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Editor's Introduction

NOMAD is proud to bring out this, the fifth volume of the best undergraduate essays written as part of the comparative literature curriculum. These essays encompass work done between fall of 2005 and summer of 2006. The course papers collected here are indicative of the breadth of work being done in comp lit, including both the interests of our undergrads and the research of our faculty and graduate students. Topics in this issue range from Russian and Sudanese novels to contemporary American film and music to the larger theoretical issues that help us situate our textual analysis.

All papers have been refereed both by the original instructor and anonymously by the editorial board. The editorial process goes as follows: the essays included here are first submitted to *NOMAD* and read by at least three readers. The editorial board then decides whether or not to accept a submission, and what changes are necessary, based on the readers' input. Accepted papers are then handed back to the students to begin the revision process. As much as possible, this

second stage is meant as an opportunity for COLT students not only to improve a given piece of writing, but to improve as writers, and also for our graduate students to gain experience with editing and working with students. Final drafts are collected and undergo a last round of copyediting by the editorial staff. Out of close to forty submissions representing the best work in COLT, the top dozen are presented here.

We would like to extend our thanks to all those who helped see this issue to light, either by submitting essays, reading submissions, copyediting or assistance with other administrative tasks. The editorial staff, along with the rest of comparative literature, is proud of the work included here and we look forward to the work we will receive in the future.

TOM DOLACK
NOMAD EDITOR



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ZAMYATIN AND “THE OTHER”: THE ETHICS OF REVOLUTION

Niko Kwiatkowski

“Revolution is everywhere, in everything. It is infinite. There is no final revolution, no final number. The social revolution is only one of an infinite number of numbers: the law of revolution is not a social law, but an immeasurably greater one. It is a cosmic, universal law – like the laws of the conservation of energy and of the dissipation of energy (entropy).”

—Evgeny Zamyatin,

“On Literature, Revolution, Entropy, and Other Matters.”

From *Antigone* to Soviet Russia, the boundary between what falls under the jurisdiction of “social” law and what falls under “cosmic” law has continuously fluctuated. This dynamism is embodied in Zamyatin’s philosophical concept of revolution or “energy,” itself described as a cosmic or natural law. The continuous undermining of orthodoxy, dogma, and human authority prevalent in Zamyatin’s “heretical” literature represents his belief in the inability of social law to escape completely the confines of nature. This reveals a philosophic hierarchy between social law and the “immeasurably greater one.” His dystopian novel *We* serves as a testament to this hierarchy: nature’s universal authority and man’s attempt to rationalize, banish, or destroy it.

The collective social body known as OneState makes up the world of *We*: an urban enclosure within which its citizens, or ‘Numbers,’ no longer have names. The events of daily life, unveiled to the reader through the journal entries of the protagonist D-503, unfold like the predetermined mechanism of a machine. D-503 is the chief builder of the INTEGRAL, a spaceship designed to be an instrument of extraterrestrial colonization, spreading the stabilizing ideals of OneState beyond the confines of OneState’s “Green Wall.”

Zamyatin’s insistence on the natural law of permanent instability opens a

dialogue discussing the place of humanity within this greater “cosmic” context, where a single life seems to be nothing great at all. How are we to reconcile Zamyatin’s infinite revolution with the ethical considerations required to live our lives as individuals, communities, and nations? “The Cave,” a lesser-known short story by Zamyatin, demonstrates his dedication to the value of the individual and explores in what ways this individuality is compromised in an essentially unstable society.

Additionally, Emmanuel Levinas’ book *Totality and Infinity* provides insight into this dialogue as it parallels philosophically the considerations that arise through the unfolding of D-503’s fictional saga. This paper aims to describe the moral dilemma that is clarified by Zamyatin and how *Totality and Infinity* might elucidate the ethical demands that coincide with a human being’s individuality. It will first be necessary to show how Levinas’ concept of “the Other” fits into *We*. This concept describes both OneState as a whole as well as the individual Numbers who collectively make up OneState. Next, this paper will discuss how D-503’s relationship with I-330 awakens his subjectivity, how this subjectivity is understood to be natural and inherent in everyone, and, finally, how Zamyatin’s concept of energy coincides with Levinas’ ethics of the face.

The Necessity of Conflict

“It is not good for people to get all they wish to get. It is sickness that makes health pleasant; evil, good; hunger, plenty; weariness, rest.”

“We must know that war is common to all and strife is justice, and that all things come into being and pass away through strife.”
—Heraclitus

The events of *Record 22* in *We* reiterate the ancient Heraclitian axiom that things are defined through their negation. D-503’s subjectivity, dissolved into the homogeneous tranquility of OneState, is made evident in the wake of a single disruptive event:



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But at this point [...] a lithe, slender female figure tore off out of our ranks screaming, “That’s enough! Don’t you dare...!” and pitched right into the midst of the rectangle [...] She was no longer a Number, she was simply a person; she existed as nothing more than the metaphysical substance of the insult committed against OneState. (122)

This conflict briefly and partially atomizes the social body, igniting a spark in D-503 that sends him into an internal philosophical discussion:

So here I am, in step with everyone else, and yet separate from all of them. I’m still trembling all over from the recent excitement – like a bridge that one of the ancient iron trains had just rumbled over. I feel myself. But it’s only the eye with a lash in it, the swollen finger, the infected tooth that feels itself, is conscious of its own individual being. The healthy eye or finger or tooth doesn’t seem to exist. So it’s clear, isn’t it? Self-consciousness is just a disease. (124)

Here it seems that the “disease” of self-consciousness arises out of its pure negative, the brief realization of the existence of other, independent beings. If the horror of OneState is to be avoided, this negativity, often arising through conflict, must be confronted. While *We* becomes at times an ode to energy and revolution, Zamyatin himself reminds us that there are *two* laws, energy and entropy, and that the one cannot exist without its opposite.

The tenuousness of Zamyatin’s dedication to the ideals of revolutionary upheaval is exhibited in one of his many lesser-known works, “The Cave.” This short story, chronicling the dwindling days of an impoverished couple struggling to survive in the barren “ice-age” landscape of a Russia torn by civil war, stands as a realistic counterpoint to what often appears in *We* as a more romanticized account of revolution. While *We* explores the horrors of social stability, “The Cave” explores the horrors of social instability. Forgotten and neglected, the characters Martin and Masha are emblematic of those who were pushed to the margins of society during the progression of an energetic revolutionary force. The ensuing reorganization of the state led to the further

neglect of both those who were and those who were not identified as a part of the "Universal Class." "The Cave" demonstrates the dangers of identifying any group of people as a collective unity whose needs and interests are fulfilled through common deeds or actions. By effectively humanizing faceless and "expendable" Russians, "The Cave" brings into question the moral validity of revolution, which, in its claim to universality, inherently overlooks the unique interests specific to individual lives. Illustrative of this is the simple fact that revolutionary movements are met with resistance. In this light, revolution is not, in its essence, counteractive to the disregard of the individual that is characteristic of OneState. The question becomes, to what degree is the loss and neglect of lives necessary to prevent paralyzing social ossification? The images of both stories create a tension between the Other's demand for ethical responsibility and the necessary cosmic law of energy. This provides a glimpse into Zamyatin's humanism.

Emmanuel Levinas' *Totality and Infinity* echoes this same humanism that arises out of conflict. The ideological undercurrents running throughout Zamyatin's essays and works of fiction, particularly *We*, are made apparent through the concept of the Other and "the face" as discussed in *Totality and Infinity*: "[t]he face resists possession, resists my powers. In its epiphany, in expression, the sensible, still graspable, turns into total resistance to the grasp. This mutation can occur only by the opening of a new dimension" (197). The face appears as the initial experience of another being. This wholly alien individual, this Other, whose thoughts and feelings belong to no one else, appears as an interruption in the shared world of experience. The face represents the Other's subjective dimension, which transcends experience. The face's assertion of distinctiveness sets the Other apart and forces the definition of boundaries between "I" and "not I," establishing the perceiver's own subjectivity (self-consciousness). This interaction is, for Levinas, an ethical process in which the individual is forced to respond to the infinity manifested in the face. "The idea of infinity, the overflowing of finite thought by its content, effectuates the relation of thought with what exceeds its capacity, with what at each moment it learns without suffering shock. This is the situation we call welcome of the face" (Levinas 197).

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This “face-to-face” encounter is, for Levinas, the fundamental moment in which subjectivity is established through an ethical response to the face. He reverses the conventional understanding of the relationship between ethics and subjectivity, arguing that moral responsibility to the face does not result from a subjective decision. Rather, subjectivity as such emerges through an understanding of the subject’s own interdependence with the Other and orientation towards the Other’s demand. Any functional individual must react “welcomingly” to the face.

OneState and the Other

OneState defines its own existence through the negation of nature. This negation is embodied in the Green Wall that mediates, through the glass, the interaction between the Numbers and nature. This wall operates functionally as a face depicting nature’s Otherness:

Man ceased to be a wild man only when we built the Green Wall, only when, by means of that Wall, we isolated our perfect machine world from the irrational, ugly world of trees, birds, and animals...

Through the glass, dim and foggy, the blunt muzzle of some beast looked at me, its yellow eyes insistently repeating one and the same thought, incomprehensible to me. We looked each other in the eye for a long time—through those shafts connecting the surface world to that other beneath the surface. (91)

D-503, a perceiving faculty of the “perfect machine world” of OneState, experiences the face of nature through the boundary of the Green Wall, reaffirming the Otherness of the alien, the “incomprehensible” infinity that OneState negates to maintain its integrity. The allusion to “that other [world] beneath the surface” refers to the subjective realm known only to the Other; it is as if D-503 is looking into infinity.

OneState collectively reacts to nature’s infinity with fear. Nature’s absolute refusal to be contained and rationalized forces the Numbers of

OneState to acknowledge their inability to neutralize the unsettling imperfections of everything lying outside the Green Wall. This fearful response to the Other's presence metamorphoses into a desire to destroy the face:

To kill is not to dominate but to annihilate; it is to renounce comprehension absolutely. Murder exercises a power over what escapes power... I can wish to kill only an existent absolutely independent, which exceeds my powers infinitely, and therefore does not oppose them but paralyzes the very power of power. The Other is the sole being I can wish to kill. (198)

Simultaneous feelings of complete alienation, yet closeness to the Other, comprise the experience of the face. The initial reaction to this presence is to eliminate the face. The notes of D-503 are initially the voice of OneState speaking directly to the reader, the alien "in the primitive state known as freedom" inhabiting the natural world beyond the city. The INTEGRAL, on which these notes are to be delivered, is the appendage of OneState, reaching out to familiarize the mysterious gaze of the celestial bodies. The literary cargo represents only a precursor to OneState's unyielding attempt to obliterate the Other: "The gods have become like us—ergo, we've become like gods. And we're headed your way, my unknown planetary readers, we're coming to make your life divinely rational and precise, like ours" (68).

The Numbers as Others

While the collective social body of OneState itself can be understood as a subject, the relationships between the Numbers themselves may more easily be applied to the types of interactions Levinas refers to in *Totality and Infinity*. D-503's encounter with the beast beyond the Green Wall marks a rare occurrence in the world of OneState; there are virtually no Others in this society. This lack of confrontation between the Numbers results in their characteristic fear of life amongst "irregularities, unknowns, X's." A variety of



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mechanisms are set in place by OneState to ensure that everything, even the bodies and thoughts of each Number, remain in the realm of public property: “the Table of Hours” describes the entire daily schedule of each Number; the buildings are constructed out of clear glass, eliminating domestic privacy; the streets are under constant surveillance with synchronized walking; and sexual activity is state-sanctioned. The result of this profoundly communal existence is an increased accuracy in each Number’s ability to speculate on what the other numbers are thinking. This phenomenon is described by D-503 as “mental crossover.” Though not literally, in essence the Numbers are all the same person, differing only in occupation and appearance: “You see? Even thoughts. That’s because no one is *one* only *one of*. We’re so identical...” (8). Mental crossover is an example of the distinction between opacity and clarity of thought, a theme reappearing throughout the novel. D-503 metaphorically describes his own head as transparent like the clear glass out of which the entire city is constructed. Residing within it are the same thoughts and tendencies that tether all Numbers to the social body: “what I think—or, to be more exact, what we think [...]” (4). Like each Number, he is essentially, a medium through which OneState functions. This pattern, however, is broken when D-503 encounters a mysterious Number named I-330:

It was as though she were speaking with my voice, putting my thoughts into words. Behind her smile always contained that irritating X [...]

An idea hit me: The way the human body is built, it’s just as stupid as those “apartments”—human heads are opaque and there’s no way to see inside except through those tiny little windows, the eyes. She seemed to guess what I was thinking and turned around. “Well, here are my eyes. What do you think.” (28)

D-503’s relationship with I-330 represents one of the rare instances where Otherness is made strikingly apparent; he has never so drastically been face to face with the indeterminable opacity of an individual. Because the similarities between all Numbers gloss over the Otherness between them, virtually none are capable of fully realizing their own differentiation from the populace.

Though this self-renewing cycle describes OneState as it functions normally, *We* demonstrates that this type of world is unstable. Zamyatin insists on the existence of something in every Number that resists public ownership and maintains Otherness. A certain degree of opacity exists in every character, in some more so than in others.

The Presence of an X: I-330

Perhaps the most opaque character in the novel is I-330; she reacts in unpredictable ways and neither identify with, nor exhibit loyalty to, OneState. The power of I-330's opacity, as it exemplifies the mystery inherent in the Other, has a profound effect on D-503, beginning the first time he interacts with her: "But I don't know—something about her eyes or brows, some kind of odd irritating X that I couldn't get at all, a thing I couldn't express in numbers" (8). This instance, D-503's first unmediated experience of the face, sets off the dramatic divergence of D-503 into two selves. The individuality and unpredictability that I-330 represents is the ineffable retreat of the Other into its own dimension; it is the Other's refusal to be mastered.

Although this experience characterizes OneState's fear and hatred of nature, D-503's reaction to this same experience and emotions is ultimately opposed to how OneState shuts out and attacks nature. D-503's reaction to I-330 demonstrates the characteristic experience of the face as described by Levinas. While the initial reaction of the subject is to destroy the face, an immediate acceptance of the Other's transcendence, the Other's refusal to be destroyed, follows. The relationship transforms from one of fear, to one of recognizing the interdependence between both subjects, an ethical necessity that fosters, not only mutual respect, but also love. I-330 explicates this important movement in Record 13 of D-503's journal: "That means you love it. You're afraid of it because it's stronger than you, you hate it because you're afraid of it, you love it because you can't master it. You can only love something that refuses to be mastered" (71). Though emerging out of the same experience of the face, this love is the antithesis of the desire to destroy, which characterizes OneState's relationship with nature as a whole.

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Elusive Nature

“Nature loves to hide.”
—Heraclitus

Inherent in every human being is a natural and irrational love for infinity and the Other that can often be scary. Zamyatin insists that no matter how much environmental conditioning molds human beings, there will always be something in us which is just beyond reach: “I have to record here that apparently we haven’t yet finished the process of hardening and crystallizing life. The ideal is still a long way off. The ideal (this is clear) is that state of affairs where nothing ever happens anymore[...].” (25). Thousands of Numbers fraction off from the social body; thousands of revolutionaries come to realize themselves as independent from OneState. This is how Zamyatin shows how energy is capable of breaking through the entropy of OneState. The love of D-503 for I-330 is energy, just as OneState’s drive to eliminate nature is entropy.

Energy and the Ethics of the Face

Energy, though more positive and powerful than entropy, involves a mixture of emotions and states of being that are conventionally understood to have more negative connotations. The poet R-13 uses the Biblical tale of Paradise to explain how OneState came to be, returning humanity to the “chains” of social stability: “Those two in Paradise, they were offered a choice: happiness without freedom, or freedom without happiness, nothing else. Those idiots chose freedom. And then what? Then for centuries they were homesick for the chains” (61). Here freedom is equated to a world ruled only by natural law, the world outside OneState’s Green Wall. “Happiness,” on the other hand, is regarded as complete assimilation into rational society with its supplementary law. The choice between freedom and happiness, as described by Zamyatin, is hypothetically offered to the reader of *We*. A truly thoughtful consideration requires confronting dogmatic assumptions about the true meaning of happiness and freedom, and dealing with whether or not the

relationship between these categories is mutually exclusive.

The subordination of entropy to energy and the moral demand inherent therein are echoed in *Totality and Infinity*. Levinas insists that, though one may desire to annihilate the face, the individual and independent Other still eludes this destruction in its infinity, though the face itself may be killed:

He thus opposes to me not a greater force, an energy assessable and consequently presenting itself as though it were part of a whole; not some superlative of power, but precisely the infinity of his transcendence. This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in his face, is his face, is the primordial expression, is the first word: "you shall not commit murder." (Levinas 199)

Embodied in the face, in its nakedness and vulnerability, is an ethical demand. This demand is responsive, arising out of the experience of the face's immediate proximity. Mutually welcoming, the face's interruption elicits an orientation as self and Other, as two subjects. This positive response is what makes us who we are as moral agents and living beings. The lifelessness of OneState characterizes the unwelcoming response to the face. Unwilling to recognize the reflection of nature's Otherness within its own community of Numbers, OneState strives to annihilate the irrational face. Though this is the motivation behind total social stability, this attempt to destroy the irrational Other will always be incomplete. Nature remains "stronger than murder."

OneState's drive towards stability, a sort of collective happiness, is a concept that makes little sense when the experience of the face, as an experience between individual beings, is taken into account:

[... S]ome ten or so Numbers from our hangar were caught napping beneath the engine exhaust – absolutely nothing was left of them but some sort of crumbs and soot... Ten Numbers – that is scarcely one hundred-millionth part of the mass of OneState. For all practical purposes, it's a third-order infinitesimal. Innumerate pity is a thing known only to the ancients; to us it's funny. (104)

Zamyatin insists, through *We* and through “The Cave” that society exists to serve the best interest of the individual, not the other way around. Though OneState may resemble a body, it is not alive. Even though elevating the value of individual happiness seems to suggest the need for social stability, Zamyatin forces us to consider what is really best for a human being. *We* suggests that true happiness requires a sort of instability, an energy which causes difference, something which causes pain that can be overcome. Balancing the equation is “The Cave,” reminding us that this energy comes at a price. Excessive entropy means the “unfreedom” and stable “happiness” of *We*, while unrestrained energy can result in the desolate ice age of “The Cave.”

Though utilizing different methods of writing, both Zamyatin and Levinas express feelings brought about by witnessing first hand great lapses in conscientiousness towards the value of individual human lives. For Zamyatin it was the poverty, turmoil, and repression of post-revolutionary Russia, while for Levinas it was the prisoner of war camps in World War II. Both contexts represent examples of historical moments during which the value of a single individual’s freedom and happiness were subordinated to the collective vision of a political ideal. The Levinasian project that aims to establish ‘Ethics as first philosophy’ and the cosmic law of energy in Zamyatin’s works are similar in their mutual appeal to the fundamental order of humanity and nature. Both authors attempt to reestablish the primacy of ethics and express the natural value inherent in every human being.

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THE PROMETHEAN ABYSS:
A READING OF CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS*

Nikos Aragon

“On th’ other side up rose
Belial, in act more graceful and humane:
A fairer person lost not Heav’n; he seemed
For dignity composed and high exploit:
But all was false and hollow; though his tongue
Dropped manna, and could make the worst appear
The better reason, to perplex and dash
Maturest counsels: for his thoughts were low
[...] Yet he pleased the ear,
And with persuasive accent thus began.”
—John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II, 108-18

Many critics consider *Heart of Darkness* to be one of the finest English novellas ever written (Guerard, “Introduction” 9; Karl 123). Composed as the nineteenth century collapsed into the twentieth, it captures the inherently modern condition: the ambiguity, fear, paralysis, impotence, and underneath it, violence, that infected Europe at the time. Joseph Conrad’s tale recounts Marlow’s penetration of that which lies deeply hidden within Europe—its unconscious darkness. As the protagonist journeys further into Africa, he discovers that the darkness, rather than belonging to the natives onto whom their oppressors project it, instead lurks inside the souls of the European colonists. Professing altruistic ideals and intentions of bringing civilization to the savages, European encroachment leaves Africa in turmoil, as the previously undisturbed tribes of the Congo are subjected to the West’s wanton avarice.

Heart of Darkness, then, is a voyage of self-discovery for Marlow. He believed that this ideal justified the cruelty of imperialism: “What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it, not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up and bow down before, and offer sacrifice to” (Conrad 10). Finally faced with the elusive reality, he must acknowledge the darkness that resides at the core of his own idealism, symbolically embodied in the agent Mr. Kurtz (Knapp 49). Only once he confronts this shadow-self, his unconscious, can he reduce its power over him and recognize the limitations placed upon him by his miasmal society.

Psychoanalytic criticism of the unconscious in *Heart of Darkness* has resulted in a vast body of work concentrated on sexuality and its suppression (Kimbrough 406-418; Knapp 49-74; Karl 123-136). And, indeed, several early passages in the text encourage sexually oriented analyses, specifically the pathetic six-inch guns of the French warship and the ubiquitous staves that the “pilgrims” carry everywhere with them. These feeble phallic symbols, ridiculed by Conrad for their ineptitude—“They wandered here and there with their absurd long staves in their hands like a lot of faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence” (Conrad 26)—are an illustration of Europe’s sterility. But more importantly, the gesture of the French gunboat and the pilgrims are a representation of the *repression barrier* between the conscious and the unconscious, something psychoanalysis skims over in its zealous pursuit of sexual symbolism. As Marlow descends further into the darkness of the unconscious, Conrad creates these increasingly unreal images—mirages that remind the reader of omnipresent efforts of colonial Europe to control those Dionysian impulses embodied in Africa. With the failure of each regulative effort, these images become increasingly hallucinatory, lending *Heart of Darkness* an illusory quality that accentuates the protagonist’s descent into the unconscious.

From the very beginning of Marlow’s voyage, the story exhibits the uncanny, otherworldly aspects of a dream. Time no longer proceeds in a linear fashion, but ebbs and flows like the tide against the shore (Guerard, “The Journey Within” 248): “Watching a coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma. There it is before you—smiling, frowning, inviting, grand,

mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering—Come and find out” (Conrad 16). Even at a safe distance from the shore, Marlow can feel the allure of Africa. It hints and beckons. The jungle seduces him with the same siren song that captivates Kurtz.

As he travels up the river, the only thing between Marlow and that fascinating abomination is his boat: “What we could see was just the steamer we were on, her outlines blurred as though she had been on the point of dissolving [...] The rest of the world was nowhere [...] Gone, disappeared, swept off without leaving a whisper or a shadow behind” (41).

The unconscious, represented by Africa, is held back by a piece of European technology, a reflection of its might and rationality. Within a cocoon of steel, Marlow is isolated, protected from the uncharted territory of his psyche. However, Marlow’s mission to rescue Kurtz inevitably draws him off the boat, deep into the jungle and the unconscious.

Kurtz becomes an allegory of European idealism with each successive, ambiguous assessment of the agent that Marlow receives on his journey up the river. His orders are to retrieve the celebrated ivory trader, part of the Company’s “gang of virtue” (28) who had left the sepulchral city to bring light to the Dark Continent. Kurtz had the answers, the “higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose” (28). He was the embodiment of the altruistic idea that inspires Marlow and the other agents (Karl 125); he was expected to lead the Company into a virtuous new epoch. Instead, the man Marlow confronts is a human Belial—a glorious façade with only darkness behind it. What he experiences internally in the presence of Mr. Kurtz’s unbridled will to power is his own heart of darkness, the hidden drives and dreams of his unconscious.

Kurtz had succumbed to the incomprehensible frenzy of the jungle: “I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude—and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core” (Conrad 57-8).

This fascinates Marlow as well. Finally, in the ultimate symbol of European idealism—“All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz” (50)—

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Marlow finds the licentious excess and absurd destruction that wallows in the centre of his culture of light: “I saw the incomprehensible mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself” (66). There is naturally some perverse attraction to this kind of monstrosity (Karl 128).

Marlow’s ostentatious epiphany suggests that he knows what he would find from the onset of his voyage. Throughout the novel, Marlow struggles with his idealism. He unconsciously realizes that he desires the impossible but ignores this knowledge. Finally, facing his shadow-self, he cannot escape the truth: “It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw on that ivory face the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror—of an intense and hopeless despair” (Conrad 68). The idealism is finally exposed and discovered to be a facade.

It is ironic that Marlow, the professed hater of lies, should discover that he had deceived himself through the entirety of his journey toward Kurtz. Marlow does not surrender to the temptation of the jungle, to the unrestrained indulgence of agent Kurtz. Instead he sees the Promethean abyss—in Kurtz, in himself, and in his society—and consciously crosses over it: “A voice! a voice! It rang deep to the very last. It survived his strength to hide in the magnificent folds of eloquence the barren darkness of his heart” (67). Accepting that even his idealism is a pretence, eloquence disguising the heart of darkness, Marlow is able to lie to Kurtz’s Intended, and move on (Knapp 74).

Marlow’s unique ability, in comparison to Kurtz and the inhabitants of the sepulchral city, to recognize the subliminal darkness and nonetheless eke out the semblance of a moral victory, gives *Heart of Darkness* a final quality of redemption. While Kurtz became “pale, indistinct like a vapour exhaled by the earth” (64), Marlow resembles an idol, a symbol of enlightenment: “His legs folded before him he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus flower” (10). For Kurtz only death could end the nightmare he had created for himself; but Marlow, having successfully undertaken the

journey to the heart of his unconscious achieves a balance within himself. Marlow forsakes idealism for truth and thereby transcends his noxious society.

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INVISIBLE MEN: A RECONSIDERATION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN
AVANT-GARDE IN THE 1960s

Jeff Williams

In his essay defining the Black Arts Movement, M. H. Abrams makes a distinction between the “‘high art’ and modernist forms advocated by Ralph Ellison [...] in the 1950s” and the “black aesthetic [that] called for the exploitation of the energy and freshness of the black vernacular” (24). Abrams claims that “the most notable and influential practitioner of the Black Arts was Imamu Amiri Baraka (born LeRoi Jones)” (24). Indeed, LeRoi Jones’ political activism (inspired by such leaders as Malcolm X), his creation of the Black Arts Repertory Theater, and his avant-garde mentality seem to separate him significantly from the reclusive Ellison who claimed that he wanted his novel *Invisible Man* to be seen not as a piece of African-American activism, but simply as a novel. Abrams separates these authors and their respective periods based on the “revolutionary impetus” exhibited by Jones and his peers, an impetus that he finds lacking in Ellison’s work. Although Jones’ public attitude was apparently more “revolutionary” than Ellison’s, the juxtaposition of Jones’ play *Dutchman* and Ellison’s *Invisible Man* clarifies both the similar social concerns and similar tools employed by both in achieving their artistic goals. With this in mind, it seems that Abrams, rather than establishing a dichotomy between the arts of the two authors, pays greater attention to their differing public attitudes. The comparison of these two works sheds light on how the respective work of Jones and Ellison bear more similarity than Abrams tends to acknowledge and also suggests that a more formal approach to African-American literature of the 1950s and 1960s exposes its historical continuity.

The historical continuity of African-American themes is notable in both authors’ treatment of jazz and blues. In his definition of the “Black Aesthetic,” Abrams explains that authors such as Jones rejected the “‘high art’ and modernist forms” of Ellison, and called instead for “the exploitation [...] of the

black vernacular, in rhythms and moods emulating jazz and the blues” (24). This definition suggests that Ellison had little concern for such “rhythms and moods,” yet his novel *Invisible Man* includes several mentions of jazz and blues music, and arguably even formally embodies the improvisational diversity of these forms. As early as the prologue Ellison’s invisible man raps about blues music: “[w]hen I have music I want to *feel* its vibration, not only with my ear but with my whole body. I’d like to hear five recordings of Louis Armstrong playing and singing ‘What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue’—all at the same time” (8). The passage not only discusses the blues, but moves with a musical rhythm—speedy, one-syllable, simple diction flows into slow words and phrases like the italicized “feel” and “whole body” with its long “o” sounds. Ellison even manipulates the capitalization scheme in the Louis Armstrong title to give it a more iambic movement: “to Be so Black and Blue.” The alternating capitalization, combined with the exploitation of rhythm, illustrates that Ellison also exhibits a significant formal concern for “the rhythms and moods emulating jazz and the blues” (Abrams 24). In fact, this concern for African-American music stretches back to the prominent Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes whose first book of poetry was titled *The Weary Blues*, further illustrating Jones’ connection with his cultural past. Although Jones, according to Abrams, attempts to separate himself from Ellison and other African-American writers, his use of jazz and blues rhythms, as a formal examination of Ellison’s novel illustrates, does little to suggest a “revolutionary impetus” in Jones’ work, at least in terms of form (24).

A close examination of the respective protagonists also serves to illustrate the similar themes residing in these two seemingly dissimilar texts. Ellison’s unnamed invisible man is a high school graduate who dresses in typically white, middle-class clothes and grapples with his race’s past from the novel’s beginning: “I am not ashamed of my grandparents for having been slaves. I am only ashamed of myself for having at one time been ashamed” (15). Jones’ protagonist Clay seems to be in a similar circumstance as the white temptress Lula reminds him near the end of the first act: “[b]oy, those narrow-shoulder clothes come from a tradition you ought to feel oppressed by. A three-button suit. [...] Your grandfather was a slave, he didn’t go to Harvard” (18). Indeed,



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neither character seems to feel at ease with where they come from, a fact that Lula makes piercingly clear when she tells Clay “I bet you never once thought you were a black nigger” (19). Although discovering the issue of connecting with the past in different ways, both characters are forced to grapple with the problem. Jones’ poem “An Agony. As Now.” helps to clarify this difficulty:

I am inside someone
who hates me. I look
out from his eyes. Smell
what fouled tunes come in
to his breath. Love his
wretched women. (2789)

Both characters experience the feeling of existing inside a white man’s body and culture while at the same time being shunned by that culture. They are unable to connect with the past or the present, the black or the white, and consequently struggle with the invisibility of non-identity. Both characters seem to struggle with being “so full of white man’s words,” a point that is illustrated formally by their names (Jones 31). Ellison’s protagonist remains nameless throughout the novel and is only identified as invisible, suggesting the emptiness of his position in American culture. Similarly, Jones’ protagonist’s name “Clay” reminds readers of putty that is easily manipulated and shaped, without any control of its own destiny. Both Ellison and Jones use a broad array of strategies, ranging from formal to cultural, to express their protagonists’ similar plight as African-Americans, suggesting that the claim of 1960s authors to avant-garde radicalism is not so apparent in their texts.

In addition to their protagonists, both authors use complex metaphors to articulate the intricate nature of race issues in America. The title *Dutchman* is by itself rich in metaphorical value as it refers to the Flying Dutchman legend of a ship that is cursed to eternally ride the sea. The “subway heaped in modern myth” that Jones portrays is itself a perpetually moving vehicle of racism from which death seems the only escape (3). After his verbally and physically violent response to Lula’s bigotry, Clay suffers the ultimate

consequence: “[a]s he is bending over her, the girl brings up a small knife and plunges it into Clay’s chest. Twice” (37). The subway car is teeming with fascinated passengers to whom Lula yells, “Get this man off me! [...] Open the door and throw his body out.” The passengers acquiesce and Clay is thrown from the car, an act that is further complicated by the subway conductor’s race: “an old Negro conductor comes into the car, doing a sort of restrained soft shoe, half mumbling the words of some song” (38). Not only does Lula—an allegorical figure of white dominance—use the subway to stalk her young African-American prey, but the Dutchman on which she rides is powered by none other than an older African-American man. As the play ends Lula acknowledges another young African-American man as the conductor says to him, “[h]ey, brother,” and “tips his hat when he reaches [Lula’s] seat,” only to continue out of the car (38). The conductor is fully aware of the injustice occurring, yet continues to perpetuate it. Ellison would likely describe Jones’s subway as “a veritable train of sorrow,” and his University President Dr. Bledsoe represents a nearly identical cultural phenomenon (129). Bledsoe shamelessly boasts of his social role while reprimanding the invisible man in his office: “I’m still king down here [...] This is a power set-up son, and I’m at the controls [...] I’ve made my place in it and I’ll have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where I am” (142-3). Much like Jones’ conductor, Bledsoe cares only for his own welfare and is even willing to kill members of his own race to maintain his position of power. Although the authors’ works, according to Abrams, should represent social concerns in markedly different ways, a close examination of metaphors illustrates their similar strategies and concerns.

Further metaphorical similarity is evident in each author’s use of symbolic imagery ranging from black and white images to white female sexuality. In his opening stage direction, Jones describes the blurring of dark and light through the car window: “[d]im lights and darkness whistling by against the glass” (3). Jones creates an image of such speed with this juxtaposition that it is worthy of a “whistling” sound, a description that suggests a simultaneous tension and cooperation between the tones. The dark and light require one another to convey speed, but at the same time refuse to amalgamate. Ellison makes use of

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the same imagery as his invisible man keeps his “eyes glued to the white line dividing the highway” while driving Mr. Norton (38). The white lines, painted on top of the black road, serve as the only marker for the invisible man to guide the car. Although seemingly in control of his fate (the car), the invisible man completely relies on the white Mr. Norton’s guidance (the white lines). Both Jones and Ellison recognize the tension between black and white Americans through symbolic imagery. A more overt recognition of the simultaneous attraction and repulsion between black and white is evident in each author’s use of white female sexuality. Jones’ Lula tempts Clay sexually throughout the play, an act that Jones clarifies with his use of the metaphorical apple:

Lula. [...] Would you like to get involved with me, Mister Man?
Clay. [...] Sure. Why not? A beautiful woman like you. Huh, I’d be a fool not to.
Lula. And I bet you’re sure you know what you’re talking about.
[Taking him a little roughly by the wrist, so he cannot eat the apple, then shaking the wrist.] (11)

Lula places her sexuality at the forefront, only to pull it away from Clay as his desire heightens. With this in mind, Jones’ allegory seems to suggest the constant strife for African-Americans who view their goals within white America clearly, but never attain them. Ellison seems to convey this temptation for African-Americans as an inedible “hard red apple stamped out of tin” (53), and supports it with a similar image of white female sexuality during the Battle Royal:

A sea of faces, some hostile, some amused, ringed around us, and in the center, facing us, stood a magnificent blonde—stark naked [...] I wanted at one and the same time to run from the room, to sink through the floor, or go to her and cover her from my eyes and the eyes of the others with my body; to feel the soft thighs, to caress and destroy her, to love her and murder her, to hide from her, and yet to stroke where below the small American flag tattooed upon her belly her thighs formed a capital V. (19)

Engulfed in a circle of white aristocrats, the invisible man simultaneously battles and embraces his lust toward the dancer. His rush of various feelings is even punctuated by a murderous hate toward the woman who faces him. Yet, the invisible man is able to act on none of these impulses, suggesting the untouchable nature of not only the woman bearing the “small American flag tattoo,” but of the American dream she represents. For both Jones and Ellison, the conflict between black and white in America is one deserving various forms of symbolic consideration, once again suggesting the similar formal, social, and political concerns of both authors.

Although Ellison and Jones displayed markedly different public attitudes regarding the concerns of African-Americans, the formal approaches and social observations existing in their works are strikingly similar. If a “revolutionary impetus” fueled the Black Arts Movement, it seems that impetus resided more in political association than in formal detail (Abrams 24). While Jones attempted to embrace an avant-garde brand of African-American literature in the 1960s, connecting himself closely with the Black Power movement, his connection to the cultural past is apparent even when juxtaposed with what Abrams defines as his polar opposite. Ellison and Jones each utilize jazz and blues styles, culturally confused protagonists, metaphors concerning black generational frustration, and symbolic imagery ranging from the colorful to the sexual to express their artistic messages. Although Abrams defines them as apples and oranges, it seems Ellison and Jones were seeking the same “apple stamped out of tin” all along (Ellison 53).

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**MISTAKEN IDENTITY: AN INSIGHT INTO THE CHARACTERS OF
ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET'S *THE ERASERS* AND
VLADIMIR NABOKOV'S *THE REAL LIFE OF SEBASTIAN KNIGHT***

Luke Samuel Dohman

In all great detective novels, authors weave together a formula of facts and reasoning that ultimately concludes with some profound revelation before which the reader sits in awe. Whether it is the delicate balance of lacking sufficient evidence, or getting caught in the analytical labyrinth of assumptions, detective stories never cease to intrigue and entrap the curiosity of the reader. Ironically enough, authors often create detectives whose fervor for the case ultimately leads them to share a similar fate. In order to fully grasp the entirety of their subject, detectives often place themselves in the mind and steps of that which they are studying. The ability to identify with the subject of interest presents itself in both Alain Robbe-Grillet's *The Erasers*, and in Vladimir Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. In *The Erasers*, the third person narration allows the reader to follow the sleuthing of detective Wallas. In the latter novel the author uses the detective to double as the narrator while still unveiling the mystery at hand. Amidst the search for answers to overlying questions and deceptive leads, these detectives begin to find themselves embracing the very characteristics of the subjects which they follow. The incessant submersion into this pool of illusive leads and facts inevitably causes the detectives to embody the identity of the subjects they study.

In Robbe-Grillet's novel *The Erasers* the consistency of the witnesses' repeated testimonies illustrates Wallas' embodiment of his criminal counterpart. Wallas's lack of familiarity with the detective field serves as a possible explanation for his mix ups. One passage from *The Erasers* reads: "Wallas has worked for the Bureau of Investigation only a short time [...] it is an accident that he happens to have this job" (57). Despite Wallas's commitment to the

case, his inexperience and reputation degrade his level of authority as an investigator. Residents quickly begin to question Wallas' innocence due to his unassertive nature and lack of a reputable alibi. A drunkard is the first to misrepresent Wallas as the suspect the night of the murder. "We walked the whole way together [...] the whole way [...] That's too easy! It's not enough to change your coat..." (117). This line refers to the similarity between Wallas and the man that the drunkard staggered behind the night of the murder. The drunkard, observing slightly different attire, insinuates that even changing his coat cannot mask Wallas's true identity. Failure to refute the drunkard's false testimony illustrates the first stage of Wallas's identification with the criminal. Skeptical of the drunkard's judgment, Wallas dismisses the description light-heartedly: "Wallas cannot help smiling at the absurdity of his conclusion. If it could only be determined that the suspect resembles himself" (116). At this point in time the detective fails to see any connection to the suspect but his ignorance proves devastating as the story progresses.

Future investigations present additional evidence of paralleling characteristics between the two. Robbe-Grillet writes about the account of a post office worker: "The girl's testimony is explicit: the man who calls himself Andre' WS resembles Wallas almost exactly. She did not hesitate when she saw the latter present himself at the window-despite the change of clothes" (186). Again, the detective's pursuit of evidence about the criminal suspect leads to another analogy between their appearances, depicting Wallas' advancing re-characterization. In order to illustrate uniformity between Wallas and the suspect, Robbe-Grillet ironically replaces Wallas in the same place that the drunkard recollected earlier: "On the other side of the street, Madame Bax's window is lit. "Hey aren't you waiting for me? Hey! Buddy!' It is the drunk who is pursuing him" (227). Wallas re-walks the very steps of the criminal the night of the murder, again, with the drunk following behind. This passage alludes to the similarities that exists between Wallas and the murder and that they could indeed be one and the same character.

Additionally, Wallas's appearance and actions are mirrored exactly by a man in a scene at a stationary shop: "And he has bought an eraser, of course...he bought the post card showing the house, the one you bought from

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me yourself this morning (Robbe-Grillet 180)!” The peculiarity of purchasing an eraser, an object for which Wallas has a unique affinity, and the postcard with a picture of the scene of the crime bear too high a likeness to be mere happenstance. The mirroring theme between the mysterious suspect and Wallas alludes to the final scene where Wallas ironically kills the supposedly deceased Dupont, becoming the murderer. Robbe-Grillet exemplifies this transformation in the lines: “Sometimes you go through hell and high water to find a murderer, and the crime hasn’t even been committed. You go through hell and high water to discover it [...] quite far from him, whereas one need only point towards one’s own chest...” (253). The passage infers that Wallas searched in vain for a murderer that did not exist. Wallas’s fixation on finding the truth blinds him to the similarities between himself and the murderer. Despite the numerous forewarnings of residents, Wallas’ ignorance inevitably costs Dupont his life. While it would be difficult to prove that the original suspect and detective Wallas are one and the same individual, his fate displays how his persistence led to the integration of traits comparable to that of the killer.

Even though the detective in Vladimir Nabokov’s *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* does not investigate a crime, the attempt to recreate a biography of Sebastian’s life forces the narrator to become the subject he adores. V., the narrator of this novel, frequently likens himself to his half-brother. V. describes one such occurrence while reflecting on a past tennis match: “but the general rhythm of their motions as they swept all over the court was exactly the same, so that had it been possible to draft both systems two identical designs would have appeared” (32). This passage alludes to a twin-like relation, a mirror image between the two characters. The very next line of novel reiterates this conclusion: ‘I daresay Sebastian and I also had some kind of common rhythm; this might explain the curious “it-has-happened-before-feeling” which seizes me when following the bends of his life’ (32). Twins often describe a similar psychological connection where they sense the others’ thoughts. The relation between the narrator and Sebastian is that of a half-brother, a far leap from identical twins. Thus, the only explanation for this déjà-vu-like sensation must have arisen through the narrator’s envelopment in Sebastian’s life. The

narrator's reference to the common rhythms and subconscious connections exhibits his desire to parallel the two brothers. Sebastian's desire to reconstruct the existence of a connection between the two brothers possibly stems from the lack of attention he received in his younger years: "but by Sebastian's constant aloofness, which, although I loved him dearly, never allowed my affection either recognition or food" (16). The desire to relive the footsteps of his brother in search for the truth serves to close the gap that once separated the two. This hunger to recreate a once non-existent relationship between the two brothers demonstrates how the narrator begins to become his brother.

In a later section, Nabokov's imagery and word choice symbolize the doubling of the narrator and Sebastian as the same character. The narrator describes the scene: "But as I look at the portrait Roy Carswell painted I seem to see a slight twinkle in Sebastian's eyes, for all the sadness of their expression" (117). At first the reader takes the narrator's description of the portrait at face value, a fine resemblance of Sebastian. Later lines reveal a mirror like projection of the painting of Sebastian's face: "These eyes and the face itself are painted in such a manner as to convey the impression that they are mirrored Narcissus-like in clear water..." (117). It is important to keep in mind that the narrator is looking at a portrait of Sebastian, which now is said to mirror the reflection of someone looking into water. One could infer that the resemblance between the narrator and Sebastian has become so similar that the narrator views the image as that of himself. One could argue that the passage is merely a representation of Sebastian alone: "Thus Sebastian peers into a pool at himself" (117). However, Nabokov's swapping of perspectives between the narrator and Sebastian illustrates the matching identities of the two characters.

In the final pages of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* the narrator himself claims to be one and the same with Sebastian. The narrator exclaims: "Thus-I am Sebastian Knight. I feel as if I were impersonating him on a lighted stage, with the people he knew coming and going" (203). After all the interviews, escapades, and dead ends, the narrator becomes so filled with the presence of Sebastian's qualities that he cannot help but admit to being Sebastian himself. The narrator explains the fate of his identity: "but the hero remains, for try as I may, I cannot get out of my part: Sebastian's mask clings to my face, the likeness

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will not be washed off. I am Sebastian, or Sebastian is I, or perhaps we both are someone whom neither of us knows” (203). By placing himself in the thick of the investigation, the narrator’s identity soon paralleled Sebastian’s so much that the effects are irreversible. The narrator’s final realization exemplifies the consequence of becoming over-involved in a detective’s investigation.

The characters of both Wallas and the narrator in the novels of Robbe-Grillet and Nabokov demonstrate their mistaken identities through their attempts to create parallels between themselves and their subjects of interest. The authors’ allusions to the similarities and interchangeable identities between the detectives and their subject provide an interesting perspective for the reader. The importance of balancing a detective’s dedication for the assimilation of facts with resilience to getting too caught up in the case is often overlooked. Despite the detective’s search for uncovering some profound revelation, he must not jeopardize his original identity or thus all his credibility as a detective is lost.

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EXISTENCE AND ESSENCE IN *MIST* AND *NAUSEA*

Jay Patel

Miguel de Unamuno's philosophy displays sympathy for socialism and the human condition. This philosophy supports immortality of the individual and life itself. The individual must confront the battle between immortality and rationality. Unamuno's tragicomic novel *Mist* focuses on a character confronting his own mortality. The protagonist, Augusto Perez, struggles to uncover the veil hiding existence and uses the concept of love to bring himself out of the mist. Existence is a central theme in this work as Unamuno believes discovering what it means for one to truly exist is the key to solving the mystery of immortality and rationality. This theme is also adapted later by Jean-Paul Sartre, particularly in the distinction he makes between existence and essence. He believes that an object, such as a chair or table, simply "is" or exists. This is also true of a person. To Sartre, the essence, or quality, is solely determined by how something acts. The main character in Sartre's novel *Nausea*, Antoine, overcomes his "nausea" by realizing that the inanimate objects he became indifferent towards were the very objects that exist in themselves. Discovering existence and essence would help alleviate the nausea and help to discover the immortality of all objects that exist. The protagonists in Miguel de Unamuno's *Mist* and Sartre's *Nausea* both attempt to find a sense of self, but take two different paths and struggle with their own uniquely existential problems. In *Nausea*, existence precedes essence. In *Mist*, however, essence precedes existence. This paper will address how the relationship between existence and essence are directly opposite in both works. Active and passive influences, applications of imagination and knowledge, and differences between the idea of the "novel" and "nivola" all support how the characters dissipate nausea and mist differently and how they realize existence and essence in their own unique way. This paper will conclude with the application of truth to the ending of both characters' lives.

I. Active and Passive Relationships with Objects

Both characters are confronted with active and passive relationships and this affects their interpretations of existence and essence differently. Antoine Roquentin starts his personal journey by taking notice of objects around him. He sees how descriptions of these objects can be exaggerated, as in the case of the diary (1). In this particular case, Roquentin believes that a person who writes in a diary purposely looks for something to write about. The diary account is not an accurate depiction of existing objects. These external objects such as a pipe or a fork or his own hand disgust him.

This seems like a passing phase of madness, but it does not wear off. Antoine questions the existence of objects further and relates the objects directly to his human senses. This relation towards the objects is not only active (such as the act of touching an object), but it is also passive. Roquentin is able to understand the fork having a “certain way of having itself picked up” (4). As he struggles with questioning the existence of inanimate objects, another question arises as to whether or not there is a struggle with animate objects, especially human beings. Antoine spends much of his time internalizing and does not particularly care for the presence of others, despite his time spent with characters such as the Self-Taught Man and Françoise, the woman who runs a bar Roquentin frequently visits called the “Railwaymen’s Rendez-vous” .

The human being who provides a struggle similar to the one he experiences with inanimate objects is Anny. As Roquentin reflects on his “relationship” with Anny, the thoughts and words he uses to describe her “remain nebulous” and “sketch vague, pleasant shapes and [then] are swallowed up” (7). This is an example of a passive relationship that can be paralleled to previous examples of the active/passive relationships involving inanimate objects such as the fork. What does the active/passive relationship mean? By holding a stone and understanding the stone being touched, Antoine begins to see the objects shedding their essences. Every object exists and any qualitative aspect of the object, the essence, whether it is the quality of the hand touching the object or the object being touched, becomes a part of the past instantaneously.

Like inanimate objects, human beings also contain essences and thoughts. Memories regarding human beings fade into the past.

An example would be Antoine's observations at the Bouville museum. As he looks upon the men in the portraits, he begins to contemplate how they lived their lives. He thinks about their rights and inevitably realizes that he does not have the right to exist (84). The idea of a right is equated with the idea of duty and all of life's duties are essences that can be shed into the past. This idea is further strengthened as Antoine observes the portrait of Philip II and his sparkling face. Soon enough the "sparkle dies away, and only an ashy residue remains" (89). These are the ashes human beings constantly shed (active) and human beings must realize that their ashes are being shed (passive) as moments fade into the past. What is at stake in shedding essences is realizing that human beings exist first and foremost and that specific actions lead to acquiring specific qualities (essences). This is Sartre's solution to alleviating the nausea.

Augusto Perez is also confronted with active and passive relationships in his process to discover the self. His story begins with his eyes. His eyes, which are affixed to his body, actively find Eugenia, a random woman passing by on the street, and follow her (22), but Augusto also sees that he is being carried by his eyes. Is Augusto controlling his eyes to follow Eugenia or are his eyes somehow controlling him? This relationship can also be seen as the antagonist contemplates life while he plays chess with Victor. When Augusto hopes to take a move back, Victor explains to him that a piece touched is a piece played (39). This could be symbolic of life for if life is a game, the person (piece) actively makes a decision to act, resulting in the person having the experience happen to him or her (passive). For Augusto, the active and passive relationships are not essences that are qualities to be shed. He sees both the action and the experience as definitions of existence. The main problem becomes what is the proper action and the best experience to have that will give him a sense of self, a meaning for his existence. Existence and what it means to Augusto is the meaningful conclusion gathered from a totality of essences.

II. Overcoming Nausea and Uncovering Mist: Two Different Applications to Imagination and Knowledge

Antoine did not make his discovery of existence and essence directly from active and passive relationships. He had to overcome this “nausea” prompted in part by the limitations of the mundane objects that he encountered. This “sweetish sickness” (10) first occurred when he picked up the stone (nausea of the hands). The nausea later occurs when he feels disgusted with the light changing from beneath his hands and the sleeves of his coat (16). Before his confrontation with existence and essence, he has taken facts from what he observes (the “things that exist around him”) and tries to make order of these facts and calls it knowledge. He later believes that nothing can be proven and that his idea of “knowledge” comes from his own imagination (13). This helps him to overcome the nausea later because Antoine is subconsciously taking existence and driving factual descriptions about existence (essence) out of them. This is not enough, however, to alleviate the nausea and he struggles by placing emphasis on certain qualitative matter that should not be of more importance than other qualitative matter. For example, although Antoine is shocked that qualities such as beauty or ugliness can be attributed to the face, he makes the error in seeing his hair as beautiful merely because it is distinguishable amongst a crowd (16). Antoine will soon realize that homogeneity and heterogeneity are both categories and that objects similar to or different from other objects are fundamentally objects that exist. These qualities, or essences, must be present in order for Antoine to uncover existence and dispel the nausea.

Augusto Perez sees life as a mist and as a nebula (31). Eugenia, the beautiful stranger, arises out of this mist to give his life a purpose, which is of eventually conquering her (37). Augusto expressed how Eugenia appeals to the imagination (237). He equates imagination with intelligence and it is Eugenia who represents the expression of Augusto’s love. Therefore, his love for Eugenia helps bring this intelligence about. This love is necessary as what, Augusto believes, always leads to knowledge or understanding. To Augusto, the confusing hazy mist is cleared by the expression of love, which is an essence in itself.

It is this quality, or essence, that allows the soul to take solid form (74). Love becomes the catalyst that drives all understanding and helps to clear the mist that holds the reigns over the meaning of his own existence. The process of love clearing the mist proves to be quite the struggle for the protagonist, however. The abstract concept becomes difficult for Augusto to prove and he continually questions himself and others. During a game of chess, Augusto's friend Victor explains to him that he is "in love ab origine" and has an "inborn love-sickness" (41). This is a concept that Augusto toys around with. He sees love as a precursor to understanding and at certain points derides love, for example as something that makes one childish (43). He questions what he is falling in love with and is told that he is "falling in love with the collective woman" (77). He also questions the origin of this love and is told that "it is in the head" and that he is an "entity of fiction" (98). Eventually Augusto discovers that he is after a soul (136) and his own happiness. His happiness relies on Eugenia being happy, but he is unsure whether or not this is actual love. Therefore, he is tempted to fall in love with every woman he encounters.

III: The Novel and the Nivola

As a historian, Roquentin researches the life of Rollebon and writes about it. He takes events that have already occurred and organizes them for his novel. As he begins to shed the essences of everything around him, he realizes that the only things that exist are the yellow pages in front of him. All of the events that occurred cannot be brought back into the present, regardless of the fact that others will be reading it in the present. Soon enough their memories of Rollebon will be shed into the past as well. Once he abandons writing about him, he realizes that Rollebon has "died for the second time" (96). He wanted this dead man to veil his own existence and in return, he would allow the dead man to live again. Perhaps this is his denial of having to confront existence or it is an attempt to keep the nausea away by bringing a dead man alive through writing. However, there is no way for the dead man to not be shed into the past. Inevitably, there is no way for essences to cover Roquentin's existence. He realizes that the only thing that exists is "I". History can only talk about what



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has existed and “an existent can never justify the existence of another existent” (178). There is no reason for him to attempt to justify Rollebon’s existence and there is no way that writing about someone who existed in the past can give meaning to his own existence. What is important to note here is that Roquentin has the freedom to abandon history and to change essences by choosing what moments to live in and these moments will shed their own essences. He can also choose not to be a part of a particular moment that could inevitably occur, which would mean those possible essences will not be shed in the future. After abandoning the novel, he decides to simply move on to something else and this is not only freedom, but it is his responsibility to do so in order to find his existence. This responsibility is necessary in order to alleviate the ever-present nausea.

The idea of the nivola in *Mist* contrasts the idea of the novel in *Nausea*. A nivola comes into play when Unamuno, the author, becomes a character in his own work and has dialogue with Augusto regarding his role as Augusto’s creator. This is a term coined by Unamuno as the author becomes a “plaything of his own inventions”. The idea of the novel is quite different. As the writer of the novel of Rollebon, Antoine had control over the subject and over himself. He was able to decide when to write and whether or not to continue writing the novel. Augusto has some free will, but not complete control due to the mist and his entire life is this mist. Antoine’s entire life is not nausea and he therefore has complete control when he overcomes the nausea. If Augusto sees his entire life as mist, then is there ever a way to fully uncover the mist? The question in a nivola is who has true control. There is always Platonic dialogue in a nivola and as Unamuno and Augusto discuss the protagonist’s situation, Augusto explains that in a nivola, there is possibility for the character to kill the creator of that character (301). This is because there are not limitations to a nivola, whereas a historical novel is bounded by the specific events that occurred in one’s lifetime. In terms of existence and essence, it is difficult to grasp who really exists in a nivola. If the creator becomes a fictitious character in his own work, then does the creator ever know if he or she is controlling the fictitious character in their own novel? Is it possible that this fictitious character, which the creator sees as his own existing product, is really controlling

him or her in some way? This concept redefines what it means to exist and how essences are ultimately tied in to the idea of existence.

IV: The element of truth: One finds it and one disregards it.

A question arises: Is truth what both characters are looking for as they discover a sense of self? In Augusto's case, truth is certainly not what he is after, for it is a social product (173) and society corrupts good men (106). What he seeks is a reason to live and to feel his own existence. One could argue that the key to finding a sense of self is to find the truth and eliminate any doubt about existence; however, this is not what Augusto is able to do. He later explains that "you doubt, then you think, then you are". This is an interesting spin on Descartes. If love comes before thought, then is the doubt that he speaks of the doubt of love? This is likely considering his back-and-forth feelings towards Eugenia. This doubt strengthens when Augusto discovers Eugenia left him for Mauricio before they were to be wed. He deals with the manner quite calmly and doubts his own existence for no other man would have taken the matter in such a calm fashion (278). Suddenly many emotions sweep through him at the same time and he weeps alone to dissolve the thought (280). Augusto speaks with Victor and explains that by making a mockery of him, Eugenia and Mauricio want to demonstrate that he does not exist (282). This is more in the belittling sense that he does not count rather than in the sense that he does not exist as a being. Victor reminds Augusto that he made an experiment out of Eugenia by seeing if she would marry him, but it was she who really experimented on him. To deal with this, he tells Augusto to make an experiment out of himself. To Augusto, this means suicide. He is unable to find a reason to live and a true method for feeling his own existence. He succumbs to the advice of Victor who is a friend of his in the social sense. If he believes that society corrupts good men, then why does he allow himself to be corrupted by Victor? Victor explains that by devouring himself, he has the pleasure of devouring (active) and the pain of being devoured (passive). Both will neutralize each other and Augusto will be a "spectacle for himself". What is a conclusion to draw from Augusto's death is that he disregards truth in all



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regards (in a social sense and a philosophical sense) and finds himself trapped in a situation that required some sort of justification. The justification he finds is the balance between an active and passive relationship and this is suicide. Whether or not he actually kills himself or if the author kills him is unsolved.

Antoine does catch a “glimpse of the truth” (82) and eventually sees the true nature of the present. This comes to light when he is at the café. The nausea that seizes Roquentin takes hold of him and he believes that nausea is not only inside of him but also on the wall and in the suspenders around him (19-20). It leaves momentarily only when he is “in the music” (22). It is when Antoine “loses himself” and lives for every moment that his nausea dissipates. The nausea slowly returns when he realizes that existence has “been there for a long time (31). Soon, for Roquentin, there are only words and he worries that these words will overtake the images that he loves. Eventually he loses attachment to images and then the words. The adventure takes him over (54) and he cannot conceive of anything around him being other than what it is (54). Taking everything around him to be exactly what it is (realizing existence) leads to Antoine having expectations. These are expectations for objects in the present and not in the past. The true being who is “in the moment” is like the doctor who is a professional and “makes the least possible noise, lives as little as possible, and lets [himself] be forgotten” (69). The doctor can live in the moment as he works and is also consistently performing without necessarily having to think or rely on essences. This is the truth in regards to the nature of the present and the key to overcoming the nausea.

In regards to others, Antoine does believe that people cannot define other people and the individual must define themselves by being conscious of their own existence. He does not see a social product as the corruptor of good men because this is a qualitative term. These qualities are mental constructs that cover existence and therefore, there is no meaning that should be applied to corruption or what it means to be “good”. His disregard for others comes from his idea that others get in the way of living in the moment and being conscious of existence. Antoine does believe in truth, but it is not something you can find in subjective essences. The only truth lies within existence itself. With a newly defined sense of self that comes from this realization, he is able to not

hold on to moments and yet lives on. He realizes that there was no point in counting on Anny and that the past, which includes the past with her, is dead (156). Instead of killing himself, he decides to outlive himself. Perhaps this is a way to slowly abandon himself to his own existence. As in the case with Augusto, Antoine's ending is also somewhat unsatisfactory in his desire to abandon himself to his own existence by creating something that is above existence. This could be due to the fact that after realizing existence, Antoine is bounded by it and the boredom must somehow be overcome. Only something that is beyond existence could help to overcome his existence. His solution is writing a novel and living endlessly through the words. What is unsatisfying is his desire to affect others. He becomes concerned with how people would read his book and what they would say (178) and this follows from his hope to burst out laughing when other men are plunged into solitude (159). According to his own philosophy, he should see the joy he feels from the situation of others as merely qualitative. His desire to affect others through his writing only gets in the way of defining his existence.

Both Antoine and Augusto have similarities and differences in their process of discovering the self and overcoming the nausea and mist, respectively. The two characters are split into two entirely different paths as they undergo the process of determining the relationship between existence and essence. As he walks along his path, Antoine is distant from having direct interactions with others. He becomes more of an isolationist, although he does rely on some social interactions that allow him to formulate existentialist questions in the first place. For example, with the Self-Taught Man, he does not enjoy the time he spends with him but he does observe the mistake the Self-Taught Man has for his useless quest for all knowledge. This interaction might be close physically, but is nevertheless distant in a relationship-sense. Antoine's observations of objects, whether it was in a café or in the park, was also indirect and from a distance. Augusto's path is different in the sense that he is very involved in social interactions because of this willful love that is the precursor to knowledge and the key to his sense of self and ultimate happiness. He directly involves himself in the process of love and does not look from afar. Instead, he makes himself known to Eugenia and formulates existentialist questions from

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what results from these interactions. Had Eugenia accepted his love willingly, would he have doubted love? Would he have concluded that it is necessary to doubt in order to think? Given that Augusto was more of a humanist than Antoine, he might have been influenced by Eugenia's reception. Perhaps the end result of both characters are somewhat disheartening in the sense that Antoine seeks some sort of reaction from others and Augusto does not find personal truth and follows the advice of Victor, but the philosophical process that both take in order to develop a sense of self is monumental and the conclusions that are drawn in regards to existence and essence are noteworthy.

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**MERGING IDENTITIES: A COMPARISON OF AFRICAN SUFFERING AND SURVIVAL
IN *SEASON OF MIGRATION TO THE NORTH* AND *YOUR NAME SHALL BE TANGA***

Lisa Poplawski

In Africa, promise and opportunity sit side by side with disease, war, and “desperate poverty” (U.S. National Security Council). This single line, given as an introduction to the United States’ Africa Policy, exposes not only the life of poverty, war and disease that troubles Africa, but also the suffering and battle to break free from those constraints, and bring to life a place of opportunity and safety. In the two novels *Season of Migration to the North*, by the Sudanese author Tayeb Salih, and *Your Name Shall Be Tanga*, by the Cameroonian Calixthe Beyala, this suffering is evident. Both texts reveal the struggle of their main characters to find peace within themselves, and in their identity. In a place of such sorrow, suffering, and confusion of true happiness, realizing individual truths can be near impossible. In the two novels, Salih and Beyala merge the identities of their characters as a solution to the societal problems described in the texts: from the influence and conflict of a European lifestyle on deep-rooted African society in *Season of Migration to the North*, to the oppression and prostitution of women in *Your Name Shall Be Tanga*.

Salih begins *Season of Migration to the North* with the narration of a Sudanese man who has returned home after traveling and studying in Europe for seven years. Upon arrival, Salih underlies the narrator’s return with a tone of happiness and fulfillment as he describes how long he has yearned for the day when he sees his family again and is in a place where “the world is as unchanged as ever” (2). However, it is the lack of modernization and socialization of this African village that later leads to the narrator’s greatest struggle as he encounters Mustafa Sa’eed, a man who has moved there five years before and who is spoken very highly of among the people. Intrigued with Mustafa and suspicious that he is not truly the man the villagers think he is, the narrator becomes obsessed with his thoughts of him after Mustafa sits

down and reveals to the narrator his past life. Mustafa, like the narrator, studied in Europe, earning various degrees as well as becoming well-known among educators and politicians alike. As Mustafa's story unfolds, he begins to tell of passionate but disastrous relationships with multiple English women that ended in the death of each one of them. Mustafa tells of the women's fascination with him as he divulged to them stories of Africa and the Nile, fulfilling the women's fantasies and imaginations of the foreign Africa they knew nothing of. After revealing his life, Mustafa disappears in the Nile and is never found either dead nor alive, leaving his wife and children in the care of the narrator in spite of the lack of a previous relationship between them.

Simply attempting to return home and melt back into his past life, the narrator's meeting with Mustafa hinders this resettlement as Mustafa, a man representing such English influence, has now halted the continuation of the narrator's life. The introduction of Mustafa into the narrator's life acts as a symbolic barrier between the merging of two very different lives: the African culture of agriculture and prayer, and the narrator's English lifestyle of poetry and education. Returning to this unchanged world, Mustafa's legacy of his wife and children eternally ties the narrator to his past English influence, since, as guardian of Mustafa's family, he can no longer escape this man who so crudely represents the difference between the darkness of Africa with the death of his lovers, compared to the innocence of the English women whom Mustafa seduces. The narrator begins to obsess over Mustafa, at first unable to extinguish him from his mind, yet over time, yearning for his thoughts to be consumed by the man: "[a]nd Mustafa Sa'eed's face springs clearly to my mind, just as I saw it the first day, and is then lost in the roar of the lorry's engine and the sound of the tyres against the desert stones, and I strive to bring it back and am unable to" (106). The commonality between the two men's pasts parallels their lives as they both have experienced two very different worlds and are now part of the inevitable struggle to live knowing both ways.

Mustafa's affairs and murders highlight the crude difference between the African and English way of life because they operate in the novel as an almost literary rape of England through the lives of those few women. As Mustafa says to an Englishman, "I have come to you as a conqueror." The line between the

English colonization of Africa and Mustafa's reaction to his country's invasion is distorted and the idea of English dominance has been reversed. Having experienced both worlds, Mustafa understands the assault of the English on Africa and is therefore capable of retaliating with his own assault on England through his identity as an African male. While it seems through his actions that he should loathe and attempt to conquer the English, the narrator's investigation of Mustafa's secret room filled with Victorian English furniture, actually reveals his own obsession with an English lifestyle and struggle to sever the two lives as he keeps the room locked and hidden from all closest to him.

As the text continues, the narrator's life is blurred with Mustafa's; the narrator can no longer escape thoughts of the man who encompasses his own struggle between African and European life. By allowing the narrator into his secret room, Mustafa has merged their two lives together as the narrator enters the room to find all European trappings including books, Persian rugs, a fireplace and mantle, and portraits of his English lovers. The narrator enters the room with the original intention of burning the entire building to release his mind of Mustafa, yet finds he cannot bring himself to destroy the symbols of European influence. Revealing his difficulty to blend this past English life with his new one, the narrator discovers that the two ways can only exist separately and at peace if they remain in his mind and in this secret room. The narrator soon comes across a vision of Mustafa, yet, as he moves closer, the vision transforms into a reflection of himself:

The light exploded on my eyes and out of the darkness there emerged a frowning face with pursed lips that I knew but could not place. I moved towards it with hate in my heart. It was my adversary Mustafa Sa'eed. The face grew a neck, the neck two shoulders and a chest, then a trunk and two legs, and I found myself standing face to face with myself. This is not Mustafa Sa'eed – it's a picture of me frowning at my face from a mirror.
(135)

It is at this point in the novel where the narrator and Mustafa's identities

begin to combine. With the physical representation of Mustafa's reflection becoming his own, the narrator's own identity fuses with Mustafa's as he continues the transformation by rummaging through letters and photographs, discovering the life of the man he has been obsessing over and enabling him to fully indulge in European memories and experiences.

Searching the room, the narrator sees a picture of Jean Morris, the woman Mustafa is charged with murdering. It is from this reflection that Salih chooses to reveal the story of her death. In finishing the story, the narrator is no longer in the room, but suddenly finds himself walking into the Nile, the very symbol of separation between the north and south. For it is throughout the entire book that the suffering and difficulty of the two lives have been symbolized by the dividing of the country into north of the Nile and south of the Nile. Representative of finally combining the two together, the narrator enters the river and at first, swims towards the north—towards his European life as he has done throughout the text—but finally ends the struggle against the water and sits exactly in the middle: “[t]urning to left and right, I found I was half-way between north and south. I was unable to continue, unable to return [...] Then my mind cleared and my relationship to the river was determined. Though floating on the water, I was not part of it” (168). The narrator chooses rebirth, neither a part of the Nile—the very symbol of Africa—nor separate from it. Swimming towards the north, the narrator and Mustafa, now one, simply forfeit their struggle and choose a rebirth out of the river. The author's intentional mystery of Mustafa's death allows for the narrator, a man who is lost in his own identity, to merge their two lives together, in effect finally finding peace between both of their African and European experiences.

While Salih focuses on the Sudan's struggle between European influence and original African culture in *Season of Migration to the North*, the female African novelist Calixthe Beyala writes of a different struggle in her novel *Your Name Shall Be Tanga*. Grossly graphic, with unending descriptions of sexuality and violence, Beyala's text tells of the immense suffering and oppression of women in Africa.

As the story begins, the reader finds two women together in a jail cell: one a European white woman named Anna-Claude, and one a seventeen year-old,

black African girl named Tanga. Although different in appearance and background, Beyala immediately begins to blur the distinction of the two as she deliberately writes to lose the reader in who is speaking at the time. Leaving out directive names of the characters after they talk, the two women in the jail cell begin to fuse together as they become one voice speaking the dialogue as it is so difficult to distinguish between the two. The description of Anna-Claude early on in the text leaves an impression of her as both lost and possibly insane as she moves to Africa in search of an African man that exists only in her mind. With no family, child, or ties to France, Beyala creates a character empty enough of story and a life of her own that the possibility of creating a new life or identity for her is achievable. Like Salih's introduction of the narrator, Beyala also opens her story with a character whose own place in the world is not secured.

Sharing the cell with Anna-Claude is Tanga, a girl only seventeen years-old who has so much story and experience of suffering to her life that it is possible to believe there only to be one person in the room: Tanga. While the majority of the novel consists of Tanga's story, introducing the two women in this way has set up Beyala to easily allow the women to become one: one with no life or identity of her own, and the other who has experienced so much life and suffering that she is on the verge of death, in need of someone to carry on her life and her story.

This necessity to continue Tanga's story is fulfilled as Anna-Claude, so intrigued by the suffering of this girl she shares her cell with, begs Tanga to tell her about her life. Tanga says that in order to share her story, Anna-Claude must become her: "[m]y secret will be illuminated. But first, the white women in you must die. Give me your hand; from now on you shall be me. You shall be seventeen seasons old; you shall be black; your name shall be Tanga" (7). Then, by holding hands, Tanga's story of suffering and oppression is transferred to Anna-Claude, not through words, but through silence.

The suffering in Tanga's life is indescribable: "What is there to say in a country where everything, even the air, is a prison?" (68). This is a country where children are prostituted, forced to work to earn money for their parents. A country where mothers are awarded for giving birth to large families, where



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in the end, only two out of the twelve children survive. A country where even the air—the substance that enables us to live—is their very own prison; that the only escape from the prison is to escape the air, and in effect, die from suffocation. The notion of being imprisoned by the air they breath reveals the extent of their everlasting suffering; the air is everywhere, the suffering is inescapable. While Salih reveals this enormity of Africa from a more metaphorical juxtaposition of the effects of European influence and colonization, Beyala’s novel presents a direct and atrocious description that follows Tanga’s life as she is forced into prostitution by her own mother who demands money from her each day.

The conditions of the people in Beyala’s text exude such poverty and misery as description after description appears of children starving and disease eating away at little boys and their families. While the topics of poverty and disease are present in the text, the most prevalent suffering experienced by Tanga is from her time in prostitution with the hundreds of men and harmful sexual encounters. From these experiences Tanga has found solace in the silence that was not only expected of her, but was forced on her as a woman. The world around her is so chaotic that all Tanga can hear is silence: she has found a way to exist in the suffering:

Silences were born from the noise of our stones. Dense silences. Putrid. Unhealthy. The cops came looking for my friend. They murdered him and made it look like suicide. Faced with the horror, some were getting ready to vomit their disgust, but the silence of the guns disappeared inside them. The others – all the others – kept their lips sealed...Nothing seen. Nothing heard. Not even the smoke and barking of the rifles. (97-98)

The silence described here is both the silent weapon of the oppressors—of their guns, of their violence—and that of the silence of the oppressed as they fear speaking out against those who have unjustly killed their friends and family members. While so many are trying to escape this silence, Tanga goes on to use it as her greatest weapon. Transferring her new found power to her cellmate at the end of the novel, Anna-Claude uses this silence to break down

the one male prison guard, a figure who serves as a representation of all men in the novel who have continually oppressed women. It is at this point in the text, when the guard comes to collect Anna-Claude from the cell to interrogate her about Tanga, that the two women's identities merge together as one.

While the prison guard questions her, Anna-Claude falls silent, refusing the questions and transcending her body as the guard becomes angry and rapes her. So long have the men controlled the women with this silence they have forced on them that finally, both Tanga and Anna-Claude, strengthened by becoming one, can control this man as Anna-Claude's silence drives him to frustration and rage. Anna Claude returns to the cell where she tells Tanga of the rape describing it as "nothing, just sex," as if it has happened to her many times before, alluding to the possibility of merging with Tanga's identity (128). The question of the merging is then made clear as Beyala stops ending Tanga's dialogues with her name, but rather refers to her as "the dying woman," indicating Tanga's symbolic death and rebirth as Anna-Claude (128). Using silence to transfer their story and to conquer the guard, the stillness and loss of voice inflicted upon Tanga has now allowed her the means to go on living through Anna-Claude; to continue her life eternally each time the story is passed on through the power of silence.

With each text consisting of a pair of characters who share a similar struggle, both Salih and Beyala merge the identities of their characters as they construct in one of the pair an answer to the other's problems. Mustafa's existence and disappearance allow for the narrator's discovery and release of his unsettled confusion about how to live in agreement with both his European and African lifestyles. While Anna-Claude's sensation of a lost life and lack of a true home or past allows for Tanga's story and suffering to be transferred to her, in effect allowing Tanga to live on rather than die at seventeen. By allowing both pairs of individuals to come together as one, the authors' technique of combining their identities serves as a means to strengthen each character in their own tribulations of finding their place in such a grief stricken country. With incredible suffering between both pairs of characters, joining identities results in a solution to their problems. Nearing the end of her story, Tanga asks the rhetorical question: "[a]fter suffering the damage of

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deprivation, shouldn't enchantment be made to last?" (130). Together as one, Mustafa and the narrator, as well as Anna-Claude and Tanga can continue their lives. They have found a solution in such an upside-down world of suffering; their survival—that very enchantment—can now carry on.

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A CULTURAL BODY OF MOTHERS: MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS IN
THE LOVER AND *PEEL MY LOVE LIKE AND ONION*

Nikki Thommen Bingham

The narrators of both Marguerite Duras' *The Lover* and Ana Castillo's *Peel My Love Like an Onion* give voices to female desire and sexuality. Their stories unfold through memories that collect and blend childhood events with female desires. Because of this, the context of these narratives always keeps in orbit the maternal relationship, finding passage into adulthood and desire through, around, under, and over the influences of the mother. However each mother exists in cultural isolation, geographically isolated from her homeland and emotionally separated from the traditions and customs she might have otherwise have utilized raising a daughter. Lacking a solid cultural foundation of their own, the narrators seek identity through their physical beings, discovering the body's potential for pleasure and its capacity to transcend the limitations placed upon their mothers as cultural outsiders. The authors present mothers and traditional maternal impulses as figures against which females must work in order to self determine, showing that female empowerment comes in the rejection of these cultural forces and in the embrace of the apolitical, personal, and physical self.

The Lover unfolds in 1930s French Indochina where the narrator, a 15-year-old girl, lives with her mother and two brothers. Her mother, alone after the death of her husband, possesses "a despair so unalloyed that sometimes even life's happiness, at its most poignant, couldn't quite make her forget it" (14). Not only is her mother's depression unknowable to the narrator, she is also convinced that her mother herself didn't know "what kind of considerations they were that haunted her and made the dejection rise up before her" (14). However, the rootlessness of the mother's depression and its engulfing nature echo both the colonized land in which they live and the act of its colonization. Writing about *The Lover*, Karen Kaivola discusses how the

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wide, messy, Mekong river symbolizes the alienation inherent in colonization, noting that the river “suggests an unstable region, unstructured by the family or social inscriptions of desire, sexuality, pleasure and pain” (36). The mother’s depression reflects this same instability, always threatening to overflow, to engulf, rise up without warning “at any given moment” (Duras 15). For the narrator’s mother, this instability is the only sure thing she has and her depression represents her own connection to the land; she projects the love of her own depression onto the rivers, telling her daughter that she “shall never again see rivers as beautiful and big and wild as these, the Mekong and its tributaries going down to the sea, the great regions of water soon to disappear into the caves of the ocean (10). The ebb and flow of the mother’s depression becomes the tradition on which the family members build their lives where a shared culture and identity are lacking.

The constant progression of her mother’s despair leaves the young girl isolated from her own history and unable to make roots in her foreign home through her family. As a result, the girl discovers her own body as a site of identity, building layers of clothing that act as a gateway into her growing sexual desires and her eventual connection to the land around her through another foreigner, her Chinese lover. Duras juxtaposes the “early” onset of sexual desire with a “late” psychoanalytical development, utilizing the Lacanian “mirror stage” to present the context of the girl’s desire. According to Lacan, a young toddler sees an ideal self in the mirror, constructing organization by utilizing reference points to orient and alienate the self from its surroundings. The subject gains identity from the image that portrays the self as part of and also separate from its surroundings, making the subject desire the cohesion the image presents while loathing her inability to actually embody the reflected entirety of the image (Silverman 118). Duras plays with this construct by introducing the coupling of love and loathing as part of the girl’s understanding of her own physical desire. Reflecting on a photo of herself in a man’s hat, gold lame shoes and her mother’s sheer hand-me-down dress as if she’s looking presently into a mirror, she states, “[The shoes] contradict the hat, the hat contradicts the puny body, so they’re right for me” (13). This collage of clothing creates images that seemingly contradict while

simultaneously embodying all of the girl's sexual possibilities: the masculinity of the hat, the hyper-sexualized shoes, the childishness of the body floating in the silken transparency of motherhood.

The abundance of photographic imagery fills a void left by her absentee mother; where there was an "inadequacy of childhood" there is now something "available to all eyes, in circulation for cities, journeys, desire" (Duras 13). The clothing has become the mode of transportation for her body to move from an asexual child to an adult constructed by physical desire. The layering of her own body in androgynous symbols of adulthood acts as a synthetic self-mothering; she at once creates a shell in which she is safe while removed from her mother's care and a mask of adulthood that allows a sexual empowerment. The girl's clothing is western, reflecting her origins, and yet imposes upon her childhood vulnerability, much the same as the colonizing force that brought her mother to Vietnam.

In this way the narrator has become both the strength and weakness represented by her paternal heritage as a colonizer and her mother's depression as a colonized being. Devoid of any other cultural guidance and heavily reliant on her own wiles to create identity, the girl combines the qualities of "colonized" and "colonizer" and layers them not only onto to her physical body as clothing, but also weaves them into her narrative itself. She discusses the white women of colonization as if she were not one of them, saying that they "save themselves up for Europe, for lovers, holidays in Italy, the long six-months leaves every three years, when they'll be able to talk about what it's like here" (19). For the narrator, the tragedy of these women is the inauthenticity of their desire and asexual qualities of their exhibitionism. She states that they "dress just for the sake of dressing," and that they only "look at themselves," yet at the next turn she shifts the narrative gaze unto herself in a scene of her own lovemaking (19).

She even shifts pronouns, changing the narrative from first person to third person at will and, as a result, changing her own body from the subject of identity to an object of her own gaze (37). She transforms the mirrored gaze of the colonized women that she sees as a source of "self-betrayal" leading to madness and suicide into a gaze in which sexuality can be experienced from

every vantage point. Peter Brooks, in his book *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*, argues that this exhibitionism allows the narrator to create her identity in relation to the male gaze “consciously and deliberately,” complicating the notion that the sexual gaze unto a woman is inherently masculine or dominant. Instead, the narrator allows the physical body to obtain its own subjectivity, acknowledging her body’s pleasure without requiring emotional response. Brooks says that, “[w]omen’s freedom, on this model, is her capacity to understand and use libido so defined, to make its masculine definition serve her own pleasure and thus make the lover only the excuse for love, an impersonal goal” (97). By writing the opening of her sexual identity in this way, the narrator resists the overwhelming depression attached to being a sexually colonized woman and appropriates the power over her own narrative in every way possible. Unlike her mother, she is in complete control of her own identity and has created it from nothing, rather than having colonized it from another. Her response is specific to the lack of cultural foundation; the creation of her identity might have been very different had her mother have been able to hand down a shared culture in the way she handed down her dress. Instead the culture of colonization reinforces the girl’s belief that surface understandings of the world lead to vulnerability and depression, whereas physical depth and narrative positionality allow strength and rooted stability.

Yet the escape from her mother’s fate is never quite realized, as we know from the opening images of the narrator’s “ravaged” face (3). The girl’s physical appearance is burdened as an older woman, as if her face is fatigued from having carried the layers of identity that the young girl created for herself. She has used her body as a vehicle of escape and pleasure where she can free herself from the burdens of her mother’s depression and encase herself in a created identity within the context of a cultural void. Anna Castillo’s character Carmen in *Peel My Love Like an Onion* has a similar objective, however it is her mother’s adherence to homeland culture and the chaotic abundance of American life in Chicago that propel her into the physical world of dance to find freedom and pleasure. Carmen’s identity, unlike Duras’ narrator, is overwrought with cultural constructions of femininity and physical ability that

are manifested primarily in her mother rather than in her surroundings.

Carmen's body, transformed by childhood polio, does not meet her mother's construction of femininity, and Carmen's resistance to her body's disability does not meet her mother's expectations for Carmen's role in the world. Carmen lives in Chicago, is of Mexican descent and discovers the Flamenco dance of her gypsy lover; her mother's response to each of these determinisms propels Carmen's active participation in them and enhances her resistance to her mother's cultural constructions. She uses her mother's resistance to the culture in which she is an immigrant as a model to resist the notion that as a second generation Mexican American Carmen must actively maintain her heritage. Instead she reinvents herself as one capable of discovering and creating her own joy by selectively picking that which she loves from each cultural influence and discarding the burden of each in its entirety.

Part of her cultural ambiguity is portrayed in language. She says she was "born in Chicago, but [her] first language was not English" and that though she speaks Spanish she's not really Mexican (Castillo 30). Language, usually a defining force in identity, serves only to confuse the issue for Carmen. Carmen finds not solidarity with her mother in their shared language, but instead senses a betrayal because it is not until adulthood that she learns her mother speaks English. She tells Carmen that she thought her children would make fun of her for speaking English, connoting a cultural attitude that transitory identity is laughable and even shameful. For Carmen's mother, speaking English would be a betrayal to her heritage, a betrayal that trumped any potential hard feelings Carmen might have later. Her mother also surprises her with her knowledge of the Roma language, saying that she learned it from a Hollywood movie.

Her mother's multiplicity of linguistic orientation conveys her abundance of inner culture, however her refusal to utilize all of it is the damming up of resources from which Carmen might otherwise draw. Carmen's search for identity is hindered by her mother's refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of a search that draws from multiple sources rather than one specific historical



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heritage. This extends to her mother's views on femininity, which dictate that a woman is defined by one man. It is also a guiding force for her expectations of Carmen's body; she feels that Carmen should know her place and settle for the role she is given rather than push the boundaries of her body through dance.

The expectations of femininity and social roles are also represented by the two women's relationship to food. Carmen's mother's house always has beans and tortillas, something she says no "self-respecting" Mexican American kitchen is without. These staples, while a source of nourishment and even comfort for Carmen, are also a burden to her. Cooking them for her mother is a task given to her "as punishment for not having married and for not having a son for whom [she] would have to make tortillas one day" (Castillo 33). Carmen is also sent on shopping trips in which she is asked to buy superfluous ingredients for exotic dishes her mother will never actually make. Harkening back to her mother's access to and under utilization of second and third languages, the interplay between the exotic and the traditional play out in food and ultimately are reflected again by her acceptance and lamentation of Carmen's dance career. Carmen's mother's insistence that she have a "real" job after she retires from dance forces Carmen to get a job at an airport pizzeria. Both at home with her mother and on the job at the airport, food represents the trap of femininity as the nurturer of others and the denigrated expectations placed on her racially and physically.

The tension of the mother's expectations of Carmen and her own actions are again portrayed in illness. Carmen's mother is a hypochondriac, and has internalized illness as a quality of her identity in the same way Carmen's leg has forced Carmen to accept polio as part of her identity. Carmen's mother, lacking control over her daughter's childhood illness, has taken on being ill herself and manifests the limitations she places on Carmen's capability in her own body. Carmen says that her mother has been complaining of heart troubles for twenty years and that now, her body "saturated with medication" really does have something wrong with it (Castillo 27). Because her mother's "illness" is located in her heart, we see a possible emotional connection between illness of the body and cultural response to illness. Her mother's

expectations of Carmen's body are culturally informed whereas Carmen's response to her body's capabilities are personally informed. The American social response to Carmen's mother's body is to medicate it, whereas Carmen understands that her mother's illness originated in her mother's emotional being rather than in her physical body. The relationships that the women have with illness serve to link each of them to specific spheres, Carmen to the personal and her mother to the social, and help the reader to understand the roots of where each woman finds identity. Just as Duras' narrator found her identity in her physical body rather than in her social surroundings, Carmen seeks identity by pushing her body toward physical empowerment and sexual pleasure. Each woman does so in contrast to the ways that their mothers identify with the land and the society that encase them and keep them from their original culture.

For Duras' narrator, sexuality was accessed through clothing and a layering of the body. For Carmen, sexual identity and pleasure are accessed through dance. Carmen's ability to transcend the expectations of her body through dance allows her sexual power she might not otherwise have and a confidence in relationships with her lovers that gives her freedom to decide her own fate, in contrast to the social and maternal control of her life outside of dance. We learn late in the story that Carmen's desire to dance came initially from her parents and a childhood memory of her mother and father dancing in the living room. Carmen's desire to dance and her attraction to men that dance with her is at once an effort to escape the fate of her parents as they are now and become them as they were when they loved each other. Her mother maintains her relationship with her father as cultural tradition would mandate, though they live in separate dwellings and she does not now dance with him. In the end, Carmen does not live with any of her lovers either, but continues to dance with them, maintaining the empowerment she gains from dance in a way her mother does not. Both women have an autonomy as women who live on their own and decide their own schedules, meals, friendships and desires, and yet Carmen's is written as fuller with an easier access to joy through the physical expression of dance.

The importance of the maternal relationship in both *The Lover* and *Peel*

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My Love Like an Onion is that it presents a necessary barrier to self identification rather than a pathway to it. There is a constant tension between the self and the mother, each narrator resisting the notion that mothers nurture daughters into becoming the person they were always destined to be. Identity is struggled into and birthed from inside of each main character and is influenced by the mother only in its efforts to be in opposition to her. Self love is not therefore a result of the love of the mother, but is instead a filler for a void created by maternal expectations. While the first image of Duras' narrator has a face that is "ravaged," we know that it is ravaged by a will to control desire, rather than a submission to depression and colonizing force. The final image of Carmen as dancing alone in her home is an affirmation of singular female identity and physical triumph, while her mother withers without a husband against which she can identify herself and with whom she can dance. The cultural mandates that the mothers lug with them to foreign lands are not internalized by their daughters, and because of this the girls become amalgams of cultural, physical, maternal and personal identity.

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THIEVES OF LANGUAGE

Tess Snook

“At a certain moment for the person who has lost everything, whether that means a being or a country, language becomes the country. One enters the country of words.”¹

—Hélène Cixous

The narrator of any story whether villain, heroine, or the author’s own voice, exists solely within the confines of words, real or imaginary. Without words, without language, there is no story, no land for characters to thrive, no country to rejoice or reject, and no place for a story to occur. As Cixous asserts, when one has “lost everything,” there are still words; words can save, condemn, create. Words can become salvation, creating worlds that exist no where else, where one is never foreign, where one is no longer lost. For the stories of Carmen La Coja and Jean Genet, both are lost: lost within their countries and lost within themselves. With no language and no country, neither of them has an identity to call their own, only ones that have been socially constructed for them. In order to find themselves, to create countries and identities that they can live within, they steal. They steal language, words belonging to those around them, of those they worship, of those they despise, of those who reject them, and they each make those words their own. By stealing language, by making stolen words their own, they are able to construct identities for themselves and create a place where they are no longer foreign, no longer restrained by borders of countries or continents. Through the theft of language they are able to create their own “country of words.”

In Ana Castillo’s novel *Peel My Love Like an Onion*, the character Carmen Santos is considered foreign for several reasons, beginning first with her “race.” Carmen is made foreign to America because she is Mexican and foreign to Mexicans because she was born in the States:



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For some reason looking Mexican means you can't be American. And my cousins tell me, the ones who've gone to Mexico but who were born on this side like me, that over there they're definitely not Mexican. Because you were born on this side *pocha* is what you're called there, by unkind relatives and strangers on the street and even waiters in restaurants when they overhear your whispered English and wince at your bad Spanish. (3)

Carmen is made foreign not just by her ethnic background but also and often more strikingly by a physical handicap. Left with a gimp leg after a childhood bout of polio, she is seen and treated as abnormal, earning the nickname "La Coja," or "the cripple," and is thus made foreign to "normal," non-crippled society. It is when she discovers she is not confined to these outsider definitions, these imposed roles, when she discovers an innate ability to dance that she is able to create her own identity and essentially, her own world to live in. This is the first instance of theft that Carmen perpetrates. She steals the movements, the body language of dance she was once physically prohibited from, and she makes it her own. She adapts this language to fit her uniquely foreign body and in the process, creates a new and powerful identity, an existence for herself outside those determined and forced upon her by others. By stealing and recreating the language of dance, Carmen creates a world for herself and uses her foreignness to create an identity that although unique, is no longer viewed as foreign.

Though Carmen's body was once defined as crippled, she redefines herself by freeing her body from the oppressive and restrictive language of others and steals the language of dance. By doing so she discovers that "it is only through language that the body gains meaning" (Cavallaro 6), and that by using this stolen language, she gives new definition to her body and to her identity as well.

For Carmen it is not easy to steal the languages of those around her. Because of her conflicting identities—between the socially constructed and her internal one—she has difficulty recognizing a language she wants or is willing to steal. She harbors certain resentments towards those around her who define her as what *they* see, not what *she* perceives of herself. Although

she speaks their languages, their words define her as an other, as foreign from themselves, in words she herself does not use or experience as her own. As a Mexican-American discriminated by both cultures, Carmen tries “like no one else on earth tries to be in two places at once. Being *pocha* means you try here and there, this way and that, and you still don’t fit. Not here and not there” (Castillo 3). This uncertainty of where or who to belong to only muddles up Carmen’s search for self-perception. These identities, these definitions imposed on her, create within her an uncertainty and an imbalance between who she *feels* she is and who she is *defined* as being. “Here we go again, language complicating life for me, as it has from my first day of school. I was born in Chicago but my first language was not English. My first language was Spanish but I am not really Mexican [...]” (Castillo 30). That each language attempts to define her according to what she is not, Carmen is caught in the flux of her identity according to what she truly is or is not, which is what she is continually struggling to determine. Ultimately she borrows from each language and creates one specific to herself, in order to ultimately define who she is in her own words.

From all the influences of language surrounding her, Carmen creates a sort of hybrid language combining Spanish and English words, as well as those of the Gypsy language of her lovers, depending on what or whom she is describing, and particularly when she is describing herself. “When Agustín became part of my life there was his language too, a language of the ancients deriving from Sanskrit, and his language brought me into a world nobody but nobody from the outside knows about [...] the language of thieves [...]” (Castillo 30). Carmen, feeling accepted into this secret club of language, appropriates the Gypsy words and even their way of life as partially her own, as a piece of her own identity. After two Gypsy lovers and nearly two decades pretending to be an accepted and true member of their society, Carmen is abandoned both by the men and by the language, and ultimately barred from its use. This shock of loss forces Carmen to realize that though she used the language and felt it as part of herself, it was never truly hers. Just as she borrows the words from English and Spanish that are not her own, Carmen will borrow the Gypsy words in order to create her own language, defying the



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definitions forced upon her yet again, by using the language and the words that are not meant to belong to her. By stealing from all these languages, selecting words from those around her, she is able to create an identity and a world where she feels less foreign.

The final theft of language that Carmen commits is also the final sense of identity that she discovers. When her polio returns with a vengeance, Carmen is no longer able to depend on the language of her body, the language of dance, to provide her even a small amount of identity. Now more crippled than ever before, Carmen turns to menial jobs in desperation, seeking any identity in which to grasp, when an opportunity to entertain anew is brought to her attention. Carmen is asked to perform by singing for an old friend, and discovers that after all the years of dancing and of searching for her own identity and language, it was there all along. Carmen turns to the language of song, discovering a voice she never knew she had. She steals this new language to create yet another new identity for herself, one that does not include her handicap or any of the identities socially forced upon her. She is able through song to discover the language that was always inside her, the one that because of those around her and their imposed definitions she never realized was there.

Before this final transformation, Carmen often had difficulty finding words to communicate herself: "I don't know why it is so hard for me to say things sometimes. Language is just too complicated no matter how many languages you steal" (Castillo 32). With her discovery of a singing voice, Carmen is finally able to have a language of her own, an art form that she can live and breathe and communicate through; one that is borrowed from no one, unique to her alone. Carmen is no longer a foreigner with no land; her land is now a "country of words," a land of music.

While Carmen La Coja's sense of being foreign in society initially stems from the crippling confines of her body, Genet constructs himself as a foreign "being," an aberration within normal society, by using his body to commit criminal acts. Although his body is not naturally formed in such a way as to make his appearance foreign, he uses his body to create an identity as such, perpetrating crimes against law-abiding society to differentiate and ultimately

alienate himself. He uses his body to commit crimes in order to purposefully define himself as foreign. This self-imposed foreignness described in Genet's autobiographical novel *The Thief's Journal*, stems from a dysfunctional childhood where abandonment and imposed definitions led him into a life determined to enforce his outsider status, not a struggle to achieve normality like Carmen does. Unlike Carmen, Genet revels in his being a foreigner, in "rejecting the country" (87) that rejected him. He defines *himself* as a thief and deviant in order to differentiate himself from those already defining him as such, essentially accepting this imposed role but adapting to his personal definition of self by further exaggerating it, relishing instead of abhorring it and seeking to change himself and the perceptions of others. He is continually working at maintaining this identity of outcast and deviant to society, proud to be a thief of goods and especially of language, if merely to appall those externally defining him.

As an outcast from day one, Genet is lost everywhere except within the world of words that he creates for himself, stealing words of beauty to describe the things and people who are looked down upon with disgust by the people of the beautiful words find sense and peace in his world, by stealing and adapting the language of the beautiful to describe the ugly, rejected, deviant people and the horrid places he sees and thrives among. This theft is Genet's way of rejecting the attempts made by "normal" society to make him less foreign, to change his deviant ways and amend his identity to "normal" or in other words "correct" social conduct and existence.

Just as he steals material goods to survive in the world of outcasts on the harsh streets and to fulfill the desires of the thugs and lovers he worships, Genet must steal words in order to exist, to be an entity on the outskirts of society. He steals words from those who live beautiful lives, those words which are not his own but are part of a world he does not and will never know. For Genet, "'Being' was reserved for those full, well-defined, scornful people who occupied the world with their assurance, took their places without hesitation, were at home everywhere where I 'was'-n't except as an infraction, intruder, little scrap from elsewhere, always on the alert" (Cixous 16).

Because Genet is viewed as foreign in normal society, he is without being



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unless he is capable of finding his own language. As much as he despises those beautiful, “scornful” people, his only hopes of existence are to use their words in order to define himself. Genet succeeds in doing this and also retaining his deviant behavior, by stealing their beautiful words and altering their meanings. By using words of splendor for those seen as ugly and abhorrent, Genet rips apart their meanings and recreates them for his own: “Splendid depravity, sweet and kindly, which makes it possible to love those who are ugly, dirty and disfigured” (91). Altering the meaning of words, using them for his own benefit, Genet becomes a true thief of language. By stealing language to make his own, he is able to, within a world that regards him with disdain and treats him as foreign, be at home with himself and create a world he can survive and thrive in.

To Genet, being a thief was “[...] a kind of active and deliberate work of art which could be achieved only with the help of language, my language, and which would be confronted with the laws springing from this same language” (114). By creating new meanings Genet eliminates their restrictive definitions and therefore does away with any regulations placed on himself, essentially creating his own “laws.” By rejecting the country he is also rejecting their laws, leaving himself free to commit whatever sins he sees fit, choosing for himself what defines them as such. Stealing language to make his own, Genet gains control of his identity and adapts the words to his own needs and defines himself as he sees fit. He is proud to be a thief, of both material objects and language, because it makes him “unique,” allowing him to remain a deviant, which he sees as his true identity.

Genet further makes himself foreign and thrives among the outcasts of society by promoting himself as a foreigner in his own homeland. His identity lies with thieves and not his nationality, and therefore his language must also be that of a thief: “To be a thief in my own country and to justify my being a thief who used the language of the robbed – who are myself, because of the importance of language – was to give to being a thief the chance to be unique” (115). Genet suggests that the language of thieves is also “the language of the robbed,” combined with the words of those outside of his world that he also steals.

While Genet creates an identity for himself out of stolen language and gains strength and pride from being a thief and foreigner, he still struggles with his internal conception of self, much as Carmen does. Genet battles perpetually with Cixous' ideas of "being" and "country," within the battlefield of his own mind. He continually attempts to define and discover himself outside the terms of "civilized" society. It is only by means of creating his own language, made-up from stolen words, that he is able to even begin to define himself: "I think that I had to hollow out, to drill through, a mass of language in which my mind would be at ease. Perhaps I wanted to accuse myself in my own language" (114). That Genet's "own language" is constructed of all the languages he has stolen from preserves Genet as a foreigner and leaves him a man with a distinctive identity. Genet's use of language creates and preserves for him a unique identity as both thief and of author, each unrestricted by speech. Genet is thus able to maintain his own identity and create a country which he can call his own.

For Carmen La Coja as well as for Jean Genet, the theft of words is their way of forming their personal identities. Their sense of foreignness is countered by the stealing of words from those who make them feel foreign, and they are each able to adapt these words towards their own use, towards the creation of their own languages, and towards forming countries for themselves that contain no boundaries, countries without definitions of who or what they must or should be. Stealing language is an act of rebellion against the countries and the people who restrict them, as well as an act of survival. Unable to exist within the confines of their socially defined worlds, they each steal to create a form of themselves that they themselves can live with. By stealing language and adapting it to their own use, they are able to remove the power behind the words of those defining them and in turn, are able to conclude for themselves who they are and how they will live. Outside the confines of societal and linguistic definitions, Carmen La Coja and Jean Genet are able to establish for themselves what and who they shall be.

Since both Carmen and Genet feel as foreigners within their "homelands," because no language truly belongs to either of them, they turn to theft, to stealing words in order to create their own continents and their own

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existence. By stealing language that is not their right to steal, Carmen and Genet create their own identities and in effect, become thieves. Without being thieves, they would have no voice, no story to tell. As thieves of language, they are able to write their own history and identities outside of the confines of “normal” language and create a “country of words” where they are anything but foreign.

¹ Cited in Suleiman xx.

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BEAUTY'S BELLICOSE BEGINNING

Desiree Afleje

One by land and the other by sea, two poems' protagonists end their journeys serenely studying the stars. To label something as serene, sacred, beautiful, or divine typically implies a thoroughly pure image. These words exist strictly at one end of the spectrum; their antonyms, such as repulsive, profane, and obscene, are in no way associated with their definitions. However, a closer relationship exists between these apparently opposite ideas. This counterintuitive association appears throughout Derek Walcott's "The Schooner Flight," and *The Inferno* written by Dante Alighieri. As a devout Catholic, Alighieri embeds a religious tempo throughout the 14th century poem, expressing controversial ideas about good and evil. While *The Inferno's* hero, Dante, explores nine circles of hell, he witnesses souls enduring eternal punishment for their sins in life. Six centuries later, located in the Caribbean, "The Schooner Flight"'s protagonist, Shabine, tells of his voyage at sea after leaving his lover, Maria Concepcion, and his family ashore.

During the two heroes' journeys through self-contemplation and social critique, both protagonists experience a myriad of concentrated emotions, including a wrenching fear. At the sight of the first anguished souls, Dante reacts thus: "[a]nd I holding my head in horror, cried [...]" (III, 29-30). In the middle passage Shabine recalls a similar experience: "I saw it was sails, my hair grip my skull, / it was horrors, but it was beautiful" (352). In these lines, the protagonists experience intense fear, which provokes them to respond physically; however, they experience this seemingly negative emotion in the face of divinity. Dante journeys towards deliverance, and Shabine describes his encounter as beautiful. Both Alighieri and Walcott's poems portray complete destruction, brute pain, and graphic scenes paralleled with movement towards salvation, moments of transcendence, and beautiful imagery. The inclusion of these opposing ideas and images demonstrate the

necessity to feel the obscene in order to truly experience the divine.

The Inferno and “The Schooner Flight” similarly depict the inescapable relationship between love and pain. Abandoning love as a purely positive emotion, they expose an ugly shade to the blissful feeling. Love and pain may not often be thought to exist in unison; however, these works demonstrate the capacity of love to produce overpowering pain. These poems present opposing emotions not as discrete occurrences, but as intertwined feelings, which intensify each other. As Shabine struggles between his yearning for Maria Conception and his love of his wife and children, he says “I loved them as poets love the poetry / that kills them, as drowned sailors the sea” (347). His description of love is not purely the affection one usually associates with this emotion, but with love he conjures the seemingly contrary idea of death. He asserts that love at its greatest strength has the ability to be fatal; love can kill. Understandably, it is in this potent manner that sailors love the sea: the waters feed them, keep them afloat, move them, become their home, but also possess power beyond human control. One wave can take many lives. Love for another human being can prove equally uncontrollable. The more love one retains for another, the more vulnerable one becomes. Dante encounters a couple who knows this truth all too well. Murdered by Paolo’s wife for their affair, Paolo and Francesca say “love lead us to one death” (V, 103). Their feelings of love for each other intensify their anguish in hell: “The double grief of loss bliss / is to recall its happy hour in pain” (V, 118-19). Paolo and Francesca’s agony in hell displays the bond between love and pain; feelings of one emotion heighten the sense of the other.

Amid these poems, the diction itself expresses this dynamic relationship between opposing sensations. Written with elements of vernacular, both poems use coarse language and depict graphic imagery. However, the often-vulgar words intertwine into a lyrical structure, becoming poetic. Because these words hold powerful, shocking, or negative connotations, their lyrical use in these texts intensifies the resonance and power of its effect. Dante uses crude and graphic language to describe Cerberus, a three-headed dog, who guards the third circle of hell: “[h]is eyes are red, his beard is greased with phlegm, / his belly is swollen, and his hands are claws / to rip the wretches

and flay and mangle them” (VI, 16-18). The verbs and nouns load these lines with a gruesome air: greased, phlegm, claws, wretches, flay, and mangle; but this ugly language exists within lyrical poetry. Written in *terza rima*, three lines per stanza, the lines carry a steady beat; the last word of the first line (phlegm) rhymes with the last word of the third line (them); mixing the poetic sound with coarse language strengthens its force. Coarse language also appears in “The Schooner Flight” as Walcott incorporates the vernacular into Shabine’s journey. Shabine describes himself saying “I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me, / and either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation” (346). The word nigger holds strong primarily negative connotations, but in this poem Shabine employs it with grace. Not only does it help demonstrate the identity conflict within the protagonist, it also becomes poetic; through alliteration “nigger” emphasizes the idea presented in the following line: either he is *nobody* or a *nation*. The alliteration of these words beginning in ‘n’ beautifully juxtapose Shabine’s internal conflict, asserting that although he is multiple ethnicities, he refuses to be divided. Shabine’s ideas resonate powerfully through his use of the vernacular.

As they advance along their painful journeys, both heroes express the idea that one must be completely broken down to be able to heal. Through their complete destruction and dismay, they are able to start anew. This absolute rebirth can only occur when one begins from the state of defeat. To set out on his journey, Shabine painfully leaves everything behind, separating himself from Maria Concepcion, from his wife, and from his children. He displays the pain he feels after cleaving himself from his current life as he yearns for Maria Concepcion throughout the poem. Realizing the inevitability of his anguish, he says “[...] there’d be no rest, there’d be no forgetting. / Is like telling mourners round the graveside / about resurrection, they want the dead back [...]” (346). This statement shows that Shabine fully comprehends the hurt he feels will not leave. He asserts that the attempt to appease this sorrow would be like telling mourners that the dead could come back to life: both only supply a false sense of hope. Like Shabine, Dante also breaks down emotionally. Rachel, an allegory for the contemplative life, describes his state as “heartstrick hesitation and pale fright” (II, 120). However, the protagonist’s acutely fragile

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emotional condition allows for growth and revitalization; both heroes directly describe this experience. Dante writes “[a]s flowerlets drooped and puckered in the night / turn up to the returning sun and spread / their petals wide on this new warmth and light— / just so my wilted spirits rose again / and such a heat of zeal surged through my veins that I was born anew” (II, 124-29). Similarly, Shabine recounts “[t]here is a fresh light that follows a storm / while the whole sea still havoc” (360). Although Dante uses a flower simile and Shabine describes a storm, the ideas run parallel: both images evoke a heightened sense of hope and resurgence that emerge from a state of devastation. After breaking down, our heroes find hope.

The transcendence Shabine experiences, and the sight of heaven Dante glimpses are not purely sacred moments: the vivid divinity of these experiences occurs because they follow profanely graphic scenes. The disturbing nature of the first images contrasts with what follows, allowing these moments to take on a pure brilliance. Shabine despondently details the corroding state of the island; however, through his frustration breaks out an impenetrable transcendence: “[o]ut of corruption my soul takes wings” (346). The image of his soul taking wings would hold much less power had the word corruption not preceded it. Because this beautiful image is juxtaposed with a word that denotes immorality and depravity, the triumph takes life. Similarly, when Dante first glimpses heaven, the divinity of this image would lose its power if it was not contrasted with the gruesome description of the devil: “[h]e wept from his six eyes, and down three chins / the tears ran mixed with bloody froth and pus” (XXXIV, 53-54). Soon after witnessing the devil, Dante looks upon heaven: “we climbed the dark until we reached the point / where a round opening brought in sight the blest / and beauteous shining of the Heavenly cars. / And we walked out once more beneath the heavenly Stars” (XXXIV, 140-143). The horrific encounter with Satan magnifies the purity and appreciation of heaven. The fresh exposure to this profane being enables the sight of heaven to appear in contrast more amazing.

Not only do these specific encounters of profanity enable the heroes to experience moments of divinity, but also the journeys themselves mirror this idea. Shabine endures a treacherous voyage, and through this experience he

gains a sense of a calm. Because of the tribulations his trip created, he fully appreciates this emotion. In the last lines he conveys this tranquil feeling while he describes gazing at the moon: “[s]ometimes it is just me, and the soft scissor foam / as the deck turn white moonlight taking me home. / Shabine sang to you from the depths of the sea” (361). Shabine stands alone in this picture, which allows him to contemplate his surroundings and internal state without interruption. He begins the poem angry and amid emotional chaos; this instability enables him to reach peace in the end. Like Shabine, Dante’s journey at large spawns in chaos, or literally out of hell, on a journey towards peace, or literally heaven. His experience of hell allows him to fully grasp the magnificence of paradise.

Chaos, horror, and anguish enable Dante and Shabine to reach and appreciate peace, beauty, and divinity. Highly acclaimed writer and philosopher Kahlil Gibran illustrates this phenomenon flawlessly: “[t]he deeper that sorrow carves into your being the more joy you can contain. Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter’s oven?” The voyage at sea, and trek through hell carve sorrow into Shabine and Dante; but these crevasses then fill with divine experience.

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MATERNAL NARRATIVES IN *SONG OF SOLOMON*

Vanessa Brunner

The disparity between the homes of Pilate and Ruth in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* forces the reader to look at these two mothers in a contrasting manner. The stark difference between these women is revealed through the differences in their relative domestic spaces, their families, and their relation to the Oedipus complex. The similarities between these two characters are revealed through their interactions with the single patriarchal figure, Macon Dead, as well as their traits as outcasts. These similarities and differences help reveal which mother follows the normative narrative, and which follows the antitypical narrative.

In *Song of Solomon*, both Ruth and Pilate are looked down on by the society that surrounds them. However, despite the fact that both of them are outcasts in their own world, their individual characteristics and way in which they approach life are very different. Pilate has been cast out from her community because of the way she chooses to live. Pilate is unmarried with two daughters, and is able to maintain her manner of living by working as a bootlegger. Pilate's southern American community dictates that this profession is inappropriate for a man, let alone a woman. Pilate has chosen this type of work, and has remained unmarried and with children, which is not typical for women during this era. Because of this, she has placed herself in between the narratives of average African-American men and women of her society. Not only do Pilate's social choices classify her as a social outcast, but the adults in the community also frown upon her spontaneous and often childlike manner. When Macon describes Pilate's home, he describes a place ruled by the bare necessities, and the absolute satisfaction of desires. "No meal was ever planned or balanced or served. Nor was there any gathering at the table [...] They ate what they came across or had a craving for" (29). This spontaneity regarding meals, something that is normally very structured in terms of family

life is only one representation of how Pilate's money from bootlegging is quickly spent on her and her daughter's wants. Her community views her frivolity as both intimidating and inappropriate compared to their regimented way of life. When Pilate appears to indulge in a childlike state of mind she separates herself from others. Part of Pilate's character as an outsider is symbolized through her name. Pilate was the Roman commander in the Bible who sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion. By naming their daughter Pilate, Pilate's parents are condemning her to a life outside of societal approval, just as the biblical Pilate sentenced the epitome of good to death and is now a symbol of foolishness and evil since then. However, despite this apparent curse, Pilate's determination allows her to bring happiness into her home despite her lower-class lifestyle and lack of support from her community.

Unlike Pilate, Ruth is an outcast mostly due to her mixed race, a circumstance that is completely out of her control. But although this is the primary reason for Ruth's own inability to be fully accepted into society, her choices in life soon begin to add to her outcast status. Because Ruth's mother is white and her father is African-American, Ruth finds herself an outcast from both worlds, unable to fit the mold of the average African-American or white citizen of her town. This conflict, combined with the complete absence of love and warmth in Ruth's life, continues to place her as an outcast from society, marking her life with a lack of love and a pronounced presence of hatred and bitterness. Ruth's status as an outcast is intensified by the choices that she makes as a mother. When she discovers that the continuation of breast feeding of her eleven-year-old son can be one good thing that helps her through her endless days, and acts upon this discovery, she is acting upon selfish desires. The reaction of the community upon hearing this news is such intense disgust that Ruth finds that no one is able to forget it. Overall, it is Ruth's racial difference and choices as a mother, which push her out of society and classify her as an outcast.

Significant differences between Ruth and Pilate, especially in terms of motherhood, are portrayed through the differences in their domestic spaces. In the novel, Ruth's home is portrayed in a cold and harsh tone, while Pilate's is viewed in a much warmer and softer manner. Although Pilate's family is

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viewed as socially unacceptable in terms of her occupation and marital status, the scene in which Morrison describes their home is almost describing a type of domestic image that is incredibly idealized and optimistic. When Macon Dead looks in the window of Pilate's home, he views a scene that one might see on a postcard: a mother and her two daughters, singing while they cook and perform other domestic duties. Morrison associates Pilate's house with warm and lush words that provoke images of comfort in the reader. However, several significant aspects complicate this image. One is the presence of alcohol, which is the substance that Pilate is cooking on the stove. Although this scene appears to have a soft undertone with only female figures, the presence of alcohol, as well as the switchblade that one of Pilate's daughters uses to cut her toenails, invokes a masculine aspect. Because there is no patriarchal male figure in Pilate's household, all of the women must take some responsibility and fill in part of the male role. This masculine aspect, which can be viewed in each of the women in this scene through the cutting of their nails and the manufacturing of alcohol, helps create a household based on equality rather than rank. Instead of the household being based around a predominant sex, the household is based around the cooperation of three women trying to survive. The sounds of Pilate and her daughters singing and the flickering lights of kerosene lamps and candles add to the soft, domestic image of Pilate's house as well as creating a warmth that seems to surround the house. Despite Pilate's supposed social inappropriateness, her house is viewed in a positive light.

Unlike Pilate's home, Ruth's house is described in a coarse manner, with the images associated with it indicating an unfriendly atmosphere and extremely regimented household. When Macon dreads going home at the end of the day, he speaks of a place where: "[...] the music could not follow, when he saw [...] a picture of where he was headed—his own home, his wife's narrow unyielding back; his daughters, boiled dry from years of yearning; his son, to whom he could speak only if his words held some command or criticism [...]" (28).

Morrison emphasizes that Macon almost craves the comfort and warm aspects that Pilate's home offers because they are so absent in his own home.

Ruth's household is characterized by a constant sense of absence; the absence of her father, of warmth, and of love, all of which are represented by images such as the watermark, Not Doctor Street, and the overall emptiness of the house. Everyone in Ruth's family has a sharply defined role. Unlike Pilate's household, there is a specific and obvious hierarchy in Ruth's home, which tends to drain the happiness from each family member. Only Milkman, Ruth's only son, remains fluid in these roles, which places him on the outside of his relative's lives. Morrison is careful to use words that invoke coldness and words that lack any sort of defining detail when describing Macon Dead's household, so that the lack of a loving and familial atmosphere is apparent to the reader.

Although Ruth's domestic space is portrayed in a negative light and Pilate's is portrayed in a positive light, their families are polar in terms of societal views. This is because of the way that each family fits into the normative narrative for a family in society. Ruth's family tends to reflect the image of the nuclear family, with both a matriarchal and patriarchal figure, as well as children. However, because of the actions of Ruth and Macon as well as the hierarchy set up in their patriarchal-based family, Ruth's family is viewed negatively. Much of this stems from Ruth's inability to take care of her children. Ruth puts her desires before the well-being of her children, as is emphasized by the breach of the Oedipal taboo Ruth performs by breastfeeding her son well after infancy. Not only is Ruth a selfish mother by putting her needs above those of her children, but she is also incapable of providing for her family. When Ruth cooks dinner each night, it is completely inedible due to the disgusting taste. "[...]she began the preparation of the food her husband found impossible to eat. She did not try to make her meals nauseating; she simply didn't know how not to" (Morrison 11). Correct nutrition is one of the absolute necessities of life, and the fact that Ruth cannot provide this basic aspect of life to her family, due to her inability to cook, casts doubts on her abilities as a mother, and puts an all around negative light on her household.

Due to the lack of a patriarchal figure, Pilate's family falls into the "other" category, outside of the normative, nuclear family. The lack of a singular masculine figure forces the female members of the family to step in and fill

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that role. This sharing of the masculine role eliminates the hierarchy that exists in Ruth's household. Also, unlike Ruth, Pilate is able to completely provide for her family. Despite her unconventional means of achieving the materials to provide for her family, and the ways in which she provides, Pilate ends up being a more successful provider and caretaker than Ruth strives to be, thus creating a much more peaceful and positive household than that of Ruth's family. The positive view of Pilate's family and the negative view of Ruth's family are somewhat ironic, considering which family follows the view of a normative nuclear family type, and which is the antitypical family. However, the influence of the mothers, the comparison of the families, as well as of each domestic space, reveals Pilate to be the nurturing mother, the type, and Ruth to be the selfish mother, the antitype.

A final difference between these two mothers, which emphasizes which one is the type and antitype, is each mother's individual relationship with the Oedipus complex. Due to the lack of masculine figures in Pilate's life, the Oedipus complex is a non-issue in her household. However, the nursing scene that sits at the center of the first chapter of *Song of Solomon*, gives rise to the view of Ruth not only as an incapable mother, but also as a sexually inappropriate mother. The Oedipus complex, as described by Sigmund Freud in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, exists in every male child, and is evident in every family narrative. It is the subconscious desire of a male child to marry his mother and murder his father. However, this complex can be successfully resolved when a mother lets go of her child. Because Ruth uses her son as a selfish means of personal comfort, it is impossible for the Oedipus complex to be resolved in her family. This scene also classifies Ruth as a selfish mother, putting her own needs before that of her children, as well as bringing to light a fear in society of mothers who refuse to let go of their children.

Overall, despite appearances due to societal normatives, one is able to conclude from the positive and negative reflections regarding each mother, that Pilate is the type and Ruth is the antitype. By playing upon the similarities and differences between these two women, and the homes and families associated with them, Morrison is able to reveal the distinction between them

as mothers. Despite Ruth's apparent role in the normative narrative for a family, her absence and selfishness puts her in a negative viewpoint and places her in the antitype framework. Pilate's love and warmth in her household, as well as her ability and willingness to provide for her family outshines her status as a social outcast. Because of this, Morrison is able to put her in a positive view.

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THE ROLE OF ART IN DEALING WITH THE INTANGIBLE

Olenka Burgess

That which we cannot see, our deepest vague suspicions, the unsettling feeling of incomprehensible solitude—these are perhaps the most important and the most difficult philosophical issues to contend with. These intangibles can be conveniently denied by a variety of methods: obsessing about the past and our memories, convincing ourselves of inescapable human connection, or simply and overtly refusing to give thought to such issues. For those who do consider them, however, these intangibles are prone to create an overwhelming sense of fear. Two characters who have become overwhelmed with the intangible—Antoine Roquentin of Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Nausea*, and Malte Laurids Brigge of Rainer Maria Rilke’s *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*—have found similar definitions for the intangible as well as similar ways to deal with it. Roquentin and Brigge both realize that because of its irrational nature, the intangible must be made tangible in order to be understood and addressed. Through art, one is able to express irrational concepts and emotions. Thus, art becomes the characters’ most effective method of dealing with the intangible without denying it.

Roquentin’s and Brigge’s terminology regarding the intangible differs, but the descriptions are quite similar. Both characters have a key phrase: for Roquentin it is “Nausea” and for Brigge it is the “Big Thing.” From these main terms, several supporting sub-terms arise: for Roquentin, “existence” and “essence,” and “Things” for Brigge. Existence and essence are the most confounding of these terms. Basically, essence is “everything that permits us to recognize an object,” and existence is “simply the fact that it *is*” (Carruth xi). *Nausea*, then, is seeing past these essences to pure indefinable existence—the intangible. Similarly, Things can be viewed as objects with strong associations to memories, or essences, and the Big Thing is the intangible—existence without meaning—which constantly poses the threat of overtaking

the tangible and rational. Describing the Big Thing, Brigge writes “it was growing out of me like a tumor, like a second head, and was a part of me, although it certainly couldn’t belong to me because it was so big” (61). In both characters, this intangible is the greatest source of fear and discomfort.

Similarities between the characters themselves can also be drawn. In both novels, the main characters are solitary, and this solitude is precisely what allows them to experience the intangible more acutely. Roquentin writes: “[p]eople who live in society have learned how to see themselves in mirrors as they appear to their friends. I have no friends. Is that why my flesh is so naked? You might say—yes, you might say nature without humanity” (18). The “nature without humanity” is akin to existence without essence. With no real friends to assign outside perceptions or traits to him, Roquentin sees just a meaningless face in the mirror. Likewise, Brigge writes “if only something of this could be shared. But would it *be* then; would it *be*? No, it *is* only at the price of solitude” (73). “It” is his heightened experience of the Big Thing. If he were to attempt to explain his experiences to somebody, they would lose their poignancy. Roquentin and Brigge realize that other people are perpetual distractions from the alienation which arises from a glimpse of true meaningless absurd existence, and in order to properly decipher this absurdity, they must avoid a social life.

It is the structures of the novels, however, which draw the strongest similarities between the two characters and their progression of understanding in dealing with intangibility. Roquentin’s and Brigge’s respective progressions are marked by three distinct transformations, each triggered by a specific medium of artistic expression: writing, visual art, and music. The first and most obvious transformation occurs at the very beginning of the two novels, in the characters’ decision to write. Both novels take the form of a notebook or diary, in first person format, helping both the reader in observing Roquentin’s and Brigge’s progression and revelations, and Roquentin and Brigge themselves in beginning to work through their existential questions by making their thoughts tangible as words on a page.

In *Nausea*, the very first thing Roquentin states is that “[t]he best thing would be to write down events from day to day. Keep a diary to see clearly—let

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none of the nuances of small happenings escape even though they might seem to mean nothing. And above all, classify them” (1). On the other hand, Brigge states “I have taken action against fear. I have sat up all night and wrote” (16). A few pages later, speaking of himself in third person as “the one who has had these alarming thoughts,” he writes that “he will have to write; that is how it will end” (25). These passages show a slight difference in the initial transformation of Roquentin and Brigge in that Brigge is already aware that writing is a measure taken against the fear of the intangible, whereas in Roquentin’s case, writing is merely an experiment in ordering and deciphering it. Nevertheless, this crucial first step is paramount for both characters in preparing them for further progression.

The characters’ second transformation occurs toward the middle of both novels. An encounter with a work of visual art leads both Roquentin and Brigge into a state of deeper contemplation. This second transformation also marks a point of deviation in the destinations of the two characters. Whereas in the first half of the two novels, Roquentin and Brigge are more focused on clarifying and defining the Nausea or Big Thing respectively, in the second half their areas of focus become more unique, although both touch upon the ways in which other people deal with the intangible.

In *Nausea*, Roquentin’s visual catalyst is the portrait room of a museum. He notices one portrait in particular of a man named Olivier Blévine. Blévine’s portrait, like the others in the gallery, is portrayed in a stately, regal manner. But, as Roquentin learns, Blévine was actually a very short man, constantly ridiculed for his stature and high-pitched voice. The stately quality of paintings representing figures of a less than stately nature exemplifies, to Roquentin, the malleable quality of essence, and the way in which the reality of the past can be retrospectively altered. He writes, “their countenances had been stripped of the mysterious weakness of men’s faces” (89), showing that there is no such thing as historical fidelity—only retroactive idealism. Real people, real events—reality in general has no relevance, as it can and inevitably will be reinterpreted or forgotten in the attempts to preserve it.

Immediately after this experience Roquentin decides to stop working on his book, an historical account of a man named Rollebon. Roquentin realizes

that writing about Rollebon's life is his own method of hiding from existence, by occupying himself with this same reinterpreting of the past as he had noticed in the portrait gallery. He writes, "M. de Rollebon was my partner; he needed me in order to exist and I needed him so as not to feel my existence" (98). As soon as he has this realization, Roquentin experiences a frenzied revelation: that of his own pure existence. He realizes that he is not Roquentin the historian, not Roquentin the man, not Roquentin; he feels himself as just a pure consciousness, and a body housing that consciousness, existing from moment to moment with no purpose. After uncovering this obstacle to his own awareness of existence, Roquentin begins to notice other peoples' obstacles. He writes: "[e]ach one of them has his little personal difficulty which keeps him from noticing that he exists; there isn't one of them who doesn't believe himself indispensable to something or someone" (111). Roquentin becomes deeply aware of the "personal difficulties" of two characters: Anny, his female counterpart, and the Self-Taught Man, the only other character with whom Roquentin has any real contact in the novel.

Roquentin agrees to dine with the Self-Taught Man, and in the process becomes rather frustrated with his realizations of people's denial of their own solitude. The Self-Taught Man especially irritates him, because his personal difficulty is humanism—the belief that man is "the central figure on the stage of reality, the rational creature for whom the nonrational world exists" (Carruth ix). The Self-Taught Man refuses to believe that Roquentin (or anybody) can live without an underlying connection with every other human being, and that misanthropy is just another form of humanism. Through this feverish belief in loving all people (to the extent of pedophilia), the Self-Taught Man avoids the discomfort of acknowledging the contingency of his own existence. This contingency, or the fact that it is not necessary to exist, that there is no reason for existence (a fact which creates true freedom), is what Roquentin realizes after leaving the Self-Taught Man, in a second moment of frenzied revelation.

Roquentin's encounter with Anny's personal difficulty begins on a slightly more hopeful note. When they meet, after not having seen each other for four years, they come to each other with singular but highly complementary experiences. Anny tells Roquentin that she has changed, that she no longer

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sees things in the same way, and that she does not like to look at things for too long because they disgust her. Roquentin is startled by the similarities between her description and his recent experiences and compares the situation to their past when he writes, "It happened once in London, we had separately thought the same things about the same subjects, almost at the same time" (145). When he tries verbally to compare their experiences, though, Anny adamantly holds that they are quite different. At this point he realizes her personal difficulty: an obsession with essence. Anny herself tells him "I live in the past. I take everything that has happened to me and arrange it" (152). This is the same concept as the retrospective idealism seen in the portrait gallery; she takes her memories of the past and consciously reinterprets them to her own satisfaction. Though Anny has had similar glimpses of existence as Roquentin, she denies her own awareness by consuming herself with the variable past.

Similarly, in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, Brigge is focused on his past and his memories. Throughout the first half of the novel he often revisits the experiences and fears of his childhood. Though he still refers to childhood events in the second half of the novel, his second transformation causes his focus to shift slightly to the ways in which people deal with death and the intangible by clinging to their memories and by inserting themselves into art. Brigge's visual catalyst is a series of ornate woven tapestries. After noticing some girls sketching the tapestries, Brigge writes "[t]hey don't notice how in everything they draw they are merely suppressing inside themselves the unalterable life that in these woven pictures has radiantly opened in front of them, infinite and unsayable" (133). He sees these tapestries as somewhat of a container for the intangible; like writing, they create tangibility for the "infinite and unsayable." Through creative expression, a person can manifest not only their thoughts and memories, but also those experiences of intangibility which can occur "only at the price of solitude," allowing them to be expressed without the dilution of social interaction.

After this initial observation, Brigge turns to ideas of love for the first time. He suggests that the sketching girls are part of a wider group of women spanning over centuries who have channeled their love into art. He writes:

And from among them [...] those powerful examples of women in love have come forth, who, even while they called him, surpassed the man they loved [...] We know about these women because there are letters that have, as if by a miracle, been preserved, or books of poems written in accusation and lament, or portraits in some gallery that look at us through an almost irresistible desire to cry. (134)

One such powerful example of a woman in love is the Portuguese Nun, also mentioned for the first time in this new focus on art and love. This figure wrote a collection of poetic love letters not for the purpose of being delivered, but purely for the sake of being written. She becomes somewhat of an idol to Brigge, exemplifying his ideas about love through artistic expression. Before delving more deeply into this subject, though, Brigge returns his focus to a few outside examples of dealing with intangibility.

The first example is another childhood memory. Brigge recalls a ritual he participated in with his mother of looking at rolls of intricate lace. As a child, he told his mother that he thought whoever created the lace must have gone to heaven, to which his mother replied “[t]o heaven? I think they are completely in these laces. Each one, looked at in the right way, can become an eternal bliss” (137-38). The “eternal bliss” is indicative of the intangible contained within art, and the artists being “completely in” the laces demonstrates how they have managed to somewhat subvert death by staying alive through the art they have produced. A person putting him or herself, via his or her experiences, into a work of art is also a way to preserve memories. Brigge discusses the importance of experiential quantity in the creation of poetry when he writes: “[y]ou ought to wait and gather sense and sweetness for a whole lifetime, and a long one if possible, and then, at the very end, you might perhaps be able to write ten good lines” (19). By accumulating experiences and memories (the “sense and sweetness”) and using them in his or her art, a person is in effect putting themselves into the work of art.

In a similar example, Brigge recounts a story he heard about Count Brahe, his grandfather. Count Brahe was in the process of dictating his memoirs to Abelone, his daughter. From these memoirs he omits the traditional accounts



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of his accomplished adult life, but rather focuses on his childhood, claiming that it is natural for this distant time to take control of him now, toward the end of his life. Focusing on memories of the more distant past gives a stronger sense of permanence to life, a stronger foundation. When a life draws to a close, nearing the intangibility of death, one can still turn inward to relive the earliest memories. In a *Nausea*-esque retroaction, a focus on the subjective shapeable past avoids and gives substance to the objective absurdity of the present.

Soon after remembering the story of Count Brahe, Brigge acknowledges his own fear of death. Death begins to take on the same sort of description as the Big Thing, as a quality of incomprehensible largeness and mystery, as well as a source of overwhelming fear. He writes:

Sometimes I think about how the sky came to be, and death: because we moved outside ourselves what is most precious to us, since there was still so much else to do first and it wasn't safe with us in all our busyness. Now much time has passed over this, and we have grown accustomed to smaller things. We no longer recognize what belongs to us and are terrified by its extreme vastness. (166-67)

In the busyness of daily life, with the prevalence of mundane issues, the things which belong to us—those fundamental questions of existence—can easily be ignored or glossed over, but once they reappear, it is often with such force and intensity that it could easily overtake a rational mind. Brigge's descriptions of the formerly vague Big Thing begin to develop more concrete associations with death, love, and God. These three factors are intimately related and all a part of the intangible Big Thing. Once Brigge comes to terms with the fear of death, he begins to progress onward to the issues of love and spirituality.

This progression and shift is the most apparent deviation from that of Roquentin. Whereas Brigge branches out from his original concerns, Roquentin stays on a straightforward path. In both cases, however, the third transformation accelerates the two characters toward their respective

conclusions. This third transformation is of a musical nature, and while close to the end of both novels, it is also mentioned in some form toward the beginning of both, again showing similarity in the novels' structures.

When Roquentin first experiences his Nausea at the beginning of the novel, the one thing that causes it to temporarily subside is a favorite record he hears playing. He notices the effect that the music itself has on his physical and mental comfort, in contrast with the uneasiness of Nausea. He writes "[t]here is no melody, only notes, a myriad of tiny jolts. They know no rest, and inflexible order gives birth to them and destroys them without even giving them time to recuperate and exist for themselves" (21). This fleeting nature of the music gives him comfort, whereas objects, having a concrete existence but a malleable essence, are the source of Roquentin's discomfort. The music is and then quickly disappears, without a conflicting constant. At the end of the novel, he hears this same song again, only this time his reaction moves beyond sensation to imagining the creation of the song itself. He imagines the singer and writer of the song as being "saved," as being "washed of the sin of existing" (177). Instead of preserving their existence through a reinterpretation, such as a painting or an historical account, the singer and writer have preserved themselves through a small piece of reality. Each time the song is played, it is real, but without being manifested physically, without the opportunity for reinterpretation. As opposed to the meaningless contingency of existing, the music "does not exist because it has nothing superfluous: it is all the rest which in relation to it is superfluous. It *is*" (174). The music is an intentional creation, giving it a solidity absent from the amorphous intangible issues—an interesting contrast, as music itself is the least tangible of the art forms (one can see and touch a painting or pages of a book). Nevertheless, this musical art as a third transformation leads Roquentin to realize that a way to justify his existence is to continue to create art in his familiar medium—writing—but not the writing of historical accounts. Rather, by creating a kind of book in which "you would have to guess, behind the printed words, behind the pages, at something which would not exist, which would be above existence" (178). By progressing from the rational (historical accounts) to the artistic (fiction), Roquentin suspects that he will be able to justify his

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existence, to ease the Nausea without denying it, by artistically exemplifying the real experience of these intangibles without recreating the past. He will be able to create something which can just “be.”

Conversely, Brigge’s intangible issues are already arising from an artistic viewpoint, as he is a writer of poetry and plays. Thus, his musical third transformation leads him a step further into the issues of love and spirituality. Earlier in the novel, his brief mentions of music are in regard to its capability to elevate the listener to a state of euphoria. This can be equated with its power to subdue Roquentin’s Nausea. When describing Abelone’s occasional singing, Brigge writes, “I endured this music, on which you could ascend higher and higher, until you thought you must have been more or less in heaven for a little while. I didn’t suspect then that Abelone was to open still other heavens for me” (125). It is indeed Abelone who spurs Brigge’s third transformation.

The transformation occurs when Abelone gives a singing performance at a Venetian party. The lyrics of her song are reflective of Brigge’s evolving views on love, especially that in order to truly love each other, two people must lose each other. The last line of the song, “the moment when I let go of you, I hold on to you everywhere,” indicates this view, as well as the next evolution of Brigge’s view—that love must be an active process directed toward God. He writes: “[t]o be loved means to be consumed in flames. To love is to give light with inexhaustible oil. To be loved is to pass away; to love is to endure” (250), showing that the active process of loving is the way to endure. After the song of the third transformation, he recounts the tale of the Prodigal Son, a parallel to his own life story.

Like Brigge, the Prodigal Son undergoes many changes, looking within himself, looking to his unfinished childhood, and like Brigge he leaves home and lives a solitary life. Brigge writes: “what he wanted in those days was that profound indifference of heart which sometimes, early in the morning, in the fields, seized him with such purity that he had to start running, in order to have no time or breath to be more than a weightless moment in which the morning becomes conscious of itself,” (251-52), the “profound indifference of heart” being the freedom to experience life’s intangibility, the freedom to love

without the consumption of being loved in return. Here the congruity between the Big Thing, love, and God becomes clear. In exploring the intangible, Brigge is initially focused on fear and overwhelm—the Big Thing perspective. But as his transformations take place, love and spirituality take the place of fear. Brigge writes that the infinite purpose of love is to strive “not for fulfillment but for greater longing” (242), not for being loved, but for loving. This designates the love of God, or the spiritual aspect of the intangible, as an infinite purpose for life. Since God is intangible, one can never be loved by him; one can only direct love towards him while never being fulfilled, due to his intangibility.

The final conclusions drawn by both Brigge and Roquentin are jumping off points for further progressions and transformations. The issues of intangibility are the most difficult and elusive; they will never cease to be problematic to these characters. But by the end of the novels Roquentin and Brigge establish a base of methods and knowledge with which to further develop their understanding of the intangible. Through writing, thoughts can be made tangible as visible ideas, as ink on paper. Through visual art, memories are materialized through a woven tapestry or a painted canvas, and through music emotions are given ethereal expression. All of these artistic methods contain some aspect of the intangible and the artistic creator. All of them have the ability to make others aware of the intangible and of their own existence. Through the creation of art, the creator brings a fragment of their own meaning to a meaningless existence. Art gives direction to the creator's life, whether that direction be toward fulfillment or toward greater longing.

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I WANNA KILL SAM: ICE CUBE AS PERSONA AND PATRIOT

Peter Alilunas

The gradual media transformation of rapper/actor/persona Ice Cube (O'Shea Jackson) from South Central gangsta to "A list" actor represents a fascinating example of a cultural commodification. Ice Cube, as a founding member of rap group N.W.A., quickly established himself as an *agent provocateur*, penning first-person lyrics with a visceral authority some have compared to Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright (Boyd 75). His subsequent solo career only increased his cultural visibility, which was perhaps permanently solidified with his presence in *Boyz N the Hood*, John Singleton's 1991 film. Following that performance, Ice Cube's "star" image has permeated his public life and he remains the most visible representative of the various modes of "original" South Central culture. All of which makes his appearance in Lee Tamahori's 2005 *XXX: State of the Union* a historically important detail worthy of close analysis. As I hope to argue, Ice Cube's presence in this film demonstrates a victory for black males even while it ambivalently sidesteps many of the gangsta political viewpoints, all the while maintaining his carefully manufactured star image.

'Cuz the Boys in the Hood are Always Hard: Development

While music may have *created* the gangsta persona tied to Ice Cube, his role as Darin "Doughboy" Baker in *Boyz N the Hood* provided an image to accompany the mythology. Essentially playing himself, Ice Cube represents the traditional gangsta in the film. Tré Styles (Cuba Gooding Jr.), the upwardly mobile black male who *abandons* the gangsta culture, becomes the opposite by which the film defines adult maturity and growth. Modeled (like the traditional Hollywood gangster) on reality (in this case, South Central black males), Doughboy represents a curious reflexive meta-text: Ice Cube's musical

persona influenced real gangstas, which in turn influenced his portrayal, which in turn further influenced his music... and so on.

In fact, gangsta rap is not merely essential to the soundtrack of *Boyz N the Hood*, but to the substance of the film itself; what Boyd calls “the juxtaposition of sound and image” (89) makes the music part of the image; all the films from the period (as well as those contemporary films following the model) feature not just a soundtrack of gangsta rap music, but actual members of the gangsta rap community as actors. As Boyd claims, “[...] the exchange of imagery between cinema and rap music [...] defines this culture as more than simply a passing trend or an outdated genre. In essence, to talk about gangsta culture is to talk about gangsta rap” (91). This reflexive aspect has been integral to Ice Cube’s career, and has undoubtedly created his “star text,” which will later become crucial in the discussion of *XXX: State of the Union*.

While demonstrating many similarities to the traditional Hollywood gangsters, the black gangsta—which we can now define as a product of 1980’s/early 1990’s South Central culture, and portrayed in a seminal performance by Ice Cube in *Boyz N the Hood*—offers many unique characteristics that set it apart from the classic model. First, their commonalities: racial/ethnic minority status; economic disadvantage; unstable familial foundations; homosocial relationships; exaggerated, hegemonic masculinity; and the use of violence as a means to achieve manhood and success. Their striking difference seems based around the “Horatio Alger” aspect of the traditional gangster tales, in which protagonists rise from poverty to extreme triumph. However, gangstas do not achieve economic success based on the capitalistic model, nor do they even use such models in their own versions of social mobility. Furthermore, they do not make themselves over into images of white wealth—a common trope of gangster films—choosing instead to buy better and flashier versions of gangsta accessories, i.e. cars, clothes, jewelry and guns.

Violence, and its associations with masculinity, seems the most important commonality. Ice Cube’s performance in *Boyz N the Hood*, as in his music, revolves around his use (and threats) of violence, an expression of the desire for authority and control. As Boyd writes, “Excess and oppressed Black masculinity are expressed symbolically through an exaggerated phallus, high-

powered weaponry, and the ability to kill at will, which do more than simply fulfill the societal stereotype of the threatening Black male” (67). Perhaps the gangsta desire for and enactment of violence can be tied to a nihilistic approach to society and the law based around historic black oppression and lack of access to true economic opportunity.

Ice Cube’s hyperviolent, aggressive persona has always been built around such nihilism, as these early lyrics from “Fuck tha Police” (from the 1988 album *Straight Outta Compton*) demonstrate: “A young nigga on a warpath / And when I’m finished, it’s gonna be a bloodbath / Of cops, dyin’ in L.A.” This anti-authoritarian perspective is a defining characteristic of both gangsta music and Ice Cube, who, following *Boyz N the Hood*, parlayed his persona into a series of solo albums and a successful acting career.

The late 1980’s/early 1990’s gangsta certainly filled an audience desire for criminals and violent, illegal activity. As Boyd notes, “Americans have always had a fascination with the underworld society populated by those who openly resisted the laws of dominant society and instead created their own world, living by their own rules” (83). With South Central Los Angeles fulfilling the role of “world,” and the gangsta credo (kill or be killed) being the “rules,” Ice Cube’s manufactured persona activated an anxiety simmering throughout America that the young, black male gangstas represented a threat to a traditional (i.e. white) way of life. This capitalization on dominant culture’s simultaneous fear and fascination with rebellion turned the gangsta from a periphery subculture into an entertainment force, yet it also perpetuates the black male as a frightening Other, and narrows available cultural definitions.

Ice Cube’s solo recordings intensified such images following *Boyz N the Hood*, particularly in “AmeriKKKa’s Most Wanted” (from his eponymous 1990 album): “Let ‘em see a nigga invasion / Point blank for the Caucasian.” Thus, even after achieving artistic success, material wealth, and widespread fame, Ice Cube continued to build on his willingness to remain an outsider and potential threat. This threatening status can be defined by two key elements: first, an exaggerated masculinity, characterized by a “hardness” and willingness to commit violence. Boyd, regarding this “hardness,” notes, “In the parlance of the street, men are praised, with phallic connotations, for their

ability to be ‘hard;’ this is a modern-day variation on what used to be referred to as ‘cool’” (62). Sarah Eschholz finds a similar conclusion in her comprehensive study on representation: “Men in the movies, particularly African-American males, rely on traditional masculinity, often violently expressed” (Eschholz et al. 324-325). For the gangsta, violence and masculinity are intertwined; one is achieved through the expression of the other.

Angry, political expression represents the second defining element of the gangsta as represented through the star images of Ice Cube. A distinct level of distrust, hatred, and even aggression toward American democracy (and its white male hierarchy) runs through Ice Cube’s lyrics, and is perhaps best observed in “I Wanna Kill Sam,” from his 1991 album *Death Certificate*:

So bitch you can fight your own wars
 So if you see a man in red white and blue
 Getting’ janked by the Lench Mob crew
 It’s a man who deserves to buckle
 I wanna kill Sam cause he ain’t my motherfuckin’ Uncle!

Ice Cube hints at a Black Nationalism, and turns his violent fantasies away from rival black males toward the American military; his interview with noted commentator Angela Davis (conducted during the album’s release) reflect this burgeoning political disenfranchisement: “I really don’t follow politicians. I really can’t talk to a politician who would hold up the flag” (186). This early segment of Ice Cube’s career demonstrates a political ideology matching his media persona: a young, black male outside the traditional hierarchies, defined by his willingness to represent violence, committed to a “hard” approach to the world around him, and an angry, extremist dialogue regarding American political/military actions. Perhaps this represents a postmodern version of the earlier Black counterculture represented by the Black Panthers, among others: rather than *merely* political, Ice Cube turned politics into entertainment, and, in turn, into profits. The alienation, hardness, and violence indicative of the frustration of the South Central community become entertainment for those far removed from its confines.

I'm Running the Show Now: Transformation

Nearly fifteen years later, Ice Cube's media persona continues to maintain the "hard" image firmly rooted in his South Central gangsta roots. The success of his acting career has led to nearly twenty more films; all offer a variation on his standard, and all neatly fit into the aggressive, masculine paradigm defining the gangsta permutation on the traditional gangster character. This consistency allows Ice Cube to be seen as a virtual "brand name;" such marketing of gangsta culture allows one of its founding members to maintain economic control over a unique, and obviously profitable, product. Ironically, this makes the aspect of protesting economic disadvantage quite personally profitable. As Boyd writes: "Contemporary society has allowed the limited participation of African-Americans in mainstream culture so long as it remains profitable to certain corporate interests" (66). If Ice Cube's first profitable corporate venture was the album *N.W.A. and the Posse* in 1987, he can be said to have maintained the profitability of the South Central gangsta for nearly two decades; in fact, with the founding of his production company Cube Vision, Ice Cube *is* the corporation (Jefferson).

This corporation thrives on the continued representation of the Ice Cube persona, which one could argue has become a cinematic archetype, able to "work" in a variety of genres: urban comedy (*Friday* in 1995 and its sequel in 2000); adventure (*Anaconda* in 1997); political drama (*Three Kings* in 1999); science fiction (*Ghosts of Mars* in 2001); and even family-friendly comedy (*Are We There Yet?* in 2005). All of these characters are remarkably similar, with his now-archetypal conventions intact. As he has stated, confirming this consistency: "I don't want to start letting my audience down. I want people to know that when they see the Ice Cube name, it's going to be a movie that is worth your money and worth your time" (Jefferson).

This brings the discussion back to *XXX: State of the Union*. Like its predecessor *XXX*, which starred Vin Diesel in the title role, this sequel asks a simplistic question: can a Generation X "bad boy" become a secret agent and save the world? Both films, designed as counter-programming against "traditional" agent/action movies (particularly the James Bond franchise),

brilliantly tap into the current desire for hip, disenfranchised anti-heroes while maintaining such tropes as overblown action, big guns and fast cars; in a nutshell, the films perfectly suit the Ice Cube persona. He is, after all, the “nigga ya love to hate” (to quote the eponymous song from the 1990 album *AmeriKKKa’s Most Wanted*), which neatly sums up the character as well. In fact, the narrative neatly follows the standard conventions of the Ice Cube persona, even down to the name “Darius,” reminiscent of “Darin” in *Boyz n the Hood*. The film clearly defines Darius as the prototype gangsta: early in the film, National Security Agency commander Gibbons (Samuel L. Jackson) describes his ideal agent: “[m]ore dangerous. With more attitude.” Darius’ subsequent introduction occurs in a U.S. Military Disciplinary Barracks where, as a soldier, he is serving a sentence for disobeying authority.

From these opening moments, Ice Cube’s external history operates to inform us that this new Secret Agent will be a South Central gangsta. Evidence for such intertextuality comes early in the film: Darius’ mother died in his childhood, his father raised him in the ghetto, and he was arrested for auto theft and resisting arrest; additionally, Darius, after his release, goes immediately to the ghetto, which will be his base of operations for the duration of the film.

Following this introduction, however, the film veers off course into unusual and previously uncharted territory. Darius, in addition to being a gangsta, is also a Navy S.E.A.L, and is called upon to stop a potential *coup d’état* from wiping out the American government. Unlike *any* of his previous films—or, in fact, *any* mainstream Hollywood production (at least to my knowledge)—the gangsta is required to save Life, Liberty and the American Way. The historical significance of such a narrative (particularly in such a high-profile production) cannot be underestimated; this persona, after all, prompted an FBI file for writing “Fuck tha Police,” as well as “I wanna kill Sam ‘cause he ain’t my motherfuckin’ Uncle!” The former threat to America is here asked to be its savior.

Throughout the film, Darius maintains the standard gangsta persona, preferring to act alone, in an isolated fashion, with deep distrust for a white male hierarchy gone wildly out of control. His Navy S.E.A.L. status seems a

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convenient excuse for military knowledge; he even states early in the film: “I’m not feeling too patriotic these days.” Similar distaste for American politics echoes throughout the film, establishing Darius as a reluctant and cynical participant. In fact, after his recruitment, Darius bluntly tells Gibbons: “I’m running the show now.” This single moment, perhaps better than any other in the film, represents the full rise of the Ice Cube persona from South Central outsider to respected authority figure.

As the narrative escalates, Darius turns increasingly to gangsta culture for basic shelter, survival, transportation, and supplies. Darius’ appeals for help from fellow gangstas allow a clever bit of political sidestepping: he appeals to the gangsta desire for freedom, telling young protégé Zeke (played by contemporary gangsta rapper Xzibit), “[i]f you don’t do it for the Red, White and Blue, do it for yourself. It’s the American way of life. Hack and jack cars and all that shit.” This approach encompasses the materialistic dimensions of the gangsta culture as well as its inherent selfish nihilism. In this analysis, the criminal culture of the gangsta, like any extreme form of capitalist enterprise, has a great deal to lose: without the freedoms of the “American way of life,” the gangsta would presumably lose the ability to steal cars, deal drugs, and commit robbery.

In the film’s conclusion, as Darius races to save the President from assassination during the State of the Union address, he does so with a group of gangstas in tow—all in exaggerated, oversized ghetto vehicles, and to the strains of “Fight the Power” by legendary rap group Public Enemy. These scenes, intercut with the white male President delivering his speech to a roomful of white politicians, present an exhilarating representation of black gangsta power racing toward the locus of American authority that reflects the broader cultural fear/fascination with the gangsta. The film seems to suggest that this subculture, if provoked, might just rise up and attack the traditional centers of power. Such imagery is eerily prefigured in Ice Cube’s 1998 song “Fuck Dying,” from the *War and Peace, Volume 1: The War Disc* album:

All connect gang members and powers
Are to meet at the West Wing

To be led into battle by the one and only
Ice Cube the Great!

Ice Cube does indeed lead the gangstas to a climactic shootout in the streets of Washington D.C. with a rogue military division. In the film's signature moment, Darius, saying, "let's redecorate," fires a tank shell into the United States' Capitol dome: rarely in the history of American cinema have there been moments of such intensely symbolic Black power. As the narrative winds to a close, the President, in a televised speech, rewards the "anonymous, unknown soldier" who saved him (actually Darius) while presenting the Medal of Honor to white agent Kyle Steele (Scott Speedman) who also participated. Darius, watching in the ghetto, remarks, "I hate this shit" before driving away, into the heart of the city, as the credits roll. This crucial moment of black exclusion does not merely serve a narrative function; it also preserves the Ice Cube persona as disenchanting, isolated, and deeply distrusting of the white political hierarchy.

XXX: State of the Union carefully constructs a scenario in which the power and legitimacy of the gangsta is reinforced, the angry black male is allowed to be the ultimate hero (for both whites and blacks), and permits him to walk away without credit or further allegiance to the system. In this way, the film resolutely buttresses Ice Cube's consistent persona; as he himself has claimed, in a statement that could easily be applied to Darius: "[h]ere's a brother who's saying something—who won't sell himself out. Knowing that he won't sell himself out, you know he won't sell you out" (Davis 180). By its conclusion, the film reinforces the Ice Cube persona as a legitimate, archetypal source of power—and a continuing, stable enactment of the original South Central image, as if Darin "Doughboy" Baker (himself merely a projected image of Ice Cube) had joined the Navy S.E.A.L.S. and saved the world.

Conclusions

The Ice Cube persona, a carefully managed, developed and maintained image stemming from late 1980's/early 1990's South Central gangsta culture,

has clearly established itself as a Hollywood archetype. The reflexive image first visualized in *Boyz N the Hood* can be defined through a series of key conventions: racially based anger and political disillusionment; extreme propensity for violence; aggressive, exaggerated masculinity; urban, inner-city geographical background (typically Los Angeles, but often-transplanted to similar urban areas); and a nihilistic, threatening posture toward traditional American values and politics.

By applying this persona to *XXX: State of the Union*, Ice Cube intertextually designates the character Darius Stone as a gangsta, with all the accompanying conventions. That this character is called upon to save the American government from a *coup d'état* represents an important and historic turning point for both Hollywood and gangsta culture: the former outsider and threat is recognized as, ironically, a potential savior and, in the process, is granted a modicum of respectability. In addition, a process of political enfranchisement (or, at least, involvement) seems to occur. Finally, and most importantly to the gangsta mythos, Darius walks away from his actions with his isolation and disillusionment (i.e. his gangsta “dignity”) intact. In other words, he has not “sold out.”

Nevertheless, this somewhat ambivalent conclusion leads to further questions: will this film lead to further heroic representations for black males? Will the gangsta continue to be an American archetype, or will it fade? Is this cultural success limited to Ice Cube, or will other members of the gangsta community find similar advancement? There is also a much deeper, problematic issue simmering beneath the film, that of the fear/fascination combination allowing the gangsta to operate for a broad audience. This narrative subtext positioning the gangsta as an Other does not permit for full cultural inclusion, and perpetuates the stereotype of young black males as potential threats. Nevertheless, one thing is quite certain: the gangsta, at least in the persona of Ice Cube, has come a long way: from defending Crenshaw Boulevard in *Boyz N the Hood* to defending the free world in *XXX: State of the Union*.

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