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C O S M O P O L I T A N I S M



Volume XII

L E T T E R F R O M
T H E E D I T O R S

What is cosmopolitanism? The question seems a pertinent one. We attend a university committed to the somewhat dubious mission of churning out global citizens, where the term cosmopolitan is thrown about all the time. After all, “cosmopolitan” literally translates to “citizen of the world.” Yet too often, this conception of a global citizenry can give way to a eurocentric form of universalism. As it propagates singularity, it effaces difference. These differences are real and these differences are important. To acknowledge this is to provide a starting point for

a repurposing of the term.

With this in mind, we hope to explore in this volume the partialities, the fragmentations, and the fissures that characterize the spaces we inhabit, both corporeal and literary. The term cosmopolitanism fit our vision for CJLC: a bridge between academic discourse and real life. We wanted to examine the material mediums people use to situate themselves. Rosa Inocencio Smith’s piece looks at the duplicitous world of social media, while our conversation with Jack Turner shows how something as quotidian as food can prove instrumental in how

we define ourselves and others.

Yet getting out of the ivory tower proved trickier than we first presumed. The scholarship of Bruce Robbins (interviewed on page 81) proved illuminating, positing a distinction between the “old” and “new” forms of cosmopolitanism. A new cosmopolitanism could acknowledge the myriad influences - complementary and conflicting - that inform our multiple identities.

As invigorating as these ideas are, we were left with the concern that these nice distinctions might not translate to the real world. We recognized this ambivalence in an article by Nicholas Dames about the impact of theory on a generation of undergraduates, a subject we asked him about in our interview. His portrait of a relationship with theory somewhere between infatuation and resentment seemed all too familiar. But Dames also gave us hope for academic writing, with his nostalgia for an era when disputes within the academy had real implications.

Cosmopolitanism has the capacity to cultivate a kind of pluralism that goes beyond tolerating difference. Writing is an

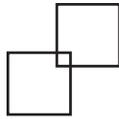
important part of this project. As the work of Meena Alexander (interviewed on page 111), and Elias Kleinblock’s essay about Anna Akhmatova demonstrate, poetry is an essential repository of memory in times of trauma. Literature is a place to celebrate and preserve difference; to record and embrace those fissures in our collective identities even as it asserts the voice of the individual.

The form of this issue, we hope, is a little cosmopolitan itself, with a sprinkling of different styles, idioms, and genres across time and space: from Oscar Wilde to Zadie Smith; from contemporary north London to “frontier” Pakistan. We hope it proves a fruitful read.

Before signing off, we have to mention our immense debt and gratitude to our faculty advisor Nicholas Dames. He has been both a help and an inspiration.

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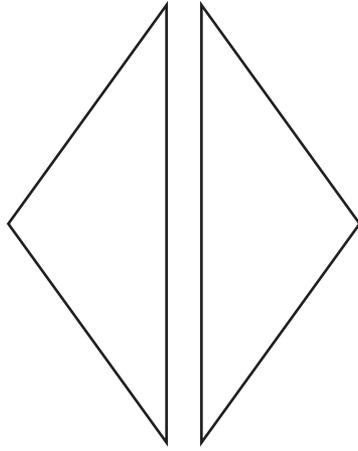
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CONTENTS

<i>Paranoid Narcissism: What Dostoevsky Knew About The Internet</i> Rosa Inocencio Smith	7
<i>Food, Desire, Identity: Interview with Jack Turner</i> Ian Trueger	23
<i>Monumental Writing: The Poetics of Cultural Memory in Anna Akhmatova's Requiem</i> Elias Kleinbock	37
<i>Youth, Theory, the Academy: Interview with Nicholas Dames</i> Hallie Nell Swanson and Ian Trueger	55
<i>Diasporic Dandies: Oscar Wilde's Aesthetic Legacy in America</i> Jonathan Carmona & Jewel Pereyra	69
<i>Internationalism, Intellectuals, Israel: Interview with Bruce Robbins</i> Ian Trueger	81
<i>Literature in the Age of Paper Mills: A Marxist Reading of Herman Melville</i> Marcela Johnson	97
<i>Language, Poetry, Disapora: Interview with Meena Alexander</i> Hallie Nell Swanson	111
<i>Dream City and the Imagined 'We': Modern Publics in Zadie Smith's London</i> Sanjena Sathian	121
<i>Margins, History, Cosmopolitanism: Interview with Manan Ahmed</i> Megan Stater	139



*PARANOID NARCISSISM:
WHAT DOSTOEVSKY KNEW
ABOUT THE INTERNET*

By Rosa Inocencio Smith

In the opening chapters of *The Double*, Dostoevsky's 1846 novella of social anxiety, Yakov Petrovich Golyadkin crashes his boss's party. Walking nervously "through two rows of inquisitive and wondering spectators",¹ "our hero" finds that

Yes! every one in the room, all had their eyes fixed upon him, and were listening in a sort of solemn expectation. The men had crowded a little nearer and were all attention. A little further away the ladies were whispering together. The master of the house made his appearance at no great distance from Mr.

Golyadkin, and though it was impossible to detect from his expression that he, too, was taking a close and direct interest in Golyadkin ... it all made our hero feel that the decisive moment had come for him.²

He's wrong, of course. The other guests are involved in their own conversations, connected with Golyadkin only by proximity—the spotlight on him is completely imaginary. His anxiety beneath it, though, is real. Golyadkin's voice trembles; tears form in his eyes. Speaking boldly and grandly and a little too loud, he delivers his best attempt at an eloquent speech

to the butler who has come to discreetly remove him—and is crushed when no one in his supposed audience reacts. Golyadkin is a paranoid narcissist, believing fearfully and hopefully that he is being watched, and staking the whole of his self-worth on the prospect.

Today, to Internet users, such feelings are all too familiar. Much discussion and criticism has already been devoted to the elevation of personal trivialities by the likes of Twitter, Instagram, and other self-published and self-promoting media; certainly, the immense variety of resources available—and used—for documenting daily life suggests for every social media user an epic as narcissistic as that of which Golyadkin is the “hero.” But the element of paranoia is just as important as that of conceit. We are warned that everything we put online could destroy our careers and relationships; that Google and Amazon read our emails, and so does the NSA. And in a social context, we are constantly visible—at least potentially so—to an entire network of friends and acquaintances, which gives every offhand comment the potential weight and reach of a manifesto.

It’s as if we are standing in the center of a roomful of people, but we don’t know where they’re looking, and we can’t help but feel, both excitedly and uneasily, that they may well be looking at us. Paranoid narcissism—the mixed desires and fears of being watched by unknown others—defines virtual society, giving rise to numerous related anxieties such as the sense of exposed insignificance and the fear of missing out. And with its self-consciously self-involved hero, who happens to suffer from all of these woes, *The Double* describes—and aptly explains—the experiential anxieties of modern social media.

Set over a three-day period in nineteenth-century St. Petersburg among a fairly unremarkable group of civil servants, *The Double* deals with a man who meets a man who looks exactly like him, and the trivial, tragic humiliations that result. With no grander goal than that of being popular among his co-workers, the protagonist—titular councilor Yakov Petrovich Golyadkin—fits remarkably well within the digital landscape. He

may not tweet the dire struggles of his morning commute, but he delights in the idea of playing the hero; indeed, the narrator's habit of referring to him as "our hero" pokes fun at the mediocrity of his life even as it exaggerates the drama of his feelings. Though unburdened by the threat of indiscreet, unguarded uploads, he feels the weight of surveillance: any pleasure he might take in his own performance turns quickly to anxiety as he searches among passersby for people who may know him, "at once assuming a decorous and sedate air when he thought any one was looking at him".³ For Golyadkin, as for any composer of funny tweets and pithy statuses, there is effort involved in maintaining an image for the world—and online, under the scrutiny of a hugely expanded community, these efforts become even more exhausting.

Still, with the social world filtered through screens and fiber optics, it can be comforting to fantasize that friends are keeping tabs on us. That is, until that particularly good photo or well-crafted tweet or link shared to catch the interest of a certain interesting person just doesn't get noticed—not a like, not a

comment, not the tiniest tick upwards in our Klout Scores. All of our unanswered, paranoid wonderings—Do they see me? Are they watching? What must they think of me now?—conspire to expose you in your shameful unimportance, driving home first the realization that no one is watching and none of them care, and then the embarrassment of having assumed that they were and they did.

Nothing pains Golyadkin more, at the "decisive moment" when he speaks and expects his audience to embrace him, than the fact that the party goes on—that "suddenly the ruthless orchestra, apropos of nothing, struck up a polka. All was lost, all was scattered to the winds".⁴ With a sense of self thus fluctuating between extremes of vanity and humility—from the certainty that everyone must know of your opinion, to the certainty that sharing it was presumptuous and foolish—the social media user's experience of the Internet is one of being at once utterly visible and utterly insignificant. Golyadkin's name, which translates roughly to "little naked one," applies equally well to us.

Meanwhile, as our feverish

scrolling confirms, everyone else seems to be doing perfectly well. Our paranoia over being watched or not is compounded by the paranoia fed by our own watching, the fear that we are always missing out. Dostoevsky invokes FOMO in the first third of *The Double*, which centers on a party to which Golyadkin is not invited. As he hides in the hall and attempts to sneak up a back staircase, the other guests' enjoyment is elaborately described in a passage that inflates the status of the event and its participants while making it clear that Golyadkin and the reader are excluded from knowing its intimate details. "I could not do justice to the solemn moment ... I could not, I positively could not, describe the enthusiasm that followed," declares the narrator, amid a breathless account of sparkling wine, beaming guests, blushing beauties. "Oh, why do I not possess the secret of lofty, powerful language, of the sublime style, to describe these grand and edifying moments of human life ... !"⁵

The grand and edifying moment in question, of course, is nothing more than a bureaucrat's toast at a dinner

party—which the narrator can and does describe in rapturous play-by-play. Yet there is always one more thing the narrator cannot put into words. The things that are described only stress the things still unknown, and the things left unknown only heighten the grandeur and mystery. It's the kind of wistful jealousy brought on by minute observation, familiar to those of us who flip through our friends' vacation photos, read the live-blogged accounts of events we can't attend, and Facebook-stalk our crushes and our exes. We know so much about what happened that it's as if we had been there—yet the fact that we were not is inescapable, and so is the knowledge that we can't know what we missed. Why, we wonder, do we too not have such busy social calendars, such quantities of friends and such opportune lighting? Why are our mundane adventures not so wittily encapsulated? The question of Dostoevsky's narrator comes to mind: "Oh, why do I not possess the secret?"

To live so nakedly in the spotlight of your own skewed per-

ceptions gives rise to a painful, pervasive embarrassment. You despise yourself for your public excesses and failures—oh, why did I post such an embarrassing, personal status?—and for your lack of compensating public success—oh, why did no one like that embarrassing status of mine? You wish to erase your tracks, but feel strangely non-existent when undocumented; your mistakes remain glaringly public, but your good qualities refuse to go viral. Some kind of escape becomes necessary, and yet there is nowhere to go. You might as well be the eternally embarrassed Golyadkin, who, following his humiliation at the party, “looked as though he wanted to hide from himself, as though he were trying to run away from himself! ... to be obliterated, to cease to be, to return to dust”.⁶

Enter the double: the curated profile, the version of you that bears all your identifying information—name, clothes, job, appearance, place of birth—but whose social grace is impeccable, whose interests are noble and fascinating, whose biography is impressive yet humbly presented, whose comments are edited for maximum wit. Bound

link by link to your real-world self with the ponderous chain of your Google results, trapped by your search and browser history in a fully customized cage, you cannot escape or erase your identity but must find a way to improve it. The avatars of social media—Facebook profiles, Twitter handles, and the like—embrace that burdensome mass of personal data and build on it, creating a version of self that is, if not quite an alter ego, at least an elaborately inflated one. Golyadkin’s double, who appears out of the shadows as he tries to outrun his embarrassment, is appears physically and biographically indistinguishable from Golyadkin, but more confident, more charming, and above all, more popular. Think of it as a deftly cropped, Photoshopped reflection: the image of yourself you always wanted to see. You have the same face, but every angle gets your good side.

Such a digital double ought to soothe your social anxieties, encouraging you to think about your most admirable qualities and take pride in displaying them. For Golyadkin, the double works this way for a single night. Flatteringly humble and solicitously sycophantic, he

treats Golyadkin as his social patron, and he lends an untiring ear to Golyadkin's anecdotal knowledge of Petersburg, Islam, and everything in between—a meandering, insubstantial conversation that recalls a series of clicks through BuzzFeed hyperlinks or, better yet, a scroll down a Facebook or Tumblr newsfeed. The double, in short, poses no social challenge to Golyadkin. His role is simply to receive and support—to empower his original and, like a real LiveJournal, absorb the narcissistic excesses that other people might discourage if they were physically present and talking back.

He provides an outlet without giving a response; he doesn't criticize; he doesn't ignore.

But just as Golyadkin is haunted by the notion that “a good man tries to live honestly ... and never has a double”,⁷ you can't help but feel the smallest pang of guilty jealousy each time your digital double makes a friend. You are uncomfortably conscious of the fact that your created, curated self is not really you—you've played up a few things, kept a few others hidden, put on a mask for your digital friends. And what would they think of you if they found out about—well, you? The anxieties

of digital life return when the double, through its interactions with the friends you hoped to gain, is conceived as yet another separate, hostile social being. You can fear missing out on your own double's activities, if the double is more popular than your real-life self.

And so Golyadkin's double, far from soothing his paranoia, exacerbates it. For one thing, he seems determined to embarrass Golyadkin in public; his practical jokes of mistaken identity range from taking credit for Golyadkin's work to forcing him to pay (and take gluttonous credit) for eleven pies eaten by the double at a restaurant. Online, this is the problem of indiscriminating likes, unfortunate photo tags, ill-advised emotional status updates—things that make you look vindictive, or obsessive, or sloppy, when really it was only a bad camera angle, or a poorly punctuated bit of sarcasm, or an unfortunate YouTube wormhole at three in the morning. But the profile, the double, purports to represent you, and how can you prove that it's lying? On the other hand, the double seems to leave you out of its more enjoyable adventures. In Dostoevsky's novel, the

ability of the socially confident double to ingratiate himself with his coworkers is both enviable and mystifying to Golyadkin, who expresses textbook FOMO in his desire “to know, too, what he keeps whispering to every one—what plots he is hatching with all these people, and what secrets they are talking about? ... If only I could...get on with them a little too...”⁸

All in all, the double's betrayals add up once again to a painful exposure of Golyadkin's insignificance: his behavior, no matter how public, no matter how embarrassing, or no matter how admirable, seems never to make people care about Golyadkin himself. The double is supposed to help Golyadkin make friends and impress his boss; instead, he makes Golyadkin look more awkward and incompetent. The double is supposed to put Golyadkin in the spotlight; instead, he steals the spotlight for himself. You'd think that with something like five hundred “friends” you would be busy all the time with things to do; instead, you're sitting staring at a screen on Friday night, repeatedly refreshing the page where your digital double smiles out at you, perfectly happy and

infinitely distant.

And yet, you still keep hoping. In spite of all the ways in which the double acts against him, Golyadkin persists in thinking that he and his double will one day be a team, that

“there might even, perhaps—who could tell—spring up a new, close, warm friendship ... so that this friendship might, in the end, completely eclipse the unpleasantness of the rather unseemly resemblance of the two individuals”.⁹

That is, the double would ideally become such a valuable source of social and emotional support that nothing else it does will matter. Gain enough friends with your digital double, and you might as well be just as cool as you say you are. Get rid of your digital double, though, and you could lose all chance of connecting with those friends. Thus, even in Golyadkin’s most deliberate confrontation with the double, the letter he writes to scold him and demand an explanation with his behavior, he is so anxious to preserve a cordial relationship that he feels the need “to soften him, flatter him,

and butter him up at the end”¹⁰ so that the double “will not take my letter in a sense derogatory to yourself”.¹¹ Resentment for the pain the double causes is mixed not only with intense admiration, but also with the fear of losing his friendship forever. Perhaps the best demonstration of the double’s isolating tendencies appears in the dream Golyadkin has after sending the letter to his double. Here, the more he tries to escape the double, the more doubles appear to pursue him, “so that at last a terrible multitude of duplicates had sprung into being; so that the whole town was obstructed at last by duplicate Golyadkins, and the police officer ... was obliged to seize all these duplicates by the collar and to put them into the watch-house”.¹² The watch-house full of selves is a fitting metaphor for the imprisoning constant watchfulness of paranoid narcissism, and the image of obstruction is telling in light of the hopes for social connection that the double has a chance to fulfill. Like the duplicates filling the town and blocking Golyadkin everywhere he goes, social media becomes not a means to experience, but a rather inhibiting filter to it.

Paranoid narcissism haunts our online interactions and feeds our social anxieties, and when we try to fix the problem with a new and better profile picture, a more popular messaging system, yet another account for more access to friends and a wider broadcast of wit, it only makes things worse. Our digital selves multiply and surround us, to stand in the way of the very relationships they are designed to create.

Dostoevsky, writing in 1846, was of course not thinking of

the Internet. Yet he saw people lonely and paranoid and vain, isolated and beset by their imaginary selves, and he wondered, perhaps, about human beings' chances for connection. At the time, societies across Europe were becoming increasingly urbanized, and the crowded, anonymous life of the city—a social world structured by passing impressions and sharp divisions between public and private lives—increased each person's encounters with others exponentially, just as the Internet has done today. And just as it has today, this sudden expansion of social worlds must have

brought into sharp relief. the fears always attached to living under the eyes of others. Say that each encounter with another person conjures a double, an impression of you inside someone else's mind. It is a version of you that is separate from you, a self that you cannot quite know. Paranoia comes from recognizing the existence of that double self, and narcissism comes from dwelling on what it could be. Communication, meanwhile, works to control it, shaping the impression that those you encounter receive—so that each of us now, through the digital doubles we build, may speak to strangers across the world in an effort to tell them who we are.

Yet the problem expands with the reach of the message: The double you create engenders doubles of its own and, as your much-more-powerful surrogate, grows ever more distant from you. The more a letter, a recording, a YouTube video endures and is valued for its content, the more it takes on a life of its own apart from its author; the more messages can be transmitted over great distances and to many people, the more possible it is for people to live apart; and thus, our capacity for

connection increases in tandem with our capacity for loneliness. There is a painful catch-22 in our efforts to communicate: It is when we are most successful in transferring ourselves to pixels or paper that our whole and human identities start to seem most obsolete.

There is an impulse, then, to remain isolate—to “keep myself to myself”¹³, as Golyadkin often announces his intention to do. But try as we might to avoid face-to-face interactions, send phone calls to voicemail, and put off writing emails, the digital double calls us back in the end. We can't help but scroll through and wonder what others are doing, can't help but do something to show them we're here, and this irresistible impulse, perhaps, is not evidence of our addiction but of some deeply human kind of courage we can't quite give up. We keep trying to connect and keep inventing ever more elaborate tools to do it because for each of us, mixed in with all the doubled impressions, is a self that we know is worth knowing and a hope, however slight, that we can be understood.

Even Golyadkin knows something about this. Close to

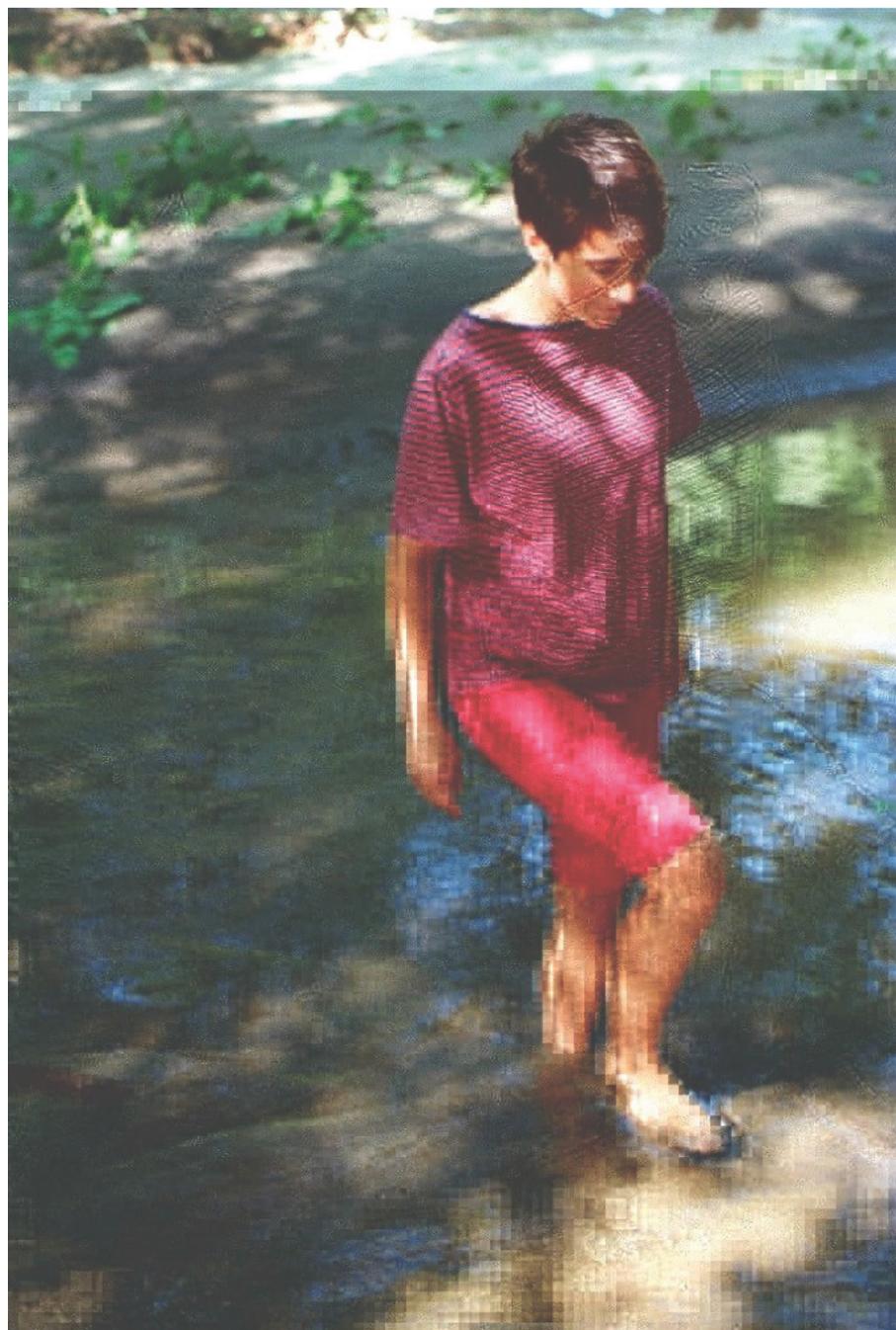
the end of *The Double*, driven to exhaustion and near insanity after chasing his double through the city, he plans at last to beg for the protection of the privy counselor, Olsufy Ivanovitch, whose approval he has been craving since he tried to crash his party in the first chapters of the novel. True, there isn't a great deal Olsufy Ivanovitch can do, but all Golyadkin really wants is to explain himself, and to have someone listen: "I am really myself by myself, your Excellency, really myself by myself," he plans to say. "I cannot be like him".¹⁴ Such a supplication is intimidating, humiliating; Golyadkin can hardly hope to impress anyone with his wit, good breeding, and confidence when he pleads abjectly for protection and openly admits that he does not have these qualities. In this case, it doesn't even work: Golyadkin can hardly get the words out, and Olsufy Ivanovitch, busy with visitors, has no time to listen and turns away. And yet, Golyadkin tells himself, his effort is a worthy one—"There's something chivalrous about it".¹⁵

Which is true. In the attempt to make this real and human connection, to reach

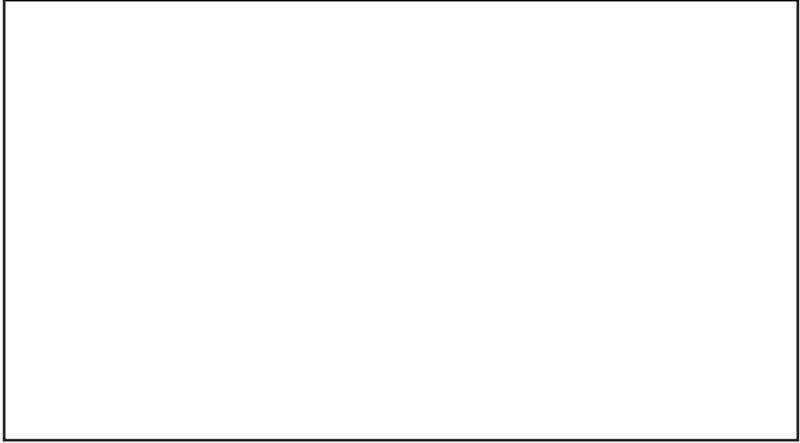
out in spite of his anxieties and self-loathing, Golyadkin risks a great deal—and so do all of us who put our imperfect selves on display. We've been trying to be ourselves by ourselves, trying to make those selves knowable to others, since long before Dostoevsky sent his hero running in shame through the streets of St. Petersburg—and still, after centuries of failure, we keep trying. It's ridiculous, painful, embarrassing, scary. Still, as Golyadkin says, there's something chivalrous about it. □

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*FOOD, IDENTITY,
NATIONALISM*

an interview with Jack Turner

By Ian Trueger

How do you see cosmopolitanism and cuisine intersecting?

I would start by questioning the question. Perhaps another way of stating the premise behind that is the sense that cuisine is tightly bound up in people's identity, and vice versa. People's cuisine expresses that, and they become extremely sensitive as soon as you start fiddling with it. If you say you doubt the seriousness of that and start talking about pastrami in New York and say you can get a better pastrami sandwich in San Francisco, people will get extremely pissed. Clearly food is a profound icon.

It's interesting--this seems to be a universal characteristic, that different groups will always define themselves, as well as the Other, in terms of what they eat. This is not a trivial point. It also seems to be universal that people insult and denigrate other cultures in terms of what they eat. The classic example is that the English call the French 'the frogs', which is supposedly an insult. Rosbif, which the French affectionately call the English, seems the exception that proves the rule.

That's interesting. In many encounters, colonial or otherwise, opposing sides often accuse one

another of cannibalism. It segues from denigration to slander...

That's a very common thing. The Li Chi, the Chinese book of ritual from the Han period, for example, is interesting: China at this point has fluid boundaries, but the sense is that China ends where people stop eating well. You know--outside this region, people don't wear proper clothes, they don't cook properly, they eat raw food. This seems to be a universal thing, a constant thing, that people talk about their primitive, barbarian neighbours as people who eat raw food. They don't cook--they are considered prehuman.

So how one eats is considered a marker of civility.

Absolutely. One of the interesting questions I tackled in my last book was that--I have just gone around saying that these are universal ideas, but it seems to me that certainly in the nineteenth century, in the European imperialist countries, you get a much more developed sense of how our food is, in a sense, what we are. And you see this particularly in the context of European colonialism in East Asia and South

Asia: this constant distinction between what an Englishman eats in India, and what a native eats in India. And related to that is how these spices were at first seen as attractive and alluring during the Renaissance, and then suddenly they cease to be attractive. They are seen as being alien. There is no doubt that there is a sort of sanitizing of the food, where it is seen as being...

Overly sensuous - romantic?

Absolutely, and the classic example of that in Romanticism is Keats. He's always talking about the spicy Orient. But the point is that the spices, and the foods that contained them, become alien, foreign. And that is certainly not how it was a couple of hundred years earlier. King Henry VIII loved his spices--they were the ultimate luxury good, as good as it gets. So that change seems to emerge in the 18th century.

Also, before the nineteenth century, you get this notion of elite cuisines. Wealthy people eat refined cuisines. Elite cuisine had more in common than did cuisines across cultures. The similarities are perhaps more pronounced than the differences: it's complicated, it's

full of spices, its got expensive ingredients, it's full of meat, but it doesn't have any distinctively national quality.

By the nineteenth century, you get the notion of a national cuisine emerging, where French cuisine is expressive of French ingredients. Every country gets this idea of its national cuisine. In a sense this begins with the English. The roast beef of old England. In the context of the more or less unending wars with France in the eighteenth century, they say, you know, -we eat roast beef, we eat plain simple food from England, while the French make this fiddly complex stuff with ragoûts and whatnot. And the ultimate expression of that is with Robbie Burns, in his "Ode to a Haggis," where he spends half the poem insulting Spanish olio and French ragoût and all this nonsense.

So you think this idea of a national cuisine, where food becomes a kind of cultural marker, begins in England then?

I think it's most developed there. The classic text is Hogarth--the classic image, "The Roast Beef of Old England." When Hogarth was kicked out of Calais [what

was formerly an English domain], he produces a series of images that are mass-circulated, in the tens of thousands--cartoons, if you like. And the image is of huge side of British Roast Beef being transported into an English Inn, where scrawny French Jacobins, these revolutionaries, who are, you know, emaciated, they are mean little peasants who eat rubbish, look on in jealousy. Now, that's broadly the period, the eighteenth century through the nineteenth, when these notions sharpen. And again, this makes perfect sense--the age of nationalism.

What I was thinking in relation to these ideas of authenticity was - especially in a place like France, where cuisine is seen as such a definitive marker of identity - has this changed since large-scale immigration began in the last fifty years? Or is the national cuisine, in a sense, exclusionary?

It may have adopted some influences from North Africa, but not really. It is exclusionary. I think there is a telling contrast between, say, British cuisine and French cuisine. Brit cuisine is very clearly influenced by Indi-

an cooking. You can get a curry and it's not considered noteworthy. It's unremarkable to go out for a curry. It's not trying something ethnic, it's actually totally normal, and the statistic that is always bandied around is that the most popular meal is chicken tikka massala. There is no comparison in France. People like their couscous, but there is no way that migrant influences have extended into the national cuisine to the same extent. Why is that? I mean that's probably unanswerable, but probably be-

these migrants precisely because they have a more...

Distinctive idea of what constitutes Frenchness?

This gives me flashbacks of a conversation I had in New York ten years ago. We were talking about migrant cuisine. I was comparing France and America and saying America does not really have a cuisine. It doesn't. It's a migrant country, it has lots of different things, but it doesn't have a cuisine. And what do I mean by a

If the local food culture is crap, the better chance you have that something decent might survive.

cause they had a more distinctive national cuisine to start with.

So you think French cuisine, like French culture, is less permeable to outside influences...

I think that's true. People talk about the difference in multicultural models between America and Britain on the one hand, loosely grouped together, and continental Europe. The distinction is there, that the French have a much harder time absorbing

cuisine? France has several cuisines but it has a set of rules, and a set of traditions which have canonical texts, ways of doing things. If you go to a French restaurant, you know that there are a set of structures, literally in the way it is organized. There's no analogy in America. What I was struck by was that I didn't mean that in a remotely critical, derogatory way, and people thought I was insulting American cuisine. And I was saying there is no single cuisine here, or

even a canonized set of ingredients, or books or cooks. It doesn't exist. Everything is up for grabs and you can do what you want. If you want to do a Thai-Mexican restaurant, that'll be fine and if you do it well enough, people will go. If you look at the modern migrant experience, you'll find food that is diverse, assimilative, and full of different influences. Compare that with France - as I know to my cost, if I want to go for a Thai meal out here, I don't eat out, I make it myself. Because it would be disgusting- shockingly bad. Again, if you go back to the very basics, "Tell me what you eat and I'll tell you what you are".

Is the rest of continental Europe the same?

Germany is an exception. This is an unscientific and unkind thing to say, but I think broadly if the local food culture is crap, the better chance you have that something decent might survive. That's what happened in England - you can get fabulous Thai, or Indonesian, or whatever you want. That's because there's not much competition. I don't think I have ever been to a restaurant that describes itself

as English. There's no place that sells English cuisine, or British food. I think Jamie Oliver tried, and they've just gone bust.

So with this idea of authenticity in mind, how do you feel about fusion cooking? Obviously these notions of authenticity are constructed to an extent, where what we perceive as authentic is often the product of quite recent innovation. Do you think the idea of authentic cooking is bullshit?

The existence of the question is what's interesting. A lot of people will say a priori that fusion cooking is bullshit. I grew up in Australia, and when I left this was so hot. When I was at Uni, there was this great revolution in food, a bit like what happened in America around the same time. There was this influence of migrant food and a belated awareness of this WASP majority that there was some amazing stuff here, and so they started making fusion food that was fabulous. And sort of hot on the heels of this, you get people saying fusion food is BS. What is interesting is why they would necessarily feel that way. Because all cuisine started off as fusion. And I'm always impressed - the

two cultures that seem the most entrenched in these reactions are the Italian and the Iranians. The French come in third. If you go to Italy and try doing something that's a little different, someone will, probably in a friendly way, question it. They'll say we have these formulas that we do - there are ways of doing things - procedures.

This is not scientific, but I've heard this from a dozen Iranian friends, that like in Italy, food is properly matriarchal. The women do it, the older women make the stuff, and they make it a particular way, so it's made by the matriarch of the family, and she's always made it this way because her mum made it this way. They get very upset about the baked rice dishes. Tah chin and Polo. You have to go through this whole ritual. I remember having this Iranian friend in New York who missed his mum's cooking and used to try and make it every now and then. It was always a big production because he had to call his mum and get instructions. This thirty something, independent guy, he needs his mum. I was saying - can't you use a book? And he said, No no no you have to do it this way.

I once made the mistake of making this famous Iranian dish, Fesenjān- duck with pomegranate. It's one of their four or five classical national dishes, like what roast beef is to the English. I got it from a recipe book and had some Iranian friends over. And I learnt to never do that again. People from these particular cultures will find that you are misquoting Shakespeare. You cannot do it differently. And that's the same thing behind the criticism of fusion food - you can't do things differently. And of course that's absurd - there are things that work better than others, but it's absurd to limit yourself to one set of rules. So no, I don't have a position on fusion. But I am continually amazed by the strength of the responses that it evokes.

Try doing this with an American - Oh, so you made your coleslaw like that. It's up for grabs. That's the background to the question about fusion. The question is more-how do you feel about rules, and are these rules important because they make a better result, or are they more like a liturgy, where these rules are part of 'us'? Maybe in an American context,

we would feel that this is a bit absurd. Absurd in the sense that your identity is bound to a set of rules. In a sense the converse applies. If you're suddenly pro-fusion food in the context of the Catalans, it shows you're not bound by traditions that you would accept a bit of curry sauce on your paella or whatever. It shows that you're a broad minded, liberal, flexible person. You are what you eat.

But every culture has its own sort of symbolic actions that re-

veg for him.

So do you think that elite cuisine has manifested itself in a different guise today, in terms of being worldly? Do you think that cosmopolitanism in terms of food is what elite cuisine is today - the whole idea of having options et-cetera?

I guess so. I think it's also about how much more accessible it is today. Knowledge is huge now. I think that's why there are so many showoffs now. I think this

Suddenly buffalo mozzarella isn't good enough. Now we've got to get something better so we get burrata.

inforce a sense of identity, no?

I remember thinking, way back in the 80s at Uni, I was pretty pleased with myself for making Thai food, which is pretty mainstream now, or Cambodian food. This kind of positions you as someone who's not like my dick-head uncle who has roast lamb every meal. That's all he has. That's what I had for lunch today actually [this interview was conducted on Easter Sunday], but it's always lamb chops and three

is the currency that so many of these TV shows trade in. You have to be up to speed in the latest organic whatever. Anyone can get this or that ingredient if they are willing to pay - access is there, whereas knowledge is even more sought after, knowing how things are made. And this whole exclusivity thing ties into the theory of the leisure class. As soon as one need is satisfied, as soon as we get buffalo mozzarella into the markets in New York City, the nature of consum-

er society - or some would say capitalist society - is to create new needs. So suddenly buffalo mozzarella isn't good enough. It used to be exclusive and sought after, but now we've got to get something even better so we get burrata. And then this burrata is better than that burrata and it's not good enough. And we all know people like this, who need the latest and greatest.

You can probably say the same thing about arugula to kale in the US. Everyone has gone kale crazy.

Yeah, there are a lots of different kales. See I remember twenty years ago arugula just wasn't around. You couldn't get it if you ordered it. The way the social scientist would phrase it is that eating is a strategy of social differentiation. I think we measure these things very crudely. With something like spices you can measure it for the very simple reason that they cost so much that only elite people could get them. In the case of pepper, as the cost of pepper came down, it ceases to be an elite product. You can actually follow its fall from grace, and suddenly wealthy people start scorning it and it's

called a poor man's spice and it ceases to be anything recherché. This happens very fast, and if you doubt that, look at an 80s cookbook. Most of them look funny to our eyes now. Most cookbooks look terribly dated terribly quickly. This notion of what's chic or fashionable moves on really fast.

So tell me about your upcoming book.

It's a history of cooking. It's actually a history of who's cooking, it's a history of the division of labor. It's about but how the labor is parcelled out. I look at how humans cook and why women always end up cooking. We talked about elites, but in this context I explore how elite cooks emerge at very early times, and how different elites use cooks as markers of their social distinction or wealth. What you often find is that in a courtly context, the cook has a big role to play in terms of projecting an image of royal taste, sophistication et cetera. But also invariably you find a sort of dietetic context too, where the cook and the ruler make a good fit, keeping the ruler in good shape with healthy food. The book also focuses on

the outsourcing of cooking . For most of history, women have done 99 percent of the cooking, but suddenly in the last couple of decades, this has changed. Thanks to this belated last wave of technological progress, cooking has been outsourced comprehensively for a lot of people. You don't need to cook at home. If you live in certain parts of the world you can get someone to cook or pre-prepare the food or process the food elsewhere. It's outsourced, and this is a colossal change, in terms of the social dynamics in terms of the house, but also in terms of public health.

That's interesting - how the domestic relations change, the set-up of the family.

If you look at the proportion of women in the workforce in the 1950 versus the proportion of women in it now, obviously it's gone up hugely. One of the big reasons is the outsourcing of domestic chores, of which cooking was probably the most onerous, along with child rearing and laundry. These things have been simplified, outsourced, or delegated. And that's how this social revolution has been able to occur.

Do you think that's sad?

I think it's an immensely complex question. You would have to be a pretty conservative and luddite person to argue that getting women out of the house is a bad thing at all. But what's a far more complex and fraught question is - what are the implications of that? To put it very crudely, when cooking is outsourced, cooking is processed. When cooking is processed, it is broadly not as good, broadly not as healthy, and broadly it comes with a set of social and economic consequences, where food tends to be produced by particular companies, and that has big implications for the diet. If everyone is eating the same stuff, you've got a whole raft of implications there that are health-based, cultural etcetera. And one of those implications is how people interact over food. how people eat together, or not together. And this is a significant change. So it's complex, yeah. The point is that the liberation of women could not have occurred without previous strides forward in technology, but its also increasingly clear that some of those strides have come with a cost attached, and with food that is quite evident.

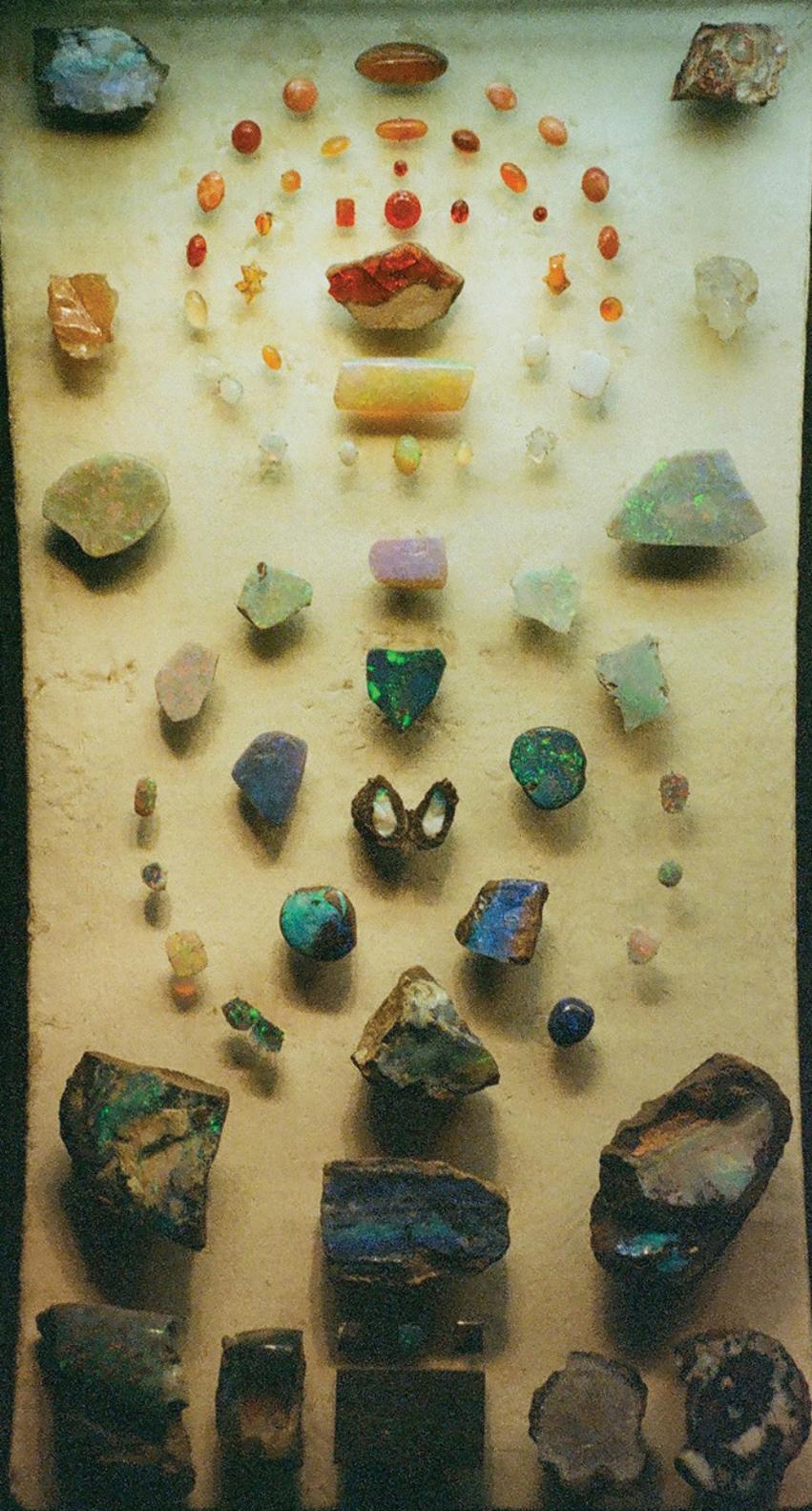
What comes into my head is Habermas's idea of the public sphere coming as a result of the coffee houses of the 18th century, where food and its produce creates a space where discourse happens.

I think this is indisputable. I think from a very early, evolutionary sense, this holds. We are the only animal who eats cooperatively. If you get other primates together with food, the alpha male, the strongest, toughest one, will have his food. He will not share it. If you put a group of hungry chimps together and a certain amount of food, you will have a fight, and the strongest chimp will get the food, and then a hierarchy will emerge. Almost all animals would do that. We don't. In certain contexts that will happen, but broadly, that's not the way humans behave over food. So this is part of our nature, if you like. The flip side is that a chimp when it eats, will be fearful of being robbed, so he eats on the run, whereas we don't. We are the only animal that cooperates over food, that eats food together. Why are we able to do that? What is the evolutionary power of that? What is the environmental constraint

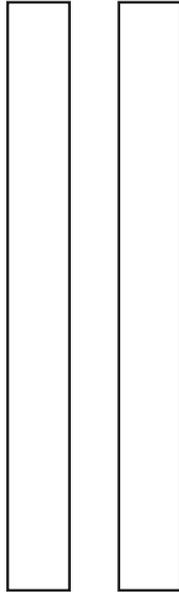
that imposed that adaptation upon us? And the answer seems to be that food production was more efficient. The production of cooked food required cooperation, and the evolutionary payoff was so great that it became the only way of behaving. And that's not far off from saying that what makes us cooperative beings, social beings, is in fact the need to cooperate over food production. It was the first division of labor. And these are fairly hot ideas in paleoanthropology. As you know, people like Adam Smith say that this cooperative function arose from a human need for trade, exchange. But in fact this notion that it's about food, I think, is a far more cogent one.

That's an interesting idea, isn't it - if we are social beings not because of tools, or hunting, or language, but if we're social beings because of the way we produce our food, that is to say cooking it, then what are the implications of abandoning that? It is in a sense pre-human behavior to eat alone. □

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*MONUMENTAL WRITING:
THE POETICS OF
CULTURAL MEMORY
IN ANNA AKHMATOVA'S
REQUIEM*

By Elias Kleinbock

In 2006, on the Robespierre Boulevard in St. Petersburg, across the Nevá from the Kresty prison, a monument was erected, dedicated to Russian poet Anna Akhmatova. It was commissioned to honor the poet's wishes through a contest incorporating architects and sculptors. The winning sculpture was made by Galina Dodonova and Aleksandr Reppo. The monument shows Akhmatova, in tattered clothing and with one arm raised to her breast, moving as if away from the prison, but with her gaze firmly fixed on it. The four final lines of her Requiem are engraved in to the surface,

ending with "beneath that blind, deep-crimson wall."¹

The story of the monument, and the poem that inspired it, traces back to 1935, when Akhmatova's son Lev Gumilev and her companion Nikolai Punin were arrested as part of the purges that followed the assassination of Sergey Kirov, a prominent Communist Party leader and a close adviser of Stalin. On the morning that Akhmatova learned of their arrests, she composed, in a fit of despair, what was to become the first poem in the Requiem cycle:

Уводили тебя на рассвете,

За тобой, как на выносе,
шла,
В темной горнице
плакали дети,
У божницы свеча оплыла.
На губах твоих холод
иконки,
Смертный пот на челе...
Не забыть!
Буду я, как стрелецкие
женки,
Под кремлевскими
башнями выть.

They led you away at day-
break;
As though following a bier,
I walked,
In the dark chamber chil-
dren were weeping,
Before the Virgin the can-
dle guttered.
On your lips the cold touch
of an icon,
On your brow, sweat of
death...Not to forget!—
Like the wives of the mur-
dered Streltsy,
I'll wail near the Kremlin
towers.²

Two things are notable here. First, with allusions to an icon of the Virgin Mary and to the Streltsy—Russian guardsmen executed en masse by Peter the Great when they rebelled

against his authority—Akhmatova expresses her personal pain through cultural symbols, finding associative pleasure and comfort in referents that were largely denied validity by the Soviet Union. The sensory experience of Eastern Orthodox religious practice—the tactile pleasure of harboring an icon—had been relegated to the under-
ground by the fervent atheism of the Soviet state project. Nostalgic associations with pre-revolutionary Russia paired with overt religiosity had no place in the cultural discourse propped up by the state propaganda machine. Second, and importantly, Akhmatova associates herself and her act of waiting near the Kremlin towers with the tormented anticipation of other women, of the wives and mothers of victims of the purges. She gives weight to her individual experience by allowing it to become one of many similar tragedies—she is “like the wives of the murdered Streltsy,” and like the Virgin Mary, weeping for her crucified son. Her plight is neither singular nor unique; Akhmatova cannot, in this small poem, speak for the hundreds of Streltsy wives, and can certainly not speak to them across the

centuries. Still, this seed-poem hints at the dissolution of individual subjectivity that will characterize *Requiem*.

Gumilev and Punin were released two weeks later, but in 1938, her son was arrested again; his parentage and past arrest made him into a perennial suspect. This time, his internment lasted seventeen months, and included a death sentence which was then commuted to exile. Akhmatova spent the duration of Gumilev's internment in the Leningrad "Kresty" prison, waiting in line to pass notes to her son, not knowing whether he was still alive. Amanda Haight describes this chapter in Akhmatova's life as being one of immense physical torment: Akhmatova, she writes, was "terribly poor and living mainly on a diet of black bread and sugarless tea. She was extremely thin and frequently ill. She would get up from bed to go and stand, sometimes in freezing weather, in the long lines of people waiting outside the prisons, hoping against hope to be able to see her son or at least pass over a parcel."³ Out of this period came most of the poetic inspiration for *Requiem*, and between 1936 and 1940,

almost the entirety of *Requiem* was composed. In 1957, she added an introductory prose paragraph entitled "By Way of a Preface," in which she recounts the harrowing experience of waiting outside the walls of the prison:

In the terrible years of the Yezhovshchina, I spent seventeen months in the prison queues in Leningrad. Somehow, one day, someone "identified" me. Then a woman standing behind me, whose lips were blue with cold, and who, naturally enough, had never even heard of my name, emerged from that state of torpor common to us all and, putting her lips close to my ear (there, everyone spoke in whispers) asked me:

— And could you describe this?

And I answered her:

— I can.

Then something vaguely like a smile flashed across what once had been her face.⁴

This opening passage, written almost two decades after the core of the poetic cycle, reveals

Requiem to be fundamentally a work about, and of, memory. Akhmatova sets to verse the almost inarticulate experience of the Great Purge, recording it both for herself and for her fellow sufferers. “By Way of a Preface” establishes a kind of contractual agreement between Akhmatova and the woman she encounters, and thus between Akhmatova and her reader by extension: “I can,” she declares, write a testament to that which I and so many others have witnessed. Waiting outside the prison, Akhmatova is just one in a crowd—it is not her suffering that she is asked to write, but “this”—shared equally among them. But it is on her shoulders alone that the responsibility to write falls. Akhmatova’s poetic impulse and her instinct to memorialize comes from a knowledge of her own responsibility as a poet to her fellow citizens.

To fulfill that responsibility, Akhmatova needed to articulate her reality in a way that broached the boundaries of her individual subjectivity but was out of the clutches of the state apparatus—to create a poetic memory of the purges in a way that is not controlled by the state. She needed to ap-

peal, in other words, to cultural memory: a kind of memory that, as Jan Assmann defines it in “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” is articulated through images, poems, and symbols, and crucially used to give life to a collective sense of identity. Akhmatova makes that appeal in the second part of Requiem’s Epilogue, dissolving her individual subjectivity into the suffering masses for whom and through whom she speaks. She insists on her identity as a singular voice and poet, culminating in the passage describing a monument to be built in her memory:

А если когда-нибудь в
этой стране
Воздвигнуть задумают
памятник мне,
Согласье на это даю
торжество,
Но только с условием —
не ставить его
Ни около моря, где я
родилась:
Последняя с морем
разорвана связь,
Ни в царском саду у
заветного пня,
Где тень безутешная ищет
меня,
А здесь, где стояла я

триста часов
И где для меня не
открыли засов
[...]
И пусть с неподвижных и
бронзовых век,
Как слезы, струится
подтаявший снег,
И голубь тюремный пусть
гулит вдали,
И тихо идет по Неве
корабли.

And if it so happens one
day they agree
To raise a memorial some-
where to me,
I'll give my consent to the
monument planned,
But on one condition,
which is - that it stand,
Not down by the sea, where
I entered this world:
I've cut the last links that
once bound us of old,
And not by the tree-stump
in old Tsarsky Sad,
Whose shade seeks me still
with disconsolate love,
But here, where they let me
stand three hundred hours,
And never so much as un-
bolted the doors.
[...]

And may the snow, melting,
well forth clear and strong,
Like tears from my eye-lids,

unmoving, like bronze,
And may the lone pris-
on-dove coo from afar,
And boats travel silently
down the Neva.⁵

Requiem, which began with a memory, ends on an appeal to memory—Akhmatova declares “the hour of remembrance is with us again.” She addresses the countless women whose voices wove their way into her poem, speaking to them like a gentle mother—“I see you, I feel you, I hear you.”⁶ All the women she describes are each, in their own way, a representative for a type of suffering: “There’s one they scarce dragged to the window, and one / Whose days in the land of her forebears are done.”⁷ These women bear no names, and could easily be fictional characters rather than historically rooted, realistic figures. They are necessarily nameless, because although Akhmatova would “like to remember each one by her name, / ...they took the list.”⁸ A mysterious and ominous they, the agents of the Soviet state, is at fault for the victims’ eternal anonymity. Because the state is responsible for the repression of the memory of the victims’ suffering, Akhma-

tova sets herself the task of counteracting this repression. In *Requiem* she does exactly that. The poem, and the monument erected in her honor in 2006, create memorials to the purges in both language and bronze. Akhmatova describes nameless women, but insists on remaining in possession and control of her own name: as a poet, she uses her gift to shape and construct the memory of her that Soviet culture will carry with it to posterity. What is unique about the kind of cultural memory inscribed by *Requiem* is that it lacks both the organization of an institutionally buttressed

operation and the conscious self-definition that is so often abused by a state with a vested interest in promoting a politically attractive mode of identification. Cultural memory, as Asmann understands it, depends on what he calls the “concretion of identity,” the moment where “a group bases its consciousness of unity and specificity upon this [structure of] knowledge and derives formative and normative impulses from it, which allows the group to reproduce its identity.”¹⁰ However, this moment in *Requiem* is complicated by the poem’s resistance against a state that repressively enforces

a false identity. Requiem creates a space for a silent community of readers and witnesses persisting in secrecy, without the legitimacy of state recognition. Thus we have an attempt to produce cultural memory without statism; cultural remembrance without state-sponsored amnesia.

Akhmatova's makes a clear distinction between "state" and "people" in her request that "if they should silence my mortified lips, / Let one hundred millions for whom my voice speaks-- / Let them take my place, and remember each year / Whenever my day of remembrance draws near."¹¹ The translation here sacrifices accuracy in meaning for accuracy in rhythm—the exact phrase is much more brutal, sounding something like "and if they should silence my tortured lips, through which a 100-million-numbered people screams..."¹² The locus of the action, of the scream, is in the people rather than Akhmatova. She is not speaking for them; rather, they are screaming through her. She insists here that her function as a channel for the voices of the Soviet people will persist even if she

is repressed—that is, her legitimacy extends far beyond the purview of the state, and is acting in a cultural sphere to which the state does not (or ought not to) have access. While she cannot claim access to the full force of cultural memory as Assmann understands it—an underground, dissent culture can never truly claim the degree of institutional strength that a state can—she can make a claim to something that transcends the communicative, that preserves the oppressed memories of the Purges in art.

Memory is made coherent through practice, and state repression of memory operates through interfering with that practice: through the eradication of material objects used for personal remembrance, the intimidation of visitors to the graves of enemies of the state, and the execution of those who would relive and retell their memories. This is especially true when the practice of memory lies in reading or otherwise encountering a work as intimately concerned with its relationship to memory as Requiem. After Requiem was completed, Akhmatova could not publish it due to state censorship, nor even

preserve written copies. Instead she had to spread the poem around among close friends, making them memorize parts of it as she wrote them. One of these friends was Lidia Chukovskaya, whose family had also been victimized by the purges. Chukovskaya's diaries—which never refer to *Requiem* by name, using a code instead—make it clear that despite a lack of official approval, *Requiem* was a refuge for those who had suffered greatly under the Terror.

“There’s an expression: as necessary, as bread or air. Now, I’ll start saying: necessary, as the word ... Forgive me, Anna Andreevna, but even you, having created this, even you don’t understand, how needed it is. Because you were not over there – to the great happiness of everyone ... While I remember myself over there, and I remember those faces and nights ... If only they, over there, could even imagine that this exists...But they will never know. How many lips have been silenced, how many eyes have closed forever ...”¹³

After a brief silence, Akhmatova responded merely—“Thank you.”

While those who have been silenced, whose “eyes have closed forever,” would never have the chance to read or see *Requiem*, the idea that a poem itself could be needed by someone who has suffered something that the author never did—spending time in exile, in the camps—represents a colossal potential for the continued life of the poem on the plane of cultural memory. Especially after *Requiem*’s publication in 1963, the spouses and relatives of victims, carrying the poem down through the generations, would have found solace in the account of suffering and in the redemptive nature of Akhmatova’s pledge to her bystander with the blue lips. Chukovskaya accounts how Akhmatova received a phone call from a woman who was speaking to her “in the name of all your admirers. We thank you for your poems, especially for one of them.” For fear of the wire being tapped, driven by the same concerns that led Chukovskaya to surreptitiously refer to *Requiem* as a work by Pushkin (surely a safe

choice), the woman neglected to mention for which poem she was thanking Akhmatova.

The secrecy with which *Requiem* was discussed and shared further underscores its status as a poetic memorial. The very act of reading it, of hearing about it, in order to keep it alive, was an act of committing it to memory. The texture of the memory, then, and the stakes involved in preserving it, become extremely pronounced, as the process of reading and remembering the poem becomes a process of keeping the memory of the horrors it describes alive. To commit a poem to memory is

to internalize it fully, to attach it in some way to one's identity. So long as *Requiem* persisted, formless, in the memories and imaginations of Akhmatova's followers—however few there might have been—the poem could not be banned and could not be censored, and nor could the memory of the Terror that it preserved. Thus individual memories aggregate into cultural memory, as each individual, through the act of memorizing, becomes a carrier and a distributor of the poem as a cultural artifact. *Requiem* emerged in a milieu that was entirely split off from the semi-commercial

aspect of publishing and control. Akhmatova's insistence on writing and distributing her poetry points to her absolute conviction in the sanctity of her poetic calling. The presence of the poem in the minds of certain people without a presence in the physical world is an altogether ideal manifestation of the unspeakability or the "official" silence surrounding the Stalinist purges. Insofar as the imprisoned were enemies of the state, to mourn their imprisonment and execution—rather than their crime and betrayal of the motherland—was an act of counter-revolutionary dissent and was itself punishable. At a time when a "poem on a scrap of paper could mean a death sentence,"¹⁴ Akhmatova's insistence on writing and distributing her poetry points to her absolute conviction in the sanctity of her poetic calling.

It was to protest the repressive practices of the Soviet state apparatus that Akhmatova stipulated that any memorial in her name should be built in front of the prison, preempting a state-sponsored memorial that would gloss over her story and the real meaning of her work. Akhmatova's fear that the state

would use a commemorative activity as a means of wiping clear the lived and practiced memory of events deemed undesirable to the state-sponsored narrative was far from unreasonable. As Catherine Merridale notes, "potentially subversive memories of the Stalin Years seem to have vanished easily without witnesses to give them credence or narratives to provide them structure."¹⁵ Private memories—what Assmann might call mere "communicative" memory, understood as existing in a spatially and temporally limited setting such as a household¹⁶—could not survive on their own in a milieu where the state insidiously attempted to use public forms of commemoration as a means of eliminating subversive narratives and controlling the dominant discourse. Public acts of commemoration of the Great Patriotic War, for example, glorified "the young, handsome, innocent soldier, the victim who fell in battle repelling the Nazi invader," but "excluded the older men and boys, the women, the victims of disease, accident, and of mass executions carried out by their own side. They excluded, too, the people who fell behind the lines, including in-

numerable victims of continued police repression.”¹⁷ This kind of double-edged remembrance project extended its deleterious fingers into the lives of relatives of the arrested. “Depending upon circumstances and its own perception of *raison d’état*,” Merridale writes, “the Soviet state was as skilled at destroying the material basis of collective memory as it was eager to commemorate the selected fallen of Mother Russia in concrete and stone.”¹⁸ Because of the constant fear of arrest and execution, individual people would destroy the material evidence of their loved ones before the state had a chance to do so. “Photographs would be destroyed, or the faces of the deceased mutilated and erased. Manuscripts were burned, as were letters, keepsakes, and diaries. These acts, which took some time and would have forced a certain amount of reflection on the part of the mourner, might be portrayed as a kind of anti-commemoration, a process which aided mourning in its early stages.”¹⁹

Requiem opens a space of commemoration. Simply reading and remembering the poem preserves the memory of the

nameless millions whose voices make up Akhmatova’s poetic shroud--and importantly, does so without naming them and thus putting them at risk for punishment. Requiem is not, as Harrington puts it, an example of “overt oppositional writing.” Akhmatova is not attempting to write a dissident work, nor even a critique of Soviet culture at large. She is trying to set herself *apart from* the state rather than *against* it, to engender a cultural memory of the Purges that can exist alongside whatever mangled narrative the propagandists in the Kremlin would come up with. Insofar as she is engaging directly with the dominant Soviet state culture, she is fighting against their claim to singular knowledge and legitimate possession of the Soviet people.

The project of Akhmatova’s monument seeks to subvert the state’s attempt at controlling the narrative, but all the while accepting the premise of a state-built monumen rather than dissenting entirely and refusing the honor. Viewed in this light, the conditions Akhmatova places on the construction of the memorial in her name can be seen as a last attack on the state control of cultural

commemoration. Akhmatova preempts the state's decision to build a monument to her, in any number of places, that would celebrate her life while passing over the suffering she endured at the hands of those who would memorialize her. The sea and Tsarskoe Selo—places associated with her childhood—necessarily do not carry the connotation of pain and suffering that Kresty, the prison outside of which she waited for her son, would bear. Akhmatova insists that her memory not be used to undermine the nation's ability to commemorate its traumas. Rather, she wants her likeness to stand forever outside the prison, cast in bronze, just as she did in flesh. She wants to prevent her memorial from being used as a way of forgetting.

Accordingly, over the Neva River, the statue of Akhmatova now cuts a dynamic figure, standing tense and solitary. Akhmatova's body turns away from the prison, as if recoiling from its frightful appearance. Fragments of her clothing are streaming away from the direction of her body as if there is a wind blowing. Her left knee is bent in a way that indicates an imbalance—her body is in

motion away from the prison, or wants to be. This is the passage of time taking form in bronze—Akhmatova herself is constantly moving away from the purges, growing further away from them in time as she grows older. The statue's sense of motion has less to do with dynamism and more with a lack of stability. She is not standing firmly, but is leaning to one side, and her head is turned off to the side in a sign of weakness or doubt.

It is the slight turn of her head that turns this from a monument to Akhmatova's life to a memorial to Akhmatova's suffering, and the suffering of all whom she represented. Her head is turned to face the prison as if by necessity, being drawn back by the memory of the months she spent waiting outside the prison. The turn towards the prison embodies Akhmatova's original intent in demanding that the monument be built outside Kresty: this is not simply a memorial to Akhmatova's suffering, but to Akhmatova's memory itself. The act of remembering something, perhaps involuntarily, is the act of turning your mind—your eyes, your head—to something you would otherwise like to

move away from. Her message to the citizens of Russia is not a positive request to remember the purges in a particular way, but rather an injunction against forgetting. The statue presents a contradiction, a paradox that the Soviet state would not have been able to deal with. How is it that something should be remembered despite being undesirable, destructive, a thing to run away from? Akhmatova would respond that it is precisely the destructive that it is incumbent upon us to remember.

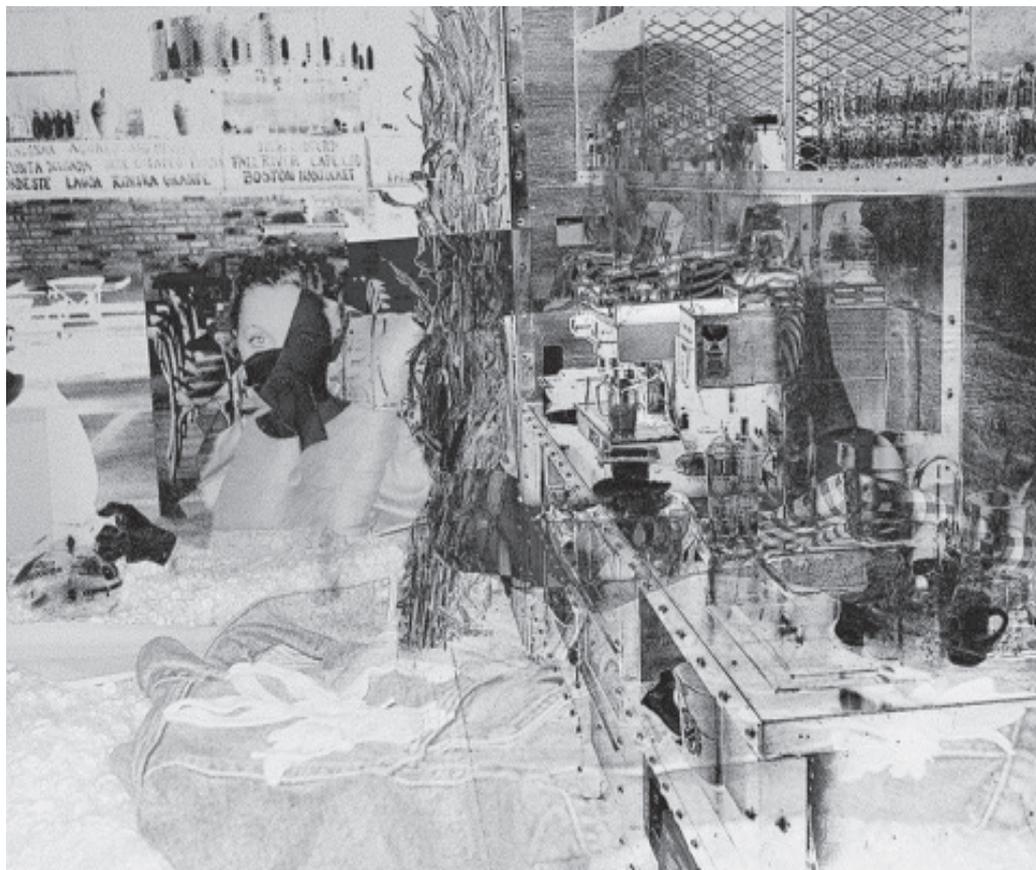
Of course, the monument fails in many ways that the poem it was inspired by succeeds. For one thing, as a tool to keep memory alive, it is less effective. A statue with a concrete and fixed location cannot spread as quickly, nor take root as profoundly, as a poem that can be memorized, performed, or read at night to oneself. The monument is not a major site for pilgrimages, and is not nearly as universally accessible as *Requiem* itself. Nor has the monument been the public rebuke to the Soviet State that Akhmatova envisioned—it was built well after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and a full 40 years after Akhmatova's death. But it now

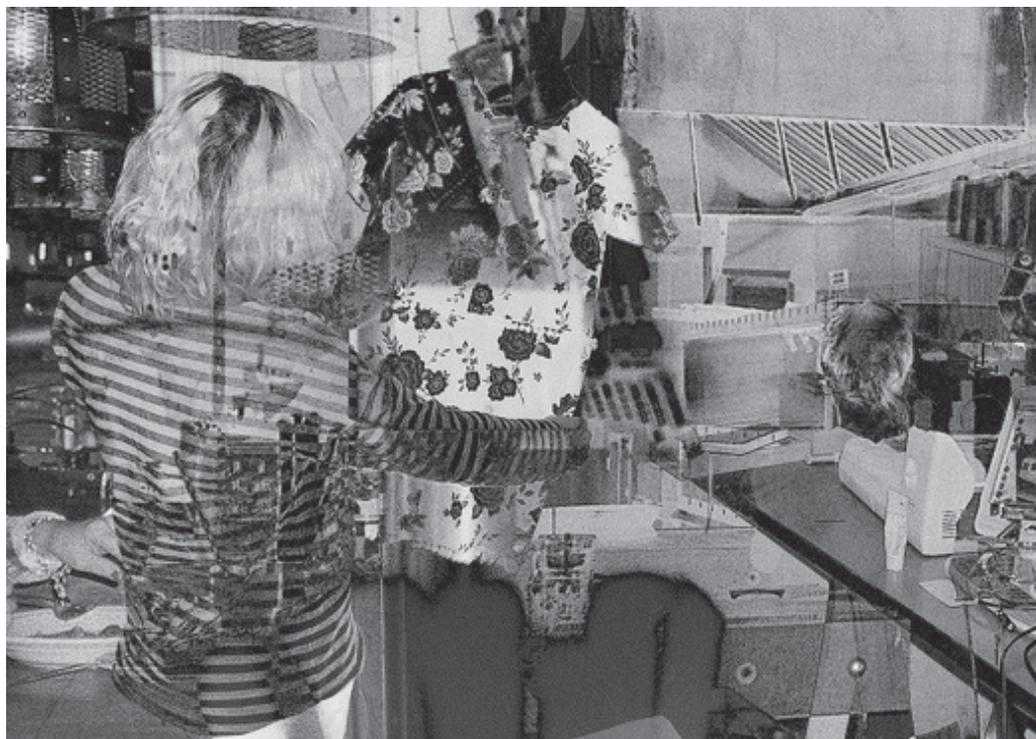
provides a kind of permanent physical representation of her memory that is valuable nonetheless. In its permanence, its refusal to allow its presence to depend on the contingencies of human culture, the monument's physical presence asserts the intransigence and resilience of memory.

In the summer of 2006—a few months before the monument was built—Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that the prison would be transferred to a new location, and that the current structure would be replaced with a residential-entertainment complex.²⁰ The cells where Akhmatova's son—and so many others—were kept will be destroyed, replaced with storefronts and flashing lights, a model of commercialized development. When the plot of land is sold and the old prison is leveled, and especially when the new and predictably garish complex is built in its place, Akhmatova's slender bronze form will take on a new and powerful commemorative function. Staring at the empty space left by the prison and filling it with her gaze, she will be a reminder that while the eyes of the market, and of our

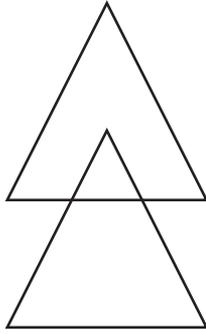
contemporary values, may be blind to the workings of memory and the suffering of generations past, her eyes are not. And as the perennial St. Petersburg snow streams down from her wide-open bronze eyes, perhaps only she will hear how the “lone prison-dove coo[s] from afar, / and boats travel silently down the Nevà.” □

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*YOUTH, THEORY,
THE ACADEMY*

an interview with Nicholas Dames

By Hallie Nell Swanson & Ian Trueger

We wanted to talk about the article you wrote for n+1. As you say, there seems to be some kind of idea that critical/poststructuralist theory is an indulgence of youth and it accompanies a whole myriad of youthful experimentations which will be shelved upon entering the real world. You teach those youths, so what do you make of this?

I wouldn't say inherently that theory is an indulgence of youth, but because of its institutionalization in the American education it's become an indulgence of youth. It's situated at a particular moment in an educational

scheme where it becomes identified very strongly with adolescence, which is peculiar, given the genesis of so much of what we call theory. It then becomes part of a kind of late 20th century bildungsroman of the humanities. My piece ['The Theory Generation', n+1 Summer 2012] was written out of a very strong feeling of ambivalence, not just about theory per se but what theory has done to me and my generation, now that we're old enough to be looking back at it with some perspective.

You haven't been able to shelve it [theory]?

There's a way in which I don't think one does leave it behind. The conclusion I came to is I think everyone takes from it a diagnostic thinking. I think an inherent hermeneutics of suspicion comes with learning a lot of theory. Which often I think can tend to a kind of affectlessness or hopelessness. And that's a habit that I don't think has gone away, and it has consequences that I think are politically interesting and ethically interesting, not always in a positive way. This may have something to do with the way in which theory is taught that could tend in that direction, that is it's appropriated as some mode of irony, and a sort of justification of irony, more than anything else.

Do you think that potentially, theory lends itself to a kind of fatalistic ironism, where one diagnoses one's own world, envisages an alternative mode of existence, but lacks the material to actualize any kind of utopia?

Yes I think it can. In the period I was identifying, which seemed important to me from my own very sharp memories of how I got trained in theory as an undergraduate, - the thing which

tends to drop out would be any kind of what we would call vulgar Marxism. But, you know, even the idea of vulgar Marxism's kind of interesting. The idea of calling something vulgar - fascinating, right? The bodies of theory that I was educated in tended to be more on the kind of deconstructive poststructuralist line with a bit of Frankfurt School theory thrown in to provide a social context. Bodies of theory that had not just a diagnosis but a programmatic plan of action were not at all part of anybody's training. They'd been fairly discredited by that time. And it's only really in the last 5 to 10 years at most that you see those creeping back in.

Is there anything new or unique about this theory-infatuated character type, or is just another kind of youthful paradigm, our own mal du siecle?

I suppose the place to look would be maybe the role of existentialism and postwar Western culture. I think what interested me, and what seemed distinctive about theory, was the sharp division it ended up producing between students who found themselves compelled by theory

and another kind of student that would have ordinarily found their home in humanities. The institution itself does a lot to promote that divorce, so creative writers head in the direction of creative writing programs which are inventions that get wildly popular in the 1990s, and they tend to leave English departments. The old cliché of the English student who wants to be a poet becomes invisible. I think that's probably one of the things that theory does that maybe prior forms of that mal du siècle didn't do. There was nothing intrinsic to say, existentialism, to make you think, there's no point in being a writer - I think maybe even the reverse. But I think that was the feeling for many of us. The default lesson in the humanities - which I don't think anyone was saying explicitly, was there's really no point.

I am friends with novelists who are of roughly the same age as I, and they all have this memory of feeling alienated - thinking, I just wanna go make something, and it turns out that I'm actually being actively dissuaded from it. There's a kind of hopelessness to that, so you leave it. So that hasn't been a plus, and if anything what I was reading [in

the n+1 article] in the careers of some novelists was their having to try to overcome that. And the ways in which they try to overcome that is by many cases sort of parodying theory or turning it into an episode in their lives that can be looked back at with a kind of regret but a little nostalgia. It's sort of like a kind of situating, as a way of saying, alright, I survived that, luckily.

So what are you nostalgic for? What was the biggest mind explosion for you in your days as a student?

What I'm nostalgic for actually myself, is the open contestation between theory and antitheory that I remember from college, which does not exist anymore. I have a vivid memory of being in a classroom that had a mixed population of undergrads and grad students. And the graduate students and professor in this course were at loggerheads throughout the entire semester because the professor was openly hostile to theory and the graduate students were openly in favor of it. And it reached a kind of climax one day where there was an argument going on between the professor and one graduate

student in particular and the professor kind of reached a level of frustration and said -alright I want you to tell me honestly, do you think Paul de Man is a better critic than Goethe. And the graduate student said -all right yes, I do think Paul de Man is a better critic than Goethe, and then the professor said If that's what you think, then you and I have no common ground. The student actually got up and left. But that it what I'm nostalgic for, it does not feel at the moment that there are those kinds of strong internal debates that there were then-it's a far drearier debate because it's not about survival.

It does sound like a very constructive dialogue to have.

I find it hard to imagine that discussion happening now. We live in a much more pluralist universe where we feel like there's no consequences to taking either of these choices. Seeing that play out and seeing that people felt so passionately about it got me interested and it said to me that there was something important going on in this discipline and it was reason for me to actually read de Man, try and figure out what I thought. I dont think that

exists anymore, and it's been part of theory's naturalization - it's no longer threatening, it no longer just finds you in certain ways, it's just assumed And that's finite, you can't artificially create it, you can't pretend the stakes were there when they're not.

You say in your article that theory is normalized now. But do you think it's all on an equal footing with the canon? Can you pick and choose between them?

I think it's on an equal footing and unfortunately, where we are now, students think of theory as a kind of dressing - it's the last thing you sprinkle on. A little bit of Derrida will enhance the flavor. But it doesn't proclaim you as an adherent, and I think that's what it certainly did 30 years ago. Certainly where I went to college, to have used Derrida in a paper would have marked you as a particular kind of person. There was a whole set of suppositions about the way the world worked that you were claiming you bought in to. And after a period of time it then becomes a kind of style, a style you can play with for a little bit and then abandon, and now it's just another ingredient I think. There's

an honesty to that - there's a way in which that's right, and there's a kind of honesty to a pluralistic university. These are all tools and we should be free to use the tools that we think are appropriate to the task at hand. But there's certainly a loss of drama.

I was thinking about Bourdieu, and his work on distinction. Can we frame theory in these terms of cultural capital, that knowledge of theory indexes one socioeconomically? How class-specific is theory?

Well, I feel less confident in saying what it does now, but it certainly at one point did. And I think this is one of the places where in some sense the project of theory in the American academy ran a bit aground, in that it became so quickly identified with a section of the elite, and it didn't address that status in any self-conscious way. Did it lose whatever social momentum it might have had at one point? Not entirely - I will say that there is an aspect of theory very broadly put that did perhaps promote some kind of egalitarianism and that would probably be in the direction of identity studies, I think. If theory ever had a kind of practical suc-

cess in this country, it would be around gender and sexuality - as far as things like legislation and practices in different institutional environments, that probably did have a real impact.

But outside of that, it's hard to see where it didn't just become marker of - and this is just gonna sound cynical - having had enough time away from the pressures of the marketplace. You can indulge in this for a time before you abandon it. It's the sign of leisure. This is what I would say is the privilege of a certain stratum of American teenagers. That's where theory would find its home.

I don't think, at least in my experience, that ever really got fully worked out, except that it does maybe seem to be constitutive of a kind of embarrassment, and maybe the avoidance of certain kinds of Marxist thinking. A tendency toward more almost fatalistic hopelessness is much more appealing than anything that would have pointed to you as being a privileged member of any kind of system. It's only in the last 10 years that that has alleviated a bit. There's more of a sense now, I think - even if a false one - that everyone in the liberal arts is in the same socioeconom-

ic boat, and its not a good one.

We asked Professor [Bruce] Robbins about the term 'champagne socialist'- if the academic has to live by their credo. Do you have any thoughts on that?

I don't know if I have any thoughts on that except that that seems to me only a question that would have arisen in the last decade. That's a question that no one was asking in the period that I was being trained in this. I think it's great that that ques-

ception on this to an extent, and if there's anything about Bourdieu that happens when you read it it's to make yourself reflexively uncomfortable about where you stand - but [the popularity of Bourdieu] too seems a slightly more recent phenomenon.

Theory has its own specific language and is easy to parody - the best example of that rhetoric you reference in your article is 'I'm finding it hard to introduce myself, actually, because the whole idea of social introductions is

A tendency toward fatalistic hopelessness is much more appealing than pointing to yourself as privileged

tion is on the table. What are the obligations of the academic, what kind of institutional politics do we need to be practising in relation to what is probably the default mode among a lot of humanities majors, something like democratic socialism. What does that entail for us? I'm just fascinated by the fact that that was never asked. And it's class that seems to me in many ways the kind of empty category of the American version of theory, that it may be that Bourdieu is an ex-

so problematized? [From Teju Cole's Open City.] Does this particular register inhibit engagement with it?

Well I love that example too, and what I love about it is, it's such a wonderful joke because of course, at one level it's pure comedy - it's such a stilted, over-educated way of articulating and expressing oneself. But of course it's also right. Oh yeah, introductions are problematic. It strikes that exactly right note as being

at that age when one can see that for the first time but then not being able to articulate it except in a way that's stilted.

I think is right, that might be one of the ways in which theory within the American academy ran in to trouble. Now I think one of the reasons that discourse becomes so easily parodied, frankly, is the belatedness and the thinness with which theory gets taught. So you come to these things without any sense of their background. This is something that Cusset makes his point in his book¹ over and over again, that the American student reads Derrida without ever having read anything like Heidegger, let alone Hegel. My example that's close to my heart is Roland Barthes, who is uniquely a product of the French educational system. If you don't understand what that system does, you don't understand what he's often up to, so when I teach Barthes I actually have students learn about the explication de texte, which is of course a method that doesn't exist in this country, because you don't understand how systematic hermeneutics is, - that there's a method of literary interpretation that is taught to you from age 10 - you don't know what you're

reacting against. It's gonna seem kind of weightless, almost a little nuts, but that's not what's going on. It's a very targeted attack at an educational system. This is also true of Bourdieu.

As far as the role of citizenship is concerned, what do you think about that? It's always struck me as fraught, particularly where France is concerned, where a lot of these theorists come from.

One of the real ironies is that you take a body of thought most of which comes into being honestly in France, in a setting where the educational system is so thoroughly controlled by the state and oriented around the state, and then you transfer it to a national setting where the state is much weaker as a cohesive force. All these kinds of analyses of power structures that one gets in Bourdieu or Foucault that are so heavily about the presence of the state, need to be pretty seriously rethought in the context of your average American college student who is not facing the same pressures. If one can live eighteen- nineteen-twenty years of one life without ever encountering any serious demands from the state, that makes the pro-

gram a little bit different. I think it's impossible to try and critique something you've never really been exposed to. And that's the kind of groundlessness that I think was present in the 80s and 90s - they were being taught a critique of something that in fact didn't exist for them, so there was kind of a pointlessness to it. It was a wonderful pointlessness, it was intoxicating in a way, but it felt really impersonal.

Richard Rorty said something twenty years ago or more now. He said that there was a certain deal that was struck in roughly the eighties, which allowed the culture wars to continue without there being any real consequence to it, in which higher education gave up any claim on secondary education whatsoever and left that to conservatives entirely. We bought each other off, but we could continue to snipe at each other.

They can take them while they're young, and you can then unteach them?

Yeah, that's right. That becomes the de facto model. And it tended to have the effect, and its very much the case still, of removing intellectuals in the United States

from any role in shaping secondary school curriculum whatsoever—we have no impact on that at all. We never even sought to have an impact. This is very far from the case in France. What Bourdieu or Foucault had to say about education matters at the level of the secondary institution. Sometimes it is antagonistic to what the state has planned, but nonetheless it matters. We worked out a kind of non-aggression pact. And this happened organically but it seemed to work for everybody.

So do you think this is why the academy is often alleged to be so divorced from reality?

Possibly...I think there are a lot of reasons for that. But I do think it has made it incumbent upon us to fight back, to try to have more of an impact on the educational system before people reach the age of eighteen. Before they come to us to have dialogues. This concord, if it worked for a certain amount of time, has sort of outlasted its usefulness. A way of thinking about our responsibilities of citizenship is to think of education as a continuum, and not just four magical years where we get to do what

we want and then we release you back into the place from where you came.

I was interested in your description of these characters, the readers of theory as ‘disappointed, maladaptive skeptics.’ Is reading theory really paralyzing? At the same time, though, there’s also this idea of theory as a kind of palliative. What kind of person does theory make you?

It probably will change as what counts as theory changes, and

done to you, and maybe because you’re not quite as pained by it, you will be able to observe it all the better. It produces a kind of livability for you but at the cost of something, maybe at the cost of some sense of agency.

Do you feel a particular legacy of that generation of theorists? Do you think they’ve influenced your practice in some way

I don’t know if I feel any obligation to theory, but I do definitely think that I’m an academic be-

Theory is a kind of local anesthetic. It produces a livability, but maybe at the cost of some sense of agency.

I’m not so sure the answer thirty years from now will look anything like how the answer looks now. Here I am really taking my cue primarily from novelists who’ve been thinking about this - it [theory] seems to have a kind of sedative function. The world is a terribly hostile place and theory is the thing that both allows you to see what’s happening to you and also some exemption from feeling the pain of it. It’s a kind of local anesthetic. You can observe the thing that’s being

cause of it. And I say that not because I felt any particular strong pull in any one direction - I had my preferences, I was the sort of student who was more compelled by something Adorno said than something Derrida said - but that’s less meaningful than the fact that the energy and the contentiousness around theory activated me as an undergraduate. Thomas Kuhn has the phrase ‘normal science’ for the periods in a discipline where everyone kind of agrees on what the dis-

cipline is doing. You just kind of do it for a while and then there's a huge paradigm shift. And those are the moments where you draw a lot of people in, because it feels like there's something very exciting going on - no one can agree on what it means to write a literary criticism or think about cultural artefacts. At that point, nobody could agree on it and everyone hated everyone else. And that was a reason to join, because it felt like intellectual excitement was in the air.

Now that I'm in some sense on the inside, I don't know whether it feels that way anymore or not. I have a slight suspicion that it doesn't - that it's possible now that literary studies has fallen into the mode of normal science. And it may not be that we all agree on what the discipline is, but we all have agreed not to fight about it. And I worry that that doesn't necessarily capture the imaginations of very smart undergraduates in the way that it might have 20 or 30 years ago. It's paradoxical for me to say in some ways that I'm an academic because of theory because I'm not a theorist, I've never been particularly indebted to theory in the work that I've produced - but it's certainly the case that if I

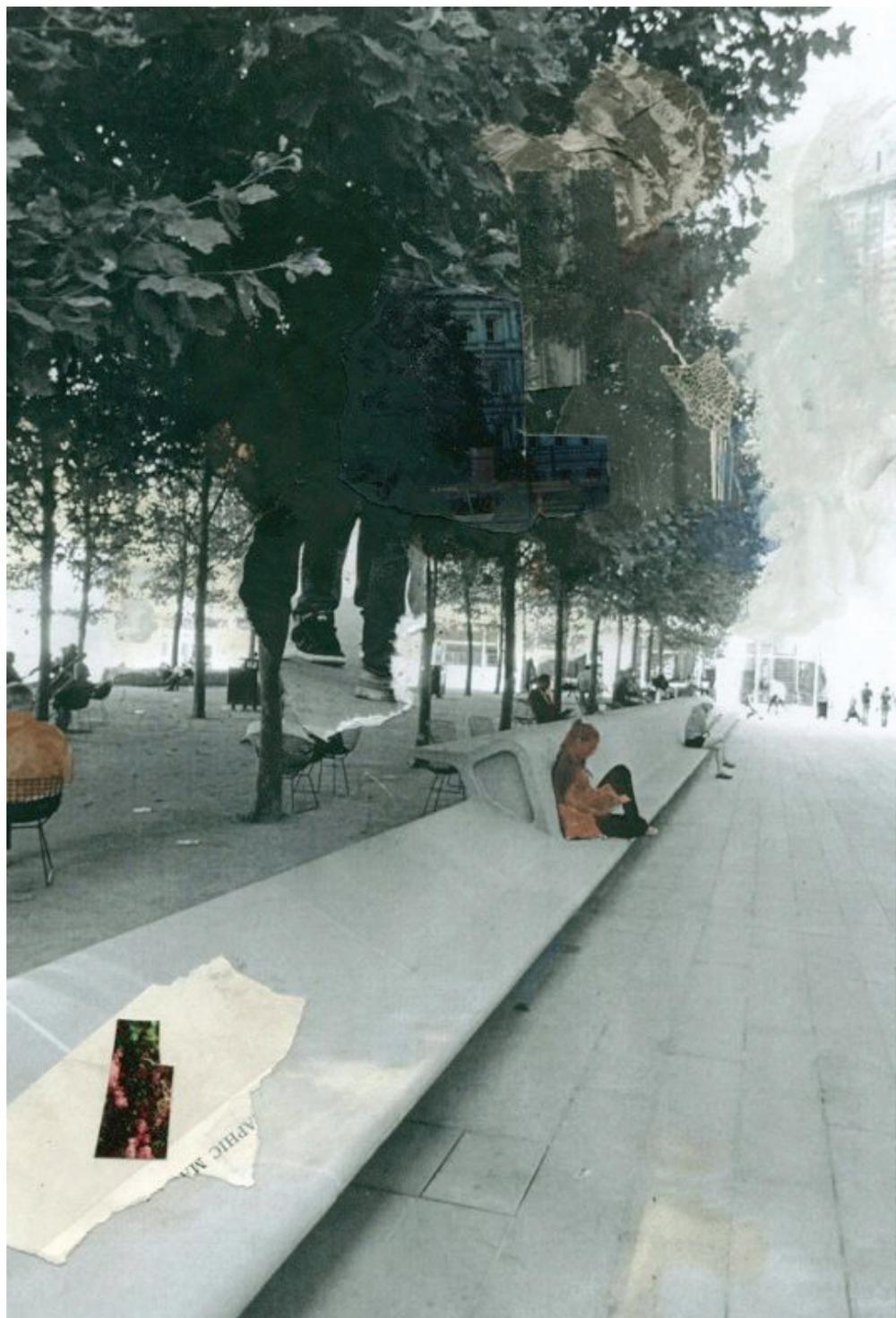
were say 20 years older than I am and had gone to college in the late 60s, it might have been that the field would have felt stodgy, or the excitement would have been elsewhere. I'm not sure I would have ended up where I am.

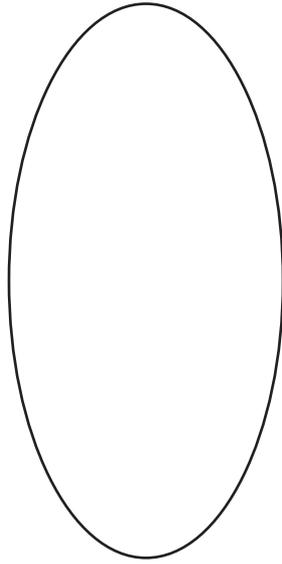
That's what we were thinking, that perhaps today's a stagnant period.

I wonder, I wonder. Again, I feel like I'm too far inside to say, and I also feel like there are a lot of ripples under the surface. There's a, what do you want to call it, stagnancy, or fallow period, that we might be in, and you can also say sometimes a decline. None of us want to feel like we're managing a decline, but in the worst moments it can feel that way, because it doesn't have that urgency - that contentious urgency - that it once did. □

Professor Nicholas Dames is Chair of the English and Comparative Literature department at Columbia University. His research is primarily focused on the novel and 19th century reading practices.







*DIASPORIC DANDIES:
OSCAR WILDE'S
AESTHETIC LEGACY
IN AMERICA*

By Jonathan Carmona & Jewel Pereyra

Oscar Wilde's dandyish dress turned into a topic of great press interest during his yearlong tour of North America in 1882, where he lectured on aestheticism, love of art for art's sake. Wilde provoked severe backlash from American commentators, who recoiled from the "aesthetic" self-presentation of the outlandishly costumed Irish lecturer, his wardrobe replete with velvet breeches, silken hose, ballet flats, and a beaver coat. Rejecting this challenge to Victorian social and cultural norms, these commentators framed Wilde as repulsively effeminate, while some of the harshest caricatures that

circulated during the tour also depicted him as a black minstrel figure. This construction of the aesthetic-dandy combined related negative ideas concerning male sexuality and racialized masculinity to portray Wilde as a supposedly degenerate "Other."

This racialized dandy image would re-emerge prominently decades later in a very different context. During the 1917-1927 Harlem Renaissance, a time of innovation in African-American literature, music, fashion, and style in New York City, the dandy image came to embody a new, iconoclastic conception of black masculinity. This new "black

dandy” was as controversial a figure as Wilde had been many years before. An examination of the dandy’s trans-historical and trans-temporal genealogy demonstrates how Wilde’s influence on alternative means of expression in America provided new and fluid markers of race, class and gender.

Four years after he graduated from Oxford, Wilde started his American tour, traveling to Northern California during April 1882. While on tour in San Francisco, San Jose, Berkeley, and Oakland, he lectured on “The English Renaissance,” “Dress and Art in Home Decorations,” “Art Decoration” and “The Art of Dress.”¹ As he gave these lectures, Wilde adopted the persona of the aesthetic dandy. Dandyism affirms deep investment in elegant dress and leisure activity, and the man who presents himself as a dandy is often depicted as a self-seeking, if not narcissistic, man with a witty tongue and a pithy use of language. The controversy that the figure of the dandy generated throws considerable light on his time period: On one level, the dandy is subjected to - and oppressed by - dominant views of gender roles, which describe

him as an effeminate character because he does not conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity. Yet as the discourse surrounding the dandy in contemporary sources demonstrates, this alternative men’s dress, demeanor, and style also challenges the public’s perception of race, class, and gender.

Thus, over the course of the tour, Wilde was transformed into an ambassador for an “otherness,” both dangerous and fascinating, that America identified in his dandyism. In 1882, an unknown British paper published four caricatures that traced Wilde’s career before and after his tour in America, including a cartoon of “The American lady who purchased our Oscar’s tresses and ‘banged the chignon’ with them.” “Sure I just bought it because I knew it was Irish,” she was depicted saying, referring to a wig made from the hair Wilde cut off in the previous image.² As this drawing illustrates, Wilde’s Irish hair came to simultaneously embody a distinctive racial identity (deemed inferior by racial pseudoscience) and an aura of fashionability. Through the act of appropriating something identified as “Irish” and claiming it for fashion, Wilde’s aesthet-

ic-dandyism was transformed into the mark of a racialized “other.” Wilde’s Irish identity and his androgynous style were also conflated in the pejorative commentary on Wilde published in American publications such as the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Harper’s Weekly*, and *Life Magazine*.

The use made of Wilde’s Irish identity is particularly important given the historical context of these commentaries. At this time, Irish immigrants and African Americans faced many of the same negative stereotypes. According to Gwen Sharp,

In many cases the same negative characteristics attributed to Africans and African Americans (sloth, immorality, destructiveness) were often also associated with the Irish. In fact, some scientists believed the Irish were, like Africans, more closely related to apes than to other Europeans, and in some cases in the U.S., Irish immigrants were classified as Blacks, not Whites.³

To illustrate how African Americans and Irish immigrants were similarly subjected to dehuman-

izing racial stereotypes, Sharp points to nineteenth-century political cartoons that portray Irish men with famine relief money as violent and apelike.⁴ This set of stereotypes was used to denigrate Irish identity. For example, in *Life Magazine*, dated 11 May 1893, there is a monkey dressed in a bib, eating with utensils in a zoo chamber.⁵ The cartoon reads: “We’ve dared to call the monkeys in the Zoo by Irish names.”⁶ Sharp argues that the dehumanizing depictions of the Irish as drunk and infantile derived from Charles Darwin’s theories of evolution, which were used by many professionals and leading scholars to justify racism in the 1800s. Here the depiction of the Irish as “monkeys in a zoo” is a shorthand for evolutionary inferiority, an insult that becomes associated with the figure of the aesthete.

Californian newspaper commentaries during and after his April 1882 visit characterized Wilde in a way similar to the caricatured Irishman of *Life*. Although Wilde dressed in a cosmopolitan, high art, aesthetic manner throughout his lecture tour, he was nonetheless presented as an apelike figure, as in this 1897 article from the *San*

Francisco Chronicle, “Bohemian Experiences of Oscar Wilde and Sir Samuel Blake”:

And, so, in the course of time, Oscar Wilde was regarded in about the same light as the wild men of Borneo. His keeper had made a binding agreement with Oscar... he was valuable to his keeper as an object of curiosity. He should not cut his hair until the expiration of his contract. He might dine out, but on those occasions he was to appear in his esthetic costume—knee breeches, velvet coat, silver-buckled shoes and lace ruffles.⁷

Here, author Dan O’Connell racializes Wilde (“about the same.. as the wild men of Borneo”) and portrays him as a degenerate animal: he has a “keeper.” O’Connell’s depiction relies on Wilde’s membership of a colonized people and his ambiguous gender presentation. By referring to Wilde as a caged figure with little agency, O’Connell renders him a spectacle synonymous with popular American freak shows - and puns crudely on a real act called the “Wild

Men of Borneo,” which featured two brothers, born in 1825 and 1827, who were considered “dwarf” and took part in American traveling exhibitions. These ideas clearly underscore the heavy racial and colonial attitudes towards dandyism, Irishmen, and their joint relationship to primitivism.

Similarly, an 1882 series of trading cards caricatures Wilde as alternately Irish, Dutch, American, African American and Chinese.⁸ The Dutch, white-haired Wilde is surrounded by sunflowers and lilies; the card reads “Strike me with a sun flower,” and money signs decorate the flower and vase.⁹ The Irish Wilde is adorned in a stereotypical green coattail, with red hair and a top hat and the words, “Begorra and I belave I am Oscar himself.”¹⁰ The African American figure, dressed in a white frock with a blue bow, lovingly holds and kisses a lily, saying in vernacular: “Ise gwine for lo wushup dat lily lease it sembles me.”¹¹ From the Irish pastoral to the Southern plantation, these cards suggest a relationship between Wilde’s Irish identity and slave labor, sunflower and cash crop. Out of all the prints, the African American figure is the

most effeminate: his hands are on his hips and his lips are full and pink. The declared “semblance” between the lily and the figure imbues this blackface Wilde with a feminized, virginal sexuality. These cards demean Wilde’s persona by associating him with femininity; in a parallel process, they also deflate Wilde’s cosmopolitan image. Associating Wilde with degrading caricatures of the minstrel figure ridicules the aesthete’s supposed high-class pretensions, instead placing the dandy within a distinctly “othered” category of degenerate style.

Wilde’s racialization foreshadowed the later adoption of the figure of the dandy by the New Negro Movement in the twentieth century. Decades after Wilde’s tour of America, as the Harlem Renaissance took hold in New York City, the New Negro movement, consisting of black intellectuals, artists, and professionals, sought to assert new black identities. This included the figure of the new black dandy. Similar to the Wildean dandy, the black dandy had a highly distinct and stylized sensibility: he wore tailored, decorated suits that hyperbolized upper-class business attire, experiment-

ed with bold colors, and mismatched prints. As with Wilde before him, the black dandy, too, inspired controversy, especially in African American communities.

While the New Negro Movement and the Harlem Renaissance strove to reinvent and uplift the black race to a bourgeois respectability, the dandy character was often seen as a “race traitor” that worked to “fulfill the wish of racial transcendence... as a mode of white aspiration/identification.”¹² Members of the black literati did not want to associate with black dandyism, which was perceived as a “Post-Victorian” and white “bohemian world of aesthetics, excess and sexual freedom.”¹³ As Monica Miller puts it: “a dandy is a kind of embodied, animated sign system that deconstructs given and normative categories of identity (elite, white, masculine, heterosexual, patriotic) and reperforms them in a manner more in keeping with his often avant-garde visions of society and self.”¹⁴

Miller also draws a diasporic trajectory of the relationship between black slaves and fashion, which challenges American ideals of race, class, and gender. She

writes:

Whether [Africans arriving in the Americas] were to become house slaves, field hands, or urban blacks used as domestics, apprentices, or managers, their new lives nearly always began with the issuance of new clothes. The clothing was frequently modified and augmented by the enslaved to indicate their ideas about the relationship between slavery, servitude and subjectivity. When racialized as black, the dandy's extravagance or tastefully reserved bodily display signifies well beyond obsessive self-fashioning and play with social hierarchies.¹⁵

Moreover, Miller writes that black dandies "as queer or square performative beings... are creatures of inventions who continually and characteristically break down limiting identity markers and propose new, more fluid categories within which to constitute themselves."¹⁶ Thus, by using fashion to assert new identities, the dandy character became a medium for queer African American men to recreate

themselves--a trend that continued from the post-Reconstruction era and through the New Negro Movement of the 1920s Harlem Renaissance into contemporary culture, as in Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston* and the work of artist/photographer Ike Ude.

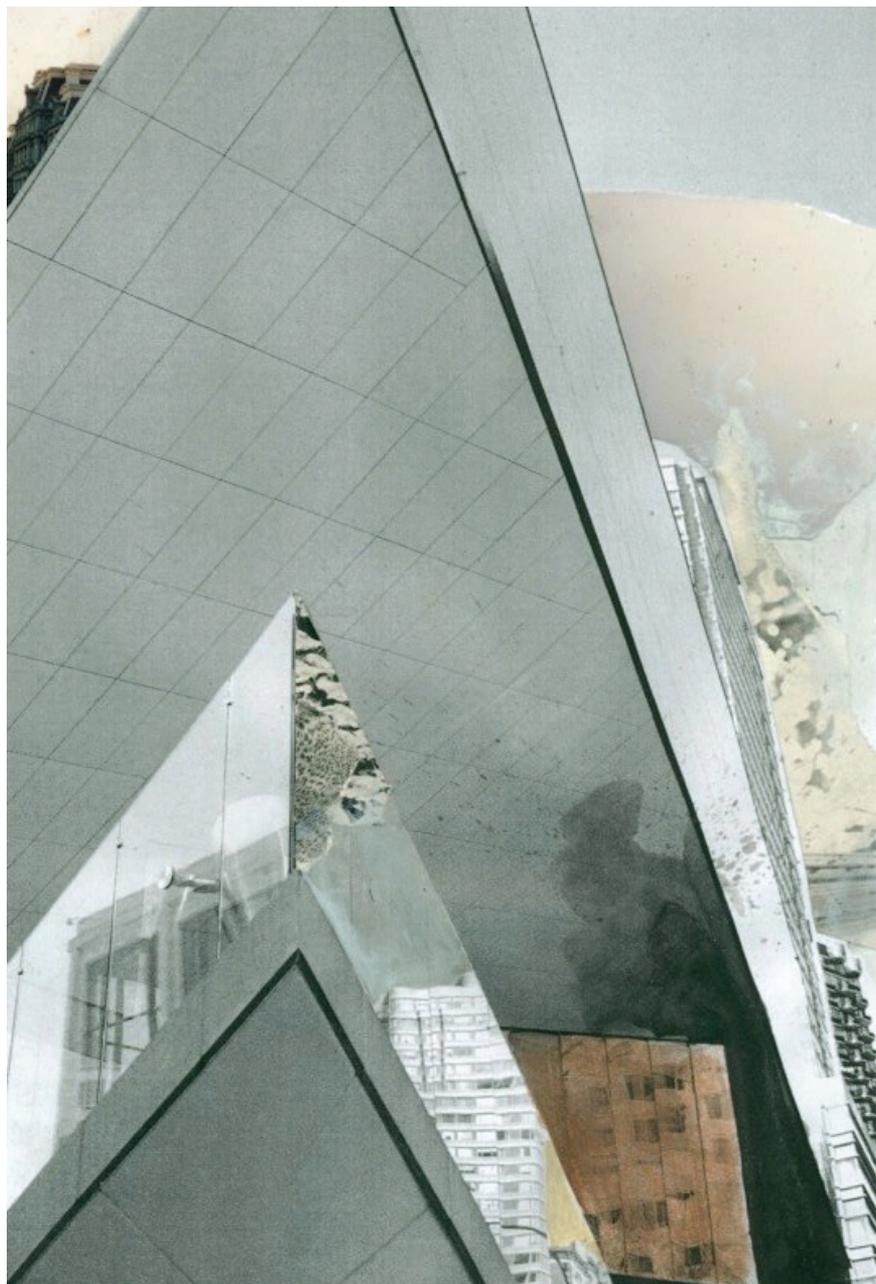
The black dandy appropriated the figure of the European dandy to overtly imitate aristocrats in order to disentangle and remap black social identities that interrelate sexuality and race together. Wilde's racialized dandyism was an insult leveled by his opponents; for the black dandy, however, it was a mark of racial assertion. Moreover, the black dandy, like Wilde's fictional dandies from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to *An Ideal Husband*, blurs the lines of gender, class, and race and re-performs them in order to present new possibilities of identity. According to Elisa Glick, in "subverting this cult of authenticity, the black dandy offers himself as a theoretical way out of the double bind of modern African-American identity.... [by embracing] the contradictions of modernity." The black dandy develops what Glick calls "a characteristically African-American idiom that

combines the elemental energy of primitivism and the stylized modernity and artificiality of decadence.”¹⁷

The Harlem Renaissance precipitated the adoption of racial and sexual stereotypes previously attached to Wilde during his 1882 American tour. The stigmas which dogged Wilde were transmuted into conscious acts of defiance. New forms of dandyism emerged from African American culture that defied sexual and racial ideals of respectability. The dandyism of the Harlem Renaissance coopted Wilde’s dandyism by emphasizing the agency of individuals within the movement, rather than external stereotypes. The dandy contradicts, challenges, and reformulates rigid and normalized classifications of gender, class, and race. Oscar Wilde’s dandyism, although harshly denigrated, provided a platform on which subsequent minority cultures could facilitate change. □

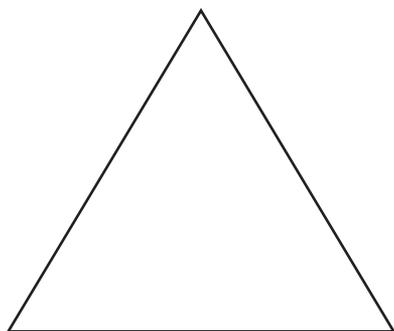
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*INTERNATIONALISM,
INTELLECTUALS, ISRAEL*

an interview with Bruce Robbins

by Ian Trueger

I'd like to start with a quotation. You said, "every American except the very poorest has an objective and appreciable interest in the continuing exploitation of the rest of the world, the siphoning off of resources so as to support a disproportionate level of comfort here." You talk about how inaction is built in to the system we inhabit. Given the interests that the American public have in continuing this exploitation, how can they be expected to take any action?

I don't believe that people always act on their self interest, at least in a crude and absolute way. I

mean humanitarianism is a reality, for example. Humanitarianism should not be understood as always self interested, although sometimes it is. It certainly has been in American foreign policy on any number of occasions. I also have a dialectical view of history and, I suppose, of social action. That is, I think there are impulses, even within consumerism, which would encourage people to recognise the political meaning in their acts of individual, seemingly private consumption, and also want to fashion, by acts of consumption, a different self than the self they otherwise put up with for the time being.

The locavore or “eat local” movement is an example. It involves people being willing to forsake certain things to which they have access in the marketplace in order to live more sustainably, according to their ethical principles. It’s not a reason for immense hopefulness, but it’s something. That impulse finds a certain support in the asceticism which is, going back to Max Weber, one of the founding impulses of the capitalist system: delayed gratification. It’s not a solution in its own right, of course. But it’s a reminder that capitalism has its internal contradictions. On the one hand, we are asked by capitalism to be hedonists and buy all the (excessive, unnecessary) things the system produces. On the other hand, we’re asked by capitalism to be ascetics, to delay our gratification and to fashion ourselves and so on. These demands are at war with each other and at the point where they pull in different directions, there are possibilities for politics to happen.

I guess this ties in to your whole idea of the ‘sweatshop sublime,’ which you describe as a moment of enlightened consumer consciousness. In your essay on the

subject, you talk about how for any internationalist anti-globalization politics to emerge, such a moment needs to manifest itself in a meaningful way. What’s your diagnosis?

There are times when I feel encouraged and there are times when I feel extremely discouraged. There are times when I feel that people, in this country in particular, are extraordinarily provincial, and unaware of the way decisions that are made here have consequences on people living in other places. It’s like we say to ourselves, I have enough to worry about just feeding my family, I’m not gonna worry about that; I’ll let them worry about it. These are discouraging thoughts, obviously. It may be, down and dirty, that we won’t think about it unless we get a very strong push from somewhere else. It’s possible that in the decline of American hegemony, there is a sort of hope for global justice. There’s certainly no guarantee. The idea that the US would be replaced by a new global hegemon, say China, is no guarantee anything would be fairer, even for the Chinese. But there are moving parts, there’s lots of rising and falling going on, and within that

it seems to me it's at least worth making some kind of effort.

In your book as well as in the social sciences at large, the term 'toothless liberalism' seems to be thrown around a lot, almost to the point of it being a kind of joke. What do you make of this?

It's certainly an argument that is made about cosmopolitanism a lot, that it's toothless. How many divisions does it have? Never enough, right? How much real power lies behind it? So that's one sense of toothless liberalism. The other one is the sense in which liberal cosmopolitanism is toothless, in that people feel like they've done their duty when they're nice to people who look different or talk different or eat different food, and by eating different food they're somehow making themselves world citizens. I don't think that actually accomplishes anything.

I guess I meant toothless in reference to the wider liberal American public, which seems to champion the whole idea of 'tolerance'. In the documentary about Edward Said and Daniel Barenboim's East West Orchestra, Barenboim condemned

the term, saying that tolerance means accepting while saying "although". It doesn't imply stepping out of oneself. It's a bit perfunctory.

I'm not a fan of tolerance among other things because it can be a little condescending. It's not a word that I use. I'm not against it, but it's not part of my program.

You said, I think, in your essay 'Blaming the System', that ignorance isn't an excuse anymore with the rise of media-technology. Do you place any hope in that?

Yeah, I do. The people who've done polls have discovered somewhat dishearteningly that most people will use the Internet to find opinions that are like the ones that they already hold rather than expose themselves to views that are different. But even if that's true, it doesn't mean it's going to stay true. The technology is there for people to listen to and hear other voices. I'm not enough of a media person to be able to say what kind of a change would be necessary in order for that technology to do the work that I think it can do, but I do believe it can help. I think it will

depend on your generation, not on my generation. You guys are born into this.

Perhaps not as much as you think! I'd like to segue into talking a bit about the role of the intellectual. You've talked in some of your essays about how activism can give way to a certain kind of self-aggrandizement, and I was wondering how you locate that within the academy itself?

I don't believe that to do the work of a literary critic well is to become an activist. To do the work of a literary critic well is to do the work of a literary critic. It's to talk in an interesting way about literature or culture more generally. I don't think that there's a natural connection with activism. It's a temptation for people [academics] to think that they have fulfilled all their citizenly duties by doing the work that they have to do anyway in order to get paid. That's a very comforting thought but it's not the way things work. So, if you want to be an activist - some people are good at it, some people want to do it - you'll probably have to find something you can do outside the university. I mean, I'm not against certain themes of ac-

tivism which are really intrinsic to the university - the protection of fellow scholars for example, as in the MLA resolution which is being voted on right now. That's certainly something that calls for activism within the university by scholars. Or guaranteeing more or less fair wages and decent working conditions for the very large number of non-tenure track faculty who now work in universities. These are obvious things that should generate activism in universities. But even then, I hope people will do more than two things.

But in terms of those people who seek to fulfil a public intellectual role, in say, the vein of Edward Said, or Slavoj Žižek, renouncing capitalism at large - how far do you think these denunciations actually get outside the academy? Do you think they transgress the boundaries of the ivory tower?

I'm quite optimistic about that actually. Said is a good example, but if you want an even more dramatic one, take someone like Noam Chomsky. Chomsky is, if not the most famous intellectual in the world, then certainly one of them, and he did something

that I hope the younger generation will aspire to emulate, that is to say, at least those who are going to become scholars. He took a reputation that he had acquired in the academy, a kind of a prestige based on his achievements in the academy in linguistics, which had nothing to do, at all, with the public. To quote Sartre, he got involved in stuff that was not his affair. No-one was asking him to talk about it. And he did it very well, using a kind of training and a kind of access to resources of information that not everybody has, and an ability to express himself that presumably all of us as academics have some degree of. He turned that, through very hard work and commitment, into his status as number one public intellectual in the world. Same story with Said. Said started his career simply as a very brilliant literary scholar.

Apparently he taught no classes on the Middle East his entire time at Columbia.

No, he never did. I had the good fortune to take a class at Harvard with him while I was a grad student. He never talked about that at all. His course was on theories

of the origin of language. But he clearly had trained himself to speak and write. He probably had, to some extent, to speak and write in a less academic way in order to do that, but there was a certain amount of training, a certain amount of capital, if you like, that he could use, that he could cash in on, in order to get himself heard on a more public stage, and that's what he did. That's something that people can do on a smaller scale, with, you know, an op-ed for your local newspaper. You don't realize how good you are at doing things that most people are not good at. You don't realize until you try it.

With that in mind, what do you think of Said's notion of the intellectual as first and foremost an oppositional figure?

I am not a big believer in the intellectual speaking truth to power, as I tried very feebly and timidly to say to him when he gave me the 'Representations of the Intellectual' lectures to look over right before delivering them publicly. There's no answer in that to the question of why power would listen. So if you want a theory of the intellectual, you need a theory of the intellectual

as situated in a social landscape, not as a heroic isolated individual somehow facing a Power with a capital P. I think we need a much more detailed notion of where power is located, rather than a kind of mythic one, and we need a much less mythic idea of the heroic, isolated individual. This applies to Orwell as well. On a certain level, maybe everyone wants to be the lonely hero standing up to power, the guy standing in front of the tank in Tiananmen Square or whatever. But where are all the other peo-

I'm fascinated by an episode in Orwell's life which hasn't been much talked about. In 1942-43, he worked for the BBC World Service, and was in the position of trying to talk South Asians into joining the war effort against the Nazis. As he realized, this was a very, very hard sell, because they knew their colonizers up close and personal, but who were the Nazis to them? The Nazis hadn't done anything to them, whereas the British had put a lot of them in jail, and some of Orwell's friends whom he asked to

I am not a big believer in the intellectual speaking truth to power. There's no answer to why power would listen.

ple? We need a model which includes all the other people.

If I'm right, that's what you were trying to say in your essay 'Said and Effort,' where you were talking about how Said does have a mode of belonging; he is situated within a landscape, that of the Western academy, despite any of his protestations to the contrary. But on the subject of Orwell - what role is he going play in your upcoming project?

be on the show with him said - George (or Eric), why should I do this for the colonial power? This goes back in a way to the Eat Local stuff, the question of what one eats. I have found some very strange elements in those radio broadcasts having to do with rationing. Orwell is much too enthusiastic about rationing, to the point where some of his bosses in the Ministry of Information actually censored him. They thought, no one is going to believe this, that you're saying

the population is so happy about rationing. And I make a connection between those broadcasts, and the enthusiasm he expressed for rationing, with arguments he made earlier, about how if you want anti-fascist solidarity - if you want solidarity between the British working class and the Indian equivalent - you're going to have to demonstrate that people in England are willing to level out the access to resources between themselves and Indians, which at this point is something like twelve to one. If even workers in Sheffield are enjoying so much higher of standard of living than the Indians I'm talking to, how am I going to get the Indians on our side? Answer: you're going to have to demonstrate, to the Indians, that even people in Sheffield - let alone people in the more prosperous South - are willing to live on less. I want to argue-- and no one else has said this to my knowledge-- that because of the solidarity of the war effort, Orwell could draw the conclusion that if the British are willing to live on less during the war effort, they might do the same again for the reasons of global justice, global solidarity. Global justice might provide a moral equivalent to war. Other

motives might lead in the same direction-- a more equitable resource distribution. Anyway, that's my piece on Orwell.

Raymond Williams famously characterized Orwell as both 'exile and vagrant', and I think this is a really important idea to bear in mind when considering Orwell's work. Orwell came from the social milieu of the English upper middle class, but his commitment to democratic socialism saw him shun these ties. To what extent do you see vagrancy as a prerequisite to preaching about social equality? Is Orwell's example one to emulate?

No. No. I think a simple no is probably the only answer. I mean it worked for him. That's great. It gave us a heroic figure and a heroic set of stories which continue to inspire people, and I'm glad they do. But you can get there by many, many different routes. I'm a little bit suspicious of the idea that you have to sacrifice yourself, you have to pay with your own life and your own comfort in order to act in a committed way, in order to have any effect on the world, in order to be believable when you speak about justice in the world.

It's too Christian?

Markedly Christian, I think.

There is a certain asceticism involved in it. But the reason the idea really interested me is that in the UK - in his time as now, I'm sure - the term 'champagne socialism' comes up a lot, and I think to an extent you can extend that to a lot of people within the academy who preach ideals. What do you make of that whole term?

Well, I think it's unfair to a lot of people who don't have champagne every day. Here in the US we have versions of the same thing. I'm thinking of the so-called trust fund hipster, for example. People are trying to reinvent themselves, and sometimes in quite interesting ways, according to interesting principles, and have a little bit of family money behind them enabling them to do that. There's a very, very long history in which independent incomes have contributed to what are sometimes very good causes. I mean, how did Karl Marx stay alive? It was other people's money. He worked very hard, he wrote his paper articles and so on, but if it hadn't been for -

not mainly his own family's, although a little bit of own family's too - Kapital would not have gotten written. I'm really interested in the rentier as a figure. This is not the same as champagne socialism. This is a word we don't even know how to pronounce! - it's a French word meaning living off unearned income. We don't have our own.

As it turns out, Orwell was fascinated by this figure. I wrote something about this in PMLA's issue on work. Orwell saw it all around him. He didn't say champagne socialism, but he did certainly talk about people who lived off unearned income. At the moment when he wrote *The Road to Wigan Pier*, he thought it ought to be possible to make a cross-class alliance between hardworking people of the working class and hardworking people of the middle class, against people who basically could live off unearned income. The rentiers were not just the aristocracy but also middle class, bourgeois people living off their investments. I'm fascinated by the fact that so much of the discrepancy in income and wealth these days depends on inherited wealth, yet we have not managed to politicise the

figure of the rentier, the figure of the person living off interest from bank accounts and stocks and bonds and so on.

*I wanted to talk about your recent work in regards to Israel. Your film *Some of My Best Friends Are Zionists* was sort of an endeavor to separate the terms, or the association between, Zionism and being Jewish in the United States. Do you think there's any hope to do that in a meaningful way in light of institutions like AIPAC?*

AIPAC has lost lately and very visibly lost, like wanting us to bomb Iran. They were basically told - Sorry, we're not gonna make policy based on what you want. And then there are lots and lots and lots of very small signs of young people in particular who have been raised with the heritage of the civil rights movement, and who are applying the principles of the civil rights movement to the Middle East also, something which in my generation absolutely had not happened. So you'll find peo-

You'll find people who when they think of Israel think of human rights violations, not socialism and kibbutzim.

Yeah! I'm glad you asked, because in this context I can really emphasize my hopefulness. That's what my little documentary is about. There really is a change that has happened, and is continuing to happen, in American Jewish opinion. There are lots and lots of signs of it. One of them is the emergence of a kind of anti-AIPAC lobbying group called J Street, which can do some of the work that AIPAC does, except for different causes. There are political battles that

ple, sixteen year olds even, who when they think of Israel think of human rights violations rather than thinking of socialism and kibbutzim. They're associating Israel with bad behaviour. And that seems to me to have crept into many, many media areas and into public opinion. Frankly, I think the champions of Israel-right-or-wrong are scared. They feel like they're starting to lose their hold on the next generation. And I think they're right to be scared, because they are.

They should draw conclusions and behave differently.

That sounds heartening.

Sorry if that's too heartening.

That doesn't really sound like a paradigm shift though, it sounds more like a de-escalation.

It's pretty gradual. I mean I'd like to see it happen faster. There are a lot of things that are sayable that ten or twenty years ago were not sayable.

But do you think that this movement is too lethargic, given the fact that Israeli settlements keep expanding?

I think dialectically, for better for worse - it's my heritage. So I think that the fact that Israel has just kept stealing Palestinian land shamelessly and playing the American government for fools, increasing the settlements and the land thefts and the land thefts and the settlements, whatever they say they just keep grabbing more and more land - as many people have said, they've killed the two state solution. The two state solution is no longer viable. And that's bad in a way, but

in another way it means that all of a sudden the one state solution is really on the agenda, by default. Only because they've behaved so badly that they've shut off an avenue which many people would have embraced. I myself, some years ago, not ten years ago, might have just said, OK, go back to the green line, go back to the borders of 1967, have two states, it's not really fair, but maybe it's the best that the Palestinians are gonna do. Now, people like me are saying: it has to be one country, one man one vote, a country of all its citizens on an equal basis. That's more radical than the two state solution.

I guess my last question in order to round stuff off concerns your work in regards to the MLA boycott of Israel. Firstly, how does that fit into your conception of cosmopolitanism, and secondly, what's your progress on that?

The resolution is being voted on from now I guess till May. The resolution is a mild and reasonable and academically-centered resolution: it does not ask for a boycott, it just asks for the MLA to speak with the State Department about discrimination that the State Department itself ac-

knowledges has been committed against scholars with Arab names who try to teach or do research or attend a conference in the occupied territories. It's interesting, there's an article in today's Haaretz in which the Israelis have apparently agreed to stop discriminating in exchange for some kind of special visa status. This is hysterically funny as far as I'm concerned. The Israelis are freely admitting to exactly the kind of discrimination that, according to the people who are arguing against the resolution, was not happening. It really does boggle the mind when you hear people, as I heard at the MLA - Cary Nelson, Russell Berman, people like that - say, "There is no discrimination, you have no evidence of discrimination." And then the Israeli government comes out and admits that it is discriminating. I call on them to draw conclusions from the Haaretz article of today. Are they not discriminating even if they say they're discriminating? Is that good enough evidence for you? It seems that the Israel-right-or-wrong people simply won't take anything as evidence of Israeli misconduct.

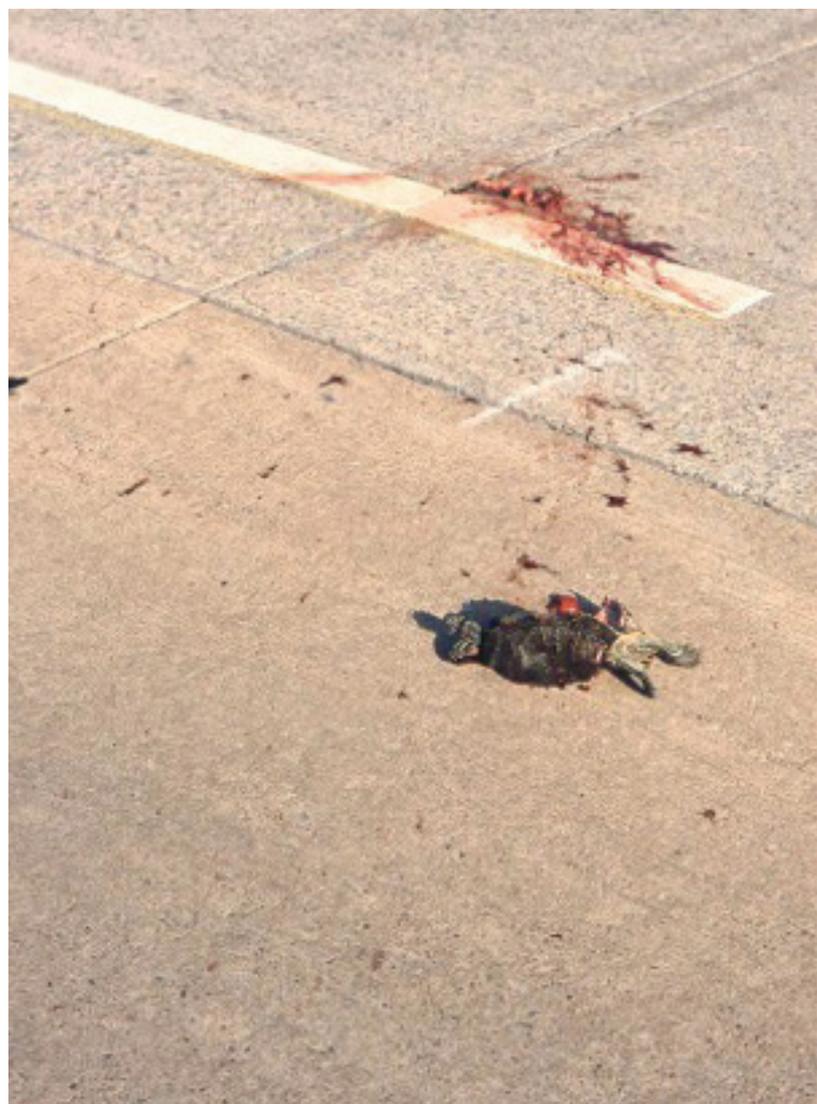
I think when dealing with that

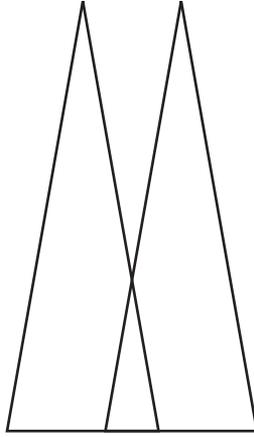
kind of dogmatism, with the Israel 'right or wrong' people, or indeed the Israeli government, you can't try and look for consistency.

You can look but you won't find it. □

Bruce Robbins is a professor in the department of English & Comparative Literature at Columbia University. His most recent book is entitled Perpetual War: Cosmopolitanism from the Viewpoint of Violence.







*LITERATURE IN THE AGE
OF PAPER MILLS:
A MARXIST READING OF
HERMAN MELVILLE*

By Marcela Johnson

Two social groups emerge amidst the mythic geography of Herman Melville's narrative journey, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," each to the other's exclusion. Both the producers and the consumers (the maids and the bachelors respectively) sustain an exploitative form of urban industrialization, although temporally removed from one another. This 1855 short story seems to anticipate Karl Marx's seminal critique of industrialization published almost a decade later. In Marx's conception, industrialization bifurcates society into two

distinct and equally perverse classes—a capitalist bourgeoisie and an exploited proletariat. Melville captures both as his diptych narrative geographically divides these classes: lavish bachelors carouse in "Paradise" and oppressed maids labor in "Tartarus." The opposing worlds are simultaneously connected and severed by paper: this commodity circulates and links the two narrative spaces, yet the bachelors' demand for it necessitates the maidens' subjugation. While Melville's denunciation of the exploitation of the maid-laborers falls under a Marxist framework, he does not

strictly operate within its materialist epistemology. Through its aesthetic and mythic discourse, Melville's story investigates the place of literature in a mechanized society where "undervalu[ing] art is...the custom."¹ Melville extends the Marxist concern with the exploitation of the worker's corporeal experience to the degradation of the artist's creative opportunity, and ultimately questions the efficacy of literature in an increasingly capitalist world.

The crux of Marxist political economy lies in the theories of surplus-value and the circulation of commodities, both of which are tied to the exploitation of human labor. In *Kapital*, Marx argues that workers instill more value in the commodities they produce than what they are paid, and the result - surplus-value - is the residual profit the capitalists retain. Marx points to the development of machines as "a means for producing surplus-value."² With the advent of industrialization, machinery organized within the factory system "augments the number of human beings who form the material for capitalistic exploitation."³ This idea is particularly salient, as

Marx proceeds to argue that the workers become systematically appropriated by the production process; they are "automaton[s]," "instrument[s] of labor," and the tools that fuel the surplus-value driven machine.⁴ Marx abhors this capitalist desire to infinitely maximize individual surplus-value, as this process simultaneously institutionalizes and normalizes oppression of the working class.

The exploitation persists outside the factory in the circulation of the commodities (objects) the workers produce. The value of commodities in the market should correspond directly to the value instilled by human labor, but Marx claims the central problem with the capitalist system arises when the commodities are valued more than their creative labor. The production process is completely abstracted from the purchased product, which disconnects the producer from the consumer and allows the capitalist to maximize the resultant surplus-value in a "restless never-ending" cycle of profit seeking, and a "boundless greed after riches."⁵

Melville sends his narrator to a paper factory located in the

depths of Tartarus, where the description of the exploitation he finds there can be seen as an instantiation of Marxist ideas. Here Melville seeks to expose the disturbing effects of industrialization on the human body through the dehumanization of the maiden factory workers, the result of a gargantuan paper machine. We see this most vividly in the narrator's sublime response to the "iron animals":

"Machinery—that vaunted slave of humanity—here stood menially served by human beings, who served mutely and cringingly as the slave serves the Sultan. The girls did not so much seem accessory wheels to the general machinery as mere cogs to the wheels." ⁶

Marx writes that the "monstrous" effects of industrialization lie in "converting the workman into a living appendage of the machine"—in Tartarus, the maid-workers are reduced to "appendages" and silent "cogs" and their subjectivity is subsumed within the body mechanic.⁷ The final line asserts a significant distinction: the maids are not merely slaves to

the tyrant-like machine, which would suggest that they retain a marginal sense of physical independence, but rather under Marx's terms they become passive "tools" and "instruments" that fuel the machine, the only thing with any agency.

The maid-laborers' own identities reflect the very commodity they produce - blank paper - as it consumes them. "The Tartarus of Maids" teems with imagery of effacement: the women laborers are repeatedly described as "pallid girls" with "pallid faces" identical to the pallid paper they produce.⁸ Melville emphasizes the workers' physical transformation in the narrator's initial reaction to the paper mill. He writes, "At rows of blank-looking counters sat rows of blank-looking girls, with blank, white folders in their blank hands, all blankly folding blank paper."⁹ The overwhelming repetition of the shared descriptor "blank" enforces the idea that the girls and the paper are virtually indistinguishable as the maids take on its characteristics, becoming blank, "empty form[s] without substance," as they are literally converted into the object of their labor.¹⁰

Paper links the bache-

lors and maids as it circulates through their respective geographies. Yet the production process undermines this connection even as it establishes it. The bachelors' opulent lifestyle is implicitly fueled by the exploited maids in "Tartarus": the bachelors are lawyers and "literary [men]" who rely on the continual use of paper.¹¹ While the production and consequent consumption of paper brings these groups "together," the bachelors are abstracted from the object's production process. The way in which Melville yokes "Paradise" and "Tartarus" together reveals the vast distance between these two worlds. Structurally, he divides the narrative into two sections using a void of blank space which enacts the symbolic structure of the story on multiple levels. On the one hand, the separation lends materiality to the physical divide the narrator must traverse from the bachelors' London home, up "bleak hills" and through "rapid waters" to reach the paper-mill.¹² More subtly, however, the space—literally blank paper—is a physical manifestation of the maids' product: Melville impels us to confront the commodity

in question before we join the narrator in the paper factory, a space the bachelors never access.

The rags lying in the factory also tangibly link the capitalist bachelors to the laborers, yet the rags denote a physicality that is not a commodity, but a spatial necessity. The rags arrive at the New England factory from all over the world—"[s]ome from the country round about; some from far over sea—Leghorn and London". The narrator reflects, "'Tis not unlikely then... that among these heaps of rags there may be some old shirts, gathered from the dormitories of the Paradise of Bachelors".¹³ That is, the rags (and consequently, the paper) not only connect the maids and bachelors commercially but also spatially.¹⁴ The rags materially and bridge two worlds; however, this link only further oppresses the maids. The rag-room is a "poisonous" place that clogs the girls' lungs and serves as a continual reminder of the physical remnants of the capitalist society the maids serve. Reflecting on the rag-room the narrator comments, "So, through this consumptive pallors of this blank, raggy life, go these white girls to death".¹⁶

The bachelors' raggy fragments are the capitalist system's sole vestige in "Tartarus," a vestige that dominates the workers' "raggy" lives and paves the way to their death.

Human exploitation is not unique to industrialization, as Melville's mythic language suggests. The title introduces a narrative which echoes and refigures myth; "Paradise" recalls the Garden of Eden and "Tartarus" evokes the Titan's prison of classical mythology, both imagined places outside of the human grasp. Mythical and classical allusions permeate the story through characters like "Socrates"¹⁶ and "Cupid",¹⁷ and physical descriptions of each site as "the Temple" and "the Devil's Dungeon" respectively.¹⁸ These ancient motifs coupled with the absence of any temporal markers indicate that the narrative is not pinned to any particular temporal or spatial context. This implies that the literal events of the story—namely, the mechanized process of human exploitation—transcend a particular historic moment. An image from W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* helps elucidate this:

The only purpose [the

silkworm moth] has is to propagate... it lived in the open, left to its own devices, until man, having discovered its usefulness, was prompted to foster it... [If] we think back to the eighteenth century, it hardly seems possible that even then, before the Industrial Age, a great number of people, at least in some places, spent their lives with their wretched bodies strapped to looms made of wooden frames and rails, hung with weights, and reminiscent of instruments of torture or cages. It was a peculiar symbiosis which, perhaps because of its relatively primitive character, makes more apparent than any later form of factory work that we are able to maintain ourselves on this earth only by being harnessed to the machines we have invented.¹⁹

Marx, Melville, and Sebald all describe the way in which the body and the machine are fused in "peculiar symbiosis" to serve the process of production, yet here Sebald explicitly demonstrates how this symbiosis is

not new. The 18th century loom workers and the 19th century factory workers are analogous to the domesticated silkworms dating from 3,500 BC, both forced into a system of oppression for economic production.²⁰ Melville understands that we are constantly beholden to the “machines” we create. A question emerges: Does industrialization exploit humans in a new or distinct way?

Melville’s story pushes Marx’s materialist argument further to investigate the unique exploitation of the mind through mechanization, a process latent in industrial

production. Not only is paper the material object fueling the production process, but blank paper is also a symbol of the “human mind...something destined to be scribbled on”.²¹ Yet the minds of this world, like the bodies, are blank. The whole factory is defined by this blankness: “You make only blank paper; no printing of any sort, I suppose?” asks the narrator. “All blank paper, don’t you?” Cupid responds, “Certainly; what else should a paper-factory make?” Fitting with the way the workers internalize and take on the characteristics of their industrial product, the maids are rendered

silent throughout the entire story: even when the narrator asks one of the girls a question, she replies with a “face pale with work”—the maids are merely blank bodies, any cognitive function effaced and replaced by work. Their voices are “banished from the spot” and are transferred onto the “hum[ming]” machine. In this way, the “iron animal” machine takes on the life force of the workers, whose world it has rendered devoid of human thought. In Melville’s story, not only is the economic exploitation he depicts an object of critique in itself, but it also becomes a metaphor, and a mechanism, for the degeneration of human ingenuity.

This is not to say that the story implies that industrialization eradicates all human intellect; rather, under this economic system, ingenuity declines, and with it artistic creation. Melville was particularly interested in this concept: In a lecture given in 1859 he laments the dismissal of art, for “to undervalue art is perhaps somewhat the custom now. The world has taken a practical turn, and we boast much of our progress, of our energy, of our scientific achievements—though

science is beneath art, just as the instinct is beneath the reason.”²² “Progress,” as Melville describes, is equated with technological and economic development; art and literature are not figured in the process.

The character of Cupid—the overseer of the machines in the factory—holds the only form of intellectual capital featured in the story: technological knowledge. When the narrator makes a comment about the length of the paper production process, Cupid leaps at the opportunity to display his expertise: “Oh! Not so long,’ smiled the precocious lad, with a superior and patronizing air; ‘only nine minutes’”.²³ Cupid guides the narrator and the reader through the paper factory, and his knowledge is considered “superior” to all others. The narrative complicates this idea slightly, as the figure of Cupid is farcical and cast as a “dimpled, red-cheeked... little fellow,” a “gold-fish”.²⁴ The narrator also comments on Cupid’s “strange innocence of cruel-heartedness” toward the maids, and notes that this hardness is shocking and “more tragical” than any sight throughout the factory—more so than the exploitation

itself.²⁵ With this critical language Melville simultaneously recognizes the utility of Cupid's practical, mechanical knowledge within the factory system and condemns its inhuman limitations.

Technology not only possesses all knowledge, but all form of invention, including reproduction. In "Tartarus" the women are all "pale virgins," and their eligibility to work is contingent upon their inability to biologically reproduce. "We want none but steady workers," the foreman of the paper-mill says, "twelve hours to the day, day after day, through the three hundred and sixty-five days... That's our rule... no married women."²⁶ Here, the human body becomes a sterile machine; the female workers give their lives to the factory and their individual ability to reproduce is transferred onto the "iron animal." This idea is best illustrated through the organic and biological language associated with the factory. Upon his arrival, the narrator immediately notices a "Blood River"²⁷ that passes through the paper-mill. Later, the room where the paper is produced is characterized by "a strange, blood-like abdominal

heat, as if here, true enough, were being finally developed the germinous particles lately seen."²⁸ The factory becomes a perverted system of natural reproduction, even while those who work there are defined by sterility. In such a system where oppression of the physical body parallels that of the mind, the machine successfully absorbs all forms of human creation and leaves them sterile.

It is not only "Tartarus" that is defined by sterility, but also the "Paradise" of the London bachelors. Just as the maids are all virgins, the bachelors willfully cloister themselves in a "Brethren of the Order of Celibacy," separated from the female world, living celibate with "no wives or children to give an anxious thought."²⁹ Instead, the bachelors' thoughts center on their lavish, excessive lifestyle—a sharp contrast to life in the empty, toxic paper-mill. Not only are both groups sterile, but the blank geographical space between the men and women severs and isolates each sphere. There is neither a desire nor possibility for human ingenuity or reproduction in either space: the only thing that connects these worlds is lifelessness, in

the form of blank paper. The sterility of the bachelors and the maids goes beyond their separate spheres: it is endemic to, and engendered by, the capitalist structure the story sets up. The only force within this system that can reproduce is the machine, but that machine creates nothing but blank paper, the embodiment of lifeless sterility. As Cupid informs the narrator, the paper in this world does not contain writing (“no printing of any sort”): the machine breeds blankness, and also eradicates the written word. “Now mark [the paper] with any word you please,” Cupid says to the narrator in order to demonstrate the production process:

“Well, let me see,” said I, taking out my pencil; “come, I’ll mark it with your name.” Bidding me take out my watch, Cupid adroitly dropped the inscribed slip on an exposed part of the incipient mass... Slowly I followed the slip, inch by inch...and so, on, and on, and on...when, suddenly I saw a sort of paper-fall, not wholly unlike a water-fall; a scissory sound smote my ear, as of some

cord being snapped; and down dropped an unfolded sheet of perfect foolscap with my “Cupid” half faded out of it, and still moist and warm... here was the end of the machine.³⁰

Coupled with the biological language likening the machine to a reproductive system (“moist and warm”), the sound of the “cord being snapped” evokes the cutting of the umbilical cord—the machine is giving birth to the paper. Yet, here “birth” is inverted: the process of creation is one of deletion. The machine’s process of erasure functions on multiple registers. Through this process both the text and the act of writing are eliminated, as the “autocratic” machine literally removes the written word. Furthermore, erasing the word “Cupid,” a symbol of both classical mythology and human sexual connection, emphasizes that industrial production squashes both human physical and imaginary reproduction. The narrator’s final line quoted above, “here was the end of the machine,” identifies the goal of the industrial process as the destruction of writing and art.

This kind of artistic desola-

tion is not limited to the machine - it reaches the narrator's own system of thought. As the narrator watches the blank paper "continually dropping, dropping" he thinks, "All sorts of writings would be writ on those now vacant things—sermons, lawyers' briefs, physicians' prescriptions, love-letters, marriage certificates, bills of divorce, registers of birth, death-warrants, and so on, without end".³¹ The narrator sees the possibility of writing, but all the words that constitute this world for him are "practical" applications, completely devoid of any writing that is artistic or literary. Once "Cupid" has been wiped out, the narrator cannot even imagine a piece of literature being written or created. Melville laments this shift in human value systems, where art is subordinated to—and in this case completely replaced by—technological progress.

"The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" seeks to reveal the declining value of literature in a society fueled by industrial production by connecting it with widespread human exploitation. Melville's story suggests that this phenomenon - oppression of the body

and mind - collapses of human creative production. Melville creates a world in which individuals have lost the capacity to imagine and desire literature as part of the human experience. But he exposes the system as unsustainable. "Bachelors' dinners, like bachelors' lives, can not endure forever," notes the narrator at the end of his lavish night in Paradise.³² The industrial system produces only sterile blankness, hostile to the act of writing. Melville transmits his critique against the oppression of ideas in a narrative, aesthetic text deeply motivated by the desire to establish literature as a valuable purveyor of knowledge.

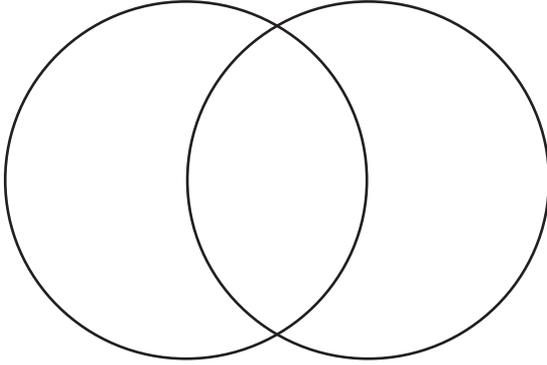
□

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*LANGUAGE, POETRY,
DIASPORA*

an interview with Meena Alexander

By Hallie Nell Swanson

How do you conceive of cosmopolitanism in relation to the South Asian diaspora, today and in the past?

We need to imagine the Indian diaspora in all its complexity as intrinsically involved in the many streams of cosmopolitan experience that define our lives. All the way from those who went as bonded labor to the Caribbean islands in the nineteenth century to writers and artists in the twentieth century who have traveled in search of experience. During the earlier years of the 1900s, the humanist ideal of a cosmopolitan existence was something that

was embraced by Tagore, and indeed other writers and thinkers. And perhaps in some ways this is a fitting way to counter the psychic violence of colonialism. I come from Kerala, on the south west coast of India. For centuries there was peaceful trade across the Indian Ocean, with Persia and Rome and other principalities. And surely, in some way or other, these ancient voyages have left their traces .

You have spoken a lot about crossing the Indian Ocean as a child, moving from India to Khartoum. How was that moment of crossing important to

you? How has it influenced how you see the world, particularly in your work?

You know, I see this first crossing as both a curse and a blessing. I turned five on the Indian Ocean. Something that happened to me, something I did not choose, and something I keep returning to again and again since I can never adequately give it voice. Perhaps all writers have something of this sort in their lives, a place they keep returning to obsessively in order to unlock the emotion there - a wordless moment that may remain so for the rest of one's life. Still the effort to make words ring out, however few they may be (and I am thinking of the lyric poem here), keeps us going. That first crossing for me involved the loss of language and also place -- I remember turning five on the steamer and staring out at the immensity of the Indian Ocean, into which somehow all that I knew had disappeared. And the clouds, the great monsoon clouds, I spent hours staring at them. What did I gain? Bit by bit the feeling grew that one life was over laid by another, a feeling that the past was always implicated in the future. A palimpsestic way of making sense

that has remained with me and helps me structure my poems.

*In the chapter "Language and Shame" in your biography *Fault Lines*, as well as elsewhere, you spoke about how learning to speak as part of an English education was an act of violence. Yet English is also the language you write in. How do you resolve that?*

I once called it 'an intimate violence.' Not the language itself, but how my British tutor in Khartoum made me learn it [making me repeat words to change my accent]. And that has always stayed with me. But it is also the language I love and out of which I mould my work. The language of Shakespeare and Donne, but also a postcolonial one that, like millions of others in this globalized world, I have made my own. For me, English, far from being tightly sealed within its own walls, is akin to a great river into and out of which many other waters flow.

If English is the lingua franca, is it irredeemably violent? What are the implications of this state of affairs?

I think things are changing with this era of globalization. Young people come from China to India to learn English. It's become a world language, and people all over sense a great freedom in using it. At the same time it's crucial, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o has so powerfully argued, to protect the other languages of the world - the minority languages if you wish, bound to region and place. Surely there is room in our world for many languages? And yet inevitably there is unevenness of power, radical inequities and languages flow in and through this. It is striking to me that the Dalit [untouchable caste] activist Chandra Bhan Prasad in India, decided to make an [idol of a] Goddess [of] English, complete with cowboy hat, a goddess who would be celebrated on Lord Macaulay's birthday -- he of the infamous Minute on Indian Education. Why a Goddess English? Because she could offer the marginalized a way of edging out of the caste system that had oppressed them for centuries and a way into a better life, better jobs.

Franz Fanon talks about a 'zone of occult instability' through which a culture of decoloniza-

tion emerges. You have written about dislocation and instability, notably in your memoir, 'Fault Lines.' Do you find something productive in these moments? I'm thinking both on the creative level in your work, and also at a broader, political level.

This is a very good question, and yes, perhaps I do find something deeply productive in these difficult moments, a something that cries out for words. In part it surely has to do with my years growing up in India and also in Khartoum, those years of the struggle for democracy that several of my friends were involved in. In India, the history of the Nationalist movement, and then the years of Emergency when Mrs. Gandhi took away civil liberties. And poetry as what might help us live in a violent world.

You have lived in many cities and are currently based in New York. Can we conceive of metropolitan areas as a kind of contact zone, and what does this mean?

I have often thought of New York City as a place where my memories from different continents can come and meet and jostle each other, a space of jagged, even

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Out of a porthole a child pokes her head.
Rocks prance under water,

Sunlight burns a hole in air
Fit for a house to fall through.

Palm trees dive into indigo.
Where is Kochi now?

Out on deck men raise glasses of cognac,
Women in chiffon saris

Giggle at the atrocious accents of the poor
Trapped in the holds with their tiny cooking stoves

And hunks of burlap to sleep in.
Between sari hems and polished toes,

The child sees flying fish
Vomited by the sea—

Syllables lashed to their rainbow wings,
Tiny bodies twisting in heaps.

Sea salt clings to them.
The sea has no custom, no ceremony.

It makes a theater for poetry,
For a voice that splits into two, three:

Drunken migrations of the soul.
No compass to the sea. The sea is memory.

Meena Alexander
From *Birthplace With Buried Stones*

ecstatic meeting. I once wrote a poem called 'Indian April' where I have Allen Ginsberg and the mystical poet Mirabai meeting each other in Central Park. I wanted them to meet each other, even though they are separated by several centuries. The ethnic mixing we have in New York, the flow of so many languages and ways of living, makes it iconic of the world as she is. Can one call the world she? Why not.

What is the role of space in your poetry? Can we conceive of poetic space as a kind of contact zone as well?

What an excellent question. Yes indeed, in imagination each moment of the sensorium can open up as a world unto itself. Right now I am in the plane high over San Francisco. Brilliant sunlight, water visible underneath. Sometimes I think of the poem as a singing space. Where something else is caught. Like light, that adds nothing but changes everything. Perhaps the poem is an architecture one might share. A fragile architecture.

Your latest book of poetry, Birthplace with Buried Stones, came out recently. Could you tell us a

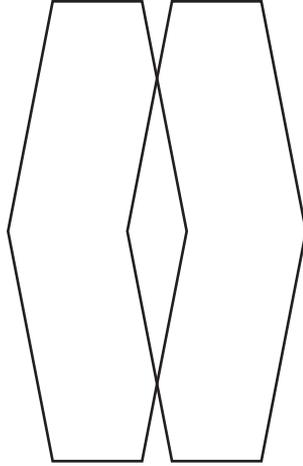
little about the poems in this collection?

Well it's a book of journeys really. Several journeys. It begins with a poem called 'Experimental Geography' about the questions I was asked on my citizenship exam, and ends with a tiny poem called 'Red Boat' about a boat in Cape Cod Bay. I have a cycle of poems inspired by reading Basho's *Narrow Road to the Deep North* in the Himalayas. As for the title poem, it's a kind of spiritual autobiography, evoking Allahabad where I was born. I left at the age of three and only returned there a few years ago. There are several elegies in the book for friends and poets I admired. There is a long poem about becoming a mother, called 'Mother Windblown'. And there are several poems about that first ocean crossing we spoke about earlier. □

Meena Alexander is a professor of English at the CUNY Graduate Center. She is author of The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience and Poetics of Dislocation, prose writings on trauma, migration and memory. Her most recent book of poetry is Birthplace with Buried Stones.







*DREAM CITY AND THE
IMAGINED “WE”:
MODERN PUBLICS IN
ZADIE SMITH’S LONDON*

By Sanjena Sathian

Zadie Smith's work is often located in the categories of the transnational, the multicultural, and the postcolonial. Yet these labels fail to situate Smith within the landscape of metropolitan London, a context essential to her identity as a writer. Now is the time to read Smith on her own terms, which means reading her both as a writer of northwest London, where she was born and raised, and of a second, fictional birthplace she calls "Dream City".

In a 2008 talk entitled "Speaking in Tongues," Smith introduced Dream City as a conceptual homeland for many

of the characters across her four novels, characters whose identities, like Smith's, are deeply grounded in London, but whose "complicated back stories, messy histories, multiple narratives," make them too complex, too multiform for their surroundings. According to Smith, Dream City is "the kind of town where the wise man says 'I' cautiously, because 'I' feels like too straight and singular a phoneme to represent the true multiplicity of his experience. Instead, citizens of Dream City prefer to use the collective pronoun 'we.'" This is "a place of many voices, where the unified singular self is

an illusion,” where “everything is doubled, everything is various.”¹

Dream City calls to Smith’s own diverse hometown of Willesden in northwest London. What allows these communities of new Londoners to create their own complicated, colorful history is an imagined “we” in which a diversity of origins not only coexists, but also, crucially, makes the collective meaningful. Yet Smith’s utopian vision rests on shaky foundations - in the lives of her characters and the worlds of her novels, the “we” of Dream City turns out to be unstable and faltering. In *White Teeth*, British national identity is under examination, a quandary still reflected by the divisive rhetoric of David Cameron, and the wider attitudes towards immigrant communities that this rhetoric encompasses.² In NW, the neighborhood is plagued by an unstable sense of race and class identity, as public housing residents collide with their middle class neighbors. In response to these fissures, the characters of Smith’s novels turn inward to the “I”, an attempted act of self-identification in the face of a insecure collective “we.”

Smith’s work, which engages high-stakes political issues like multiculturalism, race and nationality, calls to mind Benedict Anderson’s notion of the nation as an “imagined community.”³ London is constantly being reshaped by political and literary fictions, but it is also a real, changing place. A useful framework for understanding this relationship between a place and the imagination of that place is to distinguish between cities and publics. A city is a geographically charted political and juridical entity; a public is a theoretical conception of a community. Michael Warner defines a public as a self-organized relation among strangers all mutually paying attention to the same texts or set of texts. These texts might be a set of pamphlets circulating among the same community, like those circulated by Islamic fundamentalist group KEVIN in *White Teeth*, or cultural texts, such as the reality television show which captures the attention of some characters in NW.⁴ In any case, publics depend on discourse, which represents and actively shapes the community.

Warner suggests that we be-

come individual public subjects as members of a wider public. Our “self-relation” is affected by the wider public in which we participate. But a city is not necessarily a public: Warner draws the distinction that “A nation [or, in this case, a city]... includes its members whether they are awake or asleep, sober or drunk, sane or deranged, alert or comatose,” whereas “a public exists only by virtue of address,” and therefore “must predicate some degree of attention, however notional, from its members.”⁵ This hits on the major problem of the city for Smith’s characters. There is no one newspaper or even one single polis-center around which civil society can operate; there is no single set of texts around which a modern nation or city can define itself. Nations, today, include many smaller publics: in Smith’s London, publics are constantly forming around new sets of texts, new conversations that are peculiar to certain races or classes. Smith’s novels take place in a world where the nation is not yet obsolete, but is inhabited by many of these smaller publics (some of which talk to each other and others which do not). Some form counterpublics,

resisting the dominant sphere--like the Islamic fundamentalist group in *White Teeth*--and others hang below public recognition--like the Internet sex sites in *NW*. Cities are deceptive: we think we know a place by its physical mappings, but the city’s identity is constantly being remade as people within it change and grow and leave. As its elements shift, the city too shifts, reflecting its component parts.

The trouble with global cities like London, as James Holston and Arjun Appadurai explain in “Cities and Citizenship,” is that the theoretical vocabularies we have for understanding multiplicities do not easily translate into real-life community formation. The fictions of London we perpetuate—of London as a transnational city, a post-imperial land, a diasporic world—are, in the end, still fictions. The reality is that a “diaspora,” like *Dream City*, is not a place but a concept. While “Many are seeking alternatives in the post-, trans-, de-, re-, (and plain con) of current speculations about the future of the nation-state,” these conceptual categories are not enough to enfranchise the multiple identi-

ties of the protagonists in *White Teeth* and *NW*.⁶ As Holston and Appadurai put it, “until trans-nations attain more flesh and bone, cities may still be the most important sites in which we experience the crises of national membership and through which we may rethink citizenship”.⁷ London thus has the burden of becoming a home to each of these imagined categories - the burden of being an instantiation of these fictions.

Collectivity fails the second generation immigrant Millat Iqbal, the son of Samad in *White Teeth*. Millat’s disaffection leads him to attend a book burning of Salman Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses*. Although he has not read the book, Millat reacts intuitively to public spectacle as it takes hold on the airwaves and television. The reality that Millat has seen himself excluded from text-based publics means he presumes the book is another disenfranchising text and as such feels no need to read it: “He knew that he, Millat... had no face in this country, no voice in the country, until the week before last when suddenly

people like Millat were on every channel and every radio and every newspaper and they were angry, and Millat recognized the anger, thought it recognized him, and grabbed it with both hands”.⁸ Millat latches onto one thing: “So: there’s a fucking spiritual war going on—that’s fucking crazy! About time—we need to make our mark in this bloody country”.⁹ With a dearth of people like himself occupying prominent places within the British media, when he finally does see other “Pakis” on the television yelling, he aligns with them.

The irony of Millat’s anger is that such a moment of recognition might have happened had Millat read the novel. Yet while Rushdie is arguably a voice representing people like Millat, trapped between nations, Millat is disenfranchised from the growing global literary public that Rushdie represents. As a result, Millat aligns himself with another public, the members of the fundamentalist group KEVIN (Keepers of the Eternally Victorious Islam Nation) with whom he burns the book. They are paying attention not to the text of *The Satanic Verses* itself but to the media cover-

age it commands. Smith draws our attention to a larger irony of text-created identities: we depend on some texts for singularity of meaning, for something like Truth, and we burn or condemn or just do not pay attention to others—the ones that might even hold the right answers for us.

In another neat demonstration of this irony, while Millat is burning *The Satanic Verses*, his parents, Samad and Alsana, are in an argument at home. When Samad tells Alsana to act like a Bengali, she in response pulls out the *Reader's Digest Encyclopedia* and reads out a brief definition of "Bengali." When he is unhappy with the definition, she asks him if he wants to burn that, too. This mockery of identities made out of text ironizes Millat's sentiments of exclusion: if it is absurd for Samad to look up "Bengali" in an encyclopedia, it is equally absurd for Millat to feel that his identity depends on text.

In *White Teeth*, several sub-communities form around leaflets, noticeably like the political pamphlets which Anderson observes were responsible for much of early British political identity.¹⁰ Smith, surely aware

of this, reappropriates this mechanism for creating national identity in a noticeably anachronistic form. The novel includes a Jamaican-immigrant Jehovah's Witness family, an animal-rights activist group, and the Islamic extremist group KEVIN, all of which publicly self-identify and publicize by way of leaflets.

While Jehovah's Witnesses distribute the word of their community door-to-door, hand-to-hand, and while the animal-rights group tries to convert new followers, KEVIN does the opposite - their goal is to preserve a sub-community of male Muslim contemporaries, interested not in integration but in destabilizing the dominant public sphere. Hifan, one of the Brothers, singles out Millat on the school playground as a potential recruit. He tells Millat:

There is a hadith from the Bukhari...The best people of my community are my contemporaries and supporters. You are my contemporary, Millat, I pray you will also become my supporter; there is a war going on, Millat, a war.¹¹

Hifan speaks to Millat through

insular, citational dialogue, creating an internal discourse between him and Millat as equal Muslim men and “contemporaries,” members of one “community.” In this way, as the Brothers of KEVIN attempt to disperse the word of the Qur’an, they burrow themselves deeper into a niche within the already segregated South Asian immigrant community of London, and thereby foreclose any possibility of a wider public.

Millat’s interest is sparked by “leaflets called things like *The Big American Devil: How the United States Mafia Rules the World* or *Science Versus the Creator: no Contest*” but when the Brothers attempt to get Millat interested in leaflets about sexual politics or women’s issues, he withdraws, and when he does try to publicize KEVIN using these texts, he fails. Millat approaches an Indian woman in a café and “started giving her the back page of *The Right to Bare* [a pamphlet] pretty much verbatim... That’s what we think,’ he said, uncertain if that was what he thought. ‘That’s our opinion.’”¹² Millat’s choice of pronouns is telling: unable to produce an original thought or phrasing of the leaflet on his

own, he falls into the comfort of a “we”—the knowledge that he now holds some shared identity with KEVIN, which necessarily means he shares the group’s views.

But Millat is unsuccessful: “Oh, darling,’ she murmured... ‘If I give you money, will you go away?’”¹³ After this failure, Millat finds himself alone on the streets of London, further alienated by the leaflets meant to create a community. Millat retreats deeper into the KEVIN community, falling onto the comfort of a shared “we.” Yet while Millat may have the help of KEVIN, a “we” to belong to, that “we” is inauthentic to him. Smith draws our attention to the disenfranchising potential that these seemingly foundational modes of citizenship hold and suggests that membership in a community in the modern age is darker, more complicated, more full of colliding counterpublics. And the stakes are high: the texts that fail Millat lead him down a path toward extremism and violence. Smith points us toward a controversial claim: that the texts around which we form our identities, communities, publics, nations, are not only flimsier than we would

wish, but their unreliability also makes them dangerous. A world where individuals feel themselves without an identity is a world where cities are sites of territory-staking violence.

White Teeth and NW are preoccupied with similarly fragile collectivites. But NW, rather than being preoccupied with the question of a coherent national identity, asks a microcosmic question: what is one's local, community identity? And what happens to the local in an age of technology and globalization, when neighbors might identify more strongly with an organization like KEVIN than with northwest London, or with an Internet-based community more than Willesden Green? In answering these questions, NW makes a similar move as White Teeth, turning once more to the "I" in the face of a collapsing "we". This "I" turns out, once more, to be unsatisfying.

The unstable sense of collectivity in NW—and the attempt to hold it together—is demonstrated clearly when Natalie Blake becomes involved in a brief altercation on

a playground. Shortly before this episode, Natalie wishes to be "intimately involved" with strangers instead of walking silently past other people - this desire, however, is turned on its head when her involvement results in unpleasant consequences. At a playground with her child, Natalie and a few other women gang up on a white teenager and his girlfriend because the boy is smoking a cigarette. An old white lady, angry about the boy's smoking, declares: "I'm going to give them all a piece of my mind... They're all off that bloody estate". Natalie and a "formidable-looking Rasta in a giant Zulu hat" join in asking him to put out the cigarette—a veritable multicultural task-force protecting the local public grounds.¹⁴ The playground can be read as a microcosm of generational, class, and racial diversity—the perfect place to see the various elements of the NW neighborhood to converge. Together, this diverse band of women share causes of motherhood and a desire for safety in the shared public space.

The boy responds: "I don't do like you lot do round here. This ain't my manor. We don't do like you do here. In Queen's

Park. You can't really chat to me. I'm Hackney, so". As an argument erupts, the Rasta woman yells,

"I'm not Queen's Park, love, I'm HARLESDEN. Why would you talk about yourself in that way? Why would you talk about your area that way? Oh you just pissed me off, boy. I'm from Harlesden—certified youth worker. Twenty years. I am ashamed of you right now. You're the reason why we're where we are right now. Shame. Shame!"¹⁵

The nebulous "we" of the woman's statement is not race-based - it's related in part to class and in part to geography. She defines the two against the affluent "Queen's Park" stereotype (the playground is in Queen's Park): even if the two are from opposite ends of London, Hackney and Harlesden, according to her they have a class interest in common. The Rasta woman's use of the collective pronoun "we" points to her imagined collectivity of a shared neighborhood, society and public. Her "we," though, is an indistinct category which includes people, like the

boy, who define their communities along different lines: "I'm Hackney." This is not a "we" discursively created out of rational public discourse, text, or leaflets: the scene, in fact, makes a mockery of the notion of discourse as a productive social force.

The Rasta and Natalie seek a common dialogue around which to engage the boy, and they attempt to invoke shared ideals, to call on their membership in the same community. But up close, their "we" shatters. Natalie, who is not explicitly included in the conversation, jumps in to try to bridge it: "Just put it out, man. Said Natalie. She had not ended a sentence in 'man' for quite some time".¹⁶ The Rasta woman, too, slips into the local patois: "I was willing to chat with you, right?...But you just lost me with that nonsense. Shame on you, brother".¹⁷ Natalie was once Keisha, her former name associated with her working-class background, and can add "man" to the end of her sentences, and the Rasta woman claims to be from the same kind of place as the teenagers and can speak like them. But an inauthenticity about the adults' interaction with the

teenagers pervades the end of the scene. The argument is instigated by the fact of their shared public space, but this alone is not enough for Natalie and the Rasta to demand a communitarian ideal from the teens: instead, they appeal on the basis of shared conceptual space, in the form of linguistic tropes. Public ethics in this instance require an additional imagined notion of a community, of a “we”, which none of the parties seem able to agree on.

Natalie, after having successfully gotten the teenagers to back down, “accidentally locked eyes with Marcus—briefly causing her to stutter—but soon she found a void above his right shoulder and addressed all further remarks to this vanishing point.”¹⁸ Natalie, who pages ago just wanted to be “intimately involved” with people not pages ago, cannot even maintain a brief moment of eye contact with this boy: not only does their shared conceptual community fail, the two cannot even inhabit the same space. The “we” which supposedly establishes a communitarian ideal—which inspires Natalie to be a public defender—breaks down in the face of the true population of

the city. And while Natalie, whose career is predicated on buying into the notion of legally defined communities, lives her life by such imagination of a public, her stymied moment of triumph reveals Smith’s discomfort with the glue that holds publics together.

When Natalie and her friend Leah Hanwell suspect Nathan Bogle of murdering Felix, another character, the two women turn to the law to report him, placing a phone call to the police, in the trust that he will be brought to justice. This turn to the state at the end of NW marks a trust not only in the authority of the police but also in the larger system, which has allowed Natalie to succeed Felix to die and Shar, the two women’s school contemporary, to fail. Their exchange just before they call the police is telling. Leah asks Natalie,

“Why...not us? Why that poor bastard on Albert Road. It doesn’t make sense to me.” Natalie responds: “Because we worked harder,” she said, laying her head

on the back of the bench to consider the wide-open sky. “We were smarter and we knew we didn’t want to end up begging on other people’s doorsteps. We wanted to get out. People like Bogle—they didn’t want it enough... This is one of the things you learn in a courtroom: people generally get what they deserve.”¹⁹

Natalie is the more powerful, privileged member of the conversation, and it shows; she pushes her logic of self-definition onto Leah, who is less privileged, and less convinced. For Natalie at the end, the sky seems “wide-open” - the way she sees it, they are not fenced in, not trapped. Of course, Natalie has the privilege of seeing the sky; her money affords her more freedom than Leah, who is described in the book’s opening as “in a hammock, in the garden of a basement flat. Fenced in, on all sides. Four gardens along, in the estate.”²⁰ The logic which allows Natalie to trust that her life is justified is the rhetoric of meritocracy propagated by the British New Labour policy, especially as it applies to housing—the sense that the people

who live in homes and gardens and have children are the ones who seek the views of open blue sky, rather than sit in the fenced-in homes of the trapped poor.

Natalie talks herself into believing that in her life, as in the courtroom, “people generally get what they deserve.” With that trust in authority, the two women turn to the law to report Nathan Bogle. However, Smith does not endorse this view: Felix is not so easily dismissed as “the poor bastard” who had it coming; he was on his way out, just like Natalie.

While Natalie’s logic is not Smith’s, NW sets forth Natalie’s notion as the kind upon which publics depend to hold themselves together. It is how Natalie can handle living in the same space as strangers whose experiences are so far off from her own. It is the logic of a mixed community like NW, where the experiment of melding a public together out of such wide stratifications has not been entirely successful. Natalie’s jaunt out into the dark, forbidden streets of NW; her brief flirtation of walking in an unknown part of the neighborhood, unprotected, like a native; even her use of her

own former name, Keisha, as an online pseudonym (KeishaNW), are all attempts to bridge her roots with her present, her neighborhood's surroundings with her upwardly bound middle-class existence. But in the end, these each pass, and Natalie falls back on the logic that tells her to trust in the private life she has built for herself.

The last twist comes when Natalie, as she phones the authorities to report Bogle, chooses to speak in her Keisha-voice. Natalie is a barrister, which means she could use her position as part of the legal system to enforce the law. But she adopts the speech of her former working-class self to make the call. Rather than informing the state as a member of it, from within the system as a public defender, she chooses to inform from the bottom up, as a member of the wider public citizenry. She does so trusting in the divisions that make the system, rather than trusting in glue that holds a "we" together. It is an even greater submission to the state that Natalie informs as Keisha--as her "blacker" self, in the voice that she used when she lived on the estate. Rather than using her position as a

cultivated barrister and enforcer of the law, as upper-middle class Natalie, she chooses to speak as a member of the public on which the state will exert its regulatory power, as lower-class, estate-dwelling Keisha. The moment manifests a Hobbesian logic, implying that the only way to hold together a public is by trusting the civic authority that shapes it, which its members submit to, to which its members must turn. The public at the end of NW is no rational public citizenry held together around the circulation of text and discourse.

Smith's novels give us a picture of a British collective that is unstable, unsatisfying and disenfranchising, and where the turn inward—the attempt to self-define—does not ease the difficulties of living in the city. *White Teeth* initially places trust in the possibility of a coherent "we", whether generated by sub-communities or intellectual counterpublics, but Smith uses absurdism to deconstruct the components of our collectivities, slowly withdrawing her - and our - trust from community at

large. The members of KEVIN, having decided on the public spectacle of reading Sura 52 at a press conference as an act of protest, end up in a debate about which translation to use. When Millat “walked into the Kilburn Hall of an evening he had only to squint to mistake this talkative circle of chairs, these supposed fanatic fundamentalists, for an editorial meeting at the London Review of Books.”²¹ In their attempt to subvert the discourse of the dominant public sphere, KEVIN ends up creating its own intellectual subculture, thus emulating one of the characteristic formations of the wider public discourse: the bourgeois intellectual. When texts fail to constitute a coherent identity for a subcommunity’s members (here, KEVIN), the novel resorts to satire, imparting a nihilistic message that scoffs at any attempt to situate oneself meaningfully in a coherent identity.

While absurdism allows White Teeth to shy away, the stark realist style of NW’s means the issue of how to navigate the perilous terrain of “I” and “we” cannot be avoided. NW is a departure from White Teeth’s hysterical realism, as Wood calls

it.²² Instead of enormous plots, Smith employs the close-lens realism she described in Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland*, a world where “only one’s own subjectivity is really authentic...the world is covered in language.”²³ In the sections following Natalie and Leah’s perspectives, Smith’s style so immerses us in their subjectivities that the only meaning is found in tiny moments. NW has brought us too close to the lives of these people to just zoom out. This means that at the end of the novel, we need an answer: can Natalie be happy?

Natalie’s attempts to control her own self-definition ultimately bring her back to the collectivity she endeavors to define herself against. She streamlines her identity, abandoning her former name, Keisha, which she finds distasteful; yet despite these endeavors, she continues paying 10 percent of her income to her family, chooses public defense over private litigation, and insists on moving back to the neighborhood where she grew up. What appear to be her most personal choices are tied to her original community - she cannot escape the ‘we.’ In the end, her attempt to self-define, to be her own sole author, is no

more successful than KEVIN is for Millat.

What is striking, however, is that NW does not criticize the failure of the “we” from the perspective of the disenfranchised. Felix, the “poor bastard” who is murdered, is marginalized; so, too, is Nathan Bogle, the alleged murderer. But they play relatively minor roles; instead, we are largely privy to the tribulations of Natalie and Leah, the ones who should easily integrate into the “we” of wider British society. If *White Teeth* examines the failure of the public sphere for the obviously marginalized, NW depicts its failure even for those who should be enfranchised by it.

The utopian multiplicity of Dream City is no more than a dream. Smith’s account of the multiple voices in Dream City finds an interesting parallel in Natalie’s use of her Keisha voice. Smith says in the article, “between those two voices there exists no contradiction and no equivocation but rather a proper and decent human harmony.”²⁴ Yet Natalie’s experience would seem to indicate that there is conflict between her two voices, Natalie and Keisha. Smith adds that someone “from Dream

City,” with these multiple voices, should not “mistake the happy accident of his own cultural sensibilities for a set of natural laws, suitable for general application.”²⁵ This is, however, exactly what Natalie does when she uses her own experience to justify faith in the system at the end of NW. While her speech might seem to redeem the “we” that has faltered throughout the entire novel, in re-endorsing the collective, she also justifies its divisions and stratifications, and positions herself on top. Her faith in multiplicity masks a conservative reality.

Natalie’s logic is not so far off from something Smith herself has said. She wrote that she has the British state to thank for her success: “I retain a particular naivety concerning the British state, which must seem comical to many people...the state educated me, fixed my leg when it was broken, and gave me a grant that enabled me to go to university. It fixed my teeth (a bit) and found housing for my veteran father in his dotage... To steal another writer’s title: England made me. It has never been hard for me to pay my taxes because I understand it to be the repaying of a large, in fact, an almost

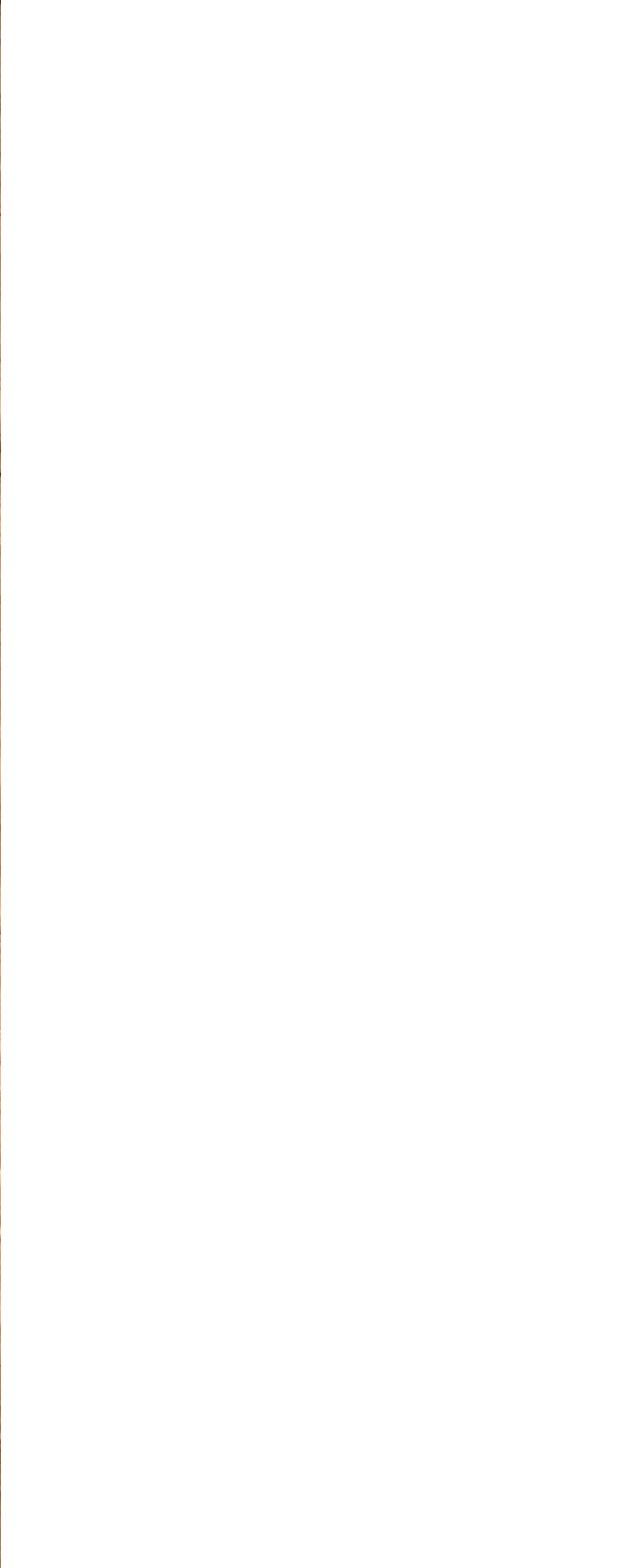
incalculable, debt.”²⁶ With this in mind, it is easy to see why NW portrays a collective held together not by idealistic energy but by conservative trust in the system.

The optimistic ‘we’ of Dream City is not attainable for Smith’s characters. Natalie idealistically attempts to engage the subcommunities of her locale, but instead falls into the comfort of the atomized relationship characteristic of modernism: the citizen viz-a-viz the state. Although such a relationship yields neither a real communitarian sensibility nor the transcendental “we” Smith refers to, it does yield a certain comfort, albeit a mechanistic one, that “people generally get what they deserve.” For people like Natalie - and Smith herself - who are beneficiaries of New Labour’s supposed meritocracy, it proves easier to trust in the idea of an exceptional individual than a system which is inhospitable to communal ideals. This logic ultimately resists the spirit of Dream City—it elevates the “I” instead of embracing the wider “we”. □

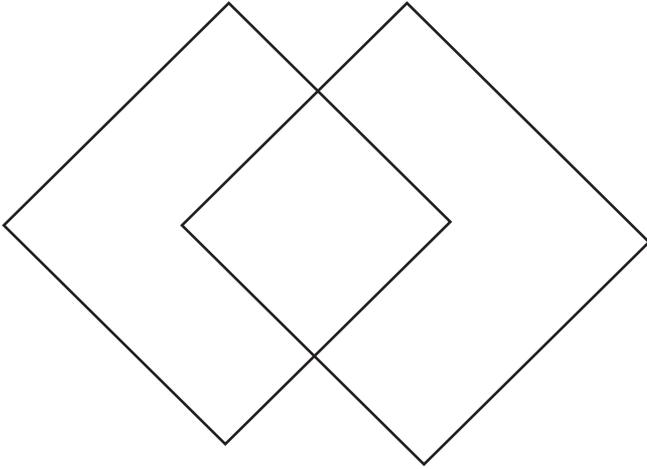
ed from a longer essay which won the John Hubbard Curtis Prize in English at Yale University.

Sanjena Sathian graduated from Yale University in 2013 with a major in English. The above is excerpt-









*MARGINS, HISTORY,
COSMOPOLITANISM*

an interview with Manan Ahmed

By Megan Stater

You grew up in Doha [Qatar] and you moved to Lahore [Pakistan] at a later age. How did it affect the way you perceive the world, or the way that you write about South Asia today?

People have a notion, not precisely of cosmopolitanism, but of globalization: they think people are more networked now or that they're more global. From The New York Times Travel Section perspective, it is a rather romantic and luxurious proposition, to be able to go from London to New York to Seoul.

I grew up in Doha because the actual face of globalization is

the movement of large amounts of labor from places with the capacity to produce labor to those with economies asking for cheap, renewable sources of human capital. In the mid-'60s, the United States was building large air force bases in Saudi Arabia and other principalities – Doha, Kuwait, Bahrain - tied to the presence of multinational oil companies. To manage this, there were statewide initiatives both from the subcontinent and Southeast Asia towards the Gulf States. This was the first massive transfer of passports; it was extremely hard to get a passport before the early '70s.

I grew up in Doha as a migrant laborer's child, a migrant laborer who had little to no civic rights and no political rights. I was a child on the liminal edges of a society that, as a general rule, had no space for the migrant himself or herself or their children. We had no schools, no playgrounds, not even a newspaper.

The relationship between the migrant laborer and the state is one of pure exploitation. I saw my father face racism, horrific abuse. I experienced that too, because if there's pervasive racism, the belief that one race is superior - biologically, genetically, or intellectually, and hence can enslave or manage another group of people - the children will experience that.

I was born in Lahore, I spent the first few years of my life there before we moved to Doha, and at home we spoke, among other languages, Urdu. You'd think that in returning to Pakistan in the 8th grade, I would now be on the inside, rather than the outside. But because I hadn't been in school there, because I wasn't part of the everyday culture, I was still liminal. My Urdu wasn't as good as my Arabic, I didn't know how to play cricket. I was

not functionally a teenager. It took me a while to integrate myself.

When I left for the United States I was very young, only eighteen years old. Again, the migrant, student or worker, who comes to the United States has a very liminal position. When you look at a campus like Columbia, and see many international students or TAs or professors, what you're seeing is a false positive. Legally speaking, you are only as good as your visa status: as long as you are current in your visa, as long as you don't do anything, or don't have an accident happen to you. Like many, I didn't have any relatives and I didn't know anyone. An international student is in a very liminal position to the majority.

These were my formative experiences - being at the edge, trying to figure out what my relationship was to the dominant political or social context. Part of my scholarship sees time, temporality, or ruptures and continuities as historiographic paradigms, rather than historic realities. If you look at these paradigms from a perspective of liminality or structural inequality, then things that may appear as continuities appear as rup-

tures, and those that appear as ruptures appear as a conjoining of different things. I think that that is one way in which my personal biography and my scholarship are linked.

Do you think that the kind of cosmopolitanism conceived by Kant – where reason is the sole measure of equality – is achievable or coherent in the world that you have experienced?

Kant has a specific idea of what he calls the citizen of the world. In his essay Perpetual Peace, he argues that reason provides universal rights and responsibilities that unify people across state or linguistic differences: a universal citizenship. But what I remember from the essay is not Kant's universalism – what I remember from that essay is that it's damn racist. His discussion of the Eskimo, his discussion of the Bedouin, and his discussion of India – it's horribly uninformed. Kant and Hegel rely upon a conception of "the universal" based on a specific degenerative Orientalist notion of the world.

Having said that, can we still say that the notion of a citizen of the world is a viable one? To me, Kantian cosmopolitanism

rings rather hollow. It rings as an ideal-type that is the privilege of only the very few. To disavow your state, to say, "I'm a citizen of the world", is not a privilege that is universal by any means.

The only people who have disavowed a state in our contemporary world are the refugees, the asylum seekers, the migrant laborers, and the enemy combatants. My understanding of the cosmopolitan is starkly different; it is a cosmopolitanism of people who are in Guantanamo, who have been disallowed representation under a state because they have not been given any basic humanity. Someone with an American passport, who doesn't need a visa to travel and can get on a plane because he or she can purchase a ticket, is not a cosmopolitan. I have family in almost every continent of this world, and I travel to see them – that doesn't make me cosmopolitan. That mobility comes from extreme privilege. The asylum seekers on Manus Island or the Iraqi or Pakistani citizen who is afraid of their life and limb – we don't consider them as cosmopolitans. But they fit the definition. They don't have a state: the state is rejecting them or they are rejecting the state. They are the citizens of

the world. Now let me ask you: where can they go? What are we doing to these people, right?

But what about modern conceptions of cosmopolitanism in the vein of Martha Nussbaum at the University of Chicago, who argues for a moral conception of citizenship that transcends national boundaries?

I think she's trying to ask us to imagine the rights of those who, like the disabled or the animal, cannot articulate their rights as

think that's precisely what, putting aside someone like Martha Nussbaum, or Judith Butler, or a group of very, very, intellectually serious and coherent philosophers, we as a political society cannot do. We cannot conceive of the world from a different perspective. We can't even conceive of a world with something rather obvious like gay rights, the right to associate with whomever you want. Nussbaum's call for moral cosmopolitanism makes more sense than Kant, but its politics, not its morality, substantially

What I remember from Kant's essay is not his universalism - what I remember is that it's damn racist.

rights, and hence devise a moral cosmopolitanism to protect those rights. I think that it is absolutely viable, and valuable, for us to imagine the Other as an empathetic being and grant them a set of rights that we then have the need, power and responsibility to protect and provide. There is nothing there prima facie that I would disagree with. I would simply say that the capacity to see the world from a different perspective is the brunt of what she's asking us to do. I

hinders it.

Especially in light of your discussion of migrant laborers, could one conceive of an economic cosmopolitanism?

That was Marx and Engels' critique, right? Capital requires global mobility. Capital will always expand, and as it expands, it will create markets and create need for a new vulnerable labor pool to exploit. Cosmopolitanism reflects modern capital. You

have a supply and labor chain from China to Bangladesh to Indonesia. Capital will continue to expand - until it comes to a crisis, of course, as hopefully it will.

The migrant laborer may travel from Kerala or Sindh to Doha or Abu Dhabi. But once they have that mobility via passport, that mobility is immediately taken away from them. Their passport is taken away, and they are immediately prisoners to their labor. Look at migrant populations in the United States. Once they cross the border, legally or illegally, they are put into a system of exploitative labor in New York or Chicago or LA. Market cosmopolitanism, from the perspective of the laborer, is not mobile, even if it seems mobile. If you look at the history of indentured labor, for example, the movement from India to the Caribbean or Africa to the United States, historians focus on the network – on the ships and the passage. But I think part of the story is of the immobility that comes as soon as they get to the destination.

How can one take an idea or methodology out of its context and apply it to medieval South Asia? Is that a legitimate exer-

cise? Does that change the idea when you take it out of its context and place it into another one?

Of course, if you were taking the idea then you would have to take the contextuality of the idea with it. But when I work on a medieval text, I'm trying to understand why it was written. That's a very basic question, there's nothing inherently more grandiose than that. Unfortunately for my time period, my place, my site, I don't have much to go from: I don't have the biography of the author, I don't have a lot of other things that were written around that context, I can't build a picture of the world outside of the text. I just have the text. The text is unstable. So how do I understand it? I take a methodology because it allows me to have a conversation with a thing. That's why I take methodologies wherever I may defensibly make a case for them. Obviously, someone else can say to me that I have not applied it correctly, or it is not applicable.

I don't think there's anything inherently apolitical. Everything we do is political and has a relationship to power. To take Foucault or to not take Foucault are

both political acts. To take an idea to South Asia or to not take it to South Asia is political. The question is where you are, how reactionary your politics are, how ethical they are. It's about the ethics of reading. It's about the ethics of doing historical research.

For example, Derrida works within the Jewish hermeneutical tradition. That Jewish hermeneutical tradition has an extremely generative, symbiotic relationship with Muslim philosophy and hermeneutics. On the one hand Derrida, the Algerian Frenchman, looks Western and on the other hand, he looks like a part of Islamic hermeneutical practices. So it depends on your politics, right?

Do the categories of "Hindu" and "Muslim" you examine in South Asia necessitate a binary relationship, where the two are always situated in opposition to one another?

Categories or classification systems are historically situated. They come into being. They're not, contra Kant, ideal constructs that we have always had and always will, existing outside of human understanding. The

Sanskritic word *mleccha* has existed since the 8th century to, more or less, now. People say that it is the word for "filthy foreigner" or "impure Muslim". We assume that the 8th century and 19th century understandings of *mleccha* - not the word, but the understanding, what comes into your mind when you hear the word - are the same. We imagine that we, as interpreters, can imagine the interpretative world in which the 8th century person said that word.

The thing is, you would never say that if it wasn't concerned with a concept. If I were to ask you to compare how you dry your hair or what you prepare for a meal with somebody from the 8th century, you would say that you could not imagine it. But you wouldn't say that about a word or category over time, even though the category is just as generative and has as much historicity embedded in it.

As historians, or people who consume the past, we can never forget that historiography, historicity, and fact live simultaneously. The politics of fear and domination that depend on the categories of "Hindu" or "Muslim" require stable definitions. That's why we have to destabilize

those categories. I'm trying to insert fissures and breaks in meaning, because then the monolithic identity doesn't seem so monolithic anymore.

Just the very simple commitment to rejecting categorical normativity leads us to a whole different way of conceptualizing data. We can read an 8th century plaque saying that a group of villagers dedicated a temple to a raja that kicked the ass of some mleccas and we can interpret that in a very different way if we are cognizant of the mean-

farmer and nothing changes. Of course everything changes, because everything is in constant conversation with something else.

Do you see continuities spanning the medieval period, colonialism, and Partition operating in South Asia today?

I think there's a lot of validity to the idea of ruptures in particular contexts. The Industrial Revolution or the rise of capital or colonialism in India - they created

Obama is thinking about assassinating another US citizen. If that same guy were in Idaho, that conversation would not take place.

ing-making in that community.

I think that leads to more productive ways of thinking about continuity. A word like mlecccha can show us how a village community tried to understand its relationship to the Other in different ways, adversarial or otherwise, over time. This means that the village, like the Other, is not a static thing. We then have a critique of the Orientalist version of India as a static place, where everyone is a

the idea that one can no longer access that which was before. The American expansion wiped out a significant number of human beings. To be a Native American on a reservation today is to have experienced a profound rupture, a profound break in history. Violence has the capacity to eliminate histories.

I would stress that there are some things that I can trace across the colonial and postcolonial period. I see continuities

that explain how difference was understood and contested, including by the colonial state. The colonial state, too, becomes part of a *longue durée* history in this way. The effort to create this *longue durée* history is to ask whether we can trace something over a long span of time, within which there were specific ruptures and violences - this is not an uncontestable position to hold. People can, and should, and do challenge me. As a good scholar, I then have to defend my position. That's what scholarship is.

Do you think that U.S. foreign policy has consolidated Pakistani identity in any way - national, regional, or ethnic? Is it constructed in opposition to or in reaction to U.S. foreign policy?

I think we must first realize that it is not U.S. foreign policy. Here, we should be cosmopolitan. We should say that the two states, the United States and Pakistan, have a policy. This is a joint policy. They may differ on certain details, but this is a policy that on both sides have certain basic conceptual overlaps. They both have a specific geography that is

considered to be a space of exception. Within that space of exception, certain rights no longer hold. The implementation of violence can be exceptional: if you kill someone there, it is not analogous to killing someone here.

A report came out today [2.28.2014], that Obama and his advisors are thinking about assassinating another United States citizen. This guy is presumably a bad guy. It doesn't really matter for our purposes. But if that same guy was sitting in Manhattan, or Idaho, then that conversation would not take place, because those spaces are not in a space of exception. Whatever else we may do to capture him, or kill him, he won't have this type of exception. There's a relationship between space and the politics. And space is created: there's no geologically determined reason for these policies. In this particular construction, then, it is not just the United States alone; it is the United States and the Pakistani state. The Pakistani state is droning and/or using military strikes on the same population.

The question is, if that's a policy and that's a space that contains individuals, does that create an identity for them? I don't know about that. What I'm

interested in is what the world looks like if you are [as good as] dead. How do you see geography if you are an individual in a space of exception? What kinds of identifiable characteristics do you take on to understand your world and speak from that perspective? That's what I'm interested in.

Your question is a valid question - perhaps these policies create identities, perhaps they don't. But I haven't really paid much attention to that part of the question. Right now, I'm writing something with Madiha Tahir, a journalist who has worked with drone survivors. We're trying to think through this question of how testimony can create a worldview through narrative. Because as I described to you, this space of exception is brought into being as a political and legal entity through a narrative. Through a legal narrative, through a moral narrative in the case of Obama, perhaps a narrative of vengeance or righteousness in the case of American politics in general. We are interested in what the testimony and its narrative looks like from that space of exception.

What continuity do you see be-

tween colonial behavior and American behavior in South Asia? Do you consider the U.S. to be a neo-imperial power?

I mean, I don't know what a "new" imperial would be.

Would you consider the U.S. to be an imperial power?

Of course. I don't think that's a non-mainstream question. I think that people on the Right conceive of a capacity to govern and manage the world. They don't call it imperialism; they call it manifest destiny. There's never been a time in United States history, as an expansionist power, that I can say would necessitate the "neo" in its imperialism.

But I also don't conceive of the United States as an imperial hegemon simply outside of its borders. We must always be local. Look at what's happening on reservations, what's happening with immigration rights, or what's happening with anyone who identifies as outside of sexually or politically normative behavior. Look at the way in which the African-American population is classified, routinized, incarcerated, and made to fit a bio-politics of exceptionalism.

That is also imperial domination. It's domination of a people who cannot resist or voice their claim of equality.

What the United States does abroad and what it does within are intimately linked. A politician can sign off on universal surveillance abroad on foreign nationals because they have that same philosophy when it comes to their own so-called citizens' rights and their understanding of policing internally. Five minutes before Snowden, we found out that the New York Police Department was surveilling migrant Pakistanis and Arab Muslims. These are presumptively all citizens, who are legally here and have the rights of free association, free speech, the right to pray and do whatever the hell they want to do. But they weren't conceived of as "us." Only when Snowden comes and says the NSA has been massively sucking up data did it become an outrage.

You conceive of imperial practices as propping up a dictator in Afghanistan or supporting a coup in Central America or assassinating a prime minister in Iran. At the exact same time in '53 that the CIA was doing something abroad, what was happening in New York? Then you start

to see the picture. The capacity to target Huey [Long] or Malcolm X or Martin Luther King is the same capacity to target outside. The capacity to engineer a regime elsewhere is the same capacity used to bust unions in this country. They're not separate capacities; we don't have to figure out the murky politics of the Orient to have a grasp on how things are happening in our name with our taxpayer money and with our political will. We just have to pay attention to what's going on here. □

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FOOTNOTES

Paranoid Narcissism, Rosa Inocencio Smith

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2. Ibid 30.
3. Ibid 4.
4. Ibid 30-1.
5. Ibid 23.
6. Ibid 33.
7. Ibid 87.
8. Ibid 101-2.
9. Ibid 66.
10. Ibid 74.
11. Ibid 75.
12. Ibid 87.
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Monumental Writing, Elias Kleinblock

1. *Poeticheskoe Zaveshchanie Akhmatovoi Ispolneno*, video, 1:01, ntv.ru, last modified Dec.18, 2006, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/100040/>.
2. Amanda Haight, *Anna Akhmatova: A Poetic Journey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 92.
3. Haight, *Poetic Pilgrimage*, 98
4. Robin Kemball and Anna Akhmatova, "Anna Akhmatova's 'Requiem, 1935-1940,'" *Russian Review* 33 (1974): 304-5.
5. Kemball and Akhmatova, "Anna Akhmatova's 'Requiem, 1935-1940,'" 304-5
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65

(1995):125-33.

10. Ibid 128.

11. Kemball and Akhmatova, "Anna Akhmatova's 'Requiem, 1935-1940,'" 304-5.

12. Ibid.

13. Assmann and Czaplicka, "Collective Memory," 115.

14. Assmann and Czaplicka, "Collective Memory," 125-33.

15. Peter Fritzsche, "The Case for Modern Memory," *The Journal of Modern History* 73 (March 2001): 87.

16. Assmann and Czaplicka, "Collective Memory," 127.

17. Catherine Merridale, "War, death, and remembrance in Soviet Russia," in *Remembering War*, ed. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1999), 62.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. "KRETTY" last modified Feb. 18, 2011. <http://www.petersburg-history.narod.ru/p307.htm>.

Interview with Nicholas Dames

1. Francois Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*

Literature in the Age of Paper Mills, Marcela Johnson

1. Herman Melville, Harrison Hayford, et al. ed., *The Piazza Tales: And Other Prose Pieces, 1839-1860* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1987), 408.

2. Robert C. Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 403, 407.

3. Ibid 407.

4. Ibid 409.

5. Ibid 334.
6. Herman Melville, Richard Chase ed., *Selected Tales and Poems by Herman Melville* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957), 221.
7. Tucker, Marx-Engels Reader, 412.
8. Melville, *Selected Tales*, 228.
9. Ibid 220.
10. The Oxford English Dictionary definition of “blank,” 6b.
11. Melville, *Selected Tales*, 209.
12. Ibid 215.
13. Ibid 213.
14. Ibid 229.
15. Ibid 223.
16. Ibid 223.
17. Ibid 211.
18. Ibid 221.
19. W.G. Sebald, and Michael Hulse ed., *The Rings of Saturn* (New York, NY: New Directions Book, 1998), 275-276.
20. Ibid 281-282.
21. Melville, *Selected Stories*, 227.
22. Gerard C.C. Tsang, Textile Exhibition, from <http://www.asianart.com/textiles/intro.html>.
23. Melville, *Selected Stories*, 225.
24. Ibid 221.
25. Ibid 224.
26. Ibid 228.
27. Ibid 222.
28. Ibid 224.
29. Ibid 209, 213.
30. Ibid 225-6.
31. Ibid 226-7.
32. Ibid 214-w

Interview with Meena Alexander

1. “The claims of our own language [English] it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. It stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the West... Whoever knows that language has

ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations. It may safely be said that the literature now extant in that language is of greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together. It is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern,—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.” The Honorable T.B. Macaulay, “Minute on Indian Education,” Columbia University MEALAC Index of Sources, April 29, 2014. http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html.

‘Autobiography,’ c. Meena Alexander, *Birthplace With Buried Stones*, (TriQuarterly Books/ Northwestern University Press, 2013)

Oscar Wilde’s Aesthetic Legacy, Jonathan Carmona and Jewel Pereyra

1. Robert D. Pepper and Oscar Wilde, *Irish Poets and the Poetry of Nineteenth Century*, (San Francisco: Book Club of California, 1972), 5.
2. See Figure 1. “Our Oscar as he appears on being returned to us,” 1883, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.
3. Gwen Sharp, “Negative Stereotypes of the Irish,” in *Sociological Images*, 8

October 2008, <http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2008/10/06/negative-stereotypes-of-the-irish>.

4. Ibid.

5. See Figure 2. "Outrageous," Life Magazine, May 11, 1893 from "Negative Stereotypes of the Irish," in *Sociological Images*, 8 October 2008.

6. Gwen Sharp, "Negative Stereotypes".

7. Dan O'Connell, "Bohemian Experiences of Oscar Wilde and Sir Samuel Baker," in *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2 October 1897, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

8. E.B. Duval, "6 caricatures of Oscar Wilde in ethnic dress," 1882, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

9. See Figure 3. E.B. Duval, "Strike me with a sunflower (caricature of Oscar Wilde)," 1882, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

10. See Figure 4. E.B. Duval, "6 caricatures of Oscar Wilde in ethnic dress," 1882, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

11. See Figure 5. E.B. Duval, "6 caricatures of Oscar Wilde in ethnic dress," 1882, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

12. Elisa F. Glick, "Harlem's Queer Dandy: African-American Modernism and the Artifice of Blackness," in *Modern Fiction Studies*, (John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 423.

13. Ibid, 425.

14. Monica Miller, *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2009).

15. Miller, *Slaves to Fashion*, 86.

16. Miller, *Slaves to Fashion*, 87.

17. Elisa F. Glick, "Harlem's Queer Dandy: African-American Modernism and the Artifice of Blackness," in *Modern Fiction Studies*, (John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 427.

Dream City and the Imagined "We", Sanjena Sathian

1. Zadie Smith, "Speaking in Tongues," *The New York Review of Books*. Feb. 26, 2009. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2009/feb/26/speaking-in>

-tongues-2/?pagination=false.

2. This speech, by David Cameron, announced the end of multiculturalism and was condemned by many commentators. Staff Blogger, "Full Transcript | David Cameron | Speech on radicalisation and Islamic extremism | Munich | 5 February 2011," *The New Statesman*, February 5, 2011. <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/02/terrorism-is-islam-ideology>.

3. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 5.

4. Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14.1 (2002): 49-90.

5. Michael Warner, "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject," in *American Literary Studies: a Methodological Reader*, eds. Michael Elliot and Claudia Stock (New York: New York

University Press, 2002), 245.

6. James Holston and Arjun Appadurai, "Cities and Citizenship," *Public Culture* 8, no. 2 (1996): 202.

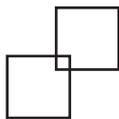
7. Ibid 202.
8. Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (New York: Random House, 2000), 194.
9. Ibid 245.
10. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
11. Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (New York: Random House, 2000), 244.
12. Ibid 310.
13. Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (New York: Random House, 2000), 310.
14. Zadie Smith, *NW* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 335.
15. Zadie Smith, *NW* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 336-7.
16. Ibid 338.
17. Ibid 338.
18. Zadie Smith, *NW* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 339.
19. Zadie Smith, *NW* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 400.
20. The description is like those of prominent liberal British commentators on the housing estate: "council housing is a living tomb. You dare not give up the house because you might never get another, but staying is to be trapped in a ghetto of both place and mind" (Hutton 2007, cited in Hancock and Mooney 2013). And it reverses the language of the conservative objectors to these policies: "As the fabric of society crumbles at the margins what has been left behind is an underclass, where life is characterised by dependency, addiction, debt and family breakdown ... The inner city wasn't a place; it was a state of mind –there is a mentality of entrapment, where aspiration and hope are for other people, who live in another place" (Duncan Smith quoted in CSJ 2007:4–5; cited in Hancock and Mooney 2013). This kind of imagination of place is the cruel underside to Dream City, the knowledge that Dream City exists, but for others; the mental experience of living on a housing estate is to live in Nightmare City. Ibid 3.
21. Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (New York: Random House, 2000), 415.
22. James Wood, "Human, All too Inhuman," *The New Republic*, August 2001. http://www.powells.com/review/2001_08_30.html.
23. Zadie Smith, "Two Paths for the Novel," *The New York Review of Books*, 20 November 2008. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2008/nov/20/two-paths-for-the-novel/?pagination=false>.
24. Zadie Smith, "Speaking in Tongues," *The New York Review of Books*, 26 February 2009. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2009/feb/26/speaking-in-tongues-2/?pagination=false>.
25. Ibid.
26. Zadie Smith, "North-West London Blues," *The New York Review of Books*, 12 July 2012. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/jul/12/north-west-london-blues/>.

ARTWORK

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- p.109: Malik Winslow, Untitled (2013) acrylic on wood.
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