, the top of her head only reaches Calvin’s pectorals. She has a small stool she uses at her register, but it doesn’t seem to be helping her to reach the light switch. Calvin gets the light for her.

“Thanks, Cal. It wasn’t even time for her break.”

A heavy-set, redheaded woman approaches the checkout and waves at them. Calvin can never remember her name, but he knows she’s a sales associate, or as Jade calls it, a grunt of the last-stop-before-goodwill. What’s-her-name appears to be carrying something large in the direction of the empty display platform at the front of the store.

Calvin’s attention is diverted when a scruffy man gets in line. He pauses in selecting between Edith-Marie, Paula, and Calvin’s registers and eventually he approaches Calvin. He tries to return a pair of women’s panties. It lies on the counter in a pathetic, dingy heap. It does not appear to have a price tag and Calvin makes no move to look for one.

“Sir,” Calvin says, “you cannot return an item without a receipt. You definitely cannot return something that has no price tag and shows visible… use.”

The man stares at Calvin and just blinks.

“I am sorry, sir, but I cannot give you any money for this item,” Calvin tells him.

“How ‘bout store credit?” the customer asks.

“No, sir.”

The man grabs the underwear and stuffs it into the breast pocket of his shirt as he leaves.

Calvin looks back to where What’s-Her-Name is in the display area. Paula, no longer standing next to Calvin, has joined her and they are both fussing over something. Then he sees what it is, a third figure. The plastic model, a female contrapposto of supple height and taut form, dons a sundress and a smile. She stands before Paula and What’s-Her-Name, a perfect representation of everything neither of them possess.

Calvin sees new women come to the store each and every day, but this one is different. She doesn’t have a shopping cart brimming with garish clothes, she doesn’t shift her purse from shoulder to shoulder from the weighted guilt of attempted shoplifting, and she isn’t talking incessantly to herself with a little electronic bud in her ear. No, she has a manner that seems to say, “I do not wish to bother you in any way. I am simply here to look.” Finally, thinks Calvin, the ideal shopper.

The day passes for Calvin. Paula comes and goes, Jade leaves early, and Calvin humors Paula by listening to her rant about the girl. The female figure becomes a welcomed distraction from the lack of customers and Calvin finds her pleasant to look at. She models a short, tight, black little number which Calvin finds hard to believe is “prom-wear,” given the lack of formality, modesty, or any type of demure articulation his mother had once used to describe the proper, lady-like attire for a girl’s high school prom. It would probably suit the likes of Jade, however, thinks Calvin.

For a slightly older wearer, a woman, the dress could be quite flattering. The model’s legs were bare and brazenly accentuated by their lack of cover; Calvin appreciated the long, smooth ride of his eyes took traveling up and down the slight curve of the plasticized thigh and calf.

“Everything okay, Cal?” Paula asks, reviving him from his brief reverie.

“Mhm,” he mumbles.

“Well, what’s up then?”

Paula waits expectantly, pushing for the resumption of a conversation they were not having.
“Oh-uh, nothing. Just thinking.” He resumes silently gazing at the model.

“How’s Bernice doing?”

The mention of the name “Bernice” is like an electric shock to Calvin’s system. He turns quickly to Paula.

“Wh-what?”

“Bernice? Your girlfriend? Or roommate…or whoever she is. The one who picks you up after work. I’ve seen you two. I haven’t seen her for a while.”

“Uh, she’s fine, I think. How do you know her name…exactly?” Calvin has never mentioned the name Bernice to anyone at work, much less talked about her as a person.

“I saw her waiting one day when I had to run to my car for my phone charger. She looked bored, so I introduced myself. She didn’t seem to know who I was. What, you don’t ever mention me?” Paula laughs playfully and Calvin winces in mock pain at her fake arm-jab.

“Well, no, not really. I don’t really mix business with pleasure, so to speak.”

“So, am I the business or the pleasure you don’t talk about?” Paula replies. She laughs, but Calvin does not.

“I don’t really want to talk about it or her, Paula,” he replies. He knows he sounds curt, but he does not feel regretful.

Paula looks a bit taken aback, if not hurt. She doesn’t pursue the topic and focuses on picking at a spot of dried something-or-another on the counter in front of her. It is light pink and crusty.

Calvin isn’t usually short with Paula or any of his coworkers, but he feels agitated. Looking at the model’s long legs, covered in some sort of black, high-heeled dress shoe (women’s fashion, with its labels and classifications, was beyond Calvin’s realm of concern and interest), had lost its previous sense of pleasurable contentment and was replaced with an irritable distaste at the sudden collision of his private and professional worlds. Bernice was not a part of Claudette’s; Claudette’s didn’t pick him up from work and go home with him; they were separate, divided by the concrete sidewalk buttressing the front of store, adjacent to the parking lot shared with the nearby strip mall. Bernice was on one side, Claudette’s was on the other, and neither crossed. Until Paula.

But she did not and does not know any better.

“Paula, sorry I snapped at you. I didn’t mean it.” Calvin could lie when he wanted and needed to.

Paula forgives him, but doesn’t go out of her way to speak to him for the rest of the day.

At closing time, Calvin turns off his checkout’s light and heads to the employee’s small lounge to fetch his coat. As he prepares to leave, he delays leaving through the back entrance, the employee entrance and loading dock area, and instead goes to the front of the store. He sees the female figure, her black dress shimmering slightly, staring blankly across the empty storefront. The large glass doors are locked and the parking lot can be seen slowly being emptied of customers and employees. Calvin knows what to expect and sees it: Bernice’s small station wagon, with its red paint and rust, is sitting under the nearest lamppost, a shaded figure at the wheel. He glances back at the figure and smiles slightly to himself. She shall be here tomorrow, perhaps wearing something new and just as exciting.

Calvin exits through the usual back entrance and makes his way around to the storefront, to Bernice’s station wagon. He avoids the dip in the sidewalk and stands frozen for a few moments at the front of the store, bathed in the yellow glow of Claudette’s ancient marquee hanging above the front door. He steps off the sidewalk, crossing the barrier, and enters his second world, that of Bernice. She honks her horn and he quickens his step to reach her before she honks a second time.

The next day, Calvin notices What’s-Her-Name changing the model’s outfit. She now wears a pair of shorts and a tank top. The tank top does Calvin in. It is lacey, low-cut, and gives Calvin a slight feeling of shameful inappropriateness when he begins imagining other customers wearing it. None of them could do it justice like the figure could.

“Well, apparently Gail has insisted that we start updating our fixtures and whatnot,” Calvin overhears Paula telling Edith-Marie. Gail is their manager. Edith-Marie doesn’t seem to particularly like the new figure. She states that she finds it vulgar and unrepresentative of the wide range of products Claudette’s carries or people it caters to.

“We do not just sell high-waisted jeans or knock off handbags, Paula. We are a ‘multi-purpose provision emporium.’ We sell things for the kitchen, the bathroom, the bedroom, the garage, the yard…this is not a department store.” Edith-Marie shakes her bony finger around her to emphasize her point.
Paula defends it, probably out of self-respect for her own handiwork in its assembling, Calvin thinks. “That doesn’t mean one customer can’t come here just for a specific clothing section, ma’am,” she says patiently to the older clerk.

Jade makes an unexpected contribution: “Hey, when did you get so defensive of this hell-hole, Edith?”

Edith-Marie blinks at her and Paula and then looks to Calvin. He feels no dislike towards the figure, even if she did seem to be dressed in a manner to cater to the young missus-population.

“She is beautiful. Most people like that. I don’t see the problem.” Calvin leaves it at that.

Calvin catches Paula after a customer leaves with three new toaster ovens of varying sizes and apologizes once again.

“Don’t worry about it, Cal. I talked to Bernice after work the other day, I understand everything. It’s not a problem.”

Paula hops down from her stool.

“Wait, what? You talked to her again?”

“Yeah, I’m going on break. It’s been slow, so you should be fine without me for a few minutes.” She hurries off, as if to avoid another verbal snap from him.

Calvin feels the same bad taste, except stronger. He can’t believe Paula had talked to Bernice again. Bernice hadn’t mentioned anything about their talk when she had picked him up, but then again, he really isn’t surprised she hadn’t said anything. She never said anything to him, not really.

The figure, the woman, seems lucky, thinks Calvin. She enjoys a privileged isolation and a lack of expectation, aside from an empty smile; he envies her for not intentionally drawing attention to herself. She just smiles, people avoid walking into her, and she smiles some more. A few people stare, but there is still no expectation of her. Obese shoppers, having given up on walking for motorized La-Z-Boys, quibble over the absent flaws in her taut form, little girls look up and up and up her supple height in awe and their mothers wince in envy at the sight of her youthful bosom. She is an anomaly; there is no one else like the female figure in the store. Edith-Marie is right in her assessment, Calvin admits to himself, as the woman does not represent the product or the people of this store. He finds this unsettling in a twisted, yet enjoyable way.

The heifer lady appears at the front of the line once more. Her varicose veins are almost quivering with excitement. She must want to pick a fight. She smiles at Paula and then approaches Calvin. She tries to return a damage blender that is not in the original packaging.

Calvin glares at the woman. She is stuffed into a sequined shirt that sparkles in the halogen lighting.

“Ma’am, you cannot return—” he begins.

“Don’t ‘ma’am’ me, I’m not an old woman.”

“Okay…miss…you can’t return an item without the box it came in.”

“Says who?”

Calvin points to the sign behind the checkout stations that lists in full, small-print detail the store return policies.

“I am happy to contact my manager if you have any other…concerns.”

“Poo,” she says, “You’ll do. I figured since the blades were already dull, it would be better to bring it in up-wrapped, to show the dullness, you know?”

“Look, you cannot return this.”

“Yes, it says on that sign I can return defective merchandise.”

“Yes,” he replies, “with the original packaging and a receipt.”

“Here’s my receipt.”

“Miss, you cannot return this. How do I know you didn’t just use it a bunch of times to shred nails or the like?”

“I have my receipt!”

Calvin rips the receipt from her hand and look at it. It is dated eighteen months ago.

“Ma’am. Our return policy is only in effect for ninety days after the purchase. If you have any further issues, you can take it up with the manager, although I can pretty much guarantee she’ll make you feel worse about your pathetic life than you normally do.”

The woman has no retort except a quivering lip. She turns and finds the exit, leaving her blender behind.

Calvin can see Paula moving towards him, but he doesn’t want another confrontation. He quickly announces he is taking an early break and heads to the store’s entrance.

The figure smiles at him and he relaxes a bit.

When his break is over, he returns to Checkout Four. Jade and Paula stare at him like timid animals.
“Sorry,” he tells them.
“You seem to be saying that a lot, lately,” Paula says quietly. “You realize we’re going to need to tell Gail about what happened, right? You can’t expect that customer not to complain.”

Calvin expects this and decides he will just deal with it when he has to.

The afternoon slips into early evening and Calvin feels a twinge of hunger. He takes a quick, unapproved break to slip to the employee lounge area where he snacks on some stale pretzels he knew had been left, forgotten, under the small end table covered in old newspapers. He folds a section of the classifieds into a paper football and plays with it. Ink smudges on his fingers.

When he returns to the floor, he stops when he sees the scene at Checkout Three.

Paula and Bernice, talking.
He approaches them. They’re laughing.
“Hey, Cal, look who just showed up,” Paula says to him.
Bernice looks at him and smiles.
“What the hell are you doing here?” he says to her.
Her smile disappears.
“I thought we had an agreement?” Calvin’s face is burning, his hands feel unsteady.

Bernice is silent and Paula looks horrified.
“Go home!” Calvin yells and Bernice rushes past him, out of the store.

“i never knew you were such an ass, Cal. She just brought you some food, figured you would be hungry. Poor girl.”

Calvin doesn’t speak to anyone for the rest of the day.
The next day, the female model is missing from her usual position at the front of the store. Calvin searches the floor, but cannot find where she may have been relocated. He starts to worry.

“Um, Jade, have you seen that one female figure recently?”
Jade looks at him from her station, sipping a Big-Gulp and filing her nails. She gives a snarling sound of disinterest, so Calvin turns to Edith-Marie and asks the same question.
“I’ve seen dozens of them. Be specific,” she says, rather loudly.
“Well, not a real woman, but the fake one, at the front of the store—”

They leave the checkout and exit the store through the back door, the employee’s entrance. They finally stop in the loading bay in behind the store. It is a dingy alleyway with a dumpster and piles upon piles of damaged and unneeded hangers.

Cal sees nothing noteworthy at first. “What are we doing here, I don’t see anything but hangers,” he tells Paula.
“You’ve got a bug up your butt the past few days. Ever since you found out I knew Bernice. I want to know what’s up with that.”
“You don’t know what’s going on, Paula, and frankly, I don’t want you to know what’s going on. It’s not your business, not anyone’s business.”
“i know, Cal.”
“And for God’s sake, don’t call me that! My name is Calvin. Cal-vin. It sounds like some sort of mispronounced bovine-” Calvin paces, towering over her, feeling much larger than he has felt in a long time.
“I just- I have my own life outside of Claudette’s and I don’t appreciate them overlapping. Bernice had no business coming here or talking to you.”
“That’s the thing, it is her business.”
Paula turns away from Calvin and walks around the dumpster. She retrieves the female figure, the mannequin, naked and dismantled of her arms and legs, and brings the torso to Calvin. She holds it out to him, and after a few moments, he takes it.

“What’s this doing out here?” Calvin asks. The little black dress and tank top are nowhere to be seen on the figure.

“Bernice did it. She was…a bit upset when you left yesterday. She pushed the thing over and one of the arms broke. Gail told us to trash it.”

“god…Bernice is my girlfriend. I wish she would respect my wishes and leave well enough alone.”

“I talked to Bernice. I think she sees things a bit. She cares about you, Calvin. You just need to listen. And you need to let yourself talk, so she can listen. She is more than ready.”

“They are not going to kill you.”

“Paula, I don’t really know if any of this is your business—”
“It’s not, but I can tell she’s upset. If you care about her at all, you’ll talk to her. Give her half the attention you’ve been giving that thing for the past few days. You’ll be surprised.” Paula gestures at the mannequin.
“I… I don’t know what I should to say to her.”

“Maybe start with, ‘How was your day?’ She does pick you up after work, start with that. Include her. It’s not going to kill you.”
The female figure smiles at Calvin. Bernice used to smile like that, but it
had been a long time since he had seen it.

“What are you going to do with it?” Paula asks.

Calvin remains still for a long time before he sits down, right in the
middle of the alley. He holds the mannequin torso in his arms.

“What, I guess.”

He tells it about his day, he talks about the week, he perfects his ques-
tions. Paula stays near him, listening and smiling in encouragement.

Paula melts away with the dinginess of the dark alley, the annoying
customers, everything. The mannequin’s smile urges him forward when he
thinks he’s run out of things to say. When the smile becomes difficult to see
in the waning sunlight, Calvin checks his watch. He hears a familiar horn
honk in the distance and he gets up to go and collect his belongings.

“Well, wish me luck,” he tells Paula. She does and, as they make their
way back to the store to clock out for the day, Calvin places the mannequin
gently into the dumpster. He pauses, takes in the smiling face once more
amidst the rubbish, and then closes the lid.
LANGUAGE pervades all aspects of life. People need it to communicate with one another, be it through body movements, the spoken word or written text. It is compulsory, like breathing, and necessary for survival. But language moves beyond its pragmatic purpose. Text, the physical manifestation of language, becomes its own entity.

This visual shape deconstructs language down into its core parts, which in turn creates a mindful presence demanding awareness. At the same time, these core parts are inherently meaningless. A word, a letter, only has meaning because a society deems it so. Without cultural context, the relevance of language disintegrates. Text becomes a grouping of lines, the echo of a symbol. Without grammar or syntax, sentences fall apart and words can contain any and all definitions. It all becomes a matter of interpretation. The period at the end of a sentence is both a mark and more than a mark; it means both nothing and everything at the same time.

Text does more than defy definition—it flattens 3-dimensional life experiences into a 2-dimensional plane. The struggle for meaning in text is the struggle for communication. Even if language is used in context, there is no perfect way to convey one’s experiences to another. From the simplest to the most complex, words cannot achieve complete clarity. A word cannot substitute life. There is always a space for miscommunication, always a chance one is left speaking to himself, even in a crowded room. Despite being the primary method of communication and connection between individuals, language is also a constant reminder of absolute isolation.
On Bathing Your Grandmother

MAEGAN CLEARWOOD

It isn’t all that different from shampooing your dog or hosing off your brother after a run in the sprinkler. You need a certain degree of disin¬terest. During that total hour spent in the bathroom and maneuvering her up and down the stairs, you are not a granddaughter; if you feel like her granddaughter, you’ll spend the whole time petrified that she will fall and crack a rib. If you feel like her granddaughter, you’ll be too hypnotized by her naked breasts and tissue-paper skin to notice the shower water puddling under your feet. No, while you are tossing your grandmother’s soiled under¬wear in the laundry hamper and stepping her into a fresh pair, you aren’t her granddaughter.

The stairs to the bathroom are steep and far away; she won’t want to leave the nest where she’s been warmed by the glow of the TV all afternoon. Coax her to the landing with jokes and laughter as breadcrumbs, then breach the first step. Place her in front, cane in her right hand, railing in her left. You’re behind, one step below, keeping a hand under her soft arm to gauge her steadiness; if she starts to teeter or her sighs sound more like exhaustion than self pity, let her rest on a step for a while. After she’s caught her breath, proceed. Her slippers make whispering sounds as they inch up the carpeted stairs. Don’t imagine her foot fumbling over the hem of her nightgown, her body swooning backwards and down the stairs, rolling you down with her.

When you finally reach the landing, let go of her arm for a bit. She’ll wield her cane across the flat ground of your parents’ bedroom. Here, she will feel comfortable enough to shuffle along without a safety net. The path to the bathroom is even now, and the floor is soft and quiet. It’s not a short journey, though, and your grandmother will need to recuperate in the rocking chair she gave your father three summers ago. Try to look interested as she tells you for the eighth time how the rocking chair used to look on her
old front porch, how Grandpa used to creak back and forth for hours in it, how nice it looks against the blue paint your mother picked out. Eventually, she’ll remember why she’s sitting there in the first place, and you’ll help her up again.

The bathroom is much more dangerous territory: the tile is fiercely cold and slippery and hairbrushes and bobby pins are strewn across the floor. Proceed with caution, but don’t look down. Focus your gaze on the toilet, not the countless flecks of water that are scattering the floor like landmines. Don’t be afraid of them. You may meet a puddle or two, but they’ve never been known to cause any casualties.

After you’ve carefully lowered her onto the toilet, you have a few minutes for final preparations. Check the fresh clothes you laid out for her earlier: are they neatly folded on the sink? Does her Christmas sweater match the slacks? Make sure her shower cap is within arm’s reach and her towel is hanging behind the door. Most importantly, inspect the shower seat. It should be placed within the water’s reach, but not so close that it will be in her eyes the whole time. Center it just so, testing the feet’s grips with a few sharp tugs. Don’t worry, she won’t teeter off the edge and crash against the glass shower door. It hasn’t happened before, anyway. Turn on the water now, giving it time to warm up before you ease her in. You’re not going to get the temperature at that perfect luke-warm evenness your first try, so don’t be discouraged. Just do your best.

By the time you’ve cleared the area, she’ll be finished on the toilet and ready for you. Lower the toilet seat before you undress her so she has some place behind her on which to collapse if necessary. Her underwear is already pooled around her feet, so that part’s easy; just lift her feet, one at a time, out and over. Then the nightgown, around the hips, past the shoulders, over the head.

Now that she’s on her feet again, your grandmother’s eyes, the same quiet, mint-green shade as your first blanket, are at shoulder level. Stare at them. Don’t let your sight wander down or she’ll notice and start retelling her scar stories: there’s the raised one on her bad shoulder, the two scraggly ones from her knee replacements, and her favorite, the white one trailing down her chest, so smooth and clean you expect a spider to be dangling from the end of it. Don’t stare at her potbelly, wide and rock-solid from five childbirths and one miscarriage, or her exhausted, wrinkled breasts. She’s easily embarrassed, so keep your eyes steady.

Secure the shower cap over her hair, slipping every last stray white curl inside, then guide her to the shower and let her check the water. Adjust accordingly. When she’s satisfied, help her onto the wooden seat where she will exhale contentedly at the water bristling against her belly and thighs. Hand her the soap and washcloth. Slide the door halfway shut so you can dive after the soap when it slips out of her hand.

She won’t need you until she needs her back scrubbed. This is her favorite part, so take extra care. Don’t be alarmed: Her shoulders are broad, but her bones are deceptively brittle. Her back against your hand will feel as thin and fragile as the gelled-over surface of soup that’s been left out too long. You will feel every vertebrae and rib beneath the soap and water. Don’t remember her last visit home, when the shoulder bone that’s pushing against your hand cracked beneath her. She has you to help her this time.

When every inch of her smells like her favorite lavender soap, you can turn off the water. Lead her onto the bath mat and hurry, hurry to cover her quaking shoulders with the towel. Warmth will slowly creep back, so be patient. When she’s ready, let her grab your arm while she dabs the water off her arms and stomach. You’ll need to help with her back. Start with her shoulders. As you move down her spine, over her buttocks, between her legs, down to her feet, she will chuckle with embarrassment: “Like a child,” she’ll say, as you lower her back onto the toilet.

Dressing goes by quickly. Your grandmother is telling stories, laughing and joking now that the immodesty of the shower is over. You will slide her legs into a baby blue pair of underwear and a carefully pressed pair of slacks. Her bra is the trickiest part, but once everything’s secure and snug, you can slip her head and arms through the sweater and fetch her glasses.

This is when you compliment her. Tell her how nicely the sequins on her Christmas tree pop against the red fleece or what a lovely color it is on her. Tell her what a lovely job her hairdresser did last week. Tell her she looks beautiful. She won’t believe you, but it won’t be a lie.
E merson is the unplaced puzzle piece. The unconventional curves and ridges of his writing make it difficult to place his prose in the overall puzzle of literary genres. As a result, his writing has been criticized for its caprice. But rarely when evaluating Emerson as writer do people take into consideration his process. Emerson’s prose is integrally intertwined with his writing process. It is impossible to scrutinize them separately. Emerson’s writing is the reflection of the experience he undergoes when composing it. For Emerson, the writing process is driven by human experience. This experience is one in which the writer is unified with nature, fully embracing all of its changes and spontaneity, making his experience one of ‘incessant metamorphosis’ (Emerson 299). His experience is elusive and ever-evolving, filled with organic qualities that shape his writing process so that it yields an unconventional prose; one that is brilliantly composed to mimic and invoke the experience of the writer. Emerson’s writing is truly an organic experience.

In his essay “Nature”, Emerson introduces the concept, according to Vince Brewton, that nature serves as an intermediate entity between humanity and what lies beyond this world (Brewton). To Emerson, nature is the medium through which all that exists beyond man may be revealed to him. In order to understand Emerson’s writing process and prose, it is essential to examine this fundamental continuity between man and nature. The connection between nature and man is accentuated in the eminent transparent eyeball passage. In “Nature”, Emerson describes his experience in the woods, “Standing on the bare ground, my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space- all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God” (Emerson 29). This passage captures the core of Emerson’s concept of continuity between nature and man.
According to Brewton, Emerson uses the “transparent eye-ball” to describe the loss of individuality in the experience of nature, where there is no seer, only seeing: “I am nothing; I see all” (Brewton). It is in the absence of egotism that man becomes one with nature. Emerson also implies that a shared pulse evidences their connectedness; “the currents of the Universal being circulate through me”. And it is in this synced state that Emerson writes.

Understanding Emerson’s process of writing is also essential to understanding the characteristics of his prose. To begin, Emerson believes that writing requires a place of solitude. He recommends, in his essay “Nature”, that the writer “…go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me” (Emerson 28). It is only in the absence of others, free from all social shackles, that Emerson/the writer is able to liberate the ideas that are locked in nature. He states that even on his own that he is not alone, rather, he, when detached from society, draws himself closer to nature. He later describes in his address, “The American Scholar”, that having resorted to a place of silence and solitude, “he then learns, that in going down into the secrets of his own mind, he has descended into the secrets of all minds” (Emerson 64). By sinking into his subconscious, Emerson is again syncing himself with nature and thus able to intimately connect with all of humanity. In contrast to the structured state of consciousness, the inner being is rooted to nature,

“The poet, in utter solitude remembering his spontaneous thoughts and recording them, is found to have recorded that, which men in crowded cities find true for them also. The orator distrusts at first the fitness of his frank confessions, --his want of knowledge of the persons he addresses,--until he finds that he is the complement of his hearers;--that they drink his words because he fulfill for them their own nature; the deeper he dives into his privatest, secretest presentiment, to his wonder he finds, this is the most acceptable, most public, and universally true. The people delight in it; the better part of every man feels, This is my music; this is myself” (Emerson 64).

By diving deeper into the self via nature, Emerson finds unity with the ideas and individuals around him. Once in harmony with nature, Emerson/ the poet/ the writer becomes one with the self and the world.

Furthermore, Emerson emphasizes that it is impossible to separate the product from the process—writing is a clear reflection of the state/the experience of the writer during the writing process. He also introduces the notion that the writing process is simultaneously spontaneous. Just as the observer, when experiencing nature, loses his identity, no longer functioning as a seer, rather only the act of seeing exists. When the writer writes, it is just writing as he experiences nature. As he states in his essay “Experience”,

“I would gladly be moral, and keep due metes and bounds, which I dearly love, and allow the most to the will of man, but I have set my heart on honesty in this chapter, and I can see nothing at last…The results of life are uncalculated and uncalculable. The years teach much which the days never know…but the individual is always mistaken. It turns out somewhat new, and very unlike what he promised himself”(Emerson 207).

Emerson writes with a heart that beats at the same meter as nature’s pulse. He has surrendered himself to the rhythm of life, moving from note to note without an awareness of the overall melody. Emerson emphasizes that experience cannot be reduced to small observable events, only to be added back up again to constitute life. There is, in Brewton’s words, on the contrary, an irreducible whole present in life and is at work through us (Brewton). It paves our path and we follow it without knowledge of where it may lead. In sum, Emerson’s writing process is solitary and spontaneous and echoes his experience as one with nature.

Emerson’s process is laborious as he attempts to put human experience and nature in words. Both nature and experience are ever-changing, evolving, an elusive series of surprises, representing both nature and experience in entirety via a seemingly static textual medium presents its problems. How does one describe the infinity of nature and the evolution of experience within the finite form of word? He states in his essay, “Experience”, that “nature hates calculators; her methods are saltatory and impulsive. Man lives by pulses; our organic movements are such…Our chief experiences have been casual”(Emerson 205). Emerson again draws on the notion that life is unpredictable and ever-evolving and that the most impressionable experiences are those that happen by chance. In this way, Emerson strengthens his principle assertion about the continuity that exists between nature and human experience. If human experience is an echo of the reality of nature, then to
accurately convey nature one must convey human experience. Consequently, in order to make his writing surprising and unpredictable, incalculable, Emerson’s writing process must be uncalculated and unpredictable, as his prose is a reflection of his process. If his prose is hard to follow, continuously surprising the reader, confusing her at times, enlightening her at others, then it accurately describes human experience and nature as the prose grows and evolves like experience.

Furthermore, Emerson exalts poetry as being the best way in which nature can be translated into the written word. In his essay “Poetry and Imagination”, he explains that “metre begins with pulse-beat, and the length of lines in songs and poems is determined by the inhalation and exhalation of the lungs...believe these metres to be organic, derived from the human pulse...” (Emerson 304). Emerson elevates poetry because its rhythm echoes that of a human heartbeat or breathing patterns. The rhythm/meter in the poem makes the words move and gives the text a pulse. In this sense, the poem is alive; it is organic, meaning it is living. Because the poem is organic/living itself, it is more apt to accurately convey life’s experiences. Yet it is imperative to remember that it is only through the poet and his experience in nature that the poem comes into existence. In “Experience”, he describes the poem as merely a reflection of the poet’s experience and process: “it is not metres, but a metre-making argument that makes a poem”(Emerson 211). The poet is challenged to “…take the passing day, with its news, its cares, its fears, as he shares them, and hold it up to a divine reason, till he sees it to have a purpose and beauty, and to be related to astronomy and history and the eternal order of the world. Then the dry twig blossoms in his hand. He is calmed and elevated”(Emerson 306). The poet must embody nature, immerse himself in it, so that he may share in her every experience, making his experience that of nature. The poet relinquishes himself to nature and, consequently, experiences life at its very roots. The poet’s experience is organic, and thus, “rightly, poetry is organic. We cannot know things by words and writing, but only by taking a central position in the universe and living in its forms. We sink to rise...”(Emerson 309). Again Emerson reiterates the fundamental continuity between man and nature, and how the experience of nature drives the process of writing and thus the prose or poetry that results.

Overall, Emerson’s unconventional writing is a result of an organic process. His writing is essentially puzzling. If Emerson’s writing did not constantly change and evolve before its reader’s eyes then the writing would not be organic. It would not serve to support Emerson’s arguments; it would not accurately convey the experience of life. But, in order for the prose to be organic, the process must also be organic, alive with the pulse of nature. Thus Emerson becomes one with nature and his writing process, in meter with her melody, yields organic writing.
Aboriginal Map Art

EMILY SCHERER

The Aboriginal civilization of ancient Australia is a fascinating culture, with a strong connection to various forms of art going as far back as 30,000 years (Wardrop). This has led to a blending of art and cartography that brings about types of maps quite unlike those seen anywhere else in the world. This fresh take on cartography has produced some pieces that do not fit our traditional view of maps, but still manages to form connections between different objects and ideas in a way that people can consult and learn from. Aboriginal art has had strong cultural influences, which are easily seen through the large amount of religious and local subject matter contained within the art. Many sites of rock art are located on old hunting trails and contain depictions of animal tracks, as well as many other symbols, some of which may point to villages, water, and other important landmarks. Due to the variety and seemingly primitive state of these maps, it is sometimes difficult to definitively categorize some Aboriginal art pieces as maps. However, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that the rock paintings that we still see today were used by ancient Aborigines to navigate through the deserts of Australia.

Due to this melding of art and cartography, Aboriginal maps can take many different forms that are far from what most people would expect. One of the most jarring examples of this are the songlines which are very old songs that are generally sung during religious ceremonies. These songlines are used to connect different dreamtime locations all over Australia and each different path has a different song associated with it (Woodward 361). The songs are generally presented as narratives of the paths taken by mythological beings; most fascinating is that they are able to contain much of the same information shown in more traditional physical depictions of the paths, with even more highly detailed information relating to the relative geographical...
positions of specific locations (Woodward 361). One of the reasons that this is so important is because Aboriginal maps are very related to their art, and due to that connection a lot of geographical information tends to get ignored for the sake of the appearance of the artwork. In addition to less concern over geographical accuracy, Aboriginal maps also tend to show their connection to art through a large and complex system of iconography that is used to display all of the important figures on maps. Circles are most commonly seen and are used to represent anything from “a particular waterhole, campsite, dance ground or sacred site, or some person, object, plant or animal that is the focus of attention” (Morphy 112). However, despite the almost limitless uses for the basic circle, other depictions are used when differentiation becomes important. For example, in Figure 1 many different animal tracks are depicted, which becomes necessary in maps of hunting grounds and religious maps depicting the mythical paths of various animal deities. This fluidity of the types of symbols used in Aboriginal maps can make it difficult for someone who is not familiar with the maps to understand what they are trying to convey.

There is also an extra dimension of information in Aboriginal maps that must be understood by the reader, this second dimension coming about through the more spiritual aspects of the information that are being presented by the map. The dimensions are shown through two different viewpoints, which can often be found together in the same map. The first perspective, called the ‘nomad’s perspective’ is the common bird’s eye view of the landscape that we are most used to seeing on maps. This is used to help geographically orient oneself and tends to focus on specific landmarks (Knudsen 238). The second perspective, or ‘sacred perspective,’ is “internal and holistic” and because of this perspective, a solid understanding of the map “is contingent upon the ability of the viewer to become absorbed by the iconography of the painting – or the topography of the land – and move into deeper spiritual layers, at which point a standard perspective really vanishes” (Knudsen 238). It is this second, ‘sacred’ perspective that creates a communication gap when it comes to understanding Aboriginal maps. This is mostly because people were never trained to look out for this unusual perspective, and quickly will dismiss these geographical inaccuracies and skewed perspectives as simply being wrong, without pausing to consider that there is a reason for their altered state.

As well as the multiple perspectives that must be understood, there is also a level of personal interpretation that can be brought to the understanding of these maps. With map paintings in particular this becomes a problem due to the dreamtime stories that are so often attached to each specific point on the map. Dreamtime stories are subject to change though, and because of this “the Aboriginal map is fluid; it is open to reinterpretation each time one arrives at a new point” (Knudsen 261). While this fluidity is obviously mainly contained to maps that are heavy with mythological significance, it is very difficult to compare maps that do demonstrate this adaptability to more traditional European maps which can also create problems with the comprehension of these maps.

Adding to the confusion westerners have with Aboriginal maps is the fact that there is no official title for an Aboriginal Cartographer, in addition to zero formal instruction of map making or even geographical knowledge (Woodward 365). In the Aboriginal society children were expected to gain an understanding of the region in the same way they learned how to speak, and this self-acquired awareness of geography resulted in highly varied cartographic depictions. Because there was an assumption that everybody had a vague idea of where everything was located, maps were usually made “principally as display or performance rather than as explanation or record” (Woodward 365). There was little technical precision and things would be shown in different locations than they actually were in order to achieve a more visually pleasing appearance. Figures 2 and 3 show this discrepancy between the cartographic representation of Wanukuruparnta, Yakurrakaji, Yulyupuyu, and Yamparlinyi and the reality, where they are not placed at even intervals, or even all in a straight line. As one Aborigine said, “We don’t need a paper map- we’ve got our maps in our heads,” so of course if this is the case they would have had no need to create highly accurate or realistic maps (Woodward 363). This lack of a need for highly realistic maps obviously

**FIGURE 1**
leads to a lack of realistic looking maps which can lead some people to question their legitimacy. This problem can be aggravated by realistic maps being drawn in a similar style for the sake of tradition and then still not being taken seriously. However, if the time is taken to really examine the maps and to get to know and understand them, it will become very clear that they are at least equal parts, if not more, cartography than art.

One type of Aboriginal map which blends abstract features with a legitimate attempt to give direction are ‘toas’, better known as way markers, which are wooden sculptural pieces that use physical form in addition to different colors to communicate locations and landmarks. Figure 4 shows a toa that shows a religious area near Lake Eyre where Milkimadlentji and MitjimanaMana first saw the souls of dead people traveling upwards to the heavens. The different colors present on the toa represent the boundary between the earth and the sky, with white dots on the top of the toa representing the souls of the deceased. The narrow area between heaven and earth represents the sky between the earth and heavens, and is likely smaller due to the decreased importance placed upon it relative to the importance of earth, where humans live, and the heavens, where the dead live (Woodward 371). A more utilitarian version of a toa can be seen in Figure 5, which shows the travels of Watapijiri and Ngardutjelpani who searched for black swan eggs on an island called Pajangura in Lake Gregory. While this seems like it would not apply in any useful way to a real life situation, it actually does because it corresponds to a real lake where Aborigines actually would go to in order to collect eggs (Woodward 385). The toa itself is in the basic shape of the island, with different colors depicting different colors of stones to help one get their bearings. There are also circles on the toa that represent swan nests, effectively leading the hunters directly to the best locations to get eggs without having to re-discover them (Woodward 385). These toas are a very good example of how well an object can work as a map, which would never be considered an option by many people.

Some of the most utilitarian forms of Aboriginal maps can be found in arguably the most well known style of Aboriginal art, rock carvings. These rock carvings were done on large permanent structures and were left behind for others to see. Because they were not being created as pieces of art there are more informative details as the maps are attempting to educate people who may not be familiar with the landscape. Many sites of these rock art maps are found near hunting trails and contain various animal tracks; this was probably an attempt to help hunters know what animals were likely to be present and where they liked to gather. The maps also contained other information that would have been useful to a traveling hunter such as where to find water and the location of other villages (Mountford 146). Some of the oldest known carvings of Aboriginal rock art were found by waterholes in Central Australia and were likely made by early Arrernte Aborigines. The public is not allowed to know the meanings of some of the symbols as they are related to a classified part of the Aboriginal religion (Ewaninga Rock Carvings Conservation Reserve). However, just by looking at Figure 6 it is easy to see animal tracks and other footprints that appear to be following specific paths; these assumptions were verified by Aboriginal guides to Charles Mountford back in 1937 (Mountford 145). These rock art carvings are most similar to the modern concept of maps, as they have a focus on locations and direction, with less concentration on the symbolic aspects of the map.
Another utilitarian form of cartography is one that depicts the different locations of water, a valuable resource in the middle of the desert. Figure 7 is a detailed painting showing the different locations of water holes in Jila Sapinta and Pajpara, while also showing features of the landscape. Even though this is such a detailed map with very distinct areas there are still no actual images of sand hills or water holes, but rather geometric shapes that symbolize the greater meaning (Woodward 367). Because the water holes are the focus of this map they are shown as circles, with the surrounding sand hills being drawn as semi-circular arches around them. Clouds positioned near the water holes are also drawn as smaller curved lines due to their importance, but the more distant sand dunes that are not the focus of the map are just shown as thick lines. There is also information about rain patterns, which is more advanced and shows the intention for the map to be used not just for decoration, but for actual navigational and other planning purposes. The circular figures present shows that there is some consistency though different Aboriginal maps, as it is very common for the most circular shapes to also be the most important parts of the map. This map also shows that not all Aboriginal maps are made to be displayed, but some are also made to be used in a more traditional sense.

Maps can also play a cultural aspect in Aboriginal society as they do in the Wandjina rock art, which can be found in Worora, Ngarinjin, Wunambel, and Unggumi (Morwood 105). In these areas the tribes relied on each other for exchange of wives and other important goods, this network of tribes became known as wunan. Because of the close interactions these tribes had with each other they had to find a way to keep track of the social order and other parts of their personal tribal identity that were not shared by the other tribes, in order to do this they came up with Wandjina (Morwood 106). According to legend the Wandjini were the ancestors of the current tribes and created the land, cultural history, and even the social order of the different tribes. When the Wandjina died they disappeared into the ground but their shadows remained on the rocks, creating the carvings we see today (Morwood 106). These shadows, not only spoke of clan identity, but also contained images of plants and animals that were found within that specific tribes territory, as well as handprints that served as a deed of ownership to the tribal estate (Morwood 106). There are also many cryptic lines and circles contained in the rock art which could potentially be a map to the sacred site of the tribe, but people who are not of the Aboriginal culture are not permitted to see them or know what they mean (Morwood 107). This more abstract concept of a map is proof that it is sometimes quite difficult to clearly define something as a map, however, due to the use of the rock art to map out social structure in addition to geographical locations it still quite objectively fits the definition of a map.

All of these maps are a product of the Aboriginal people creating their own version of cartography without the outside influence of a European perspective. This led to innovations that worked very well in their specific environments and helped them to expand upon both their geographical and religious knowledge. From song, to sculpture, to carving and painting, the only aspect of the maps that varied more than their medium was what they depicted. While the majority of maps do show physical landmarks, there is also a great deal of other information being conveyed though the maps that would not be expected, such as religious, social, and even educational information. Even the lack of accuracy that creates some problems with the understanding of these maps points towards these art pieces actually being maps. This apparently contradictory statement is true because even in modern day western culture many maps contain inaccuracies that were put there on purpose for the sake of a greater understanding of the main focus of the map. In a way similar to how we would leave out caves on a map for pilots, the Aboriginal people left out the parts of the map that were not of use to them in order to focus on the important parts of the maps that needed.
to be easy to comprehend. The great variety of types and focuses of these maps manages to be both the reason that their legitimacy as maps is being questioned, while at the same time is the reason that they are so special and can add so much to the field of cartography.

WORKS CITED

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Diagram of different symbols and their meanings used in maps (Morphy 111).

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Figure 3.
Diagram of the actual locations of Wanukurduparnta, Yakurrukaji, Yulyupuyu, and Yamparlinyi (Woodward 362).

Figure 4.
Palkarakara Tao (Woodward 370).

Figure 5.
Lake Gregory Toa (Woodward 385).

Figure 6.
Rock Engravings at Ewaninga (Mountford 146).

Figure 7.
Map of water holes at Jila Japingka and Pajpara (Woodward 367).

The Language of Uncertainty in Dora Malech’s Say So

BOND RICHARDS

Dora Malech says, in a video interview for Little Village Magazine, that she feels poetry “should be as clear as the poet is in her mind and in her heart.” Though Malech agrees that accessibility serves a necessary function in art, she carefully avoids creating “false spaces” in which perception is fixed with an unlikely degree of certainty. Say So, Malech’s second book of poems, attempts to denote, through a vibrant, variegated vernacular, those very shadow lands that constitute our immediate worlds. The language of uncertainty is explored and gives rise to a beautiful and unlikely experience.

Despite the topical chaos, there is a struggle for order within these pages. Images and themes, with fugue-like repetition, circulate through the book but never quite realize their generative cause. Connections are often drawn between two (or more) seemingly disparate concepts, creating a dialectic from which ambiguity arises, thus becoming a topic in and of itself. However, instead of a coherent synthesis of terms (as is in the ideal rendering of dialectical argumentation), the reader is left with a remarkable, and unsettled, degree of uncertainty.

Four poems, “Smart Money,” “Pocket Money,” “Fiddler’s Money,” and “Hush Money,” all seem to relate the abstract notion of some kind of currency to its material constituent. The first of these two poems to appear, “Smart Money” and “Pocket Money,” read with strong feminist overtones. The former conjures the erotic landscapes of a young woman’s body within the atmosphere of a male-dominated work environment. That it’s also a sonnet indicates the universality of the poem’s central theme. Here, the feminine form is likened to weaponry, “Pads bra with rifle wadding”; as well as with a more obscene marketable material, meat: “Inked up her navel, stole the X / clear out the alphabet and into / fable scrawled on butcher paper...”
This cyclonic configuration of symbolism requires that we try not to render each metaphor a discrete, or even fully realized, thing, but consider their design as projecting towards a goal that is not yet present. The idea of transcendence, of validating the world of ambiguity via our recognition of it, and passage through it, I think, is at the heart of Malech’s symbolic constructs.

“Pocket Money” pertains to a more innocent vision of feminine identity, though one similarly marked by the poet’s quiet lamentation. We are shown the character of a sixteen-year-old girl, partaking in a number of physical, and characteristically masculine, hobbies: carpentry, metallurgy, letterpress printing, and geophysics. By the end of the poem, and to the poet’s dismay, the character under examination exchanges her “Geiger counter / for a cue and cue ball, racked, broke.” This last activity is a switch from the intellectual hobbies of men to a more social, idle enterprise. The implications of this switch are downplayed, tonally, through the speaker’s direct and unaffected rhetoric, as well as through any ostensible reflection on the matter, or imputation of the character in the poem. However, one can sense our poet’s grief. What Malech refrains from is the assignation of moral claims about her character’s personal decisions. Her presentation of subject matter (via rhetoric and a kind of blunt-force symbolism) forces the reader to affix his/her own value judgements to the character’s actions. This refusal to damnation preserves the poem from dogma or didacticism. Malech is not telling you how to feel about her characters; nor is she stating how she feels about them. Spaces are deliberately created in the narrative to be filled by the reader’s own cognitions.

The dominion of uncertainty might more aptly be called, at least as it’s manifest in Malech’s poetry, a kind of spirituality. In a metaphysical sense, the essence of spirit is what connects all living (and nonliving) beings together, despite the facticity of physical existence. Malech’s poems seem to suggest that we each share with one another a common identity of mutual and indefinite uncertainty. This uncertainty, though an ambiguous notion without definable properties, is something each person must encounter, and try his/her best to interpret.

“On the path by the train tracks, I taught myself to recognize the marks / made by a limp in snow, shuffle in snow, stagger through snow.” This notable passage, excerpted from the poem, “God Bless Our Mess,” elucidates the theme of one’s navigation through an unfamiliar world. Here, the snow, much like in Joyce’s “The Dead,” is the metaphysical fabric that binds us in the mute totality of existence. The staggered footmarks in the snow typify—with a rather unsubtle reminder of our own isolation and lostness—the paths of those who’ve come before us. The marks, she observes, indicate a trespass of apparent struggle, while her advantageous perspective of hindsight allows for a smoother traversal. The neighboring train tracks denote the character’s conception of time (think: Einstein’s thought-experiments on relativity), and also hint at modern notions of industrialization, transportation, and communication. The illusion of order and uncertainty are coexistent. The claims to hindsight are superseded by the reader’s understanding that this perceived clarity will similarly vanish into yet another case of historic misdirection.

The speaker then addresses her own thoughts, introducing a self-conscious element to the narrative intelligence, “Another refrain snagged in my mind like a hangnail on some wearer’s pilled knit.” For a moment, we are removed from the temporal order established at the beginning of the poem, and experience the poet’s thoughts as they relate to her surroundings, not purely her memory. The refrain that she cannot stop repeating, “lit from within lit from within,” is her humorous response to the mostly innocuous, though still somewhat upsetting, scene immediately before her—a tanning salon. “Other women emerge orange / into the winter night, the sky a con- 

The language in Say So is elevated to its most purposive, and perplexing, order. As I noted earlier, the meanings of individual words are only as essential as the uniting structures holding them together, their presentation, and the associations we form from these larger constructs. Possibly the best example of this is in “Cube of ice my incubus slid a-nape,” the most confounding and language-driven poem in the collection. It concludes with these seven lines:
“[…] Hours of most of me held above my heart, wind in my everything and waited. Wondered my weight in what for, engendered. Asked ever-after’d still grit for the signet, press each petal brittle, breathe to shallow bits the deep beneath what I was up against.”

The experience behind the language is kept purposefully hidden. The level of rhetorical abstraction seems to distance the reader from the speaker’s inner world of emotions, so it’s difficult to point out what’s being felt, and the reasons why. Although abstract, I still think this poem (and others like it) is distinctly subjective, and more directly related to the speaker’s emotions than what one might originally think.

The generative episode from which these words get their meaning is extraneous. The language system presented in “Cube of ice my incubus slid a-nape” is isolated from the physical world to which it is responding. Rather, the inner world of the poet, the linguistic reaction itself, to the outer, is the focal point. The emotionalism is achieved by association, meter, and the severity of sounds; that is, rather than direct correlations to perceivable objects or events. The most difficult part about Malech’s poetry is that very often the reader must allow the language of preconscious association to fabricate the environment, as opposed to the environment shaping the language of preconscious association. For example, try wrestling any essential meaning from the following lines (still, from “Cube of ice”): “backbone gone glock-enspiel, glister to gliss / to pass on the narrow, mallet to marrow’s / caril- / to pass on the narrow, mallet to marrow’s / caril- / bone.” The idea I’m trying to get across is that the reader has to trust that the words know what they are referring to, and from there, allow them to construct a world around them. Overcoming the poem’s obtuseness, and our own feelings of uncertainty in response to it, requires a sort of patience and faith in the work, our trusting that a subject matter does exist, and that the words on the page are deliberate contrivances of the subject.

As I mentioned earlier, there is a quest for order taking place in Malech’s Say So. We can see this in a set of poems which first start to appear on page 51, and end on page 62. “Forever Hold Your Peace, Speak Now Or,” “Break, Make Or,” “Flight, Fight Or,” “Go, Touch And.” The titles are reminiscent of some kind of file system that one might find in a directory, catalogue, database, etc. With the exception of “Forever Hold Your Peace, Speak Now Or,” each of these poems is a single, ten line stanza. And, with the exception of “Go, Touch And,” every poem’s title is phrased as with the disjunction, “Or.” The set, as a whole, suggests a kind of symmetry, for its first and last poems vary from the rest of the set, though in separate ways.

It’s the moment we examine the poems by themselves that the correlations become way less apparent. Each seems to address a different theme, without taking much note of the others. “Forever Hold Your Peace, Speak Now Or” comes across as desperately sexual, in a needy, characteristically teenage, sort of way, ending with: “Ours a most venial / vernacular—do I make / you happy did I / make you happy?” In “Break, Make Or,” we’re left with an intriguing image of a redwing being reduced to a fleck on the lens of a pair of backwards binoculars. This metaphor is continued, and reconfigured, in “Flight, Fight Or,” beginning with the reflection of a cityscape in a rearview mirror, and ending with a characterization of the poet’s love interest as a bird: “I miss your wingspan miss your hollow bones.” The last of the set, “Go, Touch And,” refers both to the mathematical designs of this parable, “a fiercer math,” and the diminished image of the redwing, as “red subtractions.”

Despite the apparent circulation of a few images, each poem has its own internal logic. The poet’s decision to arrange them in a set leads us to believe that they are somehow deeply interrelated. However, we have seen that this is not really the case. Relations do exist among the poems, but they are fairly topical. The spiritual nature of Malech’s “Language of Uncertainty” shows how these poems’ indefinite identity, as components of a set, imply a deeper unity. The vague correlation implies some kind of connection, and the overruling uncertainty of what that connection is implies still a deeper unification.

The last poem in the collection, “Body Language,” which looks and reads more like two pages of dense prose, encapsulates a large number of themes introduced—and reintroduced—throughout the development of the book. “Body Language” is synoptic of the spiritual landscape, through which we’ve spent the last 75 pages (of Say So) attempting to navigate and comprehend. The language is also far less ambiguous and the imagery more concrete.

It begins: “I know the route by heart means this town winds inside me.” The poet connects the body with the world it perceives, but the relationship is forged from the inner world of the speaker. This notion of the disembodiment of embodiment has already been introduced in “Cube of ice my
incubus slid a-nape.” The language system reflects the trespass of language from the physical/external into the spiritual/insular. Beautiful light and the scattered dead are dually encountered: “The horizon is a given, and / the last light holding the horizon,” which image gives rise to “the highway’s shoulders smeared with the head / wounds of dropped dear, the yellow beetles and their fecal smell of earth, each bank vying for the river’s lick and whisper.”

Sights and sounds bear a litany of sensations and the terrain housed by the poet’s body becomes a phantasmagoria, verbal associations pinwheeling off one another, images melting into images. The *ars poetic*, reflexive language theme is summoned in the second stanza, “Yes, I cross my legs and bolt my door, read boys/girls as boys slash girls.” Again the poet reveals her processes of interpreting language, even going so far as to transform her body into a linguistic construct: “I’m still proofreading my body, adding punctuation, long ellipses / between kisses.” The wordplay intensifies, and the poet seems to find several meanings to every one word or phrase she introduces.

In the last stanza, the poet calls out to God, “Grant this flesh imminent return.” Her desired destination is uncertain, and her flesh represents an experience beyond the body itself—landscapes, horizons, road kill, the language that constitutes it all. The body becomes the world it once perceived, and wants only to return to itself. The poem, then, starts to look like a loop. It concludes with perhaps one of the greatest puns in the book: “When I say make out like bandits / I mean the end but not The End, I mean the end but empty-handed, the end but / take no prisoners, the end but kiss furiously under the black mask of the sky.” The end for Malech is rapture, together-ness, and a temporary refusal of the uncertain. The “black mask of the sky” represents the totality of uncertainty in the realm of human experience, a nothingness suspended in and hidden by the physical world, an emptiness that both binds and isolates, and gives meaning to every last one of our estranged utterances.

**WORKS CITED**


Documentos de barbarie: 
La barbarie como signo del progreso

NICOLÁS CAMPISI

Abstract

In what follows, I argue that colonial Latin American narratives (of Hernán Cortés, Bartolomé de las Casas, and Christopher Columbus) aim to foster civilization by justifying barbarism. I contextualize the reading of these texts with works by Aimé Césaire, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Walter Benjamin (among other philosophers of the Frankfurt School) and Karl Marx. While Césaire and Sarmiento dissociate the progress of civilization with the existence of barbarism, Benjamin and Marx show us that the greatest achievements of modern societies have been deeply entrenched with the institutionalized use of violence. I thus argue that national progress has often been a result of brutal displays of barbarism.

Toda colonización siempre brutaliza al colonizador, le despierta instintos de violencia exorbitante que niegan por completo el concepto de civilización. En siglos pasados la barbarie ha sido considerada como un elemento que va en detrimento de los ideales de auge y progreso que ostenta cada sociedad. En Civilización y barbarie, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento declaró que el foco de progreso de las civilizaciones no reside en la vida pastoril, en las tribus primitivas que subsisten apartadas de los grandes núcleos de población, sino en la vasta metrópoli. Según Sarmiento, la ciudad permite a un tiempo el desarrollo de las capacidades industriales del hombre y la indispensable expansión de sus propiedades y adquisiciones (68). Aunque Sarmiento haga referencia exclusivamente a la Argentina del siglo XIX, las ideas del pensador argentino están relacionadas con el discurso poscolonial del poeta y político francés Aimé Césaire. En su Discourse on Colonialism,
Césaire asegura que los procesos de colonización, entendidos como campañas para civilizar la barbarie, niegan en sí mismos las bases de la civilización (40). El discurso poscolonial de Césaire reconoce que las relaciones jerárquicas de dominación y sumisión implican el retroceso de toda civilización. Sin embargo, las concepciones de Sarmiento y Césaire resultan erróneas en tanto que disciñan el progreso de la civilización con la existencia de la barbarie.

Las ideas que Sarmiento enumeró a mediados del siglo XIX tienen su antítesis en la filosofía de Karl Marx, y aún más en la teoría crítica de Theodor Adorno y Max Horkheimer. En El capital, Marx afirma que el germen de la barbarie se encuentra en el centro de la civilización cuando critica los efectos horrosores de las empresas coloniales. En Dialectic of Enlightenment, Adorno y Horkheimer expanden el concepto marxista al determinar que la racionalidad instrumental tiene el potencial de transformarse en violencia asesina. Finalmente, Walter Benjamín asegura en Sobre el concepto de historia que las civilizaciones no son capaces de progresar sin la existencia de la barbarie. Mientras que las civilizaciones producen grandes elementos de cultura y progreso, tales triunfos también conllevan una importante cuota de barbarie.

Césaire se diferencia de estos pensadores en la medida que acepta la noción de civilización como antagónica de barbarie. La filosofía de Césaire, quien sostiene que las destrucciones de toda colonización no pueden ser justificadas, es notoriamente ilustrada por las narrativas coloniales de la conquista de América. En su Diario del Primer Viaje (1492-1493), Cristóbal Colón afirma que los aborígenes son personajes desarmados y desnudos, símbolos manifestios de barbarie, y que la falta de un dogma determinado es la excusa perfecta para la imposición del cristianismo. En sus Cartas de Relación, Cortés sostiene que el ejercicio de rituales violentos aproxima a los aborígenes a la condición de animales. Para Cortés, la práctica indígena de sacrificios sangrientos es una "cosa horrible y abominable y digna de ser punida" (22). Cortés se sirve de los rituales y sacrificios sangrientos para representar a los indios como caníbales y seres irracionales que pueden constituir una amenaza a la Corona de España. Precisamente esto le da los argumentos para esgrimir la estrategia de "guerra justa", según la cual busca atacar a los indígenas antes de ser atacado por ellos. Y es dicha idea de "guerra justa" la que en los ojos de Cortés legitima la conquista de los indígenas.

Según Cortés, la barbarie no sólo está representada en las comunidades indígenas, sino también en la figura de su antagonista Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar. Cortés refiere la avaricia desmesurada de Velázquez para describir al conquistador como un individuo corrompido. En la visión de Cortés, Velázquez "ha destruido a muchos buenos trayéndolos a mucha pobreza, no les queriendo dar indios con que puedan vivir, y tomándoselos todos para sí, y tomando él todo el oro que han cogido sin les dar parte de ello" (23). Para Cortés, Velázquez animalizaba a los aborígenes y sobornaba a los procuradores que enviaban a su isla, ya fuera con el obsequio de indios o de favores diversos, sin que los Reyes Católicos pudieran reparar en ello. En el contexto de su carta a la corona española, la estrategia de Cortes es representar los rasgos bárbaros de Velázquez con el fin de que él mismo encare al hombre civilizado.

Por su lado, Bartolomé de las Casas considera bárbaros a todos los colonizadores, no a uno en particular. El propósito de la Brevísima relaciónde la destrucción de las Indias, Bartolomé de las Casas invierte dichas concepciones al afirmar que la barbarie no reside en los aborígenes, ni en un colonizador en particular, sino en todos los colonizadores.

En sus diarios, Colón describe a las comunidades indígenas como símbolos inequívocos de la barbarie. El conquistador se refiere a los aborígenes como “gente… sin mal ni de guerra, desnudos todos, hombres y mugeres, como sus madres los parió” (92). La afirmación equipara a los indios con animales recién nacidos que, incapaces de pensar por sí mismos, dependen de la cultura española para el establecimiento de una civilización. Debido a que los aborígenes no pertenecen a ninguna secta o religión en particular, y aparentan ser harto indefensos, la instauración del cristianismo en los nuevos territorios se avizora como un cometido asequible. Al considerar a los indígenas como seres humanos indefensos, susceptibles a la imposición de la cultura española, y al promover la extinción de la cultura indígena, podríamos considerar que Colón adquiere rasgos barbáricos.

Al igual que Colón, Cortés asocia la idiosincrasia de los pueblos indígenas con manifestaciones barbarásicas. En sus Cartas de Relación, Cortés sostiene que el ejercicio de rituales violentos aproxima a los aborígenes a la condición de animales. Para Cortés, la práctica indígena de sacrificios sangrientos es una "cosa horrible y abominable y digna de ser punida" (Cortés 22). Cortés se sirve de los rituales y sacrificios sangrientos para representar a los indios como caníbales y seres irracionales que pueden constituir una amenaza a la Corona de España. Precisamente esto le da los argumentos para esgrimir la estrategia de “guerra justa”, según la cual busca atacar a los indígenas antes de ser atacado por ellos. Y es dicha idea de “guerra justa” la que en los ojos de Cortés legitima la conquista de los indígenas.

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Las Casas, el hambre de oro y piedras preciosas, así como de fama y títulos nobiliarios, lleva a los españoles a la violencia y brutalidad. Durante la narración de una masacre, Las Casas se ocupa de describir la labor de los indígenas como esclavos de los españoles y vuelve a hacer referencia a dicha comparación: “Todos ayuntados y juntos en el patio con otras gentes que a vueltas estaban, pónense a las puertas del patio españoles armados que guardasen, y todos los demás echan mano a sus espadas y meten a espada y lanzadas todas aquellas ovejas, que uno ni ninguno pudo escaparse que no fuese trucidado” (108). Las Casas utiliza la comparación entre ovejas y lobos para enfatizar uno de sus argumentos más importantes: que el hambre española de riquezas materiales genera tal exceso de irracionalidad que conduce hacia la bajeza humana, en este caso ejemplificada por el exterminio de gente muy inocente, pacífica y humilde como los indígenas.

Bartolomé de las Casas desenmascara el estereotipo de que los españoles invadieron América para evangelizar a sus pobladores. Para las Casas, los principales motivos de la colonización no son de carácter religioso, sino más bien económico. De esta manera, las guerras sangrientas y tiránicas empeñadas por los españoles llevaron a que muchas “vidas y [...] sus ánimas, y por esto todos los números y cuentos dichos [hayan] muerto sin fe y sin sacramentos” (79). Las Casas se vale de tal violencia para resaltar la irracionalidad de los españoles y aunque éstos tachan a los aborígenes de irracionales, los roles acaban por invertirse debido a su carencia de humanidad.

Los ejemplos de la violencia y destrucción inhumanas de los colonizadores abundan en el texto. Las Casas afirma que nunca podrá referirse a todos los actos tiránicos e inhumanos que presenció en América, dado que “contar los estragos y muertes y crueldades que en cada [aldea] hicieron [los españoles] sería sin duda una cosa difícilísima de decir, y trabajosa de escuchar” (111). La expansión colonial supone un exceso de acciones barbáricas; Las Casas se vale de estos ejemplos para enfatizar la deshumanización de los colonizadores.

Otra estrategia de Las Casas para describir a los españoles como bárbaros es la exaltación de la cultura indígena. A diferencia de Cortés, que tilda ciertas acciones indígenas de “punibles”, Las Casas asegura que los aborígenes “no cometieron contra los cristianos un solo pecado mortal que fuese punible por hombres” (87). De este modo, Las Casas persigue uno de sus objetivos más relevantes: persuadir al lector de que los exterminios de aborígenes son del todo injustificados. Las Casas sostiene que las comunidades indígenas tienen un sentido moral y ciertos valores de unidad que los colonizadores no están demostrando. A pesar de que los conquistadores consideren a la barbarie indígena como un aniquilamiento de la civilización, es la brutalidad exorbitante de sus acciones la que según Las Casas los conduce a un despliegue de “barbarie civilizadora”.

Al igual que Bartolomé de las Casas, el poeta y político francés Aimé Césaire denuncia las consecuencias funestas de toda colonización. Según Césaire, una nación que coloniza es inexorablemente una civilización enferma que se encamina hacia su propia destrucción.

What am I driving at? That no one colonizes innocently, that no one colonizes with impunity either; that a nation which colonizes, that a civilization which justifies colonization—and therefore force—is already a sick civilization, a civilization which is morally diseased, which irresistibly, progressing from one consequence to another, one denial to another, calls for [...] its punishment (39).

Toda colonización implica una campaña deshumana para civilizar la barbarie, y es la deshumanización lo que niega el concepto mismo de civilización. En el contexto de su discurso poscolonial, Césaire habla de la deshumanización de las potencias europeas frente a los árabes de Argelia, los “culis” de India, y los “negros” de África (36). Para Césaire, al igual que para Freud, la civilización es necesariamente impulsora de los valores más dignos de la raza humana, así como de la creación científica, artística e intelectual. Por lo tanto, Césaire considera que la colonización dilapida este esquema al emplear la violencia y la brutalidad como puntos de partida. Del mismo modo en que Las Casas formuló el símil entre ovejas y lobos, Césaire reconoce la animalización de todo colonizador: “the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal” (41). Los colonizadores, dice Césaire, llevan a cabo una barbarie notablemente imperialista, que en su implacable brutalidad deviene en genocidio y el exterminio de civilizaciones enteras.

La conquista de América es uno de los tantos ejemplos que demuestran que toda colonización deshumaniza hasta al hombre más civilizado. Como Césaire afirma en el contexto del discurso poscolonial europeo, “colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt
Sobre la barbarie, como si ambas entidades fueran radicalmente opuestas. Las sociedades y leyes o, en otras palabras, del orden como signo del progreso. La contraposición de la familia feudal y aislada, implica la existencia de instituciones del gobierno regular, etc.” (66). Sarmiento afirma que una sociedad reunida, en la de progreso, los medios de instrucción, alguna organización municipal, el gobierno regular, etc.” (74). Según Sarmiento, cuya vida transcurrió mayormente en la metrópoli argentina, la vida pastoril sólo contribuye al desarrollo físico del gaucho, en detrimento de su moralidad e inteligencia. En ese sentido, la visión de Sarmiento no difiere mucho de las concepciones de Colón y Cortés en tanto que delimita a los campesinos como individuos desnudos tanto ética como psicológicamente. De esta manera, Sarmiento afirma que dicha incapacidad moral e intelectual es la que conduce a la creación de una cultura barbárica.

Por el contrario Sarmiento reconoce que la civilización, capaz de conducir al progreso social, reside en las grandes metrópolis. El pensador argentino sostiene que la población europea, en tanto encarnaba los ideales de la industria y la ciencia, era necesaria para el desarrollo de la América decimonónica. “El hombre de la ciudad viste el traje europeo, vive de la vida industrial y la ciencia, era necesaria para el desarrollo físico del gaucho, en detrimento de su moralidad e inteligencia. En ese sentido, la visión de Sarmiento no difiere mucho de las concepciones de Colón y Cortés en tanto que delimita a los campesinos como individuos desnudos tanto ética como psicológicamente. De esta manera, Sarmiento afirma que dicha incapacidad moral e intelectual es la que conduce a la creación de una cultura barbárica.

The expropriation of the great mass of the people from the soil, from the means of subsistence and from the instruments of labor, this terrible and arduously accomplished appropriation of the mass of the people forms the pre-history of capital. It comprises a whole series of forcible methods, and we have only passed in review those that have been epoch-making as methods of the primitive accumulation of capital. The expropriation of the direct producers was accomplished by means of the most merciless barbarism, and under the stimulus of the most infamous, the most sordid, the most petty and the most odious of passions (928).

Al reflexionar sobre la acumulación primitiva del capital, Karl Marx dice que la esclavitud y el genocidio de indígenas deshumaniza a los colonizadores. Marx sostiene que el sistema de invasión colonial recurre a la deshumanización debido a que persigue una acumulación tanto de material como de capital, y con este fin se apropió del trabajador. Mediante una cita de William Howitt, el autor inglés del siglo XVIII, Marx se encarga de denunciar las atrocidades del “sistema colonial cristiano”: la trata de esclavos negros y el genocidio de indígenas (916). Al considerar estas prácticas como eminentemente irracionales, Marx sostiene que las políticas de la expansión civilizadora contienen en sí mismas la existencia de barbarie. Al contrario del pensamiento de Césaire, que asocia los conceptos de progreso y civilización, para Marx el progreso se encuentra en constante dependencia de la barbarie.

“¿Dónde colocar la escuela para que asistan a recibir lecciones los niños diseminados a diez leguas de distancia en todas direcciones? Así pues, la civilización [en las pampas] es del todo irrealizable, [y] la barbarie es normal” (70). Sarmiento declara que el progreso moral es un ideal inalcanzable debido a la diseminación de la vida campestre. Para Sarmiento, el desarrollo moral y el progreso sólo pueden llevarse a cabo en sociedades numerosas, que son las verdaderas cunas de la civilización.

Sin embargo, la existencia de toda civilización contiene en sí misma la necesidad de barbarie. Karl Marx reconoce que la barbarie forma parte inseparable de la civilización. En una perspectiva que se encuentra en las antípodas de Sarmiento, y que sin embargo también se enmarca en el siglo XIX, Marx constata que los casos más feroces de barbarie, en el contexto del feudalismo y del auge de la industrialización decimonónica, se basan en las manifestaciones más despiadadas de la civilización.
Los filósofos de la Escuela de Frankfurt reconocen la influencia de Marx y expanden sus reflexiones. En *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno y Horkheimer afirman que la racionalidad de las empresas coloniales puede conducir a la manifestación de brutalidad excesiva. La conciencia de superioridad de los colonizadores sobre sus víctimas sólo aumenta los instintos de barbarie.

To eradicate utterly the hated but overwhelming temptation to lapse back into nature—that is the cruelty which stems from failed civilization. […] The signs of powerlessness, hasty uncoordinated movements, animal fear, swarming masses, provoke the lust for murder. […] A creature which has fallen attracts predators: humiliation of those visited by misfortune brings the keenest pleasure. The less the danger to the one on top, the more unhampered the joy in the torments he can now inflict: only through the hopeless despair of the victim can power become pleasure and triumphantly revoke its own principle, discipline (88).

En este pasaje, Adorno y Horkheimer formulan la paradoja que yace en el centro de toda civilización: la existencia de crueldad, animalidad, autodestrucción, e indisciplina. En *Minima Moralia*, Adorno se refiere a esta paradoja como “progreso regresivo” (141). Según él, este progreso es “regresivo” ya que la única reacción del raciocinio humano frente a actos barbáricos es el horror ante lo incomprensible (141). A pesar de que las sociedades buscan elevar la condición humana, esos triunfos también conllevan crudas manifestaciones de barbarie.

Sin embargo, ese progreso no puede ser considerado “regresivo” debido a que revela las potencialidades del desarrollo social. Las ideas del pensador alemán Walter Benjamin nos permiten entender que los efectos de la barbarie, en tanto que desvelan la cercanía de la condición humana al salvajismo, han producido los avances más beneficiosos de la civilización. Benjamin considera que la sociedad ha alcanzado sus más grandes logros dentro de las mayores tragedias.

Todos los bienes culturales […], sin excepción, tienen […] una procedencia en la que no [se] puede pensar sin horror. Todos deben su existencia no sólo a la fatiga de los grandes genios que los crearon, sino también a la servidumbre anónima de sus contemporáneos. No hay documento de cultura que no sea a la vez un documento de barbarie (42).
Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?:
A Question of Intent

EMILY BLACKNER

“[F]or wee must consider that wee shall be as a cite upon a hill, the eyes of all people are uppon us.” John Winthrop wrote this back in 1630, for a sermon entitled “A Model of Christian Charity,” but it seems as if it is just as true today; America calls herself the leader of the free world, and many nations look to the United States and follow her example. The phrase “city upon a hill” comes from the Christian Bible; many today believe, as Winthrop did in the colonial era, that the United States is the beacon Jesus talked about in his Sermon on the Mount. More importantly, they believe that its success as a nation is attributable to God’s grace and blessings bestowed as a result of the “Godly foundation of [the] country.” Some historians question this assumption, citing Enlightenment ideals as the main source of the nation’s government. But, although there are principles in the American system of government that can be seen as Christian, it cannot be said that America was founded as a Christian nation, because the Founders did not intend for it to be so. Instead, they thought a secular government would be more beneficial in the long run.

One of the sources of contention in the debate over America’s founding is, what exactly constitutes founding? Certainly, religious freedom was part of what drove the Pilgrims to the New World in the first place, and many of the original thirteen colonies were supposed to guarantee religious liberty. But, these early colonial governments, and their citizens’ values, were quite different from those of the United States as a nation. Thus, this essay will take the stance that America’s founding occurred with the set-up of her government as outlined in the Constitution rather than with the first settlements to exist here.

Scholars have defended their belief in a secular America by pointing to the influence of the Enlightenment as a primary source for the Founders’
values like individual liberty and consent of the governed. However, “the Enlightenment is at bottom not truly neutral,” because many of its precepts were based on the Judeo-Christian tradition. Michael Novak argues convincingly that the entire philosophy “depend[s] for [its] intelligibility and... credibility upon a distinctively Jewish and Christian view of man’s relation to God.” Without the Christian belief “that faith must be free if it is to find acceptance with God,” a man’s individual right to live as he chooses—encompassing religion, speech, and all the other freedoms Americans hold dear—would have no purpose, and, thus, make no sense logically. The Protestant tradition in Christianity enforces such Enlightenment values as reason and equality because it holds every person has an equal opportunity to find a path to heaven, and that reason is applicable to religious faith as to other areas of life. Equality, reason, and individual rights are cornerstones of the American government which can therefore be traced back to the Christian religion in some way.

However, the origin of ideas is not as important in this case as what the Founders did with them. Christianity was deeply engrained throughout society and political thought, but it was clear to the Founders that they wanted to maintain a separation between church and state: “the Founders declared that ‘the government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion’” in a treaty with the Muslims in Tripoli. This is as clear an indication of their intent as any other. Also notable is the fact that “the Constitution fail[s] to mention God, nor [does] it invoke any synonym.” This is the document that actually founded America as citizens understand the country today, and if the Founders had wanted to, they could easily have inserted some mention of God in it, particularly given the fact that God was such a prominent part of daily life during the period. Laws from colonial times were often justified based on Biblical principles, quite blatantly. Thus the lack of any mention of God in this most important of the founding documents provides strong evidence to the fact that the Founders did not intend for the nation’s government to be based on Christianity.

Even if the Founding Fathers did recognize the Christian influences of their political philosophy, they had many practical reasons for insisting on a more secular government. History — both European and their own as Americans — taught of the dangers of state-sponsored religion. As mentioned earlier, colonial governments were very little like our own; they did not allow other denominations to worship freely within the colony and even exiled dissenters. They harshly restricted freedoms and confined suffrage to church members — in short, the practices of the early colonies did not resemble the liberty Americans prize today. These experiences provided an example of the dangers of unchecked religiosity, or a Christianity gone too far, using “force to control its subjects in realms both temporal and spiritual.”

These colonial governments, blatantly based on Christianity, created a society that was “unhappy and intolerant,” and the Founders wanted better for the nation. Religion, as a highly personal choice, elicits strong feelings. Even today, many people see attacks on their religion as a personal affront. This dynamic is not conducive to the kind of rational thought, discussion, and especially compromise, that democracy like America’s requires. Denominational differences also meant that not every Christian at the time believed in precisely the same things. Even if the Founders picked and chose aspects from each major denomination, there would still be resentment and hard feelings over what was not chosen, arguments about how unfair it was that Denomination A having more of its beliefs included than Denomination B. By leaving religion out entirely, the Founders ensured that each denomination was truly treated equally.

This guarantee had the added benefit of creating a stronger government, which would have appealed to the Founders after the failure of the Articles of Confederation. The people would be bound together by “one moral standard, by which the actions of all [were] to be judged,” and this standard transcended denominational lines. This was the result of each competing denomination acting as a “moral sensor,” so that each set a standard that was suitable for the country at large. So, society acknowledged “those moral precepts only in which all religions agree[d],” creating a sense of unity among the diverse groups that made it up. This sense of uniformity and similarity was a powerful force that “untangled men from the myriad associations of class, church [etc.]... and by doing so... automatically gave to the state a much higher rank.” Because people were bound together in a way that transcended the boundaries of religion, they saw their government as vital in keeping this order. So, the principles that Christians today see as “reflect[ing] Biblical values,” actually reflected the overarching societal values, which had been separated from their origins in the Bible.

America’s Founders thought that the “toleration, peace, and morality Jefferson hoped for in American religion [were] possible without conformity” to any one sect, and since government and religion have the same
purpose - mainly “regulating...men's lives, according to the rules of virtue-” they need not push the religion issue further (for fear of alienating supporters and dividing factions) if government alone could suffice. In fact, it served them better to downplay the issue and focus on the commonalities around which the citizens could rally rather than divisive differences that religious sects evoked. A united citizenry would create fewer problems for the fledgling government, making the Founders’ task of getting the institutions set up easier. The country had a system whereby “individual judgment and self-interest [could be] the bases of American mores[,] rather than the Bible,” thus rendering a national religion unnecessary. In fact, it served them better to downplay the issue and focus on the commonalities around which the citizens could rally rather than divisive differences that religious sects evoked. A united citizenry would create fewer problems for the fledgling government, making the Founders’ task of getting the institutions set up easier. The country had a system whereby “individual judgment and self-interest [could be] the bases of American mores[,] rather than the Bible,” thus rendering a national religion unnecessary.19

This does not mean that the Founding Fathers, and Americans in general, did not honor and value religious teachings in their private lives. Supporters of the Christian founding theory often point to the Founders’ personal faith as evidence for the nation’s religious founding. So, they argue, since evangelism is a major part of Christianity, the Founders would want to spread their religion and its values. However, even this perspective offers evidence for a more purposefully secular foundation. It was noted that “attempts to enforce Christian conscience have the reverse effect.” In other words, they make a person less likely to follow the dictates of that religion. So, even those Founders concerned with spreading the faith would see the wisdom of keeping it outside the realm of governmental control and favoritism.

Even the oft-cited Christian prayers held publicly by the Congress did not mean they were spreading that religion, because such things can have “significance that [doesn’t] depend on whether [one] believed in them or not.” After all, private belief and public practice are two separate things. The prayers that Congress held were then more symbolic than anything, aimed at creating a sense of gravity and purpose to the meetings. These prayers helped to form what many scholars refer to as the “civil religion” in America, where God in the abstract is mentioned in the Pledge of Allegiance, for example, or at the conclusion of a speech. Used in this context, the word God does not refer to the Christian deity but rather the more abstract idea of a force that binds the nation’s citizens together.

Yet it is all too easy to say that those who claim America had a Christian founding are entirely incorrect. Many of the Founders did, in fact, have strong religious faith, just like many citizens today. It is important to remember that it may be “impossible for the man of pious reflection not to perceive in [any momentous event] a finger of that Almighty hand” of God. Those who believe in God are apt to see him everywhere, and the religious freedom the Constitution grants means that believers can interpret the references to God found in civil religion in any way they choose. Maybe the Founders themselves saw elements of Providence in their success. But they chose to focus on other factors when crafting the Constitution, so that the nation might be as strong as possible, able to adapt and change as it grew. As forward-thinking men, it is possible that they envisioned a time when followers of other religions would want to participate to a greater extent in the governance of the country and wanted to remove religious faith as a barrier to these efforts. That way, the contributions of other religious groups could enrich the country – just like values from many sources went into America’s governing. This spirit of compromise could be applied to the current debate over America’s Christian Founding, so that everyone, regardless of religious faith or lack thereof, feels welcome, just as the Founders intended.


Manseau, Peter. Lecture in Dr. Deckman’s Religion and Politics class, September 12, 2011.


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**NOTES**


13. Peter Manseau (in class).


21. Manseau (in class), September 12, 2011.

CAROLYN BEVANS is a Senior, having just returned from a lovely semester abroad at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. She plans to continue her studies and graduate in May of 2013 with a dual degree in Art History and Humanities. Among her extracurriculars are the Douglass Cater Society of Junior Fellows, Omicron Delta Kappa and Zeta Tau Alpha, all of which have immensely enriched her experience at Washington College. In the future, she plans to pursue a career in museum education, her goal being to design and implement educational initiatives in museum settings and study their effectiveness in educating and interacting with our communities.

JASMINE BIBBS is a Senior at Washington College, majoring in Psychology and working toward a minor in Sociology. She is a member of the following honor societies: Omicron Delta Kappa, Psi Chi, and Alpha Delta Kappa. She was inspired to write “African American Women and The Quest for ‘Good Hair’” for her Sociology of the Body course in the Spring of 2011. She currently resides in Clinton, MD, with her loving family and adorable puppy.

EMILY BLACKNER is a Junior and English major with a Political Science minor. She is a Presidential Fellow, a member of Sigma Tau Delta, and President of a campus political organization. Her work as a news editor for The Elm also takes up much of her time, but when she’s not as busy she enjoys reading, writing, and watching cooking shows with her friends.

NICOLÁS CAMPISI is double majoring in Art History and Hispanic Studies. He enjoys reading Borges and Pynchon, learning about unknown Renaissance artists, and watching Lionel Messi play soccer. In the Spring of 2012 he studied abroad at the Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ) in Ecuador.

MAEGAN CLEARWOOD is a Senior double majoring in English and Drama with a Creative Writing minor. She’s originally from Middletown, MD.
Editor-in-Chief of the Elm student newspaper, Maegan is also a proud member of Writers Theater and a regular drama production participant, both onstage and off. She looks forward to spending her senior year further cultivating her passions for the theater arts, publications, literature, and all things writing-related. Hopefully, her life after Chestertown will involve a career in the ever-changing world of journalism.

MICHAEL FESTA is a Sophomore majoring in Economics and minoring in Political Science and Business Management. At WAC, he plays varsity baseball and interns in the Geographic Information Systems lab. His essay, “Yeelen: Revealing Governmental Corruption Through Malian Mythology,” was written for his World Cinema GRW class in the Fall semester of 2011 and reveals director Souleymane Cissé’s allegory to the corruption in modern day Mali through his 1987 film, “Yeelen.”

NICHOLAS LONGWORTH is a Physics and Business Management double major, and graduated in the Spring of 2012. While in school he was part of the Men’s Swim Team and the Kappa Sigma Fraternity. He is interested in historic buildings for their engineering principles (and the “living qualities” that the older buildings exude that does not seem present in newer buildings) and small town business for the added “local” factor that big business does not have. This interest became the inspiration for his submission.

KATHRYN MANION, a member of the class of 2012 and the recipient of this year’s Sophie Kerr Prize, is an English major with minors in Creative Writing and Anthropology. During her time at WC, she was involved with many on-campus publications, worked as a consultant at the Writing Center, and was the Writers’ Union Spokesperson from 2010-2012. Her post-graduation plans include attending the Denver Publishing Institute, applying to graduate programs, and continuing to write while pursuing a career in the publishing industry. She would like to thank her family, friends, and all of the WC faculty members who have instructed her over the past four years, especially Dr. Richard Gillin and Prof. Robert Mooney, as well as John Boyd and Moriah Purdy of the Washington College Writing Center.

JOHN MARSHALL graduated in the Spring of 2012 as an English major. He was born in Pennsylvania but grew up overseas in Bolivia and Colombia. He transferred to Washington College in the Fall of 2010. While at WAC, he played Men’s Rugby and was an active brother of the Kappa Alpha Order.

BOND RICHARDS is an English major lacking the formal conceits necessary for feeling comfortable promising anything of himself for the benefit of humankind. His creative instincts thrive on the delicacies of undiscovered worlds.

EMILY SCHERER is a Junior at Washington College who has been fascinated by Aboriginal culture ever since she went on a trip to Australia with her high school.

CHELSEA SIMPSON graduated from Washington College in May, 2012. She double majored in Business Management and Art and Art History. While an undergraduate at Washington College, Chelsea was involved with several campus organizations such as Washington College Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE), Alpha Chi Omega, and the Washington College Equestrian Team. Currently, Simpson is pursuing a career in Marketing and Advertising, combining the knowledge she has learned from her Business Management and Art courses. She is focused on obtaining her next goal, earning a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) in Marketing, stating, “I am very passionate about a career in this field. I know that if you love what you do, you will welcome the challenges of each and every day.”

KRISTINE SLOAN is a 22-year-old double major in English and Philosophy with a Creative Writing minor, and graduated in the Spring of 2012. She was a staff writer for the Collegian, one of the co-presidents of Philosophy Club, and a member of both the English Honor Society and Philosophy Honor Society. She plans on continuing her education in writing and literature by enrolling in an MFA program for poetry.

ALISSAVECCHIO is a Senior majoring in English and the first-ever consecutive/returning Student Editor of the WC Review. She is honored to have had the opportunity to work with the Review for a second year. Alissa is the Head Programming Assistant at the Rose O’Neill Literary House and a Writing Center consultant. When she’s not busy with schoolwork, she can be found cooking, reading, or managing her successful website.

ERICAWALBURG is a 22-year-old from Pewaukee, Wisconsin, who double majored in English and Studio Art with a minor in Creative Writing. She is a member of the Douglass Cater Society and the English Honors Society of Sigma Tau Delta, and has been involved in a myriad of campus activities including drama productions, the Writers’ Union, the Artists’ Union and the
Elm. She also attended the most recent Kiplin Hall trip to England and Ireland. Erica graduated in the Spring of 2012 and will continue her exploration of the relationship between the written word and visual language.

CHARLES WEISENBERGER graduated in the Spring of 2012. He is from Nazareth, PA, and majored in History with a minor in Political Science. During his time at Washington College, he was a member of the National History Honors Society (Phi Alpha Theta) and the Douglas Cater Society of Junior Fellows. Charles also worked at the Writing Center, played club rugby all four years, and studied abroad in South Africa. After graduation, he will be interning at the Maryland State Archives in Annapolis, performing research on the role of African Americans during the War of 1812. He plans on attending graduate school and pursuing a career in public history.

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