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IN MEMORIAM
PROFESSOR GEOFFREY V. DAVIS

Readers of *ARIEL* will be saddened to learn of the death of Professor Geoffrey V. Davis, a scholar who throughout his career was a strong advocate for Commonwealth and subsequently postcolonial literatures. Geoff taught at Aachen University (Germany) and had research and teaching fellowships at the Universities of Innsbruck (Austria); Verona (Italy); Cambridge (UK); Curtin (Australia); Växjö (Sweden); and Texas, Austin (USA).

The author, editor, or co-editor of more than thirty books, Geoff engaged with a wide range of issues in postcolonial studies. His first commitment, and one that continued throughout his life, was to Zimbabwean and South African literatures. *Matatu: A Journal for African Culture and Society*, of which he was a founding co-editor, continues publication to this day. Recently, together with Ganesh Devy and Kalyan Chakravarty, he co-edited four volumes that situated indigenous issues transnationally: *Indigeneity* (Orient Blackswan, 2009), *Voice and Memory* (Orient Blackswan, 2011), *Narrating Nomadism* (Routledge India, 2013), and *Knowing Differently* (Routledge India, 2013). The

series *Cross/Cultures: Readings in the Post/Colonial Literatures and Cultures in English*, which he co-edited with Gordon Collier, has proven to be an indispensible resource for scholars in postcolonial studies. One of Geoff's books, *Voices of Justice and Reason* (Rodopi, 2003), took its title and epigraph from a comment by Nelson Mandela that the arts were sites where the case for resistance, liberty, beauty, and equality might still be made even in the darkest years of Apartheid. That claim echoes powerfully in Geoff's research and writings and in the many conferences, seminars and talks he participated in or organized.

He served as Chair of the European Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (EACLALS) for three terms (2002–2005; 2005–2008; 2011–2014), and he was international Chair of ACLALS from 2008–2011. My personal memory of Geoff is his participation in a small session at the ACLALS conference in Vancouver in August 2007. He was a welcoming, insightful and gracious presence in the discussion. His voice will be profoundly missed.

Pamela McCallum
Editor, *ARIEL*
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Cluster on Black Diasporic Writing

"From a Distant Witness" in Rome and London: Black Atlantic Temporalities in William Demby's *Beetlecreek* and George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*

Melanie Masterton Sherazi

Abstract: Focusing on the formal methods of two modernist works of Cold War-era black Atlantic fiction, William Demby's *Beetlecreek* (1950) and George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), the article examines the authors' respective positions of exile in Rome and London and choice to pen their debut, semi-autobiographical coming-of-age novels, set in the 1930s, with existential undertones—Demby's in a small segregated town in the Southern United States and Lamming's in a small colonial village in the Caribbean. Demby and Lamming use aesthetic modes of defamiliarization as a liberatory strategy, adopting modernist formal and temporal strategies to estrange structures of oppression. The essay argues for reading the authors' novels beyond national and canonical boundaries as part of a larger body of black Atlantic literature that deconstructs racialized regimes in the Global South. I conclude with a brief reading of each writer's intersections with Langston Hughes and Richard Wright, positing mobile networks of black diasporic affiliation forged in a period of global flux and transformation. This article compares two writers normally read only in distinct African American, Afro-Caribbean, and/or Black British contexts and calls attention to their shared priorities of black modernist innovation and politico-aesthetics.

Keywords: William Demby, George Lamming, black Atlantic, expatriate literature, transnationalism, temporal turn, black internationalism

In Richard Wright's introduction to the first American edition of George Lamming's debut novel, *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), he relates that "[o]ne feels not so much alone when, from a distant witness, supporting evidence comes to buttress one's own testimony" (vi). Wright's notion of a "distant witness" instantiates a mode of black diasporic affiliation, invoked by a renowned African American writer living in exile in Paris since 1946, in praise of Lamming, an Afro-Caribbean author who expatriated to London in 1950. This article compares the distant witness of Lamming's novel with that of *Beetlecreek* (1950), African American author William Demby's first novel, written upon his expatriation to Rome in 1947. Focusing on these two works of Cold War-era black Atlantic fiction,[1] this comparative analysis explores the formal and thematic effects wrought by these avant-garde expatriate authors. Read in tandem, their shared aesthetic project of bearing witness to their segregated homelands from a position of critical distance generates complex black Atlantic temporalities that defamiliarize structures of oppression: that of Jim Crow in *Beetlecreek* and colonization in *In the Castle of My Skin*.[2]

Demby and Lamming penned these modernist novels from their respective positions in postwar Rome and London, each electing to write semi-autobiographical, coming-of-age novels with existentialist undertones set in the fraught 1930s of the Global South. With *Beetlecreek*, Demby innovated a black modernist aesthetic that follows the inner desires and thwarted dreams of multiple characters living in a small fictional town in the rural Southern United States during the Great Depression. *Beetlecreek* centers on an African American adolescent, Johnny Johnson, and his uncle, David Diggs, whose experiences share some biographical resonances with Demby's own life story.[3] *Beetlecreek* often features internal, existential reveries, and its themes focus on interracial relations and racialized violence under Jim Crow segregation. Demby worked on the novel in the late 1940s in Rome, where he was immersed in the antifascist, postwar art scene and lived with a leftist cadre of Italian artists and filmmakers. Lamming wrote his experimental bildungsroman upon his Windrush-era move to London in 1950, where he worked on the BBC radio program *Caribbean Voices* and formed friendships with other

West Indian writers and intellectuals, completing his first novel, like Demby, within the first few years of his expatriation.[4] The reader first encounters Lamming's semi-autobiographical protagonist, "G," on his ninth birthday, before he appears again in the second half of the novel in his teen years. Through its poetic language and disjunctive form, *In the Castle of My Skin* defamiliarizes the colonial power structure, subtly undoing what Lamming later characterized as his debut novel's project: to present and deconstruct the "tragic innocence" ("Sea of Stories") of the colonized in the British Caribbean.

Critical distance shaped the writings of black authors in exile like Lamming and Demby, whose decision to move abroad after World War II was influenced by the forces of racism and a dearth of opportunities at home. Demby's and Lamming's first novels set into practice critical cosmopolitan thinking—what James Clifford terms "cosmopolitanism from below" (qtd. in Robbins and Horta 9) regarding the ravages of colonial modernity amid the rise of US imperialism. Both writers experiment with form, content, and style to "imagine," in keeping with Rebecca Walkowitz's theorization of cosmopolitan style, "that conditions of national and transnational affiliation depend on narrative patterns of attentiveness, relevance, perception, and recognition" (6). Demby's and Lamming's respective displacements from their homelands are compelled by a creative impulse: systemic oppression motivates each writer to seek alternative ways of being in and seeing the world. This is not to say that Rome and London afforded unfettered, utopic freedoms or a lack of racism, but they provided artistic spaces from which to deconstruct the status quo of the segregated societies that Demby and Lamming experienced in their formative years.

Reading these authors' novels beyond national borders and canons and as part of a larger body of black Atlantic literature reveals their mutual investment in aesthetic defamiliarization as a liberatory strategy. Both novels warrant continued consideration for their formal innovation and politico-aesthetic achievements. *Beetlecreek* maintains a tone of modernist alienation and polyphonic narration that makes strange the US race relations of the 1930s, generating a temporal complexity given the racialized past of chattel slavery and the urgent demands for equity

and social justice during the post-World War II moment of its composition. *Beetlecreek* was completed four years before the US Supreme Court ruled on *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), initiating school integration and galvanizing the broader US civil rights movement. At the time of Lamming's novel's publication, in 1953, the West Indian Federation had not yet been formed, nor had Barbados gained independence from Britain. Demby's and Lamming's shared project of defamiliarization is integral to a larger project of conceiving a black diasporic voice and a desegregated aesthetic vision. Each novel uses formal methods including internal meditations, dialogue, and metaphors of stagnation and release to decolonize the material and psychic processes of racialized oppression.

Steeped in the modernist registers of experimental language, including stream of consciousness and wandering narrations that move into and across the minds of multiple main and minor characters, both novels contemplate complex modes of being in the world, and they present critical epistemologies espoused by young black characters who come of age in a time of local and global conflict. *Beetlecreek* ends on a dire, cautionary note: the violent outcome of rumor and speculation in a small segregated town in the early 1930s, which signals a world moving toward war, ethnic fanaticism, genocide, and nuclear catastrophe. *In the Castle of My Skin*'s destabilization of knowledge production begins in the late 1930s and moves into the postwar 1940s by the novel's end, situating changes transpiring on Barbados against a backdrop of global violence enacted under the nationalist banners of Nazism, Fascism, and imperialism. Lamming's novel also ends on an ambivalent note, but it is more optimistic than Demby's, as G. and his friend Trumper set their sights on a futural horizon, albeit one outside of Barbados. When read side by side, these two novels reveal surprising affinities, linked by the Global South and the authors' respective experiences in exile. In "Sea of Stories," a meditation written at the turn of the twenty-first century, Lamming remarks on the interrelatedness of the US and the Caribbean in the context of US imperialism; in the wake of "the tactical withdrawal of the British," he observes, "the Caribbean returns to its old role of an imperial frontier, now perceived as essential to the security interests of the US." The politico-aesthetics of Demby's and Lamming's debut

novels are all the more temporally complex given that they were penned from Europe at the outset of the Cold War in an era of mounting social liberation and anticolonial movements.

I. Estranging the US South from Rome: Antifascist Perspectives in *Beetlecreek*

Demby expatriated to Italy in 1947, having served there in a segregated troop during World War II. He wrote his debut novel in the midst of an Italian society refashioning itself in a moment of leftist artistic momentum that defined itself against Fascist doctrines and Italy's failed colonial ambitions in Africa, particularly its brutal occupation of Ethiopia.[5] Demby was aware of his unique choice to move to Rome rather than join the more established African American expatriate community in Paris; he relates that though there were thousands of African American servicemen in Italy during World War II, "[i]ndeed, those first years of my return to Rome after the war I had the eerie feeling of being the only Negro in Italy, since I seldom saw another Negro on the streets or met Negros in the intellectual salons I was beginning to frequent" ("An American Negro Survives" II-II).[6] Such an impression, which stands in contrast to the sizeable Afro-Caribbean population immigrating to London in this period, suffuses Demby's novel with its tone of alienation and the shared, though distinctive, feelings of isolation that its characters experience. *Beetlecreek* grew out of Demby's short story "Saint Joey," which he wrote in 1946 while studying with poet Robert Hayden at Fisk University after the war.[7] He continued working on the novel while visiting Salzburg in 1947; it came together while Demby stayed in his friend Alex Randolph's residence in Venice, the Palazzo Ca'Dario, which neighbored Peggy Guggenheim's palazzo on the Canal Grande.[8] The novel, as I discuss below, makes racial oppression strange through an inversion model—a dynamic amplified by Demby's own exceptional position as an African American author living in postwar Italy.

Through its narrative focalization, the novel gives voice to the inner worlds of four characters living in the small, fictional West Virginian town of Beetlecreek in the Depression era: Johnny Johnson, an African American adolescent who comes to stay with his uncle in Beetlecreek

while his widowed mother convalesces in a Pittsburgh hospital and who is pressured to join the town's black gang, "The Nightriders"; David Diggs, Johnny's uncle, who had dreams of leaving Beetlecreek as a young man to pursue his passion as an artist but now paints signs for a living; David's wife, Mary Diggs, who does not understand her husband's remoteness and focuses her time and energies on planning church events and working in the home of a white family to whose lifestyle she aspires; and Bill Trapp, a lonely, elderly white man and former circus worker, whose small, shabby farm is located between the black and white sections of town.

Johnny is a catalyst for change in the town. When Trapp catches Johnny plucking apples from his tree, Trapp invites him to his porch for cider rather than punish him. The reclusive Trapp has not spoken to a single person for some fifteen years. When word spreads quickly through town that Trapp has apprehended Johnny on his property, Johnny's Uncle David rushes to Trapp's house to rescue his nephew; initially, Trapp asserts that he comes from respectable folks and owns his property, but his assertions of whiteness do not cohere (Demby, *Beetlecreek* 11–12). He is, as David knows, an outcast in town. Switching gears, Trapp seizes the opportunity for human contact and offers David refreshment, and the three characters, two black and one white and spanning three generations, share a pleasant evening together. This radical breaking of silence and isolation across racial and generational lines releases a destabilizing force that flows through the town and culminates with Trapp's ostensible death by the novel's end. These themes, explored by Demby after the war, gesture back to the previous decade and engage the violent aims of white supremacy, racial oppression, and nationalism.

As mentioned above, *Beetlecreek* pursues an inversion model, as it follows the fate of Trapp, who is falsely accused of a sexual crime. In an era of sustained racial violence against African Americans, including a wave of lynchings and wrongful incarcerations, *Beetlecreek* defamiliarizes the rhetoric of crime and punishment in the Jim Crow South. Trapp, however, appears not to recognize either the overt or tacit rules of segregation. Following his first encounter with David, he meets him again for drinks at Telrico's Café, which serves an African American clientele. As

an Italian American, Telrico is a liminal figure in the town who cathects with whiteness; nevertheless, "nobody thought of Telrico as a white man, but he never forgot it himself" (154). For his part, Trapp is energized by his visits with David and Johnny, and he begins a series of kind acts: he gives two white girls cups of cider and two African American girls a wheelbarrow full of giant pumpkins for their church benefit, sharing the bounty from his fecund, Eden-esque garden. Trapp is an abject figure—when he passes through the African American section of town, the children throw stones at him, spitting at him and calling him a "[p]eckerwood, peckerwood" (57), a slur for poor whites. Trapp, nevertheless, remains determined to maintain his newfound contact with people. His largesse culminates with his throwing a picnic for the town's black and white children. The result of this interracial gathering, however, is disastrous, as he is falsely accused of molestation by one of the white girls in attendance and branded a "sex-fiend" (151) by the entire town. In his discussion of interracial encounters and the pervert in early 1950s literature, Tyler T. Schmidt observes that *Beetlecreek*'s climax "[reminds] us how deeply threatening these desegregationist acts were to the Cold War ideology of containment" (137).

Alongside this inversion model of injustice, the novel subtly paints a picture of Jim Crow segregation as the strange fruit of the racialized past. The narrative takes pains to differentiate how the allegations against Trapp spread through the segregated quarters of town, thereby tracing modes of knowledge production and circulation. In the African American section of town, the townspeople repeatedly allude to the fact that Trapp would have been lynched immediately if he had been a black man. To confirm this point, a man named Slim directly invokes the infamous Scottsboro trials (Demby, *Beetlecreek* 151).[9] Addressing a group of black men at the barbershop, Slim says, "Now you turn the tables of this thing. . . . You just pick up any newspaper from the last few years and read what happened to those Scottsboro boys and you can imagine what'd happen to him! His life wouldn't be worth a row of pins" (151). In contrast, Trapp is ostracized but no formal charges are brought against him—members of both the black and the white parts of town decide not to call the authorities. In another subtle allusion to the racial-

ized past, David visits with his old flame, Edith Johnson, in the living room of her childhood home, where there is a picture on the wall "of a Civil War battlement with a regiment of Negro troops lined up stiffly to fight a white cavalry" (181). Given Demby's own service in Italy in a segregated troop during World War II, writing this description from his vantage point in postwar Rome, where he lived, worked, and socialized freely with Italians, other Europeans, and Americans, defamiliarizes the practice of racial segregation and white supremacy's longue durée.

In keeping with the novel's use of an inversion model, the town's black adolescent gang, the Nightriders, commands Johnny to seek vigilante justice against Trapp as an initiation rite for his alleged perversion by burning down his house. James C. Hall notes the "horrible irony" that the black gang members don black robes and masks and call for violence in an "imitation of the Ku Klux Klan" (233). Initially, Johnny resists their peer pressure to join their gang and is repulsed by their leader—notably, given the antifascist context in which Demby wrote the book, called "Leader" in the text—who kills a pigeon with his bare hands to impress the other boys. Nevertheless, Johnny's growing urge to become a "member" (Demby, *Beetlecreek* 166) leads him to capitulate to their demand that he burn down Trapp's home. Johnny's violent initiation into manhood comes at the end of the novel, subverting the redemptive denouement sometimes associated with coming-of-age narratives and ostensibly leading to Trapp's death (Johnny strikes him unconscious and leaves him on his property, engulfed in flames). While Lamming's G. has apparently auspicious future prospects, the implications of Johnny's actions are dire and his fate remains uncertain. He is, after all, a black adolescent who attacked a white man, however marginalized, in a segregated Southern town, a situation that recalls Slim's speech in the barbershop.

Beetlecreek's plot takes on a double meaning as a cautionary tale about Fascism and white supremacy in light of the context surrounding its publication at the dawn of the Cold War era. *Beetlecreek* was published in English by Rinehart in 1950 and in the same year by a major Italian press, Mondadori, translated by Fernanda Pivano as *Festa a Beetlecreek*.[10] In a 2008 interview, Demby looks back on his experiences during this

period in Rome and the gap between perceptions of the role of the African American expatriate writer and his own aesthetic priorities:

> I am almost famous, you know, like . . . Alberto Mondadori invites me to dinner because I am black! But then you discover that I am a complex black guy. I don't humor the Italian celebrity who invites me or who is talking to me. I don't humor their preconceptions. I want to always challenge them. I understand that they are coming out of Fascism, I am hip, and I want to show another dimension of being black and move the understanding of what it means to be black into the future that doesn't exist yet, in which there will be a world in which human differences will be defined, but not necessarily in the same way they are being defined now. And race will not be the fundamental one. (Interview)

In conceptualizing a desegregationist aesthetics, his debut novel constructs complex layers of trauma, loss, psychic devastation and critical resistance across time and space. Again, much of this work in *Beetlecreek* takes place through an inversion model that emphasizes Trapp's outsider status, which affords several occasions for readers and the novel's African American characters to compare their collective treatment by authorities and the white majority population against Trapp's treatment when he is accused. Racism suffuses the novel's Depression-era setting, made more temporally complex by its being written from postwar Rome by an African American expatriate and veteran of a segregated troop.

While Lamming's protagonist G. is presented in the novel as a nine-year-old and later as a teenager in the postwar 1940s, Demby's novel remains temporally rooted in the early 1930s, underscoring feelings of suffocation and dread as it follows Johnny, whose struggles are juxtaposed with those of his uncle, David. David's life in Beetlecreek is stymied by Jim Crow segregation, and he assumes the role of the repressed artist in the novel. His teenage crush, Edith, returns to town to attend the funeral of her adoptive mother and destabilizes David's stagnant life. She is an object of fascination in the African American section of town, having left Beetlecreek for college and later for a life in the city.

For David, Edith's return "brought movement to his life (a life which had become static, caught in the creek reeds, turned rusty and muddy), had importance because it lifted the suffocation from him" (Demby, *Beetlecreek* 94). Edith, who enacts David's wishes to leave Beetlecreek, demonstrates a critical distance as a black female outsider, a distance that highlights an alternative mode of being predicated upon departure.

Edith's stimulating presence awakens David to an awareness of his past experiences and the racialization of his ambitions. The narration reveals how David would walk for miles as an adolescent in Pittsburgh to borrow library books related to painting so that he could emulate them in his own drawings.[11] This form of creative travel and inspiration contrasts with the fixity he encounters that suffocates him upon his move to the segregated town of Beetlecreek. The result of viewing and making art is that "for a little while he could forget that he was a Negro" (Demby, *Beetlecreek* 95). This poses a tension in the novel between art as the idealized vehicle of individual transcendence and its irreducible connection to embodied and collective experience. The narration figures social identity in Beetlecreek as relentlessly homogenized, for "up there in Pittsburgh it was being a kid first and it didn't make any difference that he was a Negro. But when he went to that Negro college, he began to feel it, and along with it, the feeling of being suffocated and unable to move" (95). This feeling of suffocation, the narration posits, was not about a dearth of "opportunities" or even "civil rights," but it "had to do with Death, feeling frozen, suffocated, unable to breathe, knowing there was little to be done about it" (96). The novel describes the town's creek where mud and reeds trap endless objects; David thinks, "like the rusty cans, he was trapped, caught, unable to move again" (95).[12]

Written with critical distance from Rome, Demby characterizes segregation in terms of death and suffocation. The novel gives voice not only to the material reality of segregation but to its nuanced psychic effects: what David terms "the feeling of the death-grip" (96), which "would seem the most natural and permanent thing in the world" (97). The only relief from the death-grip, for David, is in making art, reading, or looking at art books. His college peers would rather engage in "goodtiming with girls or drinking" to escape their own feelings of "being suffo-

cated" (96), and he, too, sometimes joins them in these activities. Years later, having lost his sense of self in a loveless marriage that yields a stillborn child (100), David yearns for a more authentic and creative life.

When Edith returns to Beetlecreek, she catalyzes a change in David, who decides to leave town with her for the North. She is a complex character who—like Lamming's character Trumper, who returns to Barbados after living in the US—brings new knowledge to the town from the urban North, reconfiguring Beetlecreek's status quo and causing characters throughout town to speculate about her experiences. In contrast to Edward Margolies' early reading of the novel, which presents Edith "as a death figure, having been hardened and corrupted in the big-city Negro ghettos" (176), the narration describes her fierce, anti-hypocritical attitude toward Beetlecreek as generating movement out of stasis and homogeneity. Moreover, Edith's apparent hardness, as she tells David, originates in the trauma of having been raped at age thirteen by an older white man while she was walking home (Demby, *Beetlecreek* 114). While Trapp is demonized and ostensibly killed over false allegations of assault, Edith's true assailant is never brought to justice, which lends another layer to the novel's inversion model and offers a nuanced call for social justice.

The "death-grip" of American racism and the peculiar status quo of Jim Crow segregation enter into a compelling dialogue with postwar Italian society. Composed in the shadow of Fascism and while Demby was living in an artists' commune with a view of the ruins of Ancient Rome, *Beetlecreek*'s narrative meditations take up recurrent cycles of oppression. Such critical cosmopolitanism conjures the US South as part of a history-haunted Global South. Demby frames his book in these terms:

> This was a story that was very sneaky, because it was a novel that was talking about some elements of racial prejudice, but not really. All the stories were occult, they were not the stories that people were thinking about. They read novels in the 1950s and what everybody was looking for, if it was a black novel, was Richard Wright. The problem was in that; no one

> was thinking about a Proust in *Beetlecreek* and persons did not suspect that a black writer was so sophisticated that [he] had had in a very short time experiences, that he was very quick to understand in a metaphysical way, all of these problems that were coming out in a middle-class crisis in Europe, and a sexual crisis that was reflecting itself in Nazism, and Fascism, and even in Communism. (Interview)

Demby theorizes the role of the black writer in cosmo-political terms. While Wright's fiction has its own project in mind—that of social realism—Demby envisions his aesthetic project in syncretic terms. Traveling the black Atlantic from Rome to the agrarian US South of the politically charged Depression era, *Beetlecreek* privileges ambiguity and modernist alienation over triumph or redemption. Such a tone is fitting for the moment of its composition in postwar Italy amid the rubble of defeat and in the aftermath of the nationalist fervor underpinning Fascism.

Beetlecreek ends on a note of profound uncertainty that is indicative of mounting Cold War geopolitical tensions. Though Edith and David leave Beetlecreek together at the novel's end, in modernist fashion, the narration takes care to avoid implying that they are bound for a utopic future in the urban North; as their bus departs in the final scene, a divide has already settled between them, imparting a note of alienation and ennui. Moreover, the pair can hear fire engines in the distance, a reminder of Trapp's likely death and young Johnny's uncertain future as his assailant. Such violence and the lovers' emotional detachment from each other are steeped in the logic of segregation. Nevertheless, David and Edith's departure registers mobility, and the destruction of Trapp's farm—located at the crossroads of the novel's black and white communities—allows for a simultaneous set of futural, desegregationist possibilities. Like the US South's uneven modernization, Rome, too, sits at the divide between Northern and Southern Italy, compounding and elaborating Demby's debut novel's meditations on social identity and intersectional, sustained forms of oppression, which are always already preceded by modes of resistance.

II. Alternative Knowledge Production in *In the Castle of My Skin*

Unlike the physical violence against Trapp in *Beetlecreek*, which ultimately defamiliarizes the ubiquity of anti-black violence in the US, Lamming's novel *In the Castle of My Skin* emphasizes the rhetorical violence of the colonial experience of his youth in Barbados, also known as "Little England." *In the Castle of My Skin* engages with multiple systems of knowledge-making—colonial, diasporic, and hybrid, among others—to deconstruct what Lamming terms in his nonfiction writing "the colonial structure of awareness" ("Occasion" 36). Lamming asserted in 2003 that this structure "was not a physical cruelty. Indeed, the colonial experience of my generation was almost wholly without violence. It was a terror of the mind; a daily exercise in self-mutilation" ("Sea of Stories"). Lamming's minor character Trumper, who moves to the US but returns to Barbados just prior to the novel's semi-autobiographical protagonist G.'s own departure to work in Trinidad, differentiates between the African American experience of racialized physical violence and the rhetorical violence of racism on Barbados: the idea, for instance, of "[M]embers Only" (Lamming, *Castle* 296) spaces on the island to which black residents could never gain membership. In Demby's novel, violence is a perpetual threat—as evidenced by talk of police raids (*Beetlecreek* 17, 20, 145) and the Scottsboro trials—that only punctures the town when Johnny attacks Trapp, whereas *In the Castle of My Skin* focuses on the psychic violence of colonialism in order to characterize the colonized's "tragic innocence" (Lamming, "Sea of Stories").

Like Demby's wandering narration, which travels across multiple characters' consciousnesses, Lamming's novel refuses a stable narrative perspective, recalling Paul Gilroy's notion of black Atlantic cultural production as "stereophonic" (3). *In the Castle of My Skin* opens with G.'s first-person narration—a perspective which returns periodically in the novel, often shifting, notably, into a "we" voice—before moving into the consciousness of other characters and also deploying a third-person point of view. This polyphonic novel spends a great deal of narrative space musing on the uses of language in a colonial context, self-reflexively emphasizing the incompleteness of knowledge in Creighton's village, the novel's setting, named after the British landlord, with depic-

tions of the villagers' forced reliance upon speculation and hearsay to make sense of and situate their respective experiences on the island. This narrative strategy both underscores the villagers' predicament and calls attention to the horizontal strategies the villagers use to make alternative meanings despite the material and rhetorical limitations imposed upon them by the colonial structure. Mary Chamberlain duly observes that Lamming's "narratives are interrupted narratives, modelled not on the compulsion of reason but on the convergences of history" (191). Chamberlain's insight signals Lamming's narrative tendency toward interruption and against a forward-moving telos, a tendency that works by historiographical compilation and juxtaposition rather than linear progression. A commingling of dialogical perspectives emerges in Lamming's novel's experimental style and disjunctive form to challenge a master narrative of colonial paternalism and progress.

At the meta-level, Lamming's text examines knowledge production from multiple angles that form an interplay between past and present: from the periphery of the village; from a liminal, proto-national space; and from the exilic space of Lamming's expatriation to London. These multiple vantage points appear throughout the text, probing modes of knowledge production and their effects. In "Narrating the Nation," Homi Bhabha posits that there is "a particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it" (359). Lamming was in a unique position at the forefront of an emerging West Indian literary movement, though speaking of and for Barbados is necessarily a fraught task. His anticolonial novel is marked with Bhabha's Janus-faced metaphor of ambivalence, as the novel reckons with the role of the racialized past in the present, casting its critical eye back upon the institutions of slavery and colonization even as it looks forward to possibilities of independence and structural refashioning. Although Lamming's text not does present nationalism as an antidote to colonialism, its implicit call for independence beckons toward a futural horizon by the novel's end. Lamming's novel contributes to the period's work of decolonizing the imagination. The fact that he wrote from postwar London—the heart of the waning British

Empire—amplifies his novel's themes through critical distance from his homeland.

With its stylistic risks and innovative form, *In the Castle of My Skin* demonstrates a loosening of rigid categories instilled by the colonial apparatus—an artistic achievement that played an integral part in the formation of an emerging literary tradition. The novel, which depicts the intimate and social life of the villagers, puts into practice Lamming's hope that a West Indian voice and vision would emerge in time, as he expresses in essays such as "The Occasion for Speaking." In keeping with this desire, the novel effectively represents a diverse range of voices and perspectives. J. Dillon Brown observes that a number of critics note the novel's elliptical, impressionistic narrative, which eschews conventional plotting and presents a certain formal difficulty characteristic of high modernism. Brown cites several reviews written in preeminent media outlets comparing Lamming's novel to Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The difficulty of Lamming executing his rallying task and vision for the West Indian novel to find its own voice is woven into the form and style of this experimental first novel.

At the outset of the novel, G. voices the instability of knowledge and memory, a motif which recurs throughout the novel, particularly in regard to the boys' colonial education at the village school. On his ninth birthday, which transpires amid a catastrophic flood, G. muses, "And what did I remember? My father who had only fathered the idea of me had left me the sole liability of my mother who really fathered me. And beyond that my memory was a blank" (Lamming, *Castle* 11). G.'s profound statement of coming into being as an "idea" in juxtaposition with his own memory as a "blank" speaks to the novel's broader concerns regarding cultural history, shared memory, and the need to tell the story of one's own past in order to create one's own cultural meanings and narratives against those assigned by the dominant order.

In this vein, and reinforcing Lamming's retrospective sense of his debut project's displaying and deconstructing the "tragic innocence" of the colonized in Barbados, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues that Lamming's novel dramatizes a cultural "mutilation and amnesia" (167). Accordingly, when one of the village schoolboys asks his teacher about slavery after

hearing an old woman's remark about the "good and great queen" freeing the island's slaves, the teacher explains to the class that slavery was something that happened "not here, somewhere else" (Lamming, *Castle* 56, 58). The teacher's statement performs the constitutive function of language in the shaping of knowledge and experience—in other words, the teacher lies to the children about the past, but her narrative seems reliable because of her role as an authority figure; this constitutive function of disseminating misinformation facilitates the colonial project of making docile subjects. One of the schoolboys expresses great relief upon hearing this information: "Thank God, he wasn't ever a slave. He or his father or his father's father. Thank God nobody in Barbados was ever a slave" (57). In response to this passage, Ngũgĩ elaborates the effect of this lesson that "slavery has nothing to do with them; it happened to others. The school reproduces the notion of Barbados as Little England, a replica of Big England. This is more real, for it is played over and over again in the colonial narrative in books and on the blackboard" (167–68). Repetition and selective reading are integral to the production of colonial knowledge. The novel uses methods of defamiliarization to make strange these processes. In turn, not all of the boys are satisfied with the teacher's reply; despite their teacher's disavowal of slavery on the island, the boys cannot entirely dismiss the old woman's memory of slavery nor the oral transmission of her knowledge in the village. The word "slave" haunts the boys' minds, a haunting that announces their increasing skepticism and attendant alternative forms of knowing that exceed the village school's obfuscating, disciplinary function.

The village school's mission to inculcate and reinforce a message of dependency on the mother country is an incomplete process. Highlighting the school's ironic function and effects, Sandra Pouchet Paquet notes how although "supposedly a source of knowledge and understanding, the school functions to perpetuate ignorance, confusion, and a destructive cultural dependence on the mother country among its pupils" (19). The production of knowledge, again, is not entirely regulated in the exchange regarding slavery between the teacher and students. John Plotz explains the transformative potential of "discovering that one's imaginary motherland, the England that made and shaped one, bears

no relation to the England of the English. In other words, by refusing its imaginary hold, one can discover that the seeming portability of the imperial motherland is an illusion" (309). The novel supports such a conclusion regarding the colonial narrative as a collective fantasy with its unrelenting, defamiliarizing examination of the objects—flags, coins, uniforms, books, etc.—that go into maintaining British subjectivity. Lamming's defamiliarizing narrative project takes on deeper resonances, as it is written from war-ravaged London, when England began to retract its colonial reach in the post-World War II era—alluded to in the novel as the inevitable end of the "ugly," which the village shoemaker subtly links to his memories of Marcus Garvey's visit to Barbados (Lamming, *Castle* 103).

The novel calls attention to the role of optical surveillance in driving the colonial project of control. Disparate images and effects commingle to form an idea of what the narrator terms "the Great," which represents a mode of colonial knowledge production relentlessly conditioned and perpetuated by the power apparatus: "The landlord. The overseer. The villager. The image of the enemy. The limb of the law, strict, fierce, aggressive. These had combined to produce an idea of the Great" (Lamming, *Castle* 28). Lamming himself points to "the Great," or dynamics of psychic violence wrought upon the colonized, affecting one's perception of one's self and the world as a form of "self-mutilation" ("Sea of Stories"). For example, the English inspector's visit to the village school inspires dread in the village's black teachers and pupils alike, so that "on such occasions the teachers and boys all seemed frightened, and the head teacher who seldom laughed would smile for the length of the inspector's visit" (Lamming, *Castle* 35). Like "the Great's" anxiety-producing omnipresence and the guilt-producing appearance of the constable among the innocent in the village, the inspector's visit interpellates the teachers and students as incomplete British subjects. The novel estranges and dissects this oppressive structure, modeling resilience in the face of oppression and a way of living within this material and psychic realm of domination.

Language, as such, is at once a tool of control in the novel and a potential vehicle of liberation. Certainly, language's indoctrinating po-

tential is made evident in the novel's treatment of colonial education. The regimented schoolhouse, however, stands in contrast to the beach, where G. and his friends Trumper, Bob, and Boy Blue spend time reflecting on their lives and speaking openly about their hopes and fears for the future. The beach—at once a place of dangerous tides and expansive possibilities—is an appropriate locale for the novel's meditations on language and recalls the paradoxically destructive and transformative power of the novel's initiating flood: "the season of flood could change everything. The floods could level the stature and even conceal the identity of the village" (Lamming, *Castle* 11). During one of the boys' oceanside discussions, language is compared to a knife: "When the feelings came up like so many little pigs that grunted and irritated with their grunts, you could slaughter them. You could slaughter your feelings as you slaughtered a pig. Language was all you needed" (154). Language, the boys recognize, has been used on the island to exact control. In this vein, G. thinks, "Perhaps we would do better if we had good big words like the educated people. But we didn't. We had to say something was like something else, and whatever we said didn't convey all that we felt" (153). G. points to both language's potential to dominate others and its inadequacy to convey meaning owing to its constant deferral. The novel presents language as differential and incomplete, so that "something was like something else." This revelation, that language has transformative, mobile dimensions, a quality which upsets young G., is ironically the same dynamic that unsettles the colonial project of fixed binaries over time and is at the heart of Lamming's novel's aesthetic aims.

Incomplete access to knowledge characterizes a key scene in which civil unrest explodes on the island, spreading from the city to Creighton's village as its black inhabitants seek better working conditions and wages. What Demby presents as an individual scandal in the form of Trapp's allegations is a communal one in Lamming's novel. Like the tension between town and city in *Beetlecreek*, Lamming focuses on the gap between village and city. As word comes to the village of riots breaking out in the city, the villagers find it "difficult to act since everything depended on the fighting in the city which no one had seen. . . . There was fighting in the city. That was what they were all told, and they repeated the words

and tried to guess who were fighting whom. But they couldn't follow it clearly" (190). Time and again, *In the Castle of My Skin* emphasizes how ruling officials withhold information from the villagers to exert domination and dampen mobilization. Nevertheless, several villagers join the masses protesting in the city despite deadly police force, and they return with news of what they have seen. Chamberlain details the widespread uprisings in the British Caribbean during the 1930s, noting that the uprising in Barbados in 1937 "[was] the culmination of a century of frustration and a watershed marking the transition from the struggle for emancipation to one for independence" (176).

Decades later, Lamming asserted that although the villagers in his fictionalized account do not harm their white landlord, who totters weakly through the village, shaken by what is transpiring, in retrospect, Lamming felt that "the past now seemed more brutal, and I wondered why I had allowed the landlord to go free" ("Sea of Stories"). He goes on:

> No white man had been killed in the riots of 1937. But I had taken liberty with other facts, in the interest of a more essential truth. And I have thought ever since that the most authentic response to the long history of shame and humiliation that produced the riots demanded that the white landlord should have been killed: the symbolic end of a social order that deserved to be destroyed. ("Sea of Stories")

Against the colonial apparatus, the villagers strive in communion with one another to come closer to what the village elder Pa calls "the facts" (Lamming, *Castle* 192) during this key scene of revolution. The narration notes that during the uprising, "[i]f they had all got together, each putting his bit with the other's, they might have been able to make a story, but they had to remain with the fragments" (194). Lamming's novel posits that these fragments, nevertheless, produce alternative knowledges and prompt further speculation by the village's inhabitants, and, by extension, the novel's readers, regarding a path toward a better future.

The novel's fragmentary, elliptical form, which wanders from first-person perspectives to heterodiegetic narration, demonstrates this theory in practice, hailing an active reader. In this way, Lamming models the undoing of the "innocence" that the British ruling class hoped to maintain as a method of control in "Little England." By relaying the experiences of its many characters, Lamming, like Demby, subtly orchestrates a chorus of perspectives without overtly championing any single framework. As Aarthi Vadde argues, "Lamming . . . strove to circumvent the individualism of the liberal cosmopolitan tradition" (135). His novel offers a shifting, polyphonic account of the colonial experience in Barbados, rather than a strictly ethnographic or autobiographical account. Lamming's polyphonic method privileges acts of imagination and critical inquiry in decolonizing processes.

In addition to the varied perspectives G. and Trumper provide as the island's new and increasingly mobile generation, the novel depicts how the village's elders, particularly Pa and his wife, Ma, make sense of the island's shifting dynamics. Notably, Lamming scripts their exchanges in dramatic fashion, signaling their roles in the manner of dialogue spoken by "Old Man" and "Old Woman" and providing elaborate descriptions that operate, in effect, as stage directions.[13] Such a strategy calls attention to their use of dialect, which opposes the rote memorization of so-called Queen's English, delivered at the village school. Pa's poetic and lyrical monologue, which he delivers late in the novel in his sleep, expresses a freewheeling mode of knowing that exceeds constraint. Still, Pa's dream-speech points to the difficulty of finding space for such meaning-making on the island, as its content is peripheral to the dominant discourse. Though his words "are fluent and coherent," Ma "couldn't follow the meaning" (Lamming, *Castle* 209). Ma remains fiercely loyal to the British landlord and the church to her dying breath, and significantly, Pa's mystical dream-speech culminates with her sudden death. Because Ma finds comfort in the landlord's presence and in religion, her passing in the wake of Pa's revolutionary dream-speech suggests the island is taking a new direction, away from colonial modes of understanding, despite the villagers' forcibly dependent position on the British in the novel's timeframe.

Pa's dream-speech articulates hope for the future generation and delivers a complex narrative of struggle that addresses the island's history of slavery, which stands in sharp contrast to the colonial narrative of progress and betterment as heard in the schoolhouse. The promise of independence and a better future, of course, is in tension with the mass departures of young villagers, like G. and Trumper, and, moreover, with the fact that Pa is ultimately sent to live out his days sequestered in the almshouse. Pa's dream-speech articulating the cultural unconscious courses with poetic power, challenging the colonial structure's binaries with its very utterance. As a village elder, Pa cannot be entirely silenced, even when he is physically removed from the village. Read within the larger project of the novel, his dream-speech evidences ways of knowing that exceed the boundaries of colonial logics, revealing their illusory nature. The various perspectives uttered in Pa's dream-speech do not necessarily cohere, in much the same way that the villagers' fragments during the uprising, for instance, do not coalesce to convey the whole story. Nevertheless, they trouble and defamiliarize the "tragic innocence" of the colonized in Lamming's text. The notion that Pa's words, as he affirms, are for "those that come after" (211) implies that, while the island is frustrated vis-à-vis its independence, liberatory possibilities exist for the island's future.

In its revolutionary approach to language and its acknowledgment of language's power to both control and subvert, *In the Castle of My Skin* voices a self-reflexive mode of subjectivity, even as it bluntly highlights the difficulties of carving out such a place within "the colonial structure of awareness" (Lamming, "Occasion" 36). G. muses, "I remained in the village living, it seemed, on the circumference of two worlds. It was as though my roots had been snapped from the centre of what I knew best, while I remained impotent to wrest what my fortunes had forced me into" (Lamming, *Castle* 220). G.'s feeling of being on the "circumference of two worlds" evokes the possibility of change inasmuch as it speaks to a mode of indeterminacy. G. notes the performative aspects of his education—he enacts the colonial drills and exercises that go into making "good subjects" and alone among his friends advances to the island's high school—which sustains the novel's critical look at colonial

education. As a young man, G. acknowledges the limited choices available to him and his friends in a staccato fashion: "America. The High School. The Police Force. These were the three different worlds where our respective fortunes had taken us" (225). G. speaks with Trumper just prior to leaving for Trinidad, and Trumper plays for G. a song by activist Paul Robeson (295). Trumper reveals his newfound race consciousness, gleaned from his time in the US, which he assures G. that he, too, will find in time. This layer adds to the novel's complex temporality, as Lamming writes the novel from London, where he is, indeed, carving out such a community and contributing to building an Afro-Caribbean literary movement that travels the black Atlantic.

Over the course of Lamming's novel, the narrative's dialogical strands unravel the tightly bound disciplinary and regulatory function of knowledge in "Little England." Though the novel has been critiqued by scholar Neil ten Kortenaar for "its ungainly style and erratic narrative" (43), its formal innovations and open-ended structure effectively rehearse the instability of knowledge and postponement of meaning in the village. The absence of a central narrative perspective thus articulates a mode of hybridity and ambivalence that underscores the alternative modes of knowledge vying for recognition in the village. Lamming's novel does not explicitly endorse any one articulation of truth; rather, the text presents a fabric of interwoven modes of understanding that commingle without concretizing, which radically contrasts the transcendental signifieds of the colonial project. The novel critiques the colonial enterprise by theorizing language's constitutive function in the production of knowing subjects and ultimately advocates for the flexible, liberationist modes of meaning-making it reflects in its experimental prose.

Viney Kirpal argues for reading and appreciating Lamming's novel "on its own terms as a work straddling different 'literary' traditions [oral and written] while remaining firmly rooted in the indigenous" (113). With its sustained deconstruction of the performativity of colonial identity and presentation of diverse identities that exceed or escape the demands of colonial identification, *In the Castle of My Skin* defamiliarizes the British colonial presence and its impact on the lived experiences of the colonized. By observing the limitations of Eurocentric knowledge

models imposed upon the island, it refashions conceptions of truth and history from a critical cosmopolitan perspective that tends toward assemblage and creolization—a self-reflexive perspective, like Demby's, forged outside of the physical bounds of one's homeland.

III. Conclusion

In 1955, Lamming traveled on a Guggenheim scholarship "through the Caribbean and North America, where Langston Hughes was his guide" (Chamberlain 184). Demby visited New York in 1956, where he received a call from his friend Arna Bontemps, who told him: "Langston Hughes is here. Come with us to Carl Van Vechten's place, so you can be photographed as a member of the Harlem Renaissance" (Demby, "Ghosts" 133). Demby concludes: "And that's the last photograph Van Vechten took of anyone connected to the Harlem Renaissance. I was the end of the line" (133).[14] Demby's feeling of reaching the "end of the line" translates into the dramatic shift in style and form that would characterize the black radical literary tradition of the 1960s at large and Demby's second novel, *The Catacombs* (1965), in particular, whose aesthetic innovation is a harbinger of transnational black experimentalism.

The critical success of Demby's *Beetlecreek* led to reporting opportunities for prominent Italian magazines like *Epoca* and American publications like *Harper's* and *Holiday*. Demby traveled frequently throughout the 1950s through much of Europe, to postcolonial Ethiopia, and to postwar Japan before returning to the US in 1956. He traveled through the South for *Reporter* magazine, where he profiled the grassroots organizing efforts of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in "They Surely Can't Stop Us Now: A Negro Reporter's Journey through the Troubled South." On his way back to Rome from this trip, Demby visited Wright in his Paris apartment overlooking the Rue Monsieur le Prince; the two discussed the Afro-Asian Bandung Conference held in 1955 in the Republic of Java, and *The Color Curtain* (1956), which Wright wrote in response to the transformative gathering. The two compared the Algerian anticolonial struggle to the black freedom struggle in the US.

Lamming, who visited the US in 1955, having worked as a freelance reporter for the BBC, was in Paris a month after Demby for the First

International Congress of Black Writers and Artists, in which Wright also participated.[15] In Lamming's talk at the Congress, "The Negro Writer and His World," he describes the role of the black writer in the world, or rather three different worlds "to which the writer bears in some way a responsibility, worlds which are distinct, and yet very deeply related" ("Negro Writer" 323): his private world, his social world (that of his home country and culture), and the world of men. His private world, Lamming elaborates, "contains the range of his ambitions, his deceit, his perplexity, his pride, his shame, his guilt, his honor, his need. All these qualities are there, hidden in the castle of his skin" (324). These remarks, which cast light on his debut novel's title, gain resonance as he explains that these three worlds are, for better and often for worse, inseparable. Tangled as they are, the task of the black writer is "to find meaning for his destiny" and his place in the world (325), which is, perforce, both a private and public undertaking.[16] This constellation of writers and their critical cosmopolitical take on the times form a poignant temporal node in black Atlantic literary history, urging us to read beyond national boundaries and canons.

Though I have found no evidence, to date, that Demby and Lamming ever met each other, their respective connections with Hughes in New York within a year and Wright in Paris within a month of one another help to map postwar networks of black Atlantic thought. Predicated on a critical detachment from structures of oppression and literary strategies of resistance, their shared project of narrative defamiliarization signals diasporic creative affiliations. This relational model situates acts of imagination in keeping with Édouard Glissant's articulation of the "poetics of relation" as being at the fore of decolonizing psychic and material processes, however "agonistic" (65) these processes may be, as Nadia Ellis forcefully contends in regard to such affinities.[17] Both winners of the Anisfield-Wolf Lifetime Achievement Award, Demby's and Lamming's respective literary and critical contributions hold great relevance for nuancing black Atlantic literary history and for probing the continued role of transnational artistic production in effecting social transformation and justice.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1 The title's "Black Atlantic Temporalities" alludes to Gilroy's foundational study *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, which defines the black Atlantic world in terms of "stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within [its] structures of feeling, producing, and remembering" (3). Though Gilroy does not discuss work by Demby or Lamming in his study, their debut novels are in keeping with his formulation and call for reading black Atlantic literary production beyond nationalist canons and in terms of their hybrid formations.

2 I invoke Shklovsky's notion of aesthetic defamiliarization as a formal technique that makes strange the familiar in the face of a "devouring" habitualization: "The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception" (12). This article elaborates this formal method as a politico-aesthetic project in Demby's and Lamming's debut novels.

3 See my introduction to Demby's posthumously published novel, *King Comus* (2017), for a biographical sketch of the author's life.

4 Chamberlain documents Lamming's friendships with Sam Selvon and C. L. R. James, among others. For detailed analyses of Black Britain and black internationalism in these years, see Matera and Ellis, the latter of which includes a reading of Lamming's participation at the 1956 Congress of Negro Artists and Writers in Paris in dialogue with Baldwin's analysis of the event.

5 The First Italo-Ethiopian War was in 1895–96 and resulted in the Italian army's defeat. In 1935, Italy attacked Ethiopia again, claiming it as a colony until Ethiopia secured its independence in 1941. Demby traveled to Addis Ababa in 1950 to interview Emperor Haile Selassie for *Epoca* magazine.

6 Several African American writers and artists spent time in Rome in the 1950s and 1960s, including Ralph Ellison, Maya Angelou, Ada "Bricktop" Smith, and Barbara Chase-Riboud. Demby's closest peer was African American expatriate actor and translator Ben Johnson, with whom he acted in *Il peccato di Anna* (1953), a retelling of *Othello* set in 1950s Rome. Other African American artists and performers living in Rome in these years include John Rhoden, John Kitzmiller, Edith Peters, and Katherine Dunham.

7 See Hall's Afterword for further details on Demby's time at Fisk and his studies there with poet Robert Hayden (231).
8 Randolph was a former Office of Strategic Services officer who befriended Demby upon his arrival to Rome.
9 In a notorious instance of racial injustice, nine African American teens, who came to be known as the "Scottsboro Boys," were falsely accused by two white women of raping them aboard a train in Alabama in 1931. The men's trials were botched and heard by racist juries. Though one of the women eventually retracted the charge, the men were brutalized throughout the flawed proceedings and served time in prison.
10 Pivano translated other American writers into Italian in this period, including Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner.
11 Demby himself was raised in Pittsburgh in a predominantly white neighborhood until his family moved to segregated Clarksburg, West Virginia, after he finished high school. There Demby enrolled in West Virginia State College, a historically black college, and studied with Margaret Walker before enlisting in the Army. Like his character David, Demby recalls visiting the Carnegie Museum, which was miles from his home, at least once a week to "gaze for hours at the works of the Italian artists, modernists like Giorgio de Chirico," painting his own versions of what he had seen and dreaming of one day moving to Europe ("Ghosts" 124).
12 Critics have aptly pointed to Albert Camus' *The Stranger* (1943) as an influence on *Beetlecreek*'s existentialist themes. See Hall on this influence; Hall, for his part, reads Soren Kierkegaard as being more of an influence than Camus on Demby's early writing (228–29). Lamming, too, had ties to literary existentialism: "Simone de Beauvoir introduced *In the Castle of My Skin* to Sartre, who chose to publish it in his series *Les Temps Modernes* in 1958" (Chamberlain 177).
13 See Chapters 4 and 8 in the novel for examples of Pa and Ma's scripted dialogues.
14 Lamming, too, was photographed by Van Vechten, in May 1955.
15 The gathering was billed in French as "Le 1er Congrès international des écrivains et artistes noires." *Présence Africaine* printed the proceedings in English and French. Though it is possible that Demby attended the Congress, I have not found evidence to that effect. Attendees included Baldwin and Hughes.
16 Ellis argues for recognizing a "*fraternal agony*" (63; emphasis in original) between Lamming's speech at the Congress and Baldwin's review of the conference, "Princes and Powers." She persuasively defines the men's shared search for diasporic affiliation as fundamentally agonistic, predicated on their respective fraught relationships to the West.
17 Glissant defines the poetics of relation in terms of an aesthetic and political mode of giving voice to a shared past and possibilities for future liberation. He writes, "What took place in the Caribbean, which could be summed up in the word *creolization*, approximates the idea of Relation for us as nearly as possible.

It is not merely an encounter, a shock (in Segalen's sense), a *métissage*, but a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry" (34; emphasis in original).

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Music and Latency in Teju Cole's *Open City*: Presences of the Past

Birgit Neumann & Yvonne Kappel

Abstract: This article sets out to explore configurations of literary musicality in Teju Cole's novel *Open City* (2011), showing how intermedial relations between literature and music are linked to the novel's exploration of transcultural histories of violence. Supporting but also displacing the larger verbal narrative, intermedial references in *Open City* produce a surplus of meaning, an unruly remainder. They do so by introducing musical frictions that resist and undermine the structural coherence of the text and gesture toward something nonlinear and latent. Modelled on the form of the fugue, the novel's contrapuntal structure reveals the disjunctions, latencies, and elisions within hegemonic orders of knowledge and destabilize established notions of community, memory, and cosmopolitanism. To afford a fuller understanding of what we call the novel's "intermedial poetics," our essay will first provide a brief definition of the concept of intermediality, showing how references to music in the novel are connected to concepts of latency and atmosphere. Following this, we will investigate configurations of literary musicality in *Open City*. We argue that the contrapuntal structure of the novel clashes with the protagonist-narrator's contrapuntal reading of urban spaces and histories, asking readers to rethink conventionalized notions of black diasporic subjects.

Keywords: Teju Cole, *Open City*, intermediality, music, latency, memory

I. Dissonant Voices in *Open City*

In Teju Cole's novel *Open City*—a complex work about migration, transcultural violence, memory, and the arts—the narrator-protagonist, Julius, wanders restlessly through the maze-like streets of New York. Upon the corner of Sixty-sixth Street, he notices signs announcing that the big Tower Records store is "going out of business" (Cole, *Open City* 16). "[I]ntrigued also by the promise that prices had been slashed," Julius enters the music store and is captivated by the "music playing overhead" (16). Almost against his will, he becomes "rapt" in Gustav Mahler's late symphony *Das Lied von der Erde* (17), luring him into "the strange hues of its world" (16). In a state of "trance," Julius notes:

> On hearing Christa Ludwig's voice, in the second movement, a song about the loneliness of autumn, I recognized the recording as the famous one conducted by Otto Klemperer in 1964. With that awareness came another: that all I had to do was bide my time, and wait for the emotional core of the work, which Mahler had put in the final movement of the symphony. I sat on one of the hard benches near the listening stations, and sank into reverie, and followed Mahler through drunkenness, longing, bombast, youth (with its fading), and beauty (with its fading). Then came the final movement, "*Der Abschied,*" the Farewell, and Mahler, where he would ordinarily indicate the tempo, had marked it *schwer*, difficult.
>
> The birdsong and beauty, the complaints and high-jinks of the preceding movements, had all been supplanted by a different mood, a stronger, surer mood. It was as though the lights had, without warning, come blazing into my eyes. (17)

Impressing deeply upon Julius' memory, the epic symphony, composed during the most painful period of Mahler's life, becomes a site of "new intensity" (17), of affect and excess, causing a longing to hear more. And yet, though evoking an affective intensity and presence, the translation of music into words also highlights the unbridgeable gap between these modes of signification. While references to music conjure up sounds, tonality, and rhythms, their reliance on words simultaneously underlines

the absence of actual music, thus giving way to a multidimensional interplay between presence and absence, fulfilment and loss. Intermedial references to music weave their medial otherness into the text and introduce a number of dissonances that partially suspend and displace the meaning-making mandate of narrative. In contrast to Julius' many explicit meditations on history, which testify to his intellectual mastery, the interplay between the intermedial references that pervade *Open City* and its plotless narrative structure create a certain "mood" (17), a sense of foreboding and an atmosphere of expectation. This atmosphere gestures toward something beyond Julius' control and existing dominant orders of knowledge and prescriptive normalcy, i.e., something that is there and yet remains latent. Such latent living on—a *sur-vivre* in the Derridean sense[1]—indexes an intractable persistence, a presence of the past that conjures up alternative, largely forgotten histories that haunt and affect subjects "without warning" (17), as Julius puts it. For immediately after listening to Mahler, Julius connects the music to the workings of memory, admitting that the force of the music escapes his control: "The five-note figure from '*Der Abschied*' continued on from where I escaped, playing through with such presence that it was as though I were in the store listening to it. . . . My memory was overwhelmed. The song followed me home" (17). For Julius, music threatens to overwhelm him and troubles his sense of continuity, causing him to experience a disrupted chronology.

It is this unruly dynamic created by the interplay between words and music, past and present, as well as sameness and difference that this essay is concerned with. *Open City*, we argue, reconfigures these dichotomies as a disjunctive interplay in which conflicting experiences and dissonant voices are bound together to create frequently uncanny echoes and unpredictable resonances. The very structure of the novel enhances this sense of contradictory openness: modelled on the musical fugue and its contrapuntal organization, the narrative intermingles different—at times conflicting and contrasting—voices, sensations, and memories. Time and again, Julius' free-floating thoughts, which occasionally merge into a stream of consciousness, are interrupted by other voices, memories, and thoughts.[2] While these bits and pieces resonate with one an-

other, they also produce dissonance, noise, and friction, thus entangling readers in an endless "web of echoes, contrasts, and connections between and across different domains" (Vermeulen 90). The contrapuntal organization unleashes an excessive remainder that defies unified, coherent, and fixed meaning-making to allow for the affective latencies that reveal contradictions immanent in Julius' narrative. Affective latencies refer to possible forces that are immanent in actualized, culturally prevalent orders and that materialize in dynamic and unexpected intensities, "disconnected from meaningful sequencing" (Massumi 25). Latency, a modality of the possible, is characterized by interruptions to normative stuctures, alerting subjects to "the limits . . . of knowledge" (Cole, "Blind Spot" 383). These limits crystallize in the novel's poetic and political endorsement of a minor ethics[3] that is committed to remembering repressed histories while highlighting the instability and unreliability of memory.

Published in 2011, Cole's novel almost immediately became an international success and has spurred a considerable range of scholarly research dedicated to the novel's originality in narrative mediation and its complex engagement with cosmopolitanism and mass migration in times of an accelerated globalization.[4] Several critics have cogently argued that the novel invites a cosmopolitan reading,[5] and yet they show that it does so not by showcasing new forms of conviviality but by unmasking the shortcomings of cosmopolitanism and its seemingly ethical momentum as a neoliberal "façade" (Krishnan 677). In *Open City* cosmopolitan attitudes are largely revealed to be a "rarified set" of "*aestheticist* . . . attitudes" and stylized gestures of a privileged elite (Vermeulen 87; emphasis in original), which ultimately fail to address, let alone change, existing inequities.

Open City tells the story of Julius, a half-Nigerian, half-German psychiatrist at New York City's Columbia Presbyterian Hospital, who roams the streets of New York City and later Brussels. On his walks, the thirty-something Julius encounters a number of different characters and visits a range of cultural institutions, such as museums, monuments, concert halls, memorial exhibitions, and internet cafés. Rather than having a well-developed and coherent plot, *Open City*'s composition of haphaz-

ard encounters, random visits, and aimless walks gives rise to a loose series of ruminations on art, philosophy, geography, and history. Step by step, Julius' thoughts, together with the multiplicity of other voices, stories, and memories evoked in the text, uncover marginalized histories—largely histories of violence, ranging from Native American genocide, the transcultural slave trade, and European histories of colonial exploitation, to the attacks of 9/11 and the Iraq War. Contrary to what the many references in the novel to cosmopolitan values might suggest, these histories of suppression connect New York City to Brussels. The titular open city is a far cry from cosmopolitan harmony. Recalling Brussels' war-time capitulation, openness in Cole's novel indexes violation, betrayal, and complicity and thus hints at the sinister side of celebratory historical accounts: "Had Brussels's rulers not opted to declare it an open city and thereby exempt it from bombardment during the Second World War," Julius explains, "it might have been reduced to rubble. It might have been another Dresden" (97). In *Open City*, the non-dialectical linking of supposed opposites (for example, the linking of openeness to war with collaboration) becomes a central resource for making familiar terms suddenly strange, prompting readers to reconsider established interpretations.

Indeed, Julius, as an epitome of the hybrid narrator-protagonist that features so prominently in contemporary diasporic African writing, sets the frame for the novel's contrapuntal approach to memory and cosmopolitanism. At first, he impresses readers with his immense historical knowledge, meticulous descriptions of various aesthetic experiences, sensitivity to humanitarian injustices, and sharp analyses of pressing socio-political issues, much of which he unfolds "on the background of a globalized imagination" (Levy and Sznaider 204). As the narrative progresses, however, he becomes increasingly suspect as a narrator, and his cosmopolitan attitude is gradually unmasked as a shallow, frequently self-aggrandizing posture. While cultivating a curiosity for the arts, he remains "magnificently isolated from all loyalties" (Cole, *Open City* 107). Gradually, Julius transforms from an acute "observer of the world around him" into a narrator "marked by a malicious narcissism" (Krishnan 677). The cultural repression of violent histories of exploita-

tion is echoed in Julius' unwillingness to confront his own sinister past: he refuses to acknowledge a rape he is accused of having committed. This shocking revelation, which disqualifies Julius as a reliable narrator and keeper of cultural memory, invites readers to reconsider the facile association of the postcolonial or diasporic subject with histories of oppression.

Both the novel's topical concerns and its distinct narrative composition are closely linked to music and musicality. Besides the novel's structural imitation of the musical fugue, the novel abounds with references to various composers of classical music, such as Henry Purcell, Ferruccio Busoni, Gustav Mahler, Franz Schubert, George Frideric Handel, Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich, and Frédéric François Chopin. The novel also alludes to Jazz and Jazz musicians, mentioning Cannonball Adderley, Chet Baker, and Bill Evans, among others. And yet, despite the prominence of music and musicality in *Open City,* the role of these intermedial references have received relatively little attention.[6] We argue that a close examination of intermediality is crucial to understanding the distinctive ways in which the novel engages with transcultural histories, memory politics, and cosmopolitanism. The references to music evoke the latent, ghostly presence of the past in the present, gesturing toward historical elisions, frictions, and potentialities within culturally prevalent orders and the conventions and beliefs that underlie our sense of reality. To come to a fuller understanding of the intermedial poetics composed by the many musical references in the novel and their affects and effects, our essay will provide a brief definition of the concept of intermediality, showing how references to music in the novel in particular are linked to latency and atmosphere (Part II). In Part III and Part IV, we will investigate configurations of literary musicality in *Open City*, illustrating how an engagement with relations between literature and music add to our understanding of the novel's multi-layered exploration of history.

II. Intermedial References to Music: Figurations of Otherness and Plays of In-Between-ness

Intermedial references in literature exert contradictory forces: they support and extend but also displace and contradict the larger verbal

context of texts, thus producing a surplus of meaning by introducing musical frictions that resist and undermine the structural coherence of the text, which then gesture toward something nonlinear and latent.[7] While allowing the verbal text and music to be connected, intermedial configurations also create fruitful tensions between words and music that allow both to maintain, even showcase, their difference (Neumann 516). By translating music into words, the verbal form of signification is confronted with an aesthetic and material alternative, a sense of otherness, which reframes the signifying repertoires of text. Mimesis here, following Michael Taussig, turns into alterity, making possible the entanglements between separate entities (129). Precisely because this play between words and music reveals that one medium cannot simply be translated into another—that there will always remain an untranslatable, unruly remainder of musicality that exceeds assimilation—this tension affirms the inherent creativity and agency of mediality. Mediality is used to describe the specificities of distinct media, which are productive rather than simply reflective since they prefigure content, form, and possible effects. The agency of mediality manifests itself in eventful frictions and resistant traces that exceed the possibilities of representation and, as Vittoria Borsò argues, "cannot be integrated into existing orders of the sayable or audible" ("Audiovisionen" 167; our translation).

Intermedial research, which over the last fifteen years has turned into a bourgeoning field within the humanities, has largely been dedicated to verbal-visual configurations while references to music have received relatively little critical attention.[8] It seems that in the contemporary Western culture that is obsessed with both words and images, the significance of music is almost inevitably underestimated (Storr xii). That music somehow stands out from the other arts and proves resistant to theorization is often linked to its "unbreachable otherness" (Crapoulet 7), which results from its lack of representational or propositional character (Storr 3), the multidimensionality of rhythm (Serres 120), the unsignifying materiality of sound and voice (Kivy 4), as well as from its unique investment in atmosphere. Music, according to Peter Kivy, thrives on "abstract, nonrepresentational, frequently expressive patterns, forms, and perceptual qualities" that cannot be contained by discursive orders of knowl-

edge (4). The materiality of sound in particular counteracts the logic of representation. But this non-representational dimension of music may also have productive effects: freed from the subordination to discourse and form, the materiality of sound may become a source of potentiality, in the sense of Giorgio Agamben, an eventful occurrence in which possibility and impossibility of action coexist and are held in balance (*Potentialities* 182). The obdurate, asignifying force of materiality affects subjects in unpredictable ways and gives rise to new, underdetermined possibilities, attachments, and connections.[9] The materiality of sound "acts much like friction in the formation of meaning, or noise in communication" (Borsò, "Threshold" 132), turning music into an event that happens but that does not necessarily "happen *to* anything" or anybody (Scruton 5; emphasis in original).

Rather than producing meaning and knowledge, music creates certain moods. According to Anthony Storr, music conjures up "moods and passions that we have not yet encountered" (118); similarly, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht links moods (*Stimmungen*) directly to the musicality of sound. Much like music, Gumbrecht argues, *Stimmungen* affect our senses although we "are unable to explain the causality" (*Atmosphere* 4). The hearing of sounds involves and even moves our body, causing unpredictable changes in physical sensation. As the hearing of sounds makes possible an "encounter . . . with our physical environment" (4), it disrupts the individual's self-contained interiority. Expounding the different connotations of the German word for mood, Gumbrecht notes that *Stimmung* is connected to both the word *Stimme* (voice) and *stimmen* (to tune an instrument) and thus blurs the difference between human and non-human sound (4). Gumbrecht suggests that moods created by music have a productive potential since they draw our attention to hitherto unnoticed aspects of reality and call for new modes of perception and description: "As the tuning of an instrument suggests, specific moods and atmospheres are experienced on a continuum, like musical scales. They present themselves to us as nuances that challenge our powers of discernment and description, as well as the potential of language to capture them" (4). But while the act of tuning an instrument (*stimmen*) makes harmony possible, it may also cause dissonance

and friction, i.e., *Unstimmigkeiten*, which can evoke experiences, memories, and practices that put to the test a community's ideals, norms, and self-understanding.

Moods are complex, multilayered, and sometimes even opaque sensations; they emerge from the presence of something that defies translation into language and cannot be codified into words. According to Gumbrecht, the evocation of a specific mood typically hints at something that is latent, starting to crystallize but refusing to materialize.[10] Thus, moods or atmospheres are "sources of energy" that operate as a vague, often uncanny foreboding, hinting at latent realities that linger beneath the surface (*Atmosphere* 18). The latent cannot be discerned or uncovered, but its presence can be felt through the sensuous particularities of atmospheres that evoke the possible, i.e., unactualized layers of meanings, intractable forces, and marginalized experiences (Gumbrecht, "Dimensionen" 11). More specifically, latency designates possibilities, connections, and alternatives that are immanent in the real—not opposed to it. It is a force that opens the actual to the possible, showing that the possible is already inscribed in the actual. Opening up a "new set of historical possibilities" and accentuating the "shadowed historical persistence" of the past (Boxall 81, 62), latency troubles chronological continuities between past, present, and future. It encodes new temporalities that lay bare the incommensurabilities of our present and that provide an opportunity for new temporal connections between temporal layers to emerge.

What does this unruly scenario entail for the reading of literary texts? Reading for *Stimmung* and latency, Gumbrecht remarks, "cannot mean 'deciphering' atmospheres and moods, for they have no fixed signification. . . . Instead, it means discovering sources of energy in artifacts" (*Atmosphere* 18). Intermedial references to music in a literary text, we argue, are a particularly productive "source of energy." As outlined above, references to music mark an absent presence, oscillating between words and music, connectivity and difference, sameness and otherness, actuality and potentiality. These references enact unpredictable connections and confront readers with "a tinge of the unexpected" (Massumi 27). The eventful frictions that synaesthetically blend the acoustic and

the verbal give the text its distinct atmosphere, opening the novel to rhythmic transactions, irregular duration, and multitemporal pulsations, which gesture toward a possibility that is immanent in "past realities" (Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere* 14). Intermedial references to music can indeed, in the words of Cole, "trick [us] into divulging truths that we do not know we know" ("Blind Spot" 383).

III. The Sonic Fugue and Contrapuntal Readings of Western History in *Open City*

Open City begins with a temporal paradox, an opening that is at the same time a continuation and succession, gesturing to prior events and forestalling "any attribution of originary words or deeds" (Cuddy-Keane 97). This "self-canceling beginning" catapults readers *in medias res* (97), as if inviting them to join Julius on one of his endless walks: "And so when I began to go on evening walks last fall, I found Morningside Heights an easy place from which to set out into the city" (Cole, *Open City* 3). Julius explains that these walks started as an attempt to break with the monotony of his evenings, which largely consisted of reading, listening to classical radio, "watching bird migrations from [his] apartment" (3), and eventually falling asleep on the sofa. He makes much of the fact that when listening to classical music, he "generally avoided American stations" since their constant commercial breaks interrupted the flow of music (4). Instead, he turned to classical radio from Europe:

> And though I often couldn't understand the announcers, my comprehension of their languages being poor, the programming always met my evening mood with great exactness. Much of the music was familiar, as I had by this point been an avid listener to classical radio for more than fourteen years, but some of it was new. . . . I liked the murmur of the announcers, the sounds of those voices speaking calmly from thousands of miles away. . . . Those disembodied voices remain connected in my mind, even now, with the apparition of migrating geese. (4–5)

Tellingly, from the opening of the novel, scenes of Julius listening to classical music are permeated with a sense of isolation, displacement, and even lack. Not only the music of "Beethoven," "Wagner," and "Shchedrin" (4) but also the "disembodied" and indecipherable voices from faraway spaces match his "evening mood." The act of connecting his isolation with the ghostly voices of announcers in Europe creates an unstable paradox: the global connection builds on disconnection, which is only heightened by the fact that Julius "couldn't understand the announcers." Rather than securing an "aural communion" (Krishnan 681), listening to classical radio stations from Europe is experienced as an act of "speaking in tongues" (Agamben, *End of the Poem* 121), which puts language's semantic intentionality and referentiality under pressure. This act indexes the very limits of communicability and translatability, demarcating where commonalities across borders fail. Agamben argues that speaking in tongues does not consist in the "pure utterance of inarticulate sounds" or in "words whose meaning I do not understand" (*End of the Poem* 66). Rather, as Daniel Heller-Roazen explains Agamben's line of reasoning, "[t]o hear such sounds is to know they mean something without knowing exactly what such a 'something' might be; in other words, it is to discern an intention to signify that cannot be identified with any particular signification" (594). The frictions between the intention to signify and the failure of others to understand that intention mark a non-signifying form of communication (594), which thrives on the materiality of sound rather than the potential meaning of the sign. The very lack of relationship, here enacted by decoupling the signifier from the signified, evokes a socio-politically resonant scenario of alienation and absence that Julius links to processes of migration: "Those disembodied voices," he stresses, "remain connected in my mind, even now, with the apparition of migrating geese" (Cole, *Open City* 5).

In the novel's opening passages, classical music persistently alludes to something beyond the present moment—to other spaces, cultures, and languages intertwined with traveling, transport, and migration. As if to compensate for his isolation, Julius starts reading his books out loud, "with [himself] as [his] audience" (Cole, *Open City* 6), transforming

the monologic structure of his narrative into a network of voices: "I noticed the odd way my voice mingled with the murmur of the French, German, or Dutch radio announcers, or with the thin texture of the violin strings of the orchestras" (5). As he inscribes his voice into the texture of the music and the announcements played on the radio, Julius' discourse comes to resemble what he calls a "sonic fugue" (5).

The fugue, translated from the Latin word *fuga* which literally means flight or escape,[11] is a contrapuntal style of composition that brings together two or more different voices which "enter imitatively one after the other, each 'giving chase' to the preceding voice" and co-existing in a tonal pattern of dissonance and consonance (Latham). Figuring prominently in the work of classical eighteenth- and nineteenth-century composers—such as Johann Sebastian Bach, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Ludwig van Beethoven—the tonal fugue is a genuinely polyphonic form that follows a clearly defined pattern. It builds on a theme that is introduced by the first voice and subsequently imitated by a second voice, usually in a different pitch. This compositional procedure is repeated with the entry of each new voice, typically yielding "an alternating sequence of subject and answer" (Latham). Because each voice will eventually counter the newly entering voice, the fugue is generally considered the most emblematic form of imitative counterpoint.[12] In counterpoint, each voice reaches out for another voice, both accepting and displacing its primacy (Adorno 145–69). The result is, as Edward Said remarks in *Music at the Limits*, a polyphonic verticality that unsettles hierarchical patterns:

> In counterpoint a melody is always in the process of being repeated by one or another voice: the result is horizontal, rather than vertical, music. Any series of notes is thus capable of an infinite set of transformations, as the series (or melody or subject) is taken up first by one voice then by another, the voices always continuing to sound against, as well as with, all the others. (5)

Another way to say this might be that the fugue's contrapuntal composition fosters entanglement and interconnectedness, without glossing over the singularity of the particular.[13]

The contrapuntal principle underlies the novel's approach to history. For "[m]ore than anything else," Julius is a contrapuntal "reader" of urban spaces, histories, politics, the arts, and many other cultural phenomena (Goyal 66). Indeed, the novel's most salient characteristic is its abrupt shifts from Julius' sophisticated reflection on the monuments of civilization to his excavation of repressed histories of violence lying underneath.[14] In this way, the prevalent histories, which frequently support the grand narratives of nations, are confronted with their latent counter-histories, yielding a complex interplay between affirmation and negation. Time and again, Julius uses the disruptive potential inherent in the latent resources of the past to inscribe into the metropolitan icons of New York and Brussels repressed acts of exploitation and violence. When wandering through the maze-like streets of New York, he realizes that the grand "office buildings, shops, streets, diners, pharmacies, all the endless hum of quotidian commerce and government" were once the site of an African burial ground (Cole, *Open City* 220). In a similar way, Julius uncovers the histories of migrants buried under the World Trade Center and, in so doing, evokes the close links between colonialism, transcultural violence, and global capitalism—links that underline the primacy of capitalist interests over cosmopolitan ideals. When Julius travels to Belgium and excavates the country's colonial histories of exploitation hidden under the grandeur of metropolitan streets, New York's subaltern histories suddenly begin to resonate with those of Brussels. Julius' contrapuntal readings of time and space establish the fragile but haunting presence of erased histories, now present only "as a trace" (Cole, *Open City* 54). In registering these traces, the contrapuntal narrative gradually replaces the linear, progressive time of globalization with Wai Chee Dimock's deep time, an alternative, multi-layered temporality that spans the distance between centuries and continents.

Much of the novel's aesthetic complexity and socio-political ambiguity resides in the fact that Julius' contrapuntal reading of time and space is itself embedded in the novel's dense fugue-like contrapuntal structure. Significantly, the structure defies Julius' control and, with each added narrative, sheds a different light on his critical ruminations. Time and again, the stories and voices of other characters interrupt and

find their way into Julius' homodiegetic narrative: Dr. Saito, his mentor and former professor whom he occasionally meets to discuss literature and the arts; Saidu, a refugee from Liberia; Pierre, a Haitian shoe-polisher; his ex-girlfriend Nadège; Dr. Maillotte, with whom be becomes acquainted on his flight to Brussels; and Farouq and Khalil, two North African migrants whom Julius meets in Brussels. Jointly, they produce a dense web of echoes, an echo-chamber in the sense of Roland Barthes,[15] which pervasively displaces notions of a single voice and unified self. The occasional absence of quotation marks in the novel adds to this sense of dissolution since at times it becomes impossible to clearly distinguish between the narrator and the other characters (Vermeulen 94). As different voices intermingle and narrative hierarchies are blurred, conventional notions of the novel as a privileged site for the exploration of subjectivity, interiority, and "the realities of psychic life" lose their validity (94). Though the "'contest' between voices" (Wolf 31) invites a number of possible connections between seemingly unrelated characters, times, and spaces and allows actualized historical narratives to resonate with latent experiences, *Open City* refutes the possibility of a narrative voice that could establish relations between strangers and create coherence. The deeper socio-political significance of this strategy lies in the novel's questioning of conventional understandings of the self and community. If Cole's novel does imagine a community, this community is one "without unity" (Culler 32)—built on difference, friction, and traumatic proximity, not on natural, genealogical relations.

Many of the stories that make their way into Julius' narrative provide a counterpoint to Western ideals of cosmopolitan hospitality and ethics. Jonathan Culler, taking issue with Benedict Anderson's claim that the nineteenth-century European novel contributed to national homogenization, argues that narratives told from a limited point of view frequently usher in social plurality and destabilize notions of national unity (Culler 23). This imagining of a different kind of community—i.e., a community without a centre and built on difference rather than natural, genealogical relations—equally applies to *Open City*, which insistently shows that strangeness and plurality cannot be reduced or integrated into a totalizing whole. For example, Saidu's painful account of the civil

war in Liberia (in which most of his family was killed), his escape to the US, and his detention in Queens indicate the limits of cosmopolitanism. But importantly, these stories also provide counterpoints to Julius' cultivated knowingness. More often than not, Julius fails to respond to the stories that others share with him, and instead of showing sympathetic engagement, he remains detached from the people who reach out to him. When Julius' next-door neighbor tells him about his wife's death five months earlier, he admits, "I had known nothing in the weeks when her husband mourned, nothing when I had nodded to him in greeting with headphones in my ears" (Cole, *Open City* 21). Music thwarts rather than enables connection. And while replacing the single narrative perspective with multiple voices might index plurality and polyvocality, it primarily reveals Julius' incapacity to think in relational terms.

Moreover, Julius is unable or unwilling to critically assess the validity of the political ideas and loyalties that other characters voice. Among the most disturbing voices in the novel are those of Farouq and Khalil, two North African migrants with whom Julius discusses urgent political topics like the conflict between Israel and Palestine and Islamophobia in the wake of 9/11. Though Julius is impressed by Farouq's immense knowledge of contemporary politics and his familiarity with the theories of Paul de Man, Edward Said, Tahar Ben Jalloun, and Walter Benjamin, Julius does not understand Farouq's passionate language: "the victimized Other: how strange, I thought, that he used an expression like that in a casual conversation" (105). Farouq's is a kind of language in which the division between political and personal allegiances, which Julius vehemently upholds, collapses. When Khalil rehearses some fairly stereotypical, politically disquieting notions about Hamas, Israel, and American foreign policies and bluntly expresses his sympathies for the 9/11 attacks, Julius fails to respond to this kind of radical thinking in any meaningful way. He muses whether "having no causes, . . . [and] being magnificently isolated from all loyalties" (107), might be a better alternative to the rage felt by Farouq and Khalil.

More than once, then, Julius loses control over "the fugue of voices" (Cole, *Open City* 216) and either remains unaffected or lets them go unchallenged. As these voices introduce "noises from far off" and give

chase to Julius' dominant narrative voice (22), they reveal Julius' affective distance, his unwillingness to commit to other people and their cosmopolitan ideals. The many counterpoints which remain unanswered, eliciting neither response nor resonance, persistently exceed the fugue's well-ordered structure and interrupt its rhythmic flow, opening it up to contingency, inconsequentiality, and atonality.[16] It seems that the Western model of the fugue, with its rigidly defined principles and its carefully balanced interplay between dissonance and consonance is hardly capable of sustaining the multiplicity of competing voices and disquieting accounts that evoke the inequalities in a globalized world. In *Open City*, tensions and frictions prevail with hardly any possibility of release. In this process, the contrapuntal structure, including the principle of polyphony, becomes shallow and inconsequential, if not ethically suspect. Vermeulen is right when he notes that "[t]he novel can be read as a catalogue of failed attempts to live up to the expectation of achieved polyphonic form" (92). Though the counterpoint and polyphony make room for difference, multiplicity, and plurality, they hardly establish connections across difference. What prevails is a constant background noise, which does not so much index socio-cultural plurality as it does *Unstimmigkeit*, i.e., dissonance within contemporary political and normative orders. By accentuating the limits of the contrapuntal form, *Open City* also compels us to reconsider facile assumptions about difference, polyphony, and hybridity that underwrite much contemporary critical theory and are all too often celebrated as the backbone of cosmopolitan conviviality.

The novel's musicalization counters Julius' reading of the city, an act that, broadly speaking, presupposes a decipherable surface. The contrapuntal structure also puts to the test the idea of being a reader of cities, stories, and people. Rather than trying to read meaning into what we perceive, the novel's intermediality challenges readers to accept a certain indeterminacy, unpredictability, and unreliability. The structure and musicality of the narrative do not "resolve into meaning" and resist integration into a linear, chronologically ordered narrative (Cole, *Open City* 22); the novel does, however, create a distinctive rhythm that unsettles the concept of space as "a synchronous surface" and uncovers its

"diachronic constitution" (Haverkamp 12). This networked and multilayered space bears the traces of the unactualized past—a past with yet unknown potential for the present and future. "Each one of those past moments," Julius notes, "was present now" (Cole, *Open City* 54). Though Julius' claim suggests an awareness of the past's persistence, he is unable to acknowledge how his own history exerts psychological pressure on his behavior.

Giving rise to feedback loops, spiraling, and disruption, one might best describe the rhythm of latency as an "idiorrhythm" (Barthes, *How to Live Together* 35). According to Roland Barthes, the idiorrhythm is a "transitory" and "fleeting" rhythm that is "always made in opposition to power" (35). It emerges in "the interstices, the fugitivity of the code" (Barthes 7)—that is, a regulating structure of signifying systems—and allows "for imperfection, for a supplement, a lack, an *idios*: what doesn't fit the structure, or would have to be made to fit" (35). In *Open City*, idiorrhythm arises from the constant changes in narrative tempo. While some chapters are dominated by long descriptions of the visual arts and architecture and unfold in a relaxed, unhurried manner, others perform rapid cuts and hectically jump from one episode or impression to the next, introducing "a potentially infinite series of submovements punctuated by jerks," as Massumi describes it in relation to affect (40). Time and again, the narrative circles back through different variations of a specific motif before morphing into the fluidities of rhythmic extemporization. And while some chapters start *in medias res* and have no obvious connection to the preceding chapter, others begin where the previous chapter ended and establish a sense of continuity. The changes in rhythm create the nagging feeling of a constantly deferred conclusion, which remains unreachable according to the dynamic of the idiorrhythm.

Laying bare possible, forgotten, and repressed experiences, *Open City*'s contrapuntal organization appears to reflect what Said calls a "contrapuntal analysis" (*Culture* 318). To counter hegemonic, unified versions of the past, Said asserts that "we must be able to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them co-

existing and interacting with others" (36). That is to say that contrapuntal analysis, which Said expressly links to the contrapuntal principle in Western classical music, makes it possible to read the imperial archive and related identitarian narratives against the grain. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that *Open City* only partly acts as contrapuntal analysis. Though its contrapuntal structure links diverse and seemingly unrelated experiences while reconfiguring history from the perspective of its immanent otherness, the novel also shows that some experiences, spaces, and people resist being read. Latent history, a spectral presence "across centuries" (Cole, *Open City* 221), remains largely unintelligible and inaudible within what Jeremy Gilbert calls, in the context of the discrepant relation between music and words, "the structural logic of language." But it is not only the very readability of experiences, histories, spaces, and persons that *Open City* calls into question but also the notion of a privileged reader. Who after all, the novel asks, can claim the right to read history in an ethically sound manner?

IV. Classical Western Music, African Repercussions, and the Dissociative Fugue: "The *Unfug* of the Code"

Julius' contemplation of the repressed histories of colonialism, economic exploitation, and transatlantic slavery that have gone into the making of contemporary New York and Brussels sparks his wish to understand his own part in these histories. Shortly after reflecting on the history of the World Trade Centre and forced dislocation within New York of "[t]he Syrians, the Lebanese, and other people from the Levant [who] had been pushed across the river to Brooklyn," Julius states, "I wanted to find the line that connected me to my own part in these stories. Somewhere close to the water, holding tight to what he knew of life, the boy had, with a sharp clack, again gone aloft" (Cole, *Open City* 59). What is remarkable about this statement is not only Julius' wish for connection—which is at odds with his usual deliberately detached perspective—but also his abrupt change in pronoun from "I" to "he." The pronoun "he" creates a network of possible references: it might refer to one of the skateboarders Julius has just watched or to John Brewster's "painting of a child holding a bird on a blue thread" (38) that caught his attention in the

American Folk Art Museum (Vermeulen 97). However, it seems more plausible that the third-person pronoun refers to Julius himself, signaling his dissociation from his past and the general alienation that grips his diasporic subjectivity. Tellingly, Julius, who is practically obsessed with uncovering collective histories, reveals little about his personal past. It is only through the dense network of intermedial references to music that Julius' troubled past is conjured up, registering experiences that had previously resisted orders of the sayable.

Julius' Nigerian upbringing and scholarly education are steeped in colonial history and its persistent postcolonial repercussions. He lost his Nigerian Yoruban father at the age of fourteen; he is also estranged from his German-born mother, who, even after her husband's death, feels closely connected to Nigeria. His rejection of his mother spurs his wish to leave his family home behind and to join a military school in Zaria, which deepens Julius' estrangement from his country of birth. His classmates perceive him as the other, a "foreigner" (Cole, *Open City* 83). It is also here, in the military context of a colonial educational system designed to extol Western culture, where Julius first becomes acquainted with classical music. He experiences this introduction as highly unsatisfactory since the music lessons "never involved any listening to music, or the use of instruments, and our musical education was composed of memorized facts: Handel's birth date, Bach's birth date, the titles of Schubert lieder" (82). The crippling over-identification with colonial culture evidently leaves little room for an appraisal of local music; it recalls the "Manichean divisions" that lie at the heart of colonialism (Krishnan 688), which reverberates in Julius' rejection of his Nigerian roots, in a suppression of his (post)colonial difference. Julius eventually turns his back on Nigeria and moves to the US, where he struggles to leave his past behind and to enact what Madhu Krishnan calls "the total eradication of history under the auspices of colonial cleaving" (688). Cleaving refers to the act of removing colonial elements of one's life selectively—in this case, Julius' attempt to move beyond his Nigerian identity and memories of his past. Because Julius is mired in isolation and alienation, his memories of Africa mainly produce gaps, blank spaces, and discontinuities: "The past, if there is such a thing, is mostly

empty space, great expanses of nothing. . . . Nigeria was like that for me: mostly forgotten" (Cole, *Open City* 155). As if to overcome the physical and psychic splits that underlie his (post)colonial subjectivity, Julius, once in New York, becomes "an avid listener" (4) to classical music and develops a dislike of jazz.

According to Cameron Fae Bushnell, classical Western music is closely linked to empire and imperial efforts to subsume the heterogeneity of colonial knowledges under unifying Eurocentric structures. Western music, Bushnell maintains, "operates as a metonym for a totalizing system based in European culture" (3) and functions as a "symbol for empire, its attitudes, structures, and systems of order" (11). Bushnell notes that classical Western music can be traced back to ancient Greece, where it underwrote "cultural notions of 'greatness'" and eventually became "universally emblematic of cultural superiority" (12). To be sure, Bushnell's statement glosses over the great diversity of classical Western music and ignores the potential disruptions and creative transformations that are introduced once Western music is transferred into colonial contexts. Such creative appropriations trouble efforts of construing empires as homogenous spaces. And yet Bushnell has a point when arguing that classical Western music formed an integral part of the colonial educational system, which was designed to propel the "civilization" of the colonized and showcase the presumed superiority of the West (12). Arguably, Julius' nagging sense of alienation goes hand in hand with his endorsement of Western music and his concomitant rejection of jazz music, which is thick with histories of transatlantic slavery but also with socio-political resistance and cultural revitalization. His ostentatious reveling in classical Western music and his dislike of jazz might indeed express Julius' desire to become absorbed by hegemonic Western and non-black subjectivities.[17] But *Open City* might as well be challenging facile ethnocentric understandings of identification, including the stereotypical link between racial heritage and cultural preference. If *Open City* is an "African book" as Cole claims ("Interview"), then this sense of Africanness clearly transgresses older concepts of black solidarity and ethnic heritage, such as provided by pan-Africanism, to usher in more ambiguous forms of identification that "go beyond conventional

frames" (Goyal 68). In this way, the novel alerts readers to the perils of identity politics, which reduces subjects (including authors) to representatives of a social group.

Paralleling the efforts of Western cultures to conceal their complicity with violence and exploitation, Julius' dissociation from his Nigerian past crystallizes in his denial of his role as Moji's violator. In this context, it is useful to remember that Moji is the sister of Julius' childhood friend in Nigeria, which is why he associates her closely with Nigeria. Just as he has distanced himself from his homeland, his "friend, or rather an acquaintance" is also "long forgotten" (Cole, *Open City* 156). The novel once again draws on a contrapuntal principle, where the entry of Moji's story displaces the primacy of Julius' voice and—dramatizing the dynamic of accusation and denial, as well as remembering and forgetting—yields a dissonant polyphony that underlies the novel's engagement with history. Before reconnecting with Moji at a party in New York, where she accuses him of raping her years ago in Nigeria, Julius contemplates with typical self-complacency how individuals struggle to hold onto a sense of normalcy. According to him, such a sense of normalcy first and foremost aims at psychic self-preservation and the construction of a usable past, which involves constant reinterpretations of wrongdoings:

> Each person must, on some level, take himself as the calibration point for normalcy, must assume that the room of his own mind is not, cannot be, entirely opaque to him. Perhaps this is what we mean by sanity: that, whatever our self-admitted eccentricities might be, we are not the villains of our own stories. In fact, it is quite the contrary: we play, and only play, the hero and in the swirl of other people's stories, insofar as those stories concern us at all, we are never less than heroic. . . . From my point of view, thinking about the story of my life, even without claiming any especially heightened sense of ethics, I am satisfied that I have hewed close to the good. (243)

The framing is remarkable since it bolsters what James Wood calls Julius' "selfish normality" that bluntly vindicates Julius' ethical arbitrariness:

because Julius does not "[claim] any especially heightened sense of ethics," he is satisfied that he has mostly "hewed close to the good." But ethics, as Moji makes clear, does not only involve hewing "close to the good"; it also involves the willingness to remember histories that interfere with individual needs of self-preservation.

When Moji confronts Julius with the knowledge that he raped her in their teens, he acts like he "knew nothing about it, had even forgotten her, to the point of not recognizing her when [they] met again" (Cole, *Open City* 244). The act of dissociating himself from a past that continues to traumatize her, Moji suggests, is itself a manifestation of power and privilege; accordingly, she considers Julius' ostentatious and self-complacent indifference a "luxury of denial [that] had not been possible for her" (244). But instead of responding to Moji's charge, Julius simply walks away, "enjoying the play of light on the river" when the

> just risen sun came at the Hudson at such an acute angle that the river gleamed like aluminum roofing. At that moment—and I remember this exactly as though it were being replayed in front of me right now—I thought of how, in his journals, Camus tells a double story concerning Nietzsche and Gaius Mucius Cordus Scaevola, a Roman hero from the sixth century B.C.E. (246)

While Julius does not deny the truthfulness of Moji's story, he refuses to be affected by it and, in an act of "calibration" (243), turns her charge into just another story. Jointly, Moji's story of traumatic suffering and Julius' failure to respond to the pain of others produce a "double story" in which the dynamics of point and counterpoint, of accusation and denial, turn ethics into a self-complacent solipsism,[18] accentuating the power structures and partiality that underlie the construction of memory. This dense, disjunctive, and multilayered temporality—akin to the "speed of [the] mental disassociations" (Cole, *Open City* 18) that Julius admits to be suffering from—slips through the net of linear chronology and reveals the limits of narrative memory to produce continuity and an ethically meaningful past. Though narrative memory is often praised as a privileged form of establishing meaningful

connections between past, present, and future, the novel illustrates that it may also give rise to disruptions and ethically precarious interpretations of the past.

In an interview, Cole has noted that a "plausible" (though not openly marked) "framing device for *Open City* is a series of visits by Julius to his psychiatrist" ("Interview"). Indeed, Moji's accusations shed a different light on the erudite protagonist. It confirms what Julius' ostentatious detachment has suggested all along, namely that his incessant walking has a compulsive dimension that intimately connects the novel's fugue to its counterpoint, the so-called "dissociative fugue" (Vermeulen 102). According to standard definitions, dissociative fugue, also known as psychogenic fugue, is characterized by temporary identity confusion, mental dissociation, breakdowns of memory, as well as the compulsion to wander and travel away from home (American Psychiatric Association). Though people suffering from dissociative fugue show few outward signs of illness, the symptoms make it difficult, if not impossible, to cultivate social relationships. Seen from this perspective, the novel's fugue form is deeply steeped in repression and amnesia. These materialize in Julius' own dissociative flight from his African past and in his attendant attempts to negate his (post)colonial difference. As suggested by the novel's contrapuntal structures, the dissociative fugue is not the opposite but an integral part of the fugue. While the novel, due to its contrapuntal structure, lays bare many disregarded histories, it also throws into relief the limits and exclusions inherent in any historical account. The formation of meaning per force relies on acts of selection and exclusion. The novel's paradoxical structure invites us to reconsider other binary divisions and easy classifications that structure our thinking, such as the division between normalcy and pathology, cosmopolitanism and violence, remembering and forgetting, postcoloniality and hegemony, and Africa and the West. Perhaps, more than anything, Cole's *Open City* teaches us how to listen to the "*fugitivity* of the code" (Barthes, *How to Live Together* 7)—the gaps and uncertainties that resist complete integration into preformed meaning-making practices—and to "trace out a story from what was omitted" (Cole, *Open City* 9): We are asked to surrender to unheard, latent, and ambiguous sounds so that a distancing

from well-known narratives about the nation, community, history, and identity becomes possible.

In *Open City*, the structural interdependency of the fugue and the dissociative fugue assert the close links between culture and violence. It confirms Benjamin's thesis that "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (256). Julius is indeed blinded by the "overwhelming . . . light" of Western art, but he immediately admits that "even that light was shadowed" (Cole, *Open City* 250). As the fugue and the dissociative fugue are entangled in a pattern of confirmation and negation, *Open City* sets free latencies of the past that haunt cultures and individuals, asking them to acknowledge their own unreliability and complicity in mechanisms of exploitation and power. This complicity, the novel suggests, does not diminish the obligation to remember, write, and rewrite history; it does however oblige us to critically assess the stories that we tell ourselves and others.

In a central passage of the novel, Julius, wandering through Brussels, enters a church in which an "unseen organist" plays a "Baroque piece" that soon "takes on the spirit of something else," something that resembles Peter Maxwell Davies' "O God Abufe" (Cole, *Open City* 138). The piece is made up of "distinct fugitive notes that sh[o]ot through the musical texture," creating a melody that is "difficult to catch hold of" and that elicits a "fractured, scattered feeling" in Julius (138). It takes Julius a while to realize that the music was not played by an "unseen organist" but "was recorded and piped in through tiny speakers" and that the "source of the fracture in the sound" was "a small yellow vacuum cleaner" (138). Here, the echo-chamber reveals its intractable, uncanny agency as the "fugitive notes" produce ever new, unpredictable, and uncontainable resonances, underlining the unreliability of memory from which to retrieve a solid understanding of the past. As a matter of fact, the peculiar mixture between the sound of high culture and those of machines, between Baroque music and "[t]he high-pitched hum from the machine" (138), temporarily bring to the fore what Julius calls the "*diabolus in musica*" (138)—the marginalized, latent, and unruly otherness immanent in standardized models of cultural patterns, as well as signifying and generic models. But they also point to the extent to

which Julius is blinded by the "overwhelming . . . light" of Western music (250), all too willing to interpret the sound of the vacuum cleaner as "distinct fugitive notes" (138). The vacuum cleaner, Julius eventually notices, is pushed by a woman who, a "few weeks before, [he] would have assumed . . . was Congolese" (138) and whose presence in the Belgium church "might . . . be a means of escape" designed to "forget" her past (140). Evoking escape, refuge, forgetting, and migration but also the limits of knowledge, the "fugitive notes" are a fitting expression of the acts of repression and absences that stabilize seemingly self-contained discourses. As the "fugitive notes" introduce an "irruptive sense of things past" (156) that trouble any "secure version of the past" (156), they produce what Anselm Haverkamp calls the "*Unfug* [nuisance] of the code" (166). According to Haverkamp, the "*Unfug* of the code" is precisely the site where the disturbing presence of latent pasts becomes perceptible and where individuals are temporarily confronted with their sinister, repressed histories (166).

V. "Mahler's Sense of an Ending": Back to the Beginning

Open City ends as it begins—with a temporal paradox. The ending brings us back to the beginning, namely to Mahler's music and to the mysteries of bird flight, and yet, the circular structure notwithstanding, the narrative refuses to come full circle. Julius, one year older and barely changed by his confrontation with past atrocities, attends a performance of Mahler's Ninth Symphony at Carnegie Hall. Julius is fascinated by the Austrian Jewish composer's "obsession with last things" and the general "sense of an ending" that pervades his music (Cole, *Open City* 250). The Ninth Symphony in particular is suffused with the personal disasters Mahler faced in his last years. Because of "the vicious politics of an anti-Semitic nature," Mahler was "forced out of his directorship at the Vienna Opera" and eventually migrated to New York (249); his daughter Maria Anna died of scarlet fever and diphtheria, and Mahler himself was diagnosed with a heart defect. Mahler, Julius muses, "made himself a master of the ends of symphonies, the end of a body of work, and the end of his own life. Even the Ninth wasn't his very last work; fragments of a Tenth Symphony survive, and it is even more funereal

than the preceding works" (250). But for Julius, Mahler's music evokes a sense of ending and death, both of which self-reflexively frame the narrative's own poetics of ending. In addition, Mahler's music transcends binary oppositions, moving beyond totalizing structures to forge new, multi-layered connections that might serve as a resource for pluralized modes of world-building. "Mahler's music," Julius notes, "is not white, or black, not old or young, and whether it is even specifically human, rather than in accord with more universal vibrations, is open to question" (252). These musings on Mahler's music induce Julius, in a very rare moment in the novel, to acknowledge his own blackness, which, up to that point, he has attempted to ignore or suppress through his endorsement of hegemonic practices. The fact that this acknowledgement is elicited by Mahler's music is fitting because the composer's ambivalence toward his own Jewishness parallels Julius' struggle with his own blackness. Scanning the audience in Carnegie Hall, Julius notes: "Almost everyone, as almost always at such concerts, was white. . . . I am used to it, but it never ceases to surprise me how easy it is to leave the hybridity of the city, and enter into all-white spaces, the homogeneity of which, as far as I can tell, causes no discomfort to the whites in them" (251–52). Once again, the novel suggests that the possibilities of music, namely its power to communicate new, open, and pluralized relations, fail to link up to real-world politics. As long as difference is negated and traumatic pasts are repressed to serve the self-aggrandizing needs of nations and individuals, change toward a more cosmopolitan and ethically more sound society appears impossible.

Open City is far from constructing a strong, politically effective counter-story that could confirm difference and mobilize marginalized voices to resist hegemonic practices. Similar to music, the novel has no message and no single point. Its engagement with political atrocities cannot be translated into any form of commitment or clear ideological position. Its refusal to associate the arts with political and moral reflexivity geared toward resistance does not however indicate a lack or even failure.[19] Rather, it has productive implications because it emphasizes the very eventfulness of the arts, including acts of reading and listening, prior to and independent from any political lesson, ideology, or

belief. The novel's poetics and politics of remembering are pitched in a minor key; they are ambiguous and polyvocal in their political thrust and dissonant in their aesthetic. The contrapuntal principle as well as the frictions between verbal narrative and musicality set free latencies—both in the sense of the historically repressed but also the historically possible—that resist integration into a unified, coherent, and meaningful structure and that defy attempts at narrative closure. The "*Unfug* of the code" evokes competing voices and dissonant noises—noises that mark their affective power by gesturing toward the forgotten and the repressed while underlying the instabilities, contradictions, and even biases of any historical narrative. This performative paradox of a weighty historical narrative that asks readers to think about historical atrocities through the use of an ethically unreliable narrator who abuses the privileges afford by his hegemonic position as a male, intellectual American lies at the heart of the novel. *Open City* is a polyvocal exploration of the ethical injunction that repressed and marginalized histories need to be remembered, even if such acts of remembering might be tainted by the fallacies of memory. The act of remembering in itself does not automatically translate into more ethically sound positions, let alone into a historical consciousness, from which a cosmopolitan ethics could be derived.

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Notes

1 Derrida's concept of *survivre* describes the living on (the persistence) of the past throughout time. This living on is not only a continuation of life but also a living on with a surplus, a transformed life. *Survivre* is connected to a ghostly return ("[s]urvivance et revenance" [Derrida, "Survivre" 153]), which has unpredictable effects because it cuts across life and death. Derrida's concept takes issue with the primacy of those living in the present and instead seeks to instill a sense of responsibility for the non-living who continue to live-on. For Derrida, it is especially language and writing in which a *survivre* of the past can happen and with which our article is concerned.

2 As Vermeulen notes, because of its melancholic tone, its pronounced engagement with the ethics of remembering, as well as its innovative play with the generic conventions of the novel, *Open City* has repeatedly been compared to the works of W. G. Sebald, one of the writers to whom Cole feels indebted (82).

3 We use the term "minor" in the sense of Deleuze and Guattari to refer to alternative political expressions and actions, which unfold a transformative yet unstable force that escapes codification and stabilization. Accordingly, a minor ethics negotiates ethical issues in relation to situated conditions and localized knowledge rather than universal principles, remaining aware of its own limits.

4 See Hallemeier; Krishnan; Vermeulen; Gehrmann; Oniwe; Hartwiger. Most of these contributions deal with the novel's ambivalent exploration of cosmopolitanism, paying specific attention to Julius' knowledgeable but unaffected perspective.

5 See, Hallemeier; Vermeulen; Krishnan.

6 Only Vermeulen (91–94) pays close attention to the musical fugue form and its contrapuntal principle of composition; Maver briefly mentions the novel's engagement with the fugue.

7 A writer, photographer, photography critic, and art historian, Cole is eager to probe new interrelations, transfers, and passages between words, images, and sounds and consistently works towards hybridizing media. Intermediality is a consistent feature of his work.

8 There are exceptions to the rule, such as the fine studies by Wolf, Bushnell, and Hoene.

9 While many scholars link the specificity of music to its connection to emotions (Storr 3; Levinson 11), we argue that music has a capacity to induce different affective states in listeners. Whereas emotions can typically be codified, classified, and named, affect is best understood as a potent yet underdetermined intensity (Massumi 24–25; Vermeulen 7) that "passes through but also beyond personal feelings" (Terada 110).

10 These ideas are expresses in Gumbrecht's *After 1945* (23) and "Encounter" (94).

11 The fugue gained popularity in the middle of the eighteenth century, mainly in Germany. The term is derived from the Italian *fuga*, which literally means "flight," and also from the Latin word *fuga*, meaning "ardor." The term also references the act of "running away" and "fleeing," from the Latin verb *fugere*. The current English spelling (1660s) is derived from the French translation of the Italian word ("Fugue").

12 For a more detailed discussion of the formal elements of the fugue, see Ratner's *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style*.

13 Despite its relatively strict formal rules, the fugue's horizontal structure is often considered a dialogic and pluralizing form.

14 For a similar reading, see Vermeulen's analysis in *Contemporary Literature and the End of the Novel: Creature, Affect, Form*.

15 Barthes' concept of the echo-chamber understands human speech as the product of previous utterances. The concept stresses the connections between utterances across time and cultures and celebrates plurality. The echo-chamber is a repetition, an echo, but a repetition with a difference (*Roland Barthes* 74). By this token, we understand the mingling of different voices in the novel as an echo-chamber: the voices revolve around similar ideas but always approach them slightly differently, thus producing echoes and slippages.

16 We understand atonality in the broad sense, i.e., as a lack of a tonal center.

17 Goyal also reads how Julius "recoils from commitment of any sort" as indicative of his wish to not be easily read as a black subject (66).

18 For a similar assessment, see Wood's review of the novel, "The Arrival of Enigmas."

19 In her reading of *Open City*, Goyal highlights the need to rethink established postcolonial approaches to literature. According to her, the novel addresses "the schism between postcolonial theory advocating hybridity or opacity and postcolonial literature gleaning ordinary life, both quotidian and violent" (66).

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Nomadic London: Reading Wandering in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and Ben Okri's "Disparities"

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Abstract: This article presents a way of reading that recognizes migrancy, wandering, and fragmented experience as fundamental narrative features in colonial and post-colonial literary contexts. Drawing on contemporary network theories and discussions of walking as a social practice, the article argues that Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) and Ben Okri's "Disparities" (1986) demonstrate the creative potential of wandering insomuch as it allows migrant characters' ground-level views to be incorporated into textual representations of London's topography and its concomitant meaningfulness. The analysis identifies a narrative practice in which metropolitan space is constructed by the lived, mobile experiences of colonial migrants and post-colonial immigrants who sidestep the controlling pressures and modulating flows of local and global network systems, especially as they are exerted by urban design, social organization, and immigration policies. This reading of mobility as aesthetic practice proposes a way of understanding these stories of im/migrants as composed of complex paths and unexpected intersections rather than as confrontational or hierarchal. It suggests that critical attention should be paid to networks as compelling structures of order and influence that, paradoxically, also offer potential for an indirect, multilayered agency.

Keywords: migrancy, mobility, wandering, networks, postcolonial London

> The nomadic city is the path itself, the most stable sign in the void, and the form of this city is the sinuous line drawn by the succession of points in motion. The points of departure and arrival are less important, while the space between is the space of going.
>
> Francesco Careri,
> *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice* 42

In *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), Sam Selvon compiles vignettes of colonial migrants who travel both across the globe and in metropolitan London. At the very beginning of the novel, Moses Aloetta, a "nine-ten year" migrant in London from colonial Trinidad, boards "a number 46 bus at the corner of Chepstow Road and Westbourne Grove to go to Waterloo to meet a fellar who was coming from Trinidad on the boat-train" (Selvon 23). Selvon's description of this route sets up the novel's focus on travelers' ground-level experiences on the local network of city streets and its overview of the global passages that comprise the network of the British Empire.[1] Selvon's opening connects London with its West Indian colonies and highlights Moses' ability to navigate London; the narrative can thus be read through a local lens that pays heed to imperial links and recognizes that late- and post-colonial travelers' experiences of places are mobile and multi-focal. These perspectives form complex networks rather than the clearly defined binaries of here and elsewhere that are characteristic of many imperialist travel paradigms.[2] *The Lonely Londoners*' persistent references to urban topography provoke a spatialized, mobile reading that resists a direct linear connection between places and instead draws attention to the experience of mobility in post-World War II London where, under the auspices of the British Nationality Act (BNA), 1948, travel between colonies and the metropole appeared to be unrestricted for all colonial subjects. Such a mobile way of reading attends to the late-colonial novel's networked texture and sets a precedent for my discussion of Ben Okri's "Disparities" (1986), a post-colonial story of wandering in 1980s London, where British borders and legal policies have been redefined to exclude the majority of Commonwealth immigrants. Both texts critique the idea of London as a fixed and stable

center of the (post) Empire and explore how belonging is linked with mobility for colonial and postcolonial im/migrants.[3]

Additionally, by privileging passages, intersections, and the shifting motion of experience over destinations, closed sites, and static settings, an experiential, mobile way of reading explores digressions from narratives and social orders that are hierarchal, directive, and exclusive. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau suggests that by focusing on the transitory experiences of "the ordinary practitioners of the city"—that is, pedestrians who move, often unseen, at ground level—a "*migrational*, or metaphorical, city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city" (93; emphasis in original). Such slippages follow from the theory of the *dérive*, or drift, defined by psychogeographer Guy Debord in 1958 as a process of actively, and without prior design, engaging with a landscape through the experiences one has while wandering without destination through a constructed space (62). Debord's theory of walking in the city with both algorithmic calculation and an openness to chance relies on the premise that designed spaces, especially cities, are organized to produce particular meanings. However, as walkers drift on and off the usual paths, they can follow or diverge from established city plans. In *Walkscapes*: *Walking as an Aesthetic Practice,* architect Francesco Careri describes walking as "an aesthetic tool capable of describing and modifying those metropolitan spaces . . . to be *filled with meanings* rather than designed and *filled with things*" (26; emphasis in original). For Careri, walkers, rather than being passively shuffled along by the designs of architects and urban planners, can understand a space through their own mobile experiences and add to its meaningfulness through the traces left by their footsteps. In this way, wandering is a powerful practice of intervening in a dominant spatial organization. Speaking of his contemporary drift-map project in which he surveyed and recorded the topographical experiences of a select group of city walkers, architect Oliver Froome-Lewis explains that travelers who allow themselves to wander a city without a particular destination "not only . . . discover an alternative, possibly alien, physical reality but also . . . gain a subversive form of critical authority over the city, together penetrating the city's exquisite armour of complexity" (387). Similarly,

Selvon's and Okri's narratives feature migrant characters who drift along the main roads and byways of London and present wandering, an unstructured mobility, not just as a metaphor for displacement but also, I argue, as a practice for the digressive creation of place within existing metropolitan urban networks.

In this article, I consider wandering as a narrative practice and a way of reading. To do so, I focus specifically on how Selvon and Okri allow their im/migrant characters to participate in London's metropolitan space outside of or parallel to the networks of order imposed by official urban planners, principles of commercial exchange, and histories of empire. Using *The Lonely Londoners* and "Disparities" as exemplary texts, I consider what Susheila Nasta refers to as a "poetics of migrancy," a concept that directs attention to the passage of migrants and immigrants between Britain and its former colonies as a movement of both connection and intervention into established hierarchies (69). In my discussion, I shift the focus from mobility on a global, empire-wide scale to actions and interactions in local metropolitan space. Hence, I argue that Selvon's and Okri's fictions use wandering in and among the city's network of streets, institutions, and policies as a strategy that is integrative, digressive, and layered and that allows the narratives a share in authority over the city's topography and its concomitant meaningfulness. In making this argument, I rely on contemporary network theories offered by writers like Manuel Castells and Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker and make use of associative reading and writing practices, such as those used to engage with hypertext and online spaces. Additionally, I refer to deliberations of mapping and walking. While such diverse modes of inquiry might, at times, seem postdated in regard to the two narratives I discuss, I contend that a network structure, composed of complex systems of points and lines, pervasively underpins many modern local and global orders, yet is most compellingly recognized in contemporary discourses about digital media and the Internet. Networks, non-linear writing styles, and topographical textual mapping are appropriate forms for understanding the narrative practices of mobility, wandering, and digression presented in *The Lonely Londoners* and "Disparities." Both narratives map a mobile and shifting sense of place

for im/migrants as they navigate London. This mobility is the key structural feature of these traveling texts and enables diversions from established narratives about nation, empire, and metropolis.

I. Reading Networks in the City

The travel along the network of London pathways depicted in *The Lonely Londoners* and "Disparities" shows migration as an everyday practice. A cartographic representation of Selvon's novel, for instance, would show that wandering, modes of ground transportation, and efforts at relocation propel the narrative's flow and provoke meaning; characters and stories are always in motion. Writing of distant reading, Franco Moretti outlines a method of literary analysis whereby a reader might prepare a literary map, or a schematic representation of a narrative, to better visualize the structural forces at play (36–37). Moretti suggests that by taking note of recurring events, objects, or processes and plotting them onto a visual rendering of the narrative world, a critic can see "'emerging' qualities, which were not visible at a lower level" (53). Literary mapping in this fashion enables an overview of a text's topography. While Moretti's practice of distant reading offers useful insight into general trends in a literary work, it does not sufficiently attend to the grounded travel of individuals, as suggested by writers like de Certeau and Careri. For instance, a bird's eye view of London's topography in *The Lonely Londoner*s and "Disparities" would show an imperial metropolis wary of the travel of colonial subjects who roam the streets and act in and on its spaces. My discussion of these texts, however, focuses less on overviews and more on the paths of individual im/migrants whose travel through the city crosses "spaces that cannot be seen" from above (de Certeau 93) and allows for deviations from established practices.

In *The Rise of the Network Society*, Castells offers a "networking logic" with which he deliberates complex organizations marked by the flows of people, goods, and information in social and global networks (76). Castells defines a network as a set of interconnected points and lines whose organization reflects relationships and power dynamics in social, cultural, and economic contexts (502). Networks are pervasive, and within a network, sources of control or origin are often difficult to locate.[4]

In *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks*, Galloway and Thacker describe networks as forms of organization that are as political as they are technical (27). They explain that networks are complex, non-linear structures that can be composed of anything from computers to streets to cultures (33). Galloway and Thacker also highlight the difficulty of ascertaining sovereignty and sources of agency within a network, where it seems that, although "no one is at the helm making each decision" (40), individual mobility is nevertheless controlled and modulated (41). Speculating on the mechanism of such control, Castells notes that "[s]ince networks are multiple, the interoperating codes and switches between networks become the fundamental sources in shaping, guiding, and misguiding societies" (502). He theorizes that flows, movement, and intersections are fundamental features of network space that affect every aspect of our lives: economic, political, and symbolic (442). Sources of authority are thus diffuse and often unrecognizable, while movement within and along a network is persistent; it is a space of going. For Castells, this persistent movement and dynamic change indicate that "the power of flows takes precedence over the flows of power" (500). Because networks are complex, they often resist hierarchal organization or binary oppositions in favor of movement and the enabling of relations (Galloway and Thacker 35). In regard to literary studies, a theory of networks promotes a view of literary works as variable participants in fluctuating social, political, and topographical contexts; passages, tangents, and parallel paths within and among texts reveal diverse social relationships and barriers. In this spirit, it is notable that Selvon's novel focuses on the footpaths and local travel of colonial migrants as they wander, looking for work or pleasure, along roads and familiar sites in metropolitan London such as Waterloo Station, the Employment Exchange, Piccadilly Circus, and other mapped and already-defined places. In doing so, Selvon recognizes an urban network in which his characters' routes run parallel, overlap, and intersect with existing paths and sites. Selvon's London becomes a plane of action and interaction, a ground-level, mobile enactment on networked space.

In *The Lonely Londoners*, migrants' first engagement with London's urban and global networks occurs at Waterloo Station, a site where the

radiating routes mark it as a major node, "a place of arrival and departure" (Selvon 25). Waterloo Station offers access to the territories and colonies of the British Empire and connects the novel's colonial expatriates to their places of origin. Sometimes long-time immigrants go there just to see the familiar faces of the arrivals and learn about current events back home. The connecting lines between colonial West Indies and metropolitan London are, in this context, geographically linear and binary even while this word-of-mouth news trafficked over shipping lines suggests informal, as well as official, layers of exchange between the colonies and London. *The Lonely Londoners* sidelines this kind of binary global view of interactions between center and margins and focuses instead on a networked and localized exploration of contested spaces and sub-networks among West Indian and African migrants in London. Such sub-networks persist despite, as the narrator recognizes, discouragement by the existing metropolitan authorities who, as they guide migrants toward often unsuitable housing and employment, try to marginalize colonial subjects even within the city. Along these lines, Ashley Dawson suggests that the storytelling circle that Moses brings together in *The Lonely Londoners* forges "a cosmopolitan sense of diasporic unity" that allows black Britons to find relief from and resist the dominant, ordering pressures of racism in the city (34). While this migrant gathering is a relevant feature of Selvon's novel, Dawson's description of the meetings as occurring in a liminal, sheltered space draws on the conventional polarizing discourse of metropole and colony and maintains the opposition of center and margin even within the boundaries of the city. In distinction from Dawson, I argue that, insomuch as the stories collected in *The Lonely Londoners* present a complex urban topography, the storytellers who gather in Moses' room every Sunday narrate their own acts of nomadic wandering within that space. Their sub-network of walked paths interposes itself into an even more complex urban network shaped in part by a history of travel in Britain's empire. Rather than existing outside in a separate or liminal space, these migrants' stories travel within and alongside existing metropolitan paths and sites, claiming both their engagement with and deviations from that network.

The network of walked routes displays the novel's effort to integrate the migrants' discursive and physical agency into an otherwise unwelcoming metropolitan space. In reflecting on networks and diasporic-ethnic identity creation, Olga G. Bailey considers how immigrants and marginalized ethnic groups develop complex and uneven connections in transnational spaces (256). While Bailey is specifically interested in virtual or "online territories" (256) that diasporic individuals and communities can inhabit and in which they can produce new subjectivities, her discussion is grounded in theories of networks as producing complex, interwoven, and international landscapes on which collective identities can be enacted. She categorizes the Internet as "not just a technological innovation but a discursive formation that has taken on a global scale" (259) and speculates how, in virtual and physical network landscapes, diasporic identities are unstable and under negotiation and immigrants engage in "a process of becoming" (257) by redefining self and place across borders. Bailey argues that the Internet offers an exemplary structure through which to consider how social and political networks among immigrants produce a multidimensional, in-flux space for identity-building, where "migrants can be active agents of their lives even when living under difficult circumstances" (259).[5] In a similarly discursive fashion, *The Lonely Londoners* presents a networked landscape both in its structure, which connects often tangentially and geographically related stories told by colonial migrants, and within the narratives, as the characters travel along London routes and places. Helping new migrants to find lodging, Moses acts "like a welfare officer, . . . scattering the boys around London, for he don't want no concentrated area in the Water" (Selvon 25). Spaced throughout the city, the migrants, through Moses' orchestration, become cartographical signposts that mark subroutes and extended connections while trying to sidestep local concerns about migrants congregating.[6] Such networked communities exist alongside existing social structures but allow for a dynamic, mobile reconfiguration of place and person. If, in the spirit of writers like Debord, de Certeau, and Careri, we read walking and other forms of mobility through complex urban and literary networks as physical and aesthetic enactments of spatial identity, then we might also suggest that the map-

ping of space in *The Lonely Londoners* renews and develops the identity of the metropolitan, soon to be post-imperial, city. We might thus see London as undergoing "a process of becoming" rather than as a preexisting, static space filled by old and new inhabitants.

Selvon's walking stories are, at times, subject to Britain's authority over urban space, but they also resist the binary, destination-driven travel implicit in the rhetoric of both colonial expansion and "reverse colonialism."[7] The novel's narrator tells stories of West Indians who, after World War II, migrated to London to find work and opportunity during a time when borders were seemingly fluid. Dawson explains that the BNA, 1948 affirmed the legal equality of all British subjects throughout the empire and freedom of movement between the United Kingdom and its colonies (10).[8] While this open-door policy was impeded by subsequent legislation that imposed restrictions and regulations on colonial migrants, *The Lonely Londoners* presents, at least in its early chapters, a somewhat positive outlook on the possibilities for colonial subjects to thrive in London, even while it acknowledges that colonial migrants are not particularly welcomed. For instance, Henry Oliver, a migrant from Trinidad that Moses meets at Waterloo Station, arrives in the city without luggage, a coat, or booty from the duty-free store on the ship. Indeed, he arrives with nothing but the clothes on his back, because he didn't see "no sense to load up [him]self with a set of things" (Selvon 33). His arrival in England is fluid and, to him, a non-event, like taking a walk from one station to the next, like never really leaving home. The narrator nicknames Henry "Galahad" and comments that he is "a kind of fellar who does never like people to think that they unaccustomed to anything, or that they are strangers in a place, or that they don't know where they going" (38). Henry refuses a polarity between home and away as well as the hierarchal power structures attached to that binary in colonial contexts. Moses, now a veteran London-dweller and aware of the racial and economic restrictions placed on West Indian migrants—the double standard raised in matters of housing, employment, and hospitality—foresees problems for this questing Galahad. His story and his enthusiasm are taken up at several points in the novel, and his

drift along city routes is exemplary of *The Lonely Londoners*' discursively networked structure.

Once in the city, connections between distant places are less fluid and clear for Galahad, and it seems, at first, that circumstances will compel him to admit a distinction between his mobility in Trinidad and his unfitness to navigate London routes. Accompanying Moses to his flat in the Bayswater on the London Tube, Galahad is amazed by the power and speed of the underground train, and he feels connected to metropolitan center of the Empire and in command. For a short time on the ship and train, he believes in a linked-up world where the national borders that separate inside and outside (or metropole and colony) are irrelevant to his sense of the smooth flow between destinations. The following day, however, he tries to make his way alone to the Employment Exchange, a common destination for West Indian migrants. As he stands perplexed and a little afraid near the Queensway Tube station amidst a jostling, busy crowd, the narrator asks: "You think any of them bothering with what going on in his mind? Or in anybody else mind but their own?" (42). Galahad becomes terrified as he finds himself "walking stupid," lost and unconnected; in this passage, he is invisible to the people around him (42). He has no conception of the whole, recognizes no signposts, and is immersed only in his immediate situation. He begins to "drift down to Whiteleys" (a shopping center in the Bayswater area) and panics at the thought of losing his sense of where he started. In this scene at ground level in London, Galahad is both unseen by passersby and unseeing; he is neither monitored nor is he able to determine the way to his desired destination. Subsequent story threads depict him confidently wandering in the city and deliberating its meaningfulness on foot at ground level. The lack of oversight and insight in this early journey informs and even enables the agency of his later travel along city networks; that is, Galahad comes to find that being unseen offers potential for autonomy from controlling gazes and wandering offers a means of exploiting that autonomy.

The linking and directive properties of networks, particularly as they are exemplified by a non-linear system like hypertext, offer insight into Galahad's predicament as representative of both the empowering and

unconventional aspects of a grounded mobility. Hypertext presents a writing space in which information or narrative elements (in the case of stories) are connected mainly by associative links; progression through a text need not be a linear movement from beginning to end but can be a vertical and horizontal flow on a plane of action. The overall structure of a hypertext work resembles a network of nodes and vertices. While *The Lonely Londoners* is clearly not hypertext in any technical sense, its collection of narratives shows a similar kind of associative linking in the different characters' travels and wanderings through London streets, and it demonstrates a structural resemblance to such networked narratives. Silvio Gaggi notes that in hyperspace, readers have choices that seem to enable control and freedom of movement. A link or a path is a choice, and a hyperlinked narrative might allow for digressions, diversions, and unusual associations. However, Gaggi points out that, alternatively, "[t]he complexity of the web and the possibility of having to make decisions without sufficient information regarding where any choice may lead can result in a disorientation that precludes any meaningful freedom" (105). Participants in an associatively linked textual environment may become lost in a maze of diverging or intersecting pathways and meanings that compromise, even as they comprise, their subjective empowerment. In the scene described above, Galahad wants to go to "the employment exchange by Edgeware Road" (40), but with so many potential routes and without a view from above or a gridded map of London, he drifts fearfully along unrecognized streets. Drift, in this scene, is debilitating. Having no "conceptual map of the whole" (Gaggi 105) puts the reader, or walker in Galahad's case, in a position to be swept along by the progress of the text without any sense of direction. Hence, while hypertext and networked spaces can provide individually empowering structures that subvert linear, destination-driven authority or hierarchal arrangements of people and space, they also provide structures that are potentially overwhelming to individuals whose agency might get lost in a system of invisible orders.[9]

Lisa M. Kabesh argues that Selvon's narrative marks out the limits of freedom and mobility for colonial migrants in London's racially organized and exclusive sectors: "*The Lonely Londoners* offers a detailed

topography of racial hierarchy in the metropole: it puts in relief different gradations of mobility and freedom that are accessible, or, as the case may be, inaccessible to the text's West Indian characters" (5). Similar to Gaggi's claims about the limits of choice in a hyperlinked environment, Kabesh warns against equating "freedom of movement with *political* freedom" and notes that the former in no way guarantees the latter, especially in these late-colonial border crossings (5; emphasis in original). I argue that Selvon recognizes this problem of passages but posits, through Galahad, that among the dangerous potentials of walking outside of allocated city routes is the equally threatening possibility of migrants assuming shared authority within a space. With knowledge of routes and a reasoned willingness to get lost, Selvon's characters find a degree of autonomy and participation in the flows of pedestrian traffic through the city. In the scene described above, Galahad's initial inability to navigate the city leaves him abject until Moses arrives. As a guide, Moses physically connects Galahad to places and people in London and figuratively brings him into the novel's network of stories. In later episodes, Galahad finds his way joyfully, as he discovers how to drift. He learns, as I will show, to embrace ground-level modes of navigating the city.

The Lonely Londoners emphasizes walking in the city; the perils and pleasures of getting from place to place drive the narrative action. The novel maps the city using the routes of its characters, paths that are, at times, problematic and dangerous. While *The Lonely Londoners* certainly addresses the distrust and exclusionary tactics many white Britons and policymakers directed toward their colonial compatriots in the 1950s, it also shows metropolitan London as a shared space that is continually re-navigated, adapted, and reassessed, sometimes in unexpected ways.

II. Layered London: A Space of Going

In *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, Bertrand Westphal suggests a new classification of "geographic fiction" that "categorize[s] [texts] according to the realms they explore" and encourages literary analysis of works to explore how they contain a compilation of mobile, multifocal perspectives (117). Westphal explains that in this mode of analysis,

"[r]epresentation of space comes from a reciprocal creation, not simply a one-way activity of a gaze looking from one point to another" (113). By refuting the hierarchical privilege of a dominating gaze in favor of identifying multiple and often competing ways of seeing, Westphal argues that "[a]lterity ceases to be the preserve of a gazing culture, because the latter itself is subject to the gaze of others" (114). Places are consistently renegotiated and recreated as they are experienced anew by travelers, dwellers, walkers, and writers. The work of a geocritic, then, is to recognize that literary representations of places, like London, are composed by a plurality of views, and then to navigate the diverse strata comprising the city's identity. This approach visualizes power in contested spaces not as binary but as complexly layered and, I suggest, dynamically mobile. In *The Lonely Londoners,* the diverse storylines that compose the novel map additional ways of seeing onto an urban space whose social and geographical composition seems historically predetermined. The novel charts a shifting cartographic representation of London.

Each pathway and encounter in each character's story inscribe an individual view of metropolitan space and speak to earlier, or contemporary, views. Rebecca Dyer notes the importance of sites in *The Lonely Londoners* and, relatedly, the layers of meaningfulness that Selvon's place descriptions bring to the literary history of London. Dyer observes "Selvon's tendency to drop the names of London's geographical and architectural features—Piccadilly Circus, Waterloo Bridge, the Thames—thus creating atmosphere by bringing up recognizable sites, many of which come to readers with imperialistic associations and literary precedents attached to them" (128). She notes that Selvon's British colonial education informs his understandings of these place names (129) and argues that the novel transforms literary London by adding a "new life story" to it and making a political and cultural claim to "emblematic" metropolitan sites (128). In this way, *The Lonely Londoners* accrues some authority over the meaning of London without displacing existing structures.

In a later thread of Galahad's story, the character brings together a global conception of place with his own lived experiences. For Galahad, the famous places of London have names full of romance and exoticism.

For instance, he finds that "when he say 'Charing Cross,' when he realize that is he, Sir Galahad, who going there, near that place that everybody in the world know about (it even have the name in the dictionary) he feel like a new man" (Selvon 84). He is, in fact, a new world man with an old nickname traveling to an old city; he recognizes his subjective authority even in the face of the dictionary's codifying authority. In this new-man spirit, he walks to the "Piccadilly Tube Station" where a clock tells "the time of places all over the world" (84). It is a common meeting spot in the city and a space where trains and world time zones converge—a juncture where here and there join and a divergent place that leads people somewhere else in both time and space. This place, at least insofar as it is represented in the novel, is emblematic of mobility and time-space slippages among places and people.

From this place of convergences, Galahad meanders toward Piccadilly Circus. His walk is deliberately unstructured and he is fully engaged in his present experience. Ana McMillin describes drift as a response against the theory that an "individual's movement in the city [is] a collection of 'constructed situations'" created by urban planners, cultural groups, and consumer-driven industries (101). Noting how psychogeographers like Debord "proposed strategies of wandering and travelling, without direction, between the 'situations' in the city, for achieving individual freedom" (101), McMillin explains that a drifter narrates the in-between, unofficial, and often illegitimate places of the city. Mobility is thus a crucial feature of the drifter's authority. As Galahad walks by the Arch on his way to the Piccadilly Circus, he passes an acquaintance who asks him to pause and "listen here to the rarse this man talking, about how the colonials shouldn't come to Brit'n, that the place overflowing with spades" (Selvon 89–90). Galahad defers confronting these practices of exclusion and walks on. Racist undercurrents flow throughout the novel but in this moment he does not let them take over his narrative or locomotive flow. His route and those of other characters flow alongside and away from such racialized discourses without allowing them the final word.

The Lonely Londoners is more concerned with being on the way to someplace and going somewhere else than with destinations and con-

frontations. As Galahad walks to Piccadilly Circus, he thinks: "[T]hat circus represent life, that circus is the beginning and the ending of the world" (90). Anything might go on there and people are always passing through, "rich people going into tall hotels, people going to the theatre, people sitting and standing and walking and talking and laughing and buses and cars" (90). It is a place of transience and Galahad places himself in this mobile space: "Galahad Esquire, in all this, standing there in the big city, in London. Oh Lord" (90). He sees himself at the center of the world, perhaps recognizing that he, like the people he sees, will pass through this place and that his position at the center is only a momentary stop along many radiating lines of travel. Froome-Lewis suggests that drift can allow a walker to become empowered, find pleasure in "teasing apart and reforming established certainties" (378), and gain a discursive authority over the ordering features of city space. In his discussion of the results of his drift map project, he notes that "[t]he walker becomes owner and curator of the readings offered by the maps, adopts a methodology of interpretation and forms priorities" (382). Galahad's walk and his growing confidence occur on a plane of action along with others' narrative accounts of going places in the city. *The Lonely Londoners* presents space not as confrontational but as complexly networked and mobile.[10]

Galahad's digressions through the city reflect the novel's networked structure. In many of the stories, the narrator privileges movement over destination. Nigerian migrant Cap, for instance, abandons his initial intention of studying law and instead adopts a nomadic, vagrant lifestyle in London. Cap is always on the move: he harnesses the vast, maze-like quality of the city, moving from hotel to hotel, engaging in sexual relations with many different women, and getting lost when he needs to make payments, escape legal authority, or evade a romantic partner. Alternatively, Jamaican-born, elderly Tanty comes to London with her extended family and settles with her nephew Tolroy in an area of London where she lives "like how some people live in small village," never leaving the safety of her own local sphere (Selvon 80). Tanty is interested in London places and names, but she refuses to travel outside her familiar space on foot, by bus, or by train until one day when her daughter goes

to work and accidentally takes the key to the food cupboard with her. As it turns out, "Tanty was waiting for a good excuse to travel out of the district, and she decide to brave London" (81). With difficulty, Tanty finds her way to her daughter's workplace, retrieves the key, and returns home "feeling good that she make the trip from Harrow Road at last" (83) and that she experienced the flows and sites of the city. With these and other vignettes, Selvon adds these migrants' footsteps and paths to existing literary maps of London, creating for his characters a sense of subjective authority marked by transience and movement.

To read this novel of metropolitan travel linearly as a set of orderly stories of journeys and experiences with clear destinations and objectives would overlook how its mobile, networked structure allows for unexpected travel, folds back on itself, and never really arrives anywhere. Speculating on what he would do with a lottery win and whether he would travel back to Trinidad, Moses thinks how "[h]e used to see all his years in London pile up one on top of the other, and he getting no place in a hurry, and the years going by, and the thought make him frighten sometimes" (98). The persistent mobility of these migrant Londoners drifting "no place in a hurry" is both empowering and debilitating. It places colonial migrants in the unstable but potentially creative position of mapping the city with their own grounded footpaths. Selvon's characters travel parallel to, and in spite of, existing social institutions that separate black and white in England and undergird the British Empire's legacy of global binaries of metropole and colony. Suman Gupta suggests that cities like London and New York "represent the accruals of history which are not understood through any limited progression of history, which push such cities into an apparently unhistoricizable complex present" (43). Moses and the other West Indian characters in *The Lonely Londoners* exemplify the idea of being both directed by the history of imperial expansion and of forging new post-colonial paths.

III. A Roaming Reading of Okri's "Disparities"

Like *The Lonely Londoners*, Okri's post-colonial story "Disparities" might be mapped according to street grids, footpaths, and the narrator's mobility. "Disparities" presents a networked nomadism that meditates

on the meaning of the cosmopolitan urban center and charts a weary homelessness. In *The Lonely Londoners,* Moses builds a communal narrative network, linking the traveling stories of various migrants. Dyer points out that Moses "interweaves migrants' individual stories, captures the swiftly changing community as it existed in the 1950s, and describes London and Londoners from migrants' perspectives and in their unique voices" (117). In contrast, the narrator of "Disparities" is isolated and unable to find community other than in an occasional sharing of public space; he travels a network of city streets without guiding landmarks or signposts. His drift through a relatively undifferentiated and indifferent city speaks to the post-colonial immigrant's sense of cultural exclusion and placelessness in London, and, paradoxically, suggests how nomadic wandering becomes a consistent feature of "home" in the late twentieth century. By reading this story from what Careri calls the "point of view of roaming" (23), one might visualize the narrative structure as a network of routes that has a physical as well as a metaphorical aspect and postulate that in this narrative, as in *The Lonely Londoners*, migrancy is both an aesthetic and a thematic element.

First published in the collection *Incidents at the Shrine* in 1986, Okri's story closely follows in time the British Nationality Act (BNA), 1981 which "repealed the automatic right of residence of Britons born outside the UK" and thus legally circumscribed the British citizenship rights of individuals from Britain's former colonies (Panayi 212). This BNA was the culmination of increasingly restrictive immigration legislation enacted in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. Randall Hansen notes that in the 1970s, for example, conservative MP Enoch Powell promoted a belief that "mass immigration was itself a threat to nationhood. It created an alien presence in the national community" (181). From 1968 on, many white Britons supported immigration restrictions based on the racialized criteria that Powell advocated in his public rhetoric and speeches, especially his infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech in which he prophesized a Britain overtaken by black people, an abridged version of which was aired on the BBC in April 1968 (Hansen 187). The BNA, 1981 repealed the BNA, 1948 and defined British citizenship "to the exclusion of the colonies for the first time" (Hansen 213). Hansen

outlines two temporary legal categories devised for those who were not granted citizenship by way of relation to a British citizen or to a legal resident of the UK: the BNA, 1981 included "British Dependent Territory Citizenship" and "British Overseas Citizenship, both "hollow shells" (Hansen 214) granting almost no rights associated with citizenship. People in the former category were residents of Britain's remaining territories, primarily Hong Kong. Those in the latter category were Commonwealth citizens who, before the BNA, 1981, were considered Citizens of the UK and the Colonies (CUKC); post-BNA, 1981, these individuals were considered honorary British "citizens" but had no guaranteed rights to enter or work in the UK (Hansen 213).[11] The provisions of the BNA, 1981 and concerns that the Act was racially motivated reveal how patterns of movement and global flows were regulated and administrated along racial lines. In contrast to the effect of the BNA, 1948, which underpins Selvon's characters' feelings of being theoretically (if not practically) at home in the Empire, the later BNA defined home as a legal state of being and promoted the invisibility of the networked history of imperialism. While "Disparities" does not directly refer to Britain's immigration policies, it does pay heed to ideas of belonging and exclusion as it explores the meanings of home, drift, and invisibility in the city.

The paths of the story are bookended by the narrator's occupation of two separate dilapidated homes. Between these two temporary houses, residences that designate two different beginnings, he wanders the streets of London where he is hungry and "always aware of a chill in [his] marrow" (Okri 37). At the start, he describes feelings of comfort, pride, and safety in the decrepit house he occupies, explaining that "[t]o have a house, that is the end of the journey of our solitude" (38). Even as he claims this sense of place, he finds himself turned out from his home by new squatters, a group of ultra-hip students who move into the upstairs for a holiday party: "They brought with them a large tape-recorder and played reggae and heavy metal music. . . . They talked about Marx, and Lévi-Strauss and Sartre and now and then one of the girls would say how easy it was to appreciate those *bastards* (she said this laughingly) when one is stoned" (38; emphasis in original). When he confronts these

seemingly progressive intellectuals, he finds "group desolation" (39) and broken mirrors and hears empty rhetoric that confirms his disenfranchisement despite his erstwhile sense of being at home.

In "Reflections on Exile," Edward Said writes that "[t]he exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience" (185). Drawing on Theodor Adorno's work, Said suggests that a feature of our mobile and migrant modernity is that "the only home truly available now, though fragile and vulnerable, is in writing" (184).[12] In both Selvon's novel and Okri's story, the drive to create a sense of home is linked to the writers' efforts to ground their writing in the physical space of London, to build a story on a grounded experience of the city streets. Elaborating on the untethered condition of exile, Said suggests that "[t]he pathos of exile is in the loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth: homecoming is out of the question" (183). This idea resonates in a mobile, or roaming, reading of "Disparities." The persistent wandering in the narrative confirms paradoxically that, for this post-colonial immigrant, the most prominent quality of being grounded is mobility. As the narrator walks, he maps the space of the city, even while he is excluded from its ordering structures of residences and public spaces. At the story's end, after much wandering, the narrator pauses at another dilapidated home: "I found a house. I had always wanted to own a house. . . . I sat down and took in the smells of rubble and suicides and the decaying human structures" (Okri 50–51). The narrator looks for home even as he recognizes that he is caught within a system of intersecting lines, a social network designed to sideline immigrants like him.

As he is driven from his first house, he comments, "Well. So. I was yet again unhoused. . . . Anyway. That was that. And who denies that the system (monster invisible) has the capacity to absorb all its blighted offshoots? And so I took to the streets. The long, endless streets" (40). Resigned to homelessness and invisibility, the narrator wanders along routes and passages within a larger urban network, which compels and

assists his travel. The narrator explains: "When I had a fever, only the streets saw me through it" (47). For the narrator, the maze-like network of streets takes on a life of its own—it is responsive and alive and it contains him. This network holds the story together and presents the only certainty the narrator knows: drift. Telling his story also becomes an act of wandering along branching paths: "I just went on and on till I got so confused in the heart of what I was saying that all I wanted to do was fall asleep" (47). Careri's descriptions of the walked city illuminate the kind of mobile structure and story that characterizes both "Disparities" and *The Lonely Londoners*. Careri observes that "[t]he nomadic city lives inside the stationary city, feeding on its scraps and offering, in exchange, its own presence as a new nature that can be crossed only by inhabiting it" (2). Roaming, Careri argues, has architectural potential—it is constructive of space within an already organized network of streets and sites. In both Selvon's and Okri's narratives, wandering offers im/migrant characters opportunities to build into and onto the cultural, social, and fictional features of the existing city.

Unlike the London of Selvon's novel, the London in "Disparities" is mostly bereft of those place names and obvious signposts that allow both readers and character an overview of the city's real spaces. In a dreamlike flow, the narrator moves from site to site through a network of generic reference points: houses, park, and pub. The drifting narrator constitutes, as well as occupies, this space, and "Disparities" maps London in its own (lack of) terms. Interrogating the correspondences between maps and real space, especially in the current age of digital navigation tools that use GPS technology, Valérie November, Edouardo Camacho-Hübner, and Bruno Latour consider two modes of mapping, mimetic and navigational, each of which implies a particular correspondence of the mapmaker to the real and the virtual (585). Mimetic mapping techniques assume an aerial view, marking borders and delineating sovereignty over territories. They offer a traditional overview of a place. Such a view is necessarily abstract and also part of the rhetoric of global power structures in both contemporary contexts and those associated with the British Empire. November, Camacho-Hübner, and Latour suggest that the mapmaker's assumption of a direct and objective reflection between

the paper map and physical space shows a limited and self-serving understanding of the fluctuations and dynamics of lived space (589). The mapper sees, in the mimetic map, an authoritative, static image of borders and territories and fails to recognize inevitable changes caused by unpredictable human, animal, and natural forces.

Alternatively, November, Camacho-Hübner, and Latour reflect on the aesthetic and practical value of a "navigational" mode of mapping to interpret space, explaining that in this mode a traveler identifies signposts that might delineate a space or mark a path. Navigational mapping is experiential and grounded, "a *deambulation* between *many* successive stepping stones in order to achieve the miracle of reference" (586; emphasis in original). Their discussion emphasizes the importance of recognizing that maps are not static; indeed, they assert that in a navigational mapping process, "*everything is on the move*" (596; emphasis in original). Such modes of mapping, whether they are cartographic or narrative, recognize transformation as a necessary feature of physical space and human geography. The authors suggest that from this viewpoint, "maps now strike you not as what represent a world 'out there' but as the dashboards of a calculation interface that allow you to pinpoint successive signposts while you move through the world" (595). This discussion of navigational mapping, like that of wandering or drift, relies on paying attention to the lived, on-the-ground experiences of people on the move and according agency to the individual traveler. Signposts and their meanings or indications might fluctuate depending on who encounters them and when; such chaotic traveling is difficult to oversee or to modulate.

"Disparities" and *The Lonely Londoners* offer such navigational maps with characters who sometimes make their ways or, other times, get lost amid configurations of existing urban signposts. In Selvon's novel, landmarks are often named and then renewed by the characters' ways of seeing and walking. In Okri's story, landmarks are ambiguous and their absence (and occasional presence) emphasizes the narrator's exclusion, disorientation, and persistence. For example, the Tube stations are sites where the vagrant narrator is noticed and chased away rather than places of convergence and transport. In another instance, as the narrator

stands on a bridge over the Thames, he literally loses an opportunity for independence and economic prosperity when he drops a suitcase full of money left in a taxi by a rich Nigerian. The city's primary mobile conduits, subways and the river, increase the immigrant's exclusion and invisibility. Both narratives, however, also show a city on the move, a mobile and changing network in which the existing order does not sufficiently promote belonging or ensure exclusion. Such experiential mapping intervenes in the idea of the city as an organized whole that can be statically overseen.

As Okri's narrator wanders to the park through the maze of streets, inspecting houses and avoiding the "eye-sores that were human beings" (40), he searches for signposts but sees only shit. Commenting on this path of feces, he notes, ironically, how this shit "is the height of civilization" (40). His view of the street, marked by waste and decay, adds an often unacknowledged layer to the urban narrative. At the park, he watches people living superficial, lives: "They laughed, nice little laughs without any depth and without any pain. Insipid love; cultured laughter" (Okri 41). On one occasion, he is seen by a group of school children whose attention he draws by yelling at them while they inspect a dead bird. The narrator's comment that the children "stared at [him] and stared at the bird. . . . Fear trembled in their eyes" suggests that the children draw a grammatical and metaphorical connection between him and the dead bird (43). The children regard him as somewhere between agent and object. He is like the bird, but he is also a disruption to their stroll, a dangerous presence. Subsequently, a passerby, walking a dog who retrieves the dead bird, deliberately chooses not to see the narrator, dismissing, in language and in imagination, his very existence (44).

The narrator's existence is defined by his relentless mobility; his movement in the network of streets affirms his presence and he steps aside from the gazes that accuse or dismiss him. After the incident in the park, he "hug[s] the streets again" (45) and travels to a local pub filled with other outsiders, "the very cream of the leftovers, kicked-outs, eternal trendies, hoboes, weirdos, addicts and peddlers" who, like him, are overlooked people (45). In this public space, he finds no interpersonal connection deeper than proximity. The narrator tries to tell his story to a

fellow in the pub but leaves off in the middle of it, "glad to be rid of that whole bunch of depressives and trendies who mistake the fact of their lostness for the attraction of the outsider's confusion" (48). Refusing to romanticize exile, he walks the streets again and finds solace when, "in that sweet-tempered solitude of the streets," he dreams of "a wonderfully small room in the sky that is composed of ten thousand taxi-cabs and pasted over with the quarter of a million pounds that belonged to a Nigerian" (48). The road holds potential for mythmaking and remaking reality.

The competing pressures of mobility and exclusion in "Disparities" provide insight into how networked systems control interaction and modulate flows between locals and immigrants. Relatedly, in "Cosmopolitan Capsules: Mediated Networking and Social Control in Expatriate Spaces," André Jansson discusses the problem of "capsular civilization," which is produced in urban networks where individuals are both highly connected and isolated. Network nodes (like the house, the neighborhood, the ethnic enclave, the computer, or the TV screen) "operate in the form of capsules" that insulate individuals from real contact (239). Jansson investigates a disjuncture between migrants and locals "for whom encapsulation operates as a protective cocoon, a means for distinctive connectivity and mobility, and those who are merely imprisoned and marginalized by the logic of encapsulation" and suggests that these formulations of encapsulation do not necessarily accord with rhetoric that underscores the integrative, democratic potential of a network (239–40). With regard to transnational networks in a single urban milieu like London, Jansson explains that an active or agentive cosmopolitanism requires that both transnational travelers and local inhabitants exhibit "a willingness and socialized aptitude to see 'the other' within oneself, to rediscover the national as the *internalized global*" (245; emphasis in original). Without such a mindset, transnational spaces exhibit instead a "glocal logic of encapsulation" (243). Via processes of inclusion and exclusion, they become spaces "not for connectivity and exchange but for separation and dominance" (239) of people segregated by categories like nationality, race, class, or belief system. In "Disparities," the city is shown as a network of routes and

sites that promote prescribed behaviors (at the bar, the park, the house) and set up inclusive or exclusive relationships. The "monster invisible" (Okri 40) that acts on the narrator points to the underlying structural violence that drives him to a persistent nomadism. However, his wandering, while a likely consequence of systematic exclusion and a capsular logic of separation, also allows him to evade control and to influence the meaning of the city for himself and others through mythmaking. Wandering permits him a freedom of movement that both complies with and resists attempts to sideline and contain him.

IV. Conclusion

Both *The Lonely Londoners* and "Disparities" sidestep the dominant logic that orders metropolitan space. They demonstrate how a networked system, like a city plan, can be insidiously controlling and how mobility can be a practice of both acquiescence and resistance to its flows and modulations. Urban networks draw individuals into their processes and orderly paths, yet they also allow for wandering, a pointless drift that evades pre-existing plans. As I have shown, in Selvon's and Okri's works, im/migrant wanderers along London's byways and passages participate in creating a mobile, transformative sense of place. Mobility thus becomes a resource for immigrant self-imagining in this metropolitan urban space that often inhibits movement by geographical directives or containment. In its focus on grounded mobility, this essay has attempted to provide a human-centered and experiential way of reading literary works depicting travel and migrancy in colonial and post-colonial contexts and thus recognize the excessive and autonomous aspects of migrant travel, as well as the restrictive and exclusionary tactics in place in post-imperialist London.

Both *The Lonely Londoners* and "Disparities" construct stories in a metropolitan space that is already constructed. Their wanderers and wandering stories bring additional, and perhaps often unrecognized, layers to the city, highlighting that London is not a static receptacle for im/migrants to arrive at and see, but a moving, shifting space of becoming. Both texts offer exemplary instances for considering a mobile aesthetic, or a way of reading that recognizes mobility, wandering, di-

gressive pathways, and fragmented experience as fundamental features of global and local networks and of narrative composition in such milieus. This mobile aesthetic sets up wandering as a writing and reading practice that enables otherwise subjected or lost voices to contribute to the meaning of a place, even if that meaning is itself the condition of being lost. Such a grounded practice is not intended to simply privilege an experiential understanding over a more global overview. More complexly, *The Lonely Londoners* and "Disparities" imagine a relationship between metropolis and (post-)colony from the perspective of mobility in a networked system. They represent places as composed of layered and connected viewpoints and paths rather than as binary and discrete. These fictions suggest that further critical attention be paid to how network systems function in enabling control over places and people and how individuals might engage in creative practices of walking. Both narratives redefine conceptions of places as hierarchical and fixed and instead emphasize the grounded and mobile paths of their characters, promoting their tactile and dynamic connections with British metropolitan space.

Notes

1 My construction of grounded and aerial viewpoints draws, in this first instance, from the work of de Certeau, who in *The Practice of Everyday Life* writes of his own effort:

> To locate the practices that are foreign to the 'geometrical' or the 'geographical' space of the visual, panoptic, or theoretical constructions. These practices of space refer to a specific form of *operations* ('ways of operating'), to 'another spatiality' (an 'anthropological', poetic and mythic experience of space), and to an *opaque and blind* mobility characteristic of the bustling city. (93; emphasis in original)

2 At the time of *The Lonely Londoners*' 1956 publication, Trinidad, Tobago, and Jamaica were British colonies. They claimed independence from colonial rule in 1962.

3 In this article, I recognize that migrant and immigrant are contested terms. I use the former to refer to individuals who travel between Britain and its colonies under the auspices of the British Nationality Act of 1948 which, among other provisions, "defined as a British subject, anyone born within His Majesty's dominions" (Hansen 41). I use immigrant to refer to post-colonial or Commonwealth travelers to Britain from former British colonies who did not qualify for

citizenship or subjecthood under later legal provisions. For more, see chapters 2 and 9 of Hansen.

4 For a compelling visual rendering of the complexity of network systems, see also American artist Mark Lombardi's diagrammatic drawings of networks of financial and political corruption. He calls these network visualizations "narrative structures." A selection of his drawings can be found online in an exhibit record at the Pierogi Gallery.

5 See also Said's "Reflections on Exile." Said suggests that because exiles are acquainted with at least two nations from the inside, they demonstrate "a plurality of vision [that] gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions" and often gives the writing of exiles an unfamiliar and multi-vocal character (186). Said's reflections on the effects of disparity of place provoke further consideration of how the traces of the traveler's origins influence a new sense of a place.

6 Hansen cites a 1950 memorandum by the Colonial Secretary, James Griffiths, noting that among the problems associated with the influx of West Indian and other colonial immigration to Britain post-Second World War were "the concentration of migrants in inadequate inner-city housing, employer prejudice against black workers, and the occurrence of sporadic instances of civil unrest" mostly between black and white men (58). Such concerns led the Colonial office in the 1950s informally to discourage immigration (68).

7 See the introduction of Dawson's *Mongrel Nation*, in which she describes "reverse colonization" or the mass migration of colonial subjects to England as a movement that "overturned the spatial and cultural apartheid cementing colonial rule" (4).

8 See Chapter 2 of Hansen.

9 See also Part 1 of Galloway and Thacker.

10 See also Bentley's discussion of fragmentation as a narrative strategy in *The Lonely Londoners* (73).

11 See Chapter 8 of Hansen.

12 In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno writes: "For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live. In it he produces, as his family once did, refuse and lumber" (87).

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Body as Battleground: Acts of Ingestion in D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* and Philip's *Zong!*

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Abstract: This article explores the trope of ingestion in two literary representations of the 1781 *Zong* massacre, Fred D'Aguiar's novel *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) and M. NourbeSe Philip's book-length poem *Zong!* (2008). In drawing attention to acts of ingestion, I seek to expand scholarly discussion of these two texts, which has to date somewhat stalled around framing them as confrontations with the traumatic past. Grounded in scholarship that argues that ingestion forms "political subjects" by "fusing the social with the biological" (Tompkins 1), this article posits the act of ingestion as a navigation of socio-historical/political forces. In these two texts, ingestion functions within systems of power wherein those in privileged positions can be consumers while the enslaved are excreters, with bodies in states of dissolution. Those benefiting from the slave trade are critiqued in these texts for their dystopic overconsumption and cannibalistic voraciousness, while those enslaved are portrayed in terms of the impossibility of achieving nourishment even when able to eat or drink. Although common theoretical assumptions link ingestion with empowerment, my exploration of these texts reveals the insufficiency of such an assumption. Since to consume is also to confront one's dependence on and vulnerability to outside matter, for the enslaved the act of ingestion can be an incorporation of—and hence surrender to—one's enslavement.

Keywords: *Zong* massacre, ingestion, body, transatlantic slave trade

> No other fundamental aspect of behavior as a species except sexuality is so encumbered by *ideas* as eating[.]
>
> Sidney W. Mintz (*Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom* 8)

Ingestion represents more than just a biological necessity; it is an act through which the individual negotiates the porousness of the supposed boundaries between inside and outside and, by extension, between self and other. In other words, through ingestion, the individual fuses one's body with matter outside of it, incorporating not only material nourishment but also its histories of production and distribution and its individual, familial, and/or cultural meanings. Through the act of ingestion and the subsequent processes of digestion, the individual becomes a metaphorical and literal embodiment of his/her social worlds. With Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes[1] providing early impetus, food studies has long explored food as a carrier of socio-cultural meaning. As Barthes argues, food "is not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviour" (29). He further asserts that food is not merely an object but rather "sums up and transmits a situation; it constitutes an information; it signifies" (29). This kind of acknowledgement of food's signifying power naturally leads to scholarship which assumes that food "is an excellent locus for the study of group dynamics—how different populations exclude, include, reject, accept, and otherwise influence each other" (Bower 8). Food can, therefore, be seen as a mode of "cultural expression" (Loichot x) with wide-ranging efficacies whereby it may function as "a form of political resistance" (x) or, conversely, be a symptom of "commodified foreignness . . . [that] incorporat[es] and finally annihilat[es] all difference" (Peckham 181).[2]

In that food often "establishes who is inside and outside specific groups" (Narayan 161), it is vital to contextualize food products and foodways so as to understand their broader historical and cultural significances. In terms of the Atlantic slave trade—the socio-historical scene that I address in this essay—various studies focus on this kind of contextualization, including Sidney W. Mintz's groundbreak-

ing consideration of sugar in *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1985), Meredith Gadsby's *Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration, and Survival* (2006), Mark Kurlansky's *Salt: A World History* (2002), Herbert C. Covey and Dwight Eisnach's *What the Slaves Ate: Recollections of African American Foods and Foodways from the Slave Narratives* (2009), and Judith A. Carney and Richard Nicholas Rosomoff's *In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa's Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World* (2009). Nevertheless, the role food plays in both representing and constructing individual and collective identities cannot be fully understood without also focussing on the act of eating and the subsequent processes of digestion. As Kyla Wazana Tompkins asserts, shifting the focus from food to ingestion is necessary because "acts of eating" help to "cultivate political subjects by fusing the social with the biological" (1). Food may carry socio-historical significance, but it is through acts of ingestion that individuals take into their bodies these histories and meanings and must, therefore, navigate relationships with them and with the groups and situations responsible for constructing them.

The following discussion looks to Fred D'Aguiar's novel *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) and M. NourbeSe Philip's book-length poem *Zong!* (2008) to consider the act of ingestion as just such a navigation of socio-historical/political forces. Both texts take the 1781 *Zong* massacre as their subject, imaginatively recreating a historical event in which approximately 131 enslaved men, women, and children were cast overboard alive from the slave ship *Zong*. The justification offered for this massacre? A shortage of supplies—specifically of water. A shortage that made it, according the ship's captain and crew, a necessity to kill some, supposedly those who were already ill and potentially dying, in order to save the majority. Given the role this perceived lack of sustenance played in inciting the slavers to massacre,[3] it is not surprising that *Feeding the Ghosts* and *Zong!* highlight food products and acts of ingestion.[4] As the following discussion describes, acts of ingestion function as a negotiation of power relations, but whether or not ingestion indicates empowerment depends largely on the consumer's social position. Theoretically, to ingest rather than to be ingested is to be empowered, but at the same time, ingesting means confronting one's reliance on matter outside of the self, hence

one's lack of self-sufficiency. For the slavers in these texts, ingestion may at times, though rarely, bring awareness of this lack of self-sufficiency and thereby provoke doubt in the rightfulness of one's power, but for the enslaved, the implications of ingesting (or not ingesting) are grave. For the enslaved, to ingest can be to consume one's enslavement, to become one with a system that devours them.

In drawing attention to acts of ingestion in these two texts, I seek to expand scholarship that has predominantly framed them as encounters with the traumatic past. *Feeding the Ghosts* and *Zong!* do, of course, ask the reader to contemplate memory, trauma, and the construction and recovery of history since these texts' narrative content and form make such themes central. D'Aguiar's text narrativizes an unproven but mythologized occurrence from the historical *Zong* voyage: the protagonist Mintah is the imagined reconstruction of an unidentified enslaved person who was cast overboard as part of the massacre but who was rumoured to have climbed back on board.[5] As a survivor of the massacre, Mintah comes to cast herself as a holder of memory and thereby confronts the dilemmas of representing the past. Not only does Mintah construct a written narrative of the massacre—one that is given little weight by authorities—but she also eventually sculpts figures representing the victims of the *Zong*. Despite these various efforts to honour the past, *Feeding the Ghosts* speaks to the inevitable complexities and failures involved in writing into history what was previously erased: despite her efforts, Mintah's depictions gain little audience and she, in the end, seeks freedom from the past.

Although Philip dismisses *Feeding the Ghosts*[6] as ineffective in its approach to the past because "[a] novel requires too much telling" ("Notanda" 190), *Zong!* has been subject to similar conversations since it, too, represents a confrontation of the historical record. Taking a two-page court case summary as the basis for her book of poetry, Philip limits herself to using only the words of this historical document or words that can be formed, Boggle-like, from the words of the document. As Philip describes in the concluding "Notanda" of her collection, this limit, which frustrates authorial control, achieves an engagement with the past that ethically respects the past's inaccessibility. To tell with-

out telling is the goal Philip sets for herself, and the complexity of her poetic form is her means of accomplishing it.

Even though *Feeding the Ghosts* and *Zong!* overtly argue for the need to "open up a space of remembrance" (Craps 60),[7] critical discussions of these texts have stalled around this issue, thereby problematically restricting the significance of these texts. The narrowness of this framework is particularly problematic for *Zong!*, which is too often discussed in terms of the difficulty of its form as a performance of the inaccessibility of the past. While a focus on form is certainly necessary—and it is where Philip herself points her readers—such discussions tend to overlook the poetry's content. When the fluidity, multiplicity, and even denial of meaning become *Zong!*'s main meaning, readers are too easily let off the hook from engaging with the text's content in any kind of sustained way. As Philip acknowledges, voices—and hence characters—do emerge in the latter sections of *Zong!*, and yet readings of this text have done little to consider the details of the narratives that form out of the fragments.[8] In turning my attention to a foundational leitmotif that emerges in *Zong!*—the act of ingestion—I propose an alternate reading strategy for this text. Rather than concentrating solely on the absent, unknown, uncomprehended, and/or incomprehensible, this approach respects the book's non-linearity and subsequent fluidity of meaning while still reading across its fragments and highlighting the narrative content that surfaces.

A reading that respects this text's non-linearity may require meanings be provisional, but a reading that pays attention to *Zong!*'s narrative content reveals a diegetic world, much like that of D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts*, in which the act of eating is a key measure of power. The worlds of these texts confirm, as Covey and Eisnach argue, that "[t]o understand food and its distribution is to gain insight into the operation of society" (1). In particular, in both *Zong!* and *Feeding the Ghosts*, relationships with food reflect social hierarchies. Whereas those complicit in the slave trade are portrayed as eaters, the enslaved are the unnourished, who negotiate bodies in constant states of dissolution.

In theory, the one who consumes is empowered. This figure arguably "secures his own identity by absorbing the world outside himself"

(Kilgour 6–7) or, in Mikhail Bakhtin's words, "triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured" (qtd. in Kilgour 6). And yet, as represented by these texts, the enslaved cannot easily take on this role of empowered consumer. In fact, in *Zong!*, a changing relationship with food is a key marker of the rupture between the pre-slavery past and the conditions onboard the *Zong*. For Wale and Sade, an enslaved couple and the only named enslaved characters who have a storyline in *Zong!*, capture and enslavement is associated particularly with a loss of their identities as eaters. Their pre-capture lifestyle is portrayed as pastoral—both simple and satisfying. More specifically, before their capture Wale and Sade are shown to have control over their food sources. Not only do they

> ha ve one go at (168),

but they also

> e at fr
> esh fish f rom the r
> iver [.] (169)[9]

Sade is pictured as being able to ensure that their child is well-nourished:

> *sade* feeds *a*
> *de* yam p ap [.] (160)

The narration of their capture, which juxtaposes an image of them eating with the coming of the "*fun fun*" (the "white," according to the Yoruba section of *Zong!*'s glossary), suggests that part of what enslavement compromises is their agency as eaters. Their capture is portrayed as follows:

> *wale*
> and *sad* *e* eat *fu*
> *fu den de fun* *fun dem c* *am ba*
> *m ba* *m b* *am d*
> *em ha* *ve bi*
> *g gun* r un *wa* *le* ru
> n run *s* *ade* ru n see *wal*
> *e* run *sad* *e* too [.] (131)

In this scene, they transform from being eaters to being under threat and needing to escape. The narration even casts them in a Dick and Jane-like story—"run *wale* run . . . see *wale* run." As such, in their metamorphosis, they not only lose their status as eaters but also transition from being subjects performing actions—eating, running—into objects of another's action, namely, of another's gaze: "see *wale* run" (131).[10]

Whereas the place and time for Wale and Sade to nourish themselves lies in the past, the sailors achieve continuity in their eating between their past, present, and future. While buying slaves before the voyage from

the m an in the re
d fez fr om over th
e gold dun
es (144),

the sailor describes a scene in which they

sit o n the ru
g a go od rug fr om the e
ast from t unis eat dat es fresh f
igs [.] (144)

When they set sail, they do so with

crates of portginwinebeercider & water (117)

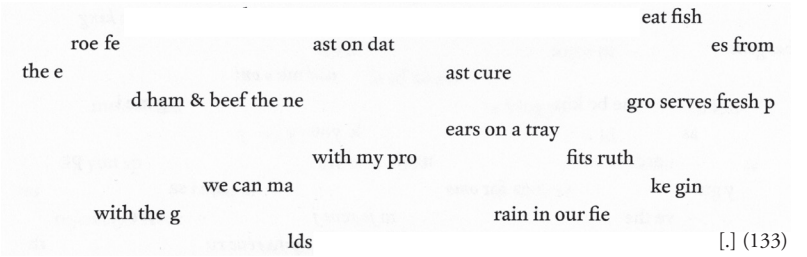
and

there were
spuds live fowl pigs [.] (117–18)

Their supplies "on board" include

spu ds win e por
t ru m ha m corn & rice [.] (140)[11]

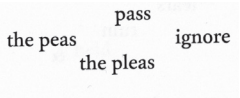
Even the sailor's vision of the future with his "dear ruth" is one of abundance. He describes them dining on "egg drop so up" (133); they



[.] (133)

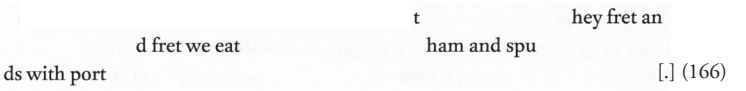
Whether or not this depiction of abundance is a realistic possibility or just wishful thinking,[12] *Zong!*'s tendency to render food items associated with the slavers in catalogue form[13] conveys a plentifulness that is part of their imaginary—before, during, and after the voyage. They need not choose between similar food objects but instead envision consuming whatever they wish, their choices dictated by desire rather than need. These are lists held together by "ands," not "ors." The slavers can enjoy "dates" *and* "fresh figs"; "spuds" *and* "rice"; "port," "gin," "wine," "beer," "cider," *and* "water"; "fowl" *and* "pigs"; "cured ham" *and* "beef."

The enslaved have no similar imaginary or option to sustain, let alone build up, their bodies with nutrients. *Zong!* makes frequent comparisons between the slavers and the enslaved, forming an "us" versus "them" binary on the basis of access to sustenance. For example, such play with language as



(82)

draws a comparison between the slavers and the enslaved. The use of two words that are almost but not quite the same establishes the imbalance between groups; the slavers are positioned to ingest "the peas," while the enslaved can only expel ineffectual "pleas." Furthermore, throughout *Zong!*, paratactic juxtapositions of "we" and "they" statements appear, emphasizing a grave contrast:



[.] (166)

While the enslaved can only "fret and fret"—note the repetition of the same action—the slavers can ingest a relatively complete meal. Similarly,

they hur t we w
ill have a big d ish of s puds with b eef (145)

The slavers have the sustenance, while the enslaved have only pain. In fact, while the slavers are associated with various foodstuffs, the enslaved largely have only inedible matter. What the enslaved must do is

eat t
heir fea r [.] (145)

As a result, whereas the image of the slavers becomes one of satiation, the image of the enslaved is one of malnourishment. The sailor describes being served by an enslaved girl:

we e at we d
oze she but a b it a s lip of a g
irl [.] (145)

The way words are fragmented in the latter sections of *Zong!* further differentiates the slavers from the enslaved. The splitting apart of words into their constituent parts reveals hidden meanings within larger words; these hidden meanings relay further critique regarding the deprivation the enslaved face. For instance, when distinguishing between "our" and "their" fates, Philip fragments "fate" tellingly. She writes,

we a re of f to me
et our fat e their fa
te a date i da re not mi
ss [.] (166)

While "our" can be coupled with the word "fat"—an association that occurs again on the following page,

the ora cle cur
se s u s leave s us to our fat
es (167)—

"their" cannot; "fate" for the enslaved is "fa" and "te." Fatness is available only to the slavers, not to the enslaved. Similarly, differing treatments of the word "create" reveal contrasting relationships to the act of eating. The voice, seemingly of the main sailor, asks,

wha
t do we cre ate [?] (167)

He then concludes that he, along with his shipmates, have

rob them o
f all they cr eate [.] (167)

The different handling of the fragmentation of "create" establishes that "we" can be associated with the word "ate," whereas "they" cannot. The poem's "they" are left with letters that may be pronounced as "eat," but these letters do not form a word that is accepted as part of the English language, and this segmenting of the word, in fact, alters the pronunciation of "create," taking the sound "ate" away. The deformation of the word thus reflects the compromised relationship the enslaved experience with the act of eating. This spelling even hints towards an incompleteness that communicates the seeming impossibility of the enslaved inhabiting the position of "eater." "[E]ate" could, after all, be completed with a 'r' to become "eater," but it is not.

Even when the sailor does describe the "they"—interpretable as the enslaved—as eating, the wording tends to suggest a failure of digestion. Twice in short succession, "they" are described as eating and subsequently defecating:

t hey eat th
ey shit (143),

and seven words later,

they e at they s
hit [.] (144)

The parataxis of these statements, coupled with the repetition, suggests that the enslaved are caught in a cycle whereby what they ingest fails to stay with them long enough to be assimilated by their bodies.

As such, the image of the enslaved that develops is one in which they dissolve rather than grow, excrete rather than consume. They "leak pus" (145); they have "leaky piles" (150). Women's breasts too are described as leaking: they have "leaky / teats" (170); their "teats / leak in necessity" (65). While this image suggests that the women at least consume

nutrients enough to produce breast milk,[14] it figures a compromised food chain. Not only are the women excreters who cannot retain what they have consumed to fuel their own bodies, but since their breasts are described as leaking rather than as feeding the young, what they excrete also goes to waste, unconsumed by members of the next generation, who, if even still present and alive, inherit the impossibility of nourishment.

In *Zong!* the comparison of the slavers to the enslaved in terms of their access to nourishment criticizes slavery and its systems. *Feeding the Ghosts*, however, denounces slavery through the association of all those complicit in the trade—even the public—with dystopic overconsumption. Much as Philip's book represents slavers as experiencing conditions that allow them to choose between multiplicitous food items, *Feeding the Ghosts* represents those complicit in the slave trade as selfishly consumptive. Whereas the enslaved women in the novel are portrayed as being forced to trade sex for food—food used primarily to nourish their families—the sailors and the broader British public are portrayed as inhumane gluttons.

The sailors in *Feeding the Ghosts* use their access to food as a weapon against the enslaved on board the ship; for example, when the second mate and the boatswain enter into the part of the hold occupied by the enslaved women, they do so "*armed* with loaves of bread and chunks of cheese" (D'Aguiar 74; emphasis added). As the narrator explains, "[i]f [the women] refused" to participate in this economy of sex for food, they "would be taken by force anyway. The women knew all this when they gave their consent for bread and cheese" (74). The women themselves, however, are not shown to benefit from this acquired food. The narrative focusses instead on the women giving this food to the enslaved men: "A piece of bread and cheese was handed to [the men] in the dark and they accepted it with thanks and ate it. If a few found it hard to swallow knowing how it was earned, it was not out of resentment for the woman, who had to do what she did for reasons they all knew, but because they were choked with anger at the men who could do such a thing to captive women" (75). The enslaved men may consume the food (with difficulty and remorse), but whether or not the women consume

the food they have been forced to earn through sex is a lacuna left in the narrative. After acquiring the food, the women "return to the slave hold and wriggle into a space between other women" (75), where "[s]emen from the crew would seep from them" (75) and their neighbours "ordered" their tears "to be silent" (76). Just as *Zong!* portrays the enslaved, the women in this scene are excreters, not consumers.

Later in the narrative, Simon, the cook's assistant who befriends Mintah on board the ship, reveals that the British people are grossly ignorant about the costs of their own consumption. Shortly after the conclusion of the trial that ruled in favour of the ship's owners receiving the insurance money, the narration, through Simon's focalization, offers the following image: "[Simon] passed coffee houses with crowds spilling out of their doors and a sweet aroma of roasted coffee beans and molasses. Tobacco clouded the air and men puffed on pipes, productive as chimneys. Drunks with rum on their breath stumbled into this path or greeted him as though he were a long-lost friend" (176). This passage features not only people consuming products associated with the slave trade but also a dystopic excess. The crowds are excessive; they escape containment, spilling out onto the streets. This image, however, is not festive. The tobacco smokers do not just smoke but become chimneys, clouding the air; the drinkers do not just drink but are drunk. This portrayal equates the British public with acts of leisurely, luxurious, and thoughtless consumption; it also signals the apathetic indifference to the exploitative conditions that have produced these privileges.

The novel further shows the inhumanity of those complicit in the trade through references to food and acts of ingestion during the course of the trial. Despite historical depictions of Lord Chief Justice Mansfield as making rulings that were useful in the movement towards abolition,[15] D'Aguiar constructs Mansfield more as "eater" than thoughtful and fair overseer of the proceedings. Lord Mansfield may enter the court assuming the stereotypical appearance of a judge—he "straightened his wig" (137), and his robe "fell around his legs and his chair, giving him the appearance of floating above" (137)—but his first, and almost only, concern throughout the trial is that "he'd be out of the court in time

to dine at The King's Head" (137). With persistent imaginings of "a cured pheasant, his favourite" (137), he is preoccupied, throughout the trial, with his stomach. Furthermore, his fixation on food casts the proceedings as an appetizer to the meal he desires: He "want[s] his palate gently stirred and whetted by the morning's deliberations" (138). The narrative represents aspects of the trial as foodstuffs for Mansfield to digest. Mintah's journal adds "spice to an otherwise bland menu of events" (155); applause from the spectators is "savour[ed]" (171). From Mansfield's perspective, "[i]f he pictured everyone in various stages of being smoke-cured he would surely accelerate events and time itself to the propitious date at The King's Head" (138). The dystopia of this society is rooted not only in inhumane unfeeling but also cannibalistic voraciousness, albeit a metaphorical one.

A similar dystopic hunger appears in *Zong!*, in which the sailors both feast on abundant supplies and consume cannibalistically. They

find the fu
n in [. . .]
n
egro me at (163),

"din[ing]" on it and "grow[ing] fa / t" (Philip 164). The lips, even the toes, of the women are "ripe" (71, 106), as if fruit to be consumed. Moreover, having developed

a taste
for the she
negro (91),

the sailors "feast o /n flesh" even as

she rips and tears
his cape [.] (128)`

While these references reflect a pursuit of sexual satiation through violence rather than a literal feeding upon flesh, the implication remains the same: the enslaved are objects existing solely to be consumed. The enslaved become even the bread in the Lord's Prayer's plea for sustenance. This prayer, common in Christian religions, asks God to "give us

this day our daily bread," a line that appears frequently in *Zong!*. In one instance, this line importantly becomes

give us this
day our ne groes [.] (159)

The multiple references to this line of the Lord's Prayer are, significantly, never followed by the rest of the prayer, which asks for "forgive[ness for] our trespasses" and "deliver[ance] . . . from evil" (*Book of Common Prayer*).[16]

Just as those complicit in the slave trade are portrayed as ingesting while the enslaved become the ingested, the hypocrisy of this binary—and subsequently of a system that depends upon the dehumanization of another—is revealed through failures of digestion. In a study that interprets a history of the Black body as consumable, Tompkins demonstrates that just because there exists a "fantasy" of the Black body as "edible[,] . . . [it] does not mean that the body will always go down smoothly" (8). In looking to such food products as licorice baby candies, Aunt Jemima syrup, and Jim Crow cookies, Tompkins attributes agency to those bodies thought edible, asserting that Black bodies can "stick in the throat of the (white) body politic" (8). In *Feeding the Ghosts*, difficulties in consuming Black bodies represent fissures in the ideologies used to justify slavery and excuse its exploitation and violence. For Kelsal, the First Mate responsible for carrying out the massacre, "with each slave disposed of, the churning sensation in his stomach had intensified" (D'Aguiar 67). His vomiting leads to questions regarding whether he has "los[t] his stomach for the job" (68). Furthermore, although Chief Justice Mansfield seeks an easily digestible trial, his subsequent doubt about the rightfulness of the massacre results in indigestion. When confronted with the details of the *Zong* massacre, details that run counter to his philosophy of "protect[ing]" the enslaved—but only because "[t]hey make you a profit" (138)—he is "threatened [with the] stir[ring] of those awful acids in his stomach" and their "climbing to his throat" (138). His conclusion that the actions were necessary allows his stomach to settle and become receptive to consumption: "the juices

were in a state of readiness" (169). For Mansfield, the trial at last becomes digestible because "[e]veryone was well and truly smoked in his mind" (171).

Whereas Mansfield and the broader public remain blind to the costs of slavery, Simon, a man critical of slavery thanks to his friendship with Mintah, perceives the system of slavery in terms of undigested bodies. Simon realizes that by consuming the products of the slave trade, the British public is, in fact, consuming the lives of enslaved Africans. His critique of slavery foregrounds the hypocrisy at the heart of Britain's supposed civility—a civility dependent upon cannibalistic self-centredness. Echoing the views of the abolitionist William Fox, who in a bestselling pamphlet argued that consuming sugar was tantamount to consuming the blood of slaves (Morton 11), Simon reasons that "going by this last voyage of the *Zong*, . . . if the losses of every voyage of a slave ship were counted, for each cup [of coffee], each spoonful [of sugar], every ounce of tobacco, an African life had been lost" (D'Aguiar 176). His subsequent vision of the sea as a grotesque mass grave dramatizes his realization of the gravity of this loss. In his vision, the sea "opened instantly and with hardly a splash [the enslaved] were admitted into it and the opening closed" (99). In a text in which the sea is a mouth that "nibbl[es]" (4) and "swallow[s]" (27), Simon's vision signals the gross appetite of the slave trade. The sea in *Feeding the Ghosts* is a mouth that consumes the bodies of the enslaved and conceals the evidence of their wrongful deaths.

And yet in Simon's vision, the sea is unable to swallow and digest these lives. In his imagining, Simon sees a "sea full of Africans. The *Zong* rose and dipped over their bones, and the sound of the sea was the bones cracking, breaking, splintering" (176). As the vision evolves, the sea turns "red. Now it boiled with the bodies of Africans" (177), and finally,

> [i]nstead of a gigantic body of breathing salt water, he saw black skin and flesh. The ship's prow parted, not sea, but flesh, cut through it like water, splashed it skywards in fragments like the sea, broke it up in the expectation that it would mend behind,

> but looking back he saw not sea water mending in a ship's wake
> but broken bodies, ploughed through. (179)

The progression of this image does not depict bodies decomposing. Instead, Simon first notes the bones, then the black skin and flesh, a re-embodiment of sorts taking place as the bones seemingly regain their flesh. What he sees is not a digestion, hence disappearance, of bodies but rather the horror of the unassimilable, of what cannot be consumed. His vision is of a humanity broken, persistent in its haunting—but only if empathetic witnesses, like Simon, stop to look.

In these failures of digestion, acts of ingestion are uncanny reminders of the false dichotomy between self and other on which the ideology of slavery depends. Just as slavery depends on constructing the enslaved as non-human (so as to make them metaphorically edible matter), ingestion, as Maggie Kilgour argues, "assumes an absolute distinction between inside and outside, eater and eaten" (7). However, this distinction "breaks down, as the law 'you are what you eat' obscures identity and makes it impossible to say for certain who's who" (Kilgour 7). In other words, "[e]ating threaten[s] the foundational fantasy of a contained autonomous self," because that which had been other becomes the self "as food turn[s] into tissue, muscle, and nerve and then provide[s] the energy that drives them all" (Tompkins 3). As a result, as Deane W. Curtin asserts, acts of ingestion draw into question "the absolute border between self and other which seems so obvious in the western tradition," revealing the distinction to be "nothing more than an arbitrary philosophical construction" (9). If through ingesting, one must acknowledge that the self is not different from the other but instead fuelled by that other, then it is no wonder the attempted consumption of the enslaved in these texts often yields indigestion. Even though to ingest is to wield power, to ingest simultaneously "reveals the fallaciousness of the illusion of self-sufficiency and autonomy that the inside/outside opposition tries to uphold by constructing firm boundary lines between ourselves and the world" (Kilgour 9).

The enslaved, to return to Tompkins' assertion, do not always "go down smoothly" (9) in these texts because the act of ingestion can pro-

voke a self-conscious confrontation of the consumer's imbrication with and reliance upon what is ingested. For example, as much as the sailor of *Zong!* seemingly celebrates his ability to dine on "negro meat" (Philip 164, 171), his acts of eating also prove to be self-consumptive. At one point, he announces that

> we din e on me
> at [.] (149)

The splitting apart of "me at" allows "we dine on me" to surface, illustrating a subconscious doubt about the ethics of his actions. In consuming the other, he is consuming himself (a consumption that eventually culminates in his suicide). To perpetuate the colonialist/racist argument that slavery is a just system requires a belief in the rightfulness of one's dominance and subsequently a repression of one's similarity to and innate dependency upon the other. The difficulties in the digestive process that these texts portray symbolize the uncanny—and unfortunately fleeting— surfacing of this knowledge.

For the enslaved, however, the act of ingestion, when possible, is even more threatening. It can signify surrender. Jane Bennett contends that what is consumed is "a powerful agent . . . that modifies" the consumer (43). Food has a "self-altering, dissipative materiality . . . [that] enters into what we become" (Bennett 51); it has the "active power to affect and create effects" (Bennett 49). As a result, "[c]onsumption may signify mastery over the other, but it may also signify one's subjection to the other" (Roy 30). For the enslaved, nourishment is not only edible matter; it also represents an ideology that gives one group the right to grant or deny another group's access to sustenance. Consumable matter is thereby caught up in the system of slavery and is symbolic of it as a result. To consume, thus, can be to ingest one's enslavement. Conversely, a refusal to eat can function as a form of protest and claiming of self. Covey and Eisnach, for instance, report that "[s]ome slaves refused to eat during the Middle Passage voyage as an act of self-determination and control. Refusing to eat was an act of defiance" (2). *Feeding the Ghosts* is, in fact, rife with refusals of food. When Mintah is cast overboard, the enslaved who witness this act of violence use food as a weapon and

object of protest: "A couple of men hurled their bowls at Kelsal and the others and ran to intervene" while others "emptied their bowls on the deck or simply threw them at the crew" (D'Aguiar 49). In the midst of depicting the chaos of this scene, the narrative eye zooms in on a "little girl" who is "cr[ying] into her bowl of porridge" while "an adult coaxe[s] her to eat" (49). The depiction of the aftermath of Mintah's assumed murder—Mintah, as I mention above, manages to climb back onboard the *Zong*—concludes with the following paragraph:

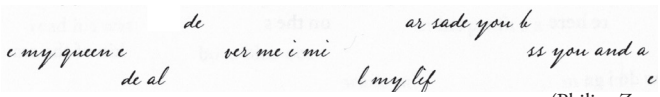
> The girl stared at her bowl. Rain covered the porridge like a lavish condiment. Eat, the adult begged, eat for Mintah, so you can grow big, beautiful and strong like her. The child looked up at the adult, wished it was Mintah holding that spoon. But she had seen Mintah flung into the big water, from which no one ever returned. Knowing death had taken Mintah and so would soon take her too, she decided not to feel hunger any more, not to feel anything. To banish hunger in her wait for death to come. She opened her mouth. Closed her eyes. Shut out the wind and the rain. Swallowed the gruel. (50)

The adult constructs eating as a life-sustaining activity, something that will enable the girl to grow up and become a figure of strength like Mintah had been. For the child, however, eating is not a step towards life but an instigator of death. Her initial refusal to eat is not just about the girl taking control of her body; it is also about preserving a feeling of loss, of lack. Just as nostalgia maintains one's connection to a place and people lost, the feeling of hunger allows the girl to maintain a connection with her body.[17] To feel hunger is to feel the result of her enslavement, to feel an emptiness that cannot be filled, particularly not with the food of her enslavers. In choosing not to feel hunger anymore, she is choosing not to feel anything, to lose her connection with her body and with the environment—the wind and rain—that surrounds it. In eating, she resigns herself to the dispossession of her body; her swallowing of the gruel is her surrender. Concluding with sentence fragments, the wording of this passage further performs the girl's defeat. The girl, as the subject of a sentence, disappears upon the

opening of her mouth; by the time she "[s]wallow[s] the gruel," "she" is no longer even present.

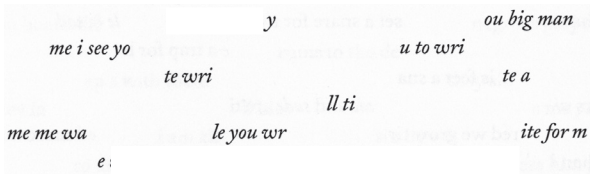
As the experience of this girl suggests, the enslaved portrayed in these two texts cannot experience the act of ingestion as the "triumph" that Bakhtin suggests it is. Instead, both texts move towards climactic moments of consumption, but these acts of ingestion do not prove life-sustaining.[18] While Wale literally ingests a letter to his wife that he has had a sailor write for him in *Zong!*, Mintah describes herself metaphorically drinking her carvings of the *Zong* massacre victims. Both Wale and Mintah then perish, Wale jumping to his death, Mintah consumed by a fire she (mistakenly?) sets. Unlike the girl's act of eating, which requires that she ingest food that is implicated in her enslavement, both Mintah's and Wale's acts of ingestion take them outside of their reliance on their captors for sustenance.[19] Wale and Mintah pursue alternative, self-reliant forms of nourishment: Wale eats his own words, while Mintah ingests her memories.

In the case of Wale, although the paper he ingests is not literally nourishing, it is symbolically so. By consuming this piece of paper, which holds Wale's words as transcribed by his captor, Wale ingests proof of his humanity, or more specifically, proof that his humanity has been recognized by his captor. The words that Wale ingests—



(Philip, *Zong!* 172)—

express emotion and his bond to his family, two qualities the enslaved were assumed to lack. More importantly, Wale's success in getting the sailor to perform a task for him—the writing of his letter—represents his ability to thwart the tenets of slavery that define him as inhuman and other. When approaching the sailor, Wale states,



(172),

and indeed, throughout *Zong!*, this sailor has been characterized by his ability to write. Not only does he frequently write letters to his own love, "dear ruth," but he is also called upon by the other sailors to write letters to their partners. The sailor writes, "dear / clair i / write this / for / sam" (85); to "lisa," he offers "these words" that come "from [dave's] lips" (85); to "eve," he conveys that "piet says he longs" (85); to "eva davenport," he "fear[s] / the news is / not good" (85). Wale's ability to convince the sailor to perform this task suggests that the hierarchical relationship between Wale and the sailor is, at least momentarily, levelled. Further, in writing this love letter for Wale, the sailor must confront the collapse of the binary distinguishing Wale from the sailor and his shipmates; the letter equates Wale with all the others for whom he has written and, by extension, equates Sade with all the other intended recipients of the love letters. Wale's dying declaration is even performed and recorded in English. In one way, this choice of language speaks to the hegemony of English and the cultural costs that that hegemony will exact, but in another way, Wale's use of English deconstructs the binary between self and other on which the sailor's beliefs and actions depend.

Wale's actions at the conclusion of *Zong!* are difficult to interpret.[20] Why does Wale have the letter written only to then swallow it and jump to his death, taking that letter with him? Why does he privilege the written word instead of telling the sailor of his love for Sade? Having the letter written may signify his ability to compel the sailor to help him, but in eating it, Wale prevents his written words from achieving the immortality that writing often promises.[21] Of course, by eating the letter, Wale also saves his words from history's gaze and possible misrepresentation or erasure. Although it remains difficult to discern whether Wale's final act represents triumph or defeat, his action does suggest an attempted reunification of self. Through ingesting words that express his love for Sade and Ade, Wale attempts to become one with these words and hence with the self that was possible before slavery. As I describe above, before their capture Wale, Sade, and Ade enjoy a pastoral ideal; they are a carefree and supportive family. By eating words that materialize this prior life, Wale fuses his current self with his past one,

bringing that past self into his body as fuel. Of course, if he were to continue living, slavery would make the continued integration of these selves impossible. To die at this moment is to die when the rupture in his continuum of self has, at least symbolically, been healed.

Mintah's acts of ingestion similarly suggest a desire to become one with herself through consumption. Before her final climactic act of ingestion—the drinking of her carvings—Mintah envisions her own self as possible nourishment. After she escapes from the sea and is recaptured, she finds herself roped to four men who had helped her in a largely unsuccessful insurgence. While covered by canvas and sporadically beaten, Mintah enters a dream state in which she realizes that "[t]hose who died must have perished with the belief that the land was the past and the sea was the present; that there was no future" (D'Aguiar 112). Throughout her contemplations, she feels "lost. At sea. Lost to her name. Her body" (112). In this dream state, Mintah returns to Africa (whether this is a recollected memory of her childhood or a fictional reimagining remains unclear) and experiences herself as bodiless. She then describes her ideal destination: "First she wanted to feel soil, mud, stone, rock, clay, sand, loam, pebbles, boulders, grass. Then wood. There must be water. But in a stream or river. Water she could see her face in and a face she could drink" (115). This vision communicates Mintah's desire for fresh water, something that will quench thirst, unlike the sea water that "stung" (226) because she "choked on salt" (53). This vision also indicates her need for the steadiness of land, a location from which she can be still enough to form a reflection of herself. But most importantly, in this river she seeks "a face" that "she could drink" (115), a desire that indicates her wish to thwart the destructive power of the Middle Passage, and, by extension, the sea itself, which had "come between" (200) her and her body. To consume herself is to put herself back together. Although not explicitly stated, the self that she seeks to assimilate into her body can be read as the self that had been traumatized on the *Zong*. The face in the water may be her reflection, but it is seemingly staring up from below the water's surface; the face thus symbolizes the person who was thrown overboard and nearly drowned.

Mintah's practice as a wood carver is her means of navigating a relationship with the past. As a wood carver, she creates goblets for her "visitors," seemingly tourists who give little thought to the wood as a materialization of history: "If only they could see that what they are laying their hands on is a treasure, that it harbours the past, that it houses the souls of the dead and that the many secrets of the earth are delivered up in it" (D'Aguiar 208). Although "the past" that the wood represents is not exclusively Mintah's traumatic past, the word choices in this passage suggest that Mintah connects the wood to her experience of the Middle Passage. That the wood "harbours" the past suggests that for Mintah, her carving helps bring the past to shore; her carving tames the past, steadies it, frees it from the tumult of the sea; her carving helps bring the perpetual Middle Passage to some form of conclusion. Mintah carves figures memorializing the victims of the *Zong* in addition to the goblets, shapes that suggest a "man, woman or child reaching up out of the depths" (208–09). As Mintah describes, "[t]here are 131 of them" and she has "been working on another for months now" with plans for "ten more after that" (209). The numbers imply that the carvings represent the victims of the *Zong* massacre: the 131 men, women, and children cast overboard alive, Mintah who climbed back onboard, and the ten others who are said to have jumped to their deaths rather than waiting to be thrown. Although her visitors proclaim that they "cannot keep such a shape in their homes" because "[s]uch shapes do not quench a thirst. They unsettle a stomach" (209), for Mintah, these figures "are [her] goblets" (209). From these she does not drink liquid but "drink[s] their grain. [She] drink[s] light from them, the way it shines off head and shoulders and back" (209). By metaphorically drinking the victims of the massacre, Mintah honours the dead, symbolically bringing them back to life; in consuming them, they are assimilated into her still living body, becoming, to return to Tompkins' words, the "tissue, muscle, and nerve[,] . . . the energy that drives them all" (3).

Mintah cannot, however, gain sustenance from this act of ingestion. Just as memories of her childhood, her "diet of recall" (D'Aguiar 61), become unfulfilling, drinking the trauma of the *Zong*, even for the sake of honouring the dead, cannot nourish her. Her description of raid-

ing the "storehouse" of her childhood memories may suggest that her diet has become unbalanced—"she found she was simply retrieving the same things time and again" (61)—but her consumption of the trauma of the *Zong* massacre is even more destructive in that it involves a parasitic relationship. As much as she drinks these figures and the traumatic past they symbolize, the past also consumes her: "It used her body as such. For sustenance. For the life it could not otherwise live since it could not be told" (223). The concluding moral of this novel is that ghosts want and need to be fed. To be fed is to be cared for and nourished by the next generation; it is to be nurtured for continued "life." Unfortunately, it is upon Mintah that the ghosts feed, leaving her with only one last act of ingestion, an act that is simultaneously her destruction: "Fire pushed her to her knees. She opened her mouth for air and ate fire" (226).

* * *

The narratives of both *Zong!* and *Feeding the Ghosts* move towards these climactic acts of eating, wherein the enslaved or formerly enslaved at last become eaters. In this way, one hopes that the trajectory of these narratives moves towards the enslaved characters achieving power. One wants them to enjoy the act of eating as, in Bakhtin's words, "joyful, triumphant" and for eating to mean that they have "triumph[ed] over the world" by "devour[ing] it without being devoured" (qtd. in Kilgour 6). And yet, no such victory is available. What is available to Mintah and Wale to eat, after all, is not literal food but rather aspects of themselves. An ouroboros may eat its own tail to regenerate itself, but Wale and Mintah enjoy no such renewal. They eat only to be eaten, by the sea and by the flames respectively. Theirs is an ambivalent achievement of power in a world that requires physical deprivation and death in order to sustain one's pride and sense of self. In such a world, no such binary that links eating with empowerment and not eating with weakness is possible. To eat is a biological necessity that promotes well-being and yet acquaints one with the vulnerabilities of the body. To not eat is to face ill-health and possible death and yet may be an act of strength, a refusal to assimilate into oneself whatever systems and ideologies with which the food is imbricated. As these texts convey, to be able to eat is not to

be able to achieve power; rather, to already possess power is to be able to eat, and to do so with little conscience or regret.

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Notes

1 Barthes' 1961 "Vers une psycho-sociologie de l'alimentation modern" ("Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption") helped to make the study of food as culture possible by arguing that food is a sign communicating meanings beyond itself. Lévi-Strauss' 1965 "Le Triangle Culinaire" ("The Culinary Triangle") similarly positioned food as a form of communication, arguing that "the cooking of a society is a language in which it unconsciously translates its structure" (43).

2 Peckham is particularly interested in the cuisine of cultural groups that become a "form of world cooking" that is "served up by a mainstream culture and consumed in a feast that feeds the muscles of the ravenous nation" (181).

3 The question remains whether or not this perceived lack of sustenance was in fact a fabricated interpretation meant to justify an action that was more rooted in a desire to transfer the costs of the journey to the insurance company. An enslaved person killed out of necessity would allow the ship's owners to recoup the insured value of £30, a value not likely achievable on the slave auction blocks given the grave condition of many of the enslaved after the *Zong*'s long, arduous, and illness-ridden journey.

4 Another key literary representation of the *Zong* massacre, Dabydeen's long poem "Turner" (1994), similarly makes the act of eating a foundational aspect of its narrative. I have, however, excluded it from my discussion here because its handling of the trope of eating warrants its own argument and discussion.

5 In that D'Aguiar chooses to fictionalize this rumoured event, he is engaging in the recovery of a lost history and thereby negotiating the limits and implications of that recovery. D'Aguiar's choice to fictionalize the events and even to portray facts inaccurately (for instance, in D'Aguiar's text, the Captain testifies regarding his decision to order the massacre whereas in the historical record, Captain Luke Collingwood died shortly after the conclusion of the journey and so did not have the opportunity to testify) suggests a desire to use fiction as a means of "succeed[ing] where traditional historiography" cannot (Spaulding 7). Fictionalization allows the unknowable to gain some, albeit incomplete, presence,

and consequently, as has been argued by such scholars as Spaulding and Keizer, fictionalization becomes a means of gaining control over the past, diminishing its threat, and putting it to use "for the benefit of the present and the future" (Keizer 17).

6 I have assumed that Philip's reference to "a novel about it [the *Zong* massacre]" (190) is to *Feeding the Ghosts* since it is the sole novel overtly portraying the *Zong* massacre. Unsworth's *Sacred Hunger* does feature a similar casting overboard of living slaves for the sake of insurance money, but it does not claim to specifically represent the *Zong* voyage. Furthermore, Cliff's *Abeng* refers to the massacre but only in passing.

7 Craps uses these words to describe *Feeding the Ghosts* and Dabydeen's "Turner," but they are an equally appropriate description of *Zong!*

8 Khan refers to some of the narrative content, noting the relationship between a sailor and Ruth, but most often these narrative details are absent from scholarly discussions of *Zong!*

9 The visual layout of quotations from *Zong!* appears as accurately as possible. A number of quotations have been scanned so as to give a sense of the text's font style and size.

10 My reading assumes that in rendering Wale and Sade as spectacle, the narrative depicts a loss of power. Of course, a further implication of "see *wale* run" could be that this imperative functions as part of the text's ethics of recovery and pursuit of justice. This command is, after all, also a call to witness. Philip's echoing of a Dick-and-Jane-type narrative, nevertheless, also associates Wale and Sade's coming enslavement with a diminishment of the narrative tools available to convey their story. Wale and Sade are under threat of capture and their story too is threatened by possible conscription into Western models. I am thinking here of interpretations of Morrison's allusion to Dick-and-Jane stories in *The Bluest Eye*. As Werrlein has argued, Dick-and-Jane narratives, which were standard school readers in the United States throughout the 1930s-60s, were a hegemonic force constructing the white middle class as the norm to which to aspire; these readers, subsequently, functioned as "a national illiteracy campaign that systematically disenfranchised young black Americans, especially young black girls" (62). Morrison opens *The Bluest Eye* with a Dick-and-Jane-like narrative and uses fragments of it throughout, which foregrounds the exclusion of families like the Breedloves from the actual Dick-and-Jane books. Similarly, Philip's allusion to these Dick-and-Jane narratives restricts the narrative options available to Wale and Sade and thus performs their possible representational containment.

11 Although the sailors are predominantly pictured as having sustenance on board the *Zong*, there is a voice, which one assumes is a French sailor, that surfaces sporadically, stating "*j ai soif*" ["I'm thirsty"] (98) and/or "*j ai faim*" ["I'm hungry"] (Philip 98, 131, 152, 157).

12 Rediker reports, for instance, that to limit consumption, a barrel of water would be placed on the maintop platform so that "[s]ailors were forced to climb all the way up to take a single drink" (206). There also exists testimony that "sailors were sometimes 'obliged to beg victuals of the slaves'" (Rediker 261). (For the source of 'obliged to beg victuals of the slaves,' please see Rediker's endnote 83 [400].) It may be difficult to tell whether or not the sailors exaggerated their experience of limited sustenance. Nevertheless, since the "rates of mortality of the crew on slave ships were considerably higher than for crews on other routes, including the commodity trade with Africa" (Klein 131), it is plausible that the conditions they experienced were grave.

13 For a reading of the significance of Philip's use of the catalogue in *Zong!*, see Fehskens.

14 Not all the women are represented as being able to produce breast milk. At another moment, a woman is characterized by "paps" that "hang dry" (Philip 121).

15 The portrait of Mansfield that biographers have constructed is of a man with ambivalent attitudes towards slavery. Mansfield may have made the groundbreaking Somerset decision (1772) which ruled that an enslaved person could not be removed from England against his will, a decision that paved the way for abolition in England. But as Heward describes, "there is no evidence that Lord Mansfield's views on the subject of the slave trade were in any way in advance of his contemporaries" (139). Poser reports that Mansfield was affected by John Locke's and James Beattie's arguments against slavery (288, 290), and yet Mansfield was also known to have proclaimed that he "would have all masters think [the enslaved] free, and all negroes think they were not, because then they would both behave better" (qtd. in Heward 143). According to Poser, Mansfield experienced "a tension between his rational and humane beliefs and his unwavering support of British commerce and the sanctity of property. He understood the importance of the slave trade to British merchants, yet he knew that slavery could not be justified on any rational or humanitarian ground" (290). Poser draws the conclusion that Mansfield was ultimately "[l]ess concerned about liberty than about social and economic damage control" (290).

16 These references to the enslaved as food draw upon documented assumptions on the part of the enslaved that transatlantic slavery supported European cannibalism. For example, in his autobiographical narrative, Equiano states, "I asked them if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and loose hair" (ch. 2). Although assuming that one was to be eaten may seem like an extreme conclusion, an unthinkable conclusion is quite understandable amidst apocalyptic conditions. As Piersen writes, "[t]he tradition of insatiable white man-eaters explained why no one ever returned after being purchased on the coast" (4). Many depictions of the slave trade narrativize this fear of becom-

ing food. For example, in Hill's *Book of Negroes*, Aminata, upon capture, believes that "the captors would beat us, boil us and eat us" (29), while Fanta, despite being told their fate is to be labourers, is convinced that "[t]hey are going to eat us, anyway" (61). As well, the enslaved women described by D'Aguiar in *Feeding the Ghosts* think "they were slaves destined to be eaten" (76). This fear of literal cannibalism may have been unfounded, but the bodies, health, and spirits of the enslaved were, of course, consumed in many other ways.

17 This argument is informed by Mallipeddi's construction of nostalgia as a key mode of resistance for the enslaved. Mallipeddi asserts that "[i]t was by tenaciously retaining and cultivating memories of Africa to the point of self-destruction that slaves sought to counter the forces of dislocation" (247). The choice not to eat functions similarly to a destructive preservation of memory in that both nostalgia and hunger are about preserving a feeling of loss in order to preserve a connection to one's self (body and home) before enslavement.

18 Leong similarly constructs the enslaved in *Zong!* in terms of a perpetual lack of nourishment, her focus centering particularly on a lack of water. Asserting that "the slaves remained thirsty even with an ample supply of water on hand" (804), Leong asks, "What is it to be thirsty when one is surrounded by water?" (799). Thirst, as argued by Leong, becomes a "*permanent* condition" (807; emphasis in original).

19 This pursuit of more self-sufficiency in acquiring nourishment is consistent with a broader theme, particularly in *Feeding the Ghosts*, of the enslaved seeking nourishment outside of that which is regulated by their captors. Specifically, the novel describes multiple instances of the enslaved quenching their thirst with rain water.

20 For example, Wale's eating of this letter bears relation to various Biblical ideas, namely Ezekiel's swallowing of the scroll and the figuring of Jesus as the Word made flesh.

21 Danticat's short story "Children of the Sea" from *Krik? Krak!* narrates a similar scenario, one equally as difficult to interpret. Just before the journal in which one of the protagonists has been writing is to be thrown overboard, a fellow migrant insists his name be written in it despite knowing that the book is to be destroyed. Of course, Danticat's story is complicated by the fact that though the journal has been discarded, somehow readers have access to its contents, suggesting that a kind of alternate, more metaphysical mode of communication is possible.

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The Politics of Food and Appetite in Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* and V. S. Naipaul's *Half a Life*

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Abstract: This essay contends that materialist as well as culturalist views of resistance to particular foods fall short of grasping the significance of this resistance in Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) and V. S. Naipaul's *Half a Life* (2001). It argues that a critical focus on postcoloniality is necessary to understand the treatment of food and appetite in these novels. These novels demonstrate how a history of domination has charged Indian material culture with political meaning: they implicitly relate the fates of their protagonists in post-liberation India to Mohandas Gandhi and Indian nationalism's ambivalence about whether to embrace the meat-eating of the former British colonisers or promote vegetarianism and fasting as elements of national identity. The novels suggest that a semantic over-determination of appetite and consumption transforms the sons' resistance to the ways of their fathers into an unintended repetition of the positions of coloniser and colonised.

Keywords: food, appetite, Mohandas Ghandhi, vegetarianism, Anita Desai, V. S. Naipaul

The novels *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) by Anita Desai and *Half a Life* (2001) by V. S. Naipaul share themes, character constellations, and structural characteristics. Both novels deal with sons who resist their father's dietary practices, who are raised in post-liberation India and later emigrate to the West, and whose lives highlight the political meanings of food and appetite in India. And both novels are driven by the tension between food and appetite, and dietary restrictions and self-

restraint. I argue that understanding the politics of food and appetite in these novels requires a postcolonial approach that exposes how a history of domination has charged material practices with political meanings. I show that Desai's and Naipaul's novels implicitly relate the fates of their protagonists to Indian nationalism's ambivalence about whether to embrace the meat-eating of the former British colonisers or promote vegetarianism and fasting as elements of national identity. Both novels' point of reference is Mohandas Gandhi, who first made meat-eating and then vegetarianism and fasting central elements of his liberatory nationalism. Both protagonists struggle with the legacy of their fathers, who either rejected or embraced Gandhi's call for a meatless diet. In this way, the novels offer different critiques of the politics of food and appetite in post-liberation India.

In Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*, the male protagonist turns against his father's practice of meat-eating. The novel suggests that the politics of food benefits men at the cost of the physical and mental starvation of women and that Gandhi usurped the position of women when he used vegetarianism to fashion men as representatives of a feminized Indian polity. Gandhi's focus on vegetarianism also reinforced the caste system. At the same time, the novel points out that vegetarianism is an alternative to the unlimited appetite associated with Western modernity. In Naipaul's *Half a Life*, the protagonist rejects his father's culinary and sexual self-restraint, which was inspired by Gandhi as a strategy, reserved for Brahmins, to maintain status under colonial rule. *Half a Life*'s political agenda is quite different from that of *Fasting, Feasting*: it critiques Gandhi as well as Indian traditions of self-restraint. The novel proposes that the Indian quarrel over the control or indulgence of appetite is concerned with both culinary practice and sexuality. In both spheres, Indian methods of regulating appetite came to signify opposition to the colonial appetite for new territories. My central claim is that the fates of the sons in both novels suggest that in post-liberation India and the Indian diaspora, the old political quarrel about dietary practice has led to a semantic over-determination of appetite and consumption. This in turn transforms resistance to the ways of the fathers into an unintended repetition of the positions of coloniser and colonised.

In addressing these issues, I seek to contribute to the understanding of Desai's and Naipaul's works and intervene in the debate in food studies over how to interpret resistance to particular foods. Critics and theorists such as J. M. Coetzee and Tobias Döring et al. understand it as the body's ability to resist cultural expectations, while others such as Michel de Certeau read it as a strategy, available to ordinary persons, for reclaiming agency from all-pervasive economic, political, and cultural forces. I argue that neither the materialist nor the culturalist view can account for the politics of food and appetite in Naipaul's and Desai's works because they pay too little regard to the historical dimension elaborated in these novels. Instead, it requires a distinctly postcolonial approach to make the present readable by exposing how a history of domination has charged material culture and its practices with political meanings.

I. *Fasting, Feasting*

Fasting, Feasting tells the story of Uma and Arun, a brother and sister in a Brahmin family. While food plays an important role in Desai's earlier novels *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) and *Clear Light of Day* (1980) (Jackson 162, 166), in *Fasting, Feasting* dietary practices form the material nexus of class, gender, and political distinctions between individual characters and between India and the United States. The nonlinear narrative of Part One focuses on the mundane practices that constitute Uma's life in India between the 1950s and the 1980s and suggests that she not only lives in her little brother's shadow but that the wealth of attention her brother receives depends on her continuing subservience to her male family members. Uma, who is having trouble finding a husband and is viewed as unattractive, is made to bottlefeed Arun. Throughout the day, she and her mother ensure "that a fixed quantity of milk was poured down his gullet whether he wanted it or not. . . . Then, when Papa returned from the office, he would demand to know how much his son had consumed" (Desai, *Fasting, Feasting* 30). In addition to receiving the best food, Arun is also given the best English-style education available. His father wants him to succeed in the modern world, the door to which the English supposedly threw open when they colonised India. Uma, on the other hand, is deprived of food as well as education. All she is fed are

the pious and, in the context of her situation, ironic words of convent school sisters: "The lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (20). When a potential husband is finally found and invited to the house, the man asks Uma's parents for the hand of her sister Aruna, even though Aruna is only thirteen. Uma's brother, Arun, will study in the US in accordance with his father's plans, whereas she is certain to live out her life in the confines of her parents' home. She does not openly rebel, but even while she is still going to school, she suffers the first of the fainting fits that will seize her throughout her life and will almost make her drown in the river where she and her family take a ritual bath. Uma's periodic fits transport her to another realm and thus are a form of resistance to her immobility and spiritual starvation (Poon 36).

Crucially, the privileges lavished upon Arun stifle and overburden him. The ambitious educational demands he must meet mirror his earlier force-feeding: he has to stomach the food as well as the books his father orders him to consume. Like Uma, his resistance to his parents' culinary regimen occurs at the bodily level but does so much earlier. When baby Arun is fed eggs, he turns away wildly, and his parents realize that he is a vegan. His father orders Uma to force cod liver oil between Arun's teeth, but Arun snaps them shut on her finger, which begins to bleed.

The scene encapsulates Uma's and Arun's dilemmas. As the male heir of the family, Arun thrives on Uma's bottlefeeding and the food she is not eating, and his biting transforms this parasitic relationship into a symbolic act of "cannibalistic gender discrimination" (Poon 39). Ironically, though, he simultaneously expresses resistance to eating meat and animal products such as the cod liver oil. Arun's biting but not ingesting stresses that his precocious veganism is a form of self-assertion against his father who believes his son needs to be fed meat in order to grow strong (Poon 35–37). Arun's veganism triumphs over his father's culinary pedagogy as if to demonstrate the body's ability to resist acculturation.

Food studies scholars often argue that bodies and the food that sustains them cannot be entirely disciplined by the pressures of culture and that a portion of the body will always resist acculturaion.[1] Indeed,

Coetzee makes this point about *Fasting, Feasting*: "At a precultural level, the level of the body itself, [Arun] resists the pressures of assimilation" (291). Coetzee prioritizes the material over the cultural. de Certeau, on the other hand, suggests that food refusal is best read as a consumer tactic against the pressures of economic and political forces (de Certeau 10–21).[2]

However, I argue that neither approach can adequately unlock the significance of Arun's refusal. The salient point of the passage explored above is only understood when we learn about the reaction of Arun's father:

> A meat diet had been one of the revolutionary changes brought about in [Arun's father's] life, and his brother's, by their education. Raised amongst traditional vegetarians, their eyes had been opened to the benefits of meat along with that of cricket and the English language: the three were linked inextricably in their minds. . . . Now his own son, his one son, displayed this completely baffling desire to return to the ways of his forefathers, meek and puny men who had got nowhere in life. (Desai, *Fasting, Feasting* 32–33)

In light of his father's vexation, Arun's veganism is less a physical predisposition signifying the body's resistance to acculturation or a consumer's reclamation of an autonomy encroached on by economic forces than an unwitting return to the ways of his Brahmin forefathers. Arun embodies a reawakening of the traditional customs his father laid to rest for the sake of what he believes to be modern and progressive.

It is here that *Fasting, Feasting* implicitly invokes the mid-nineteenth-century debate over diet and national character to which Gandhi responded. In his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Gandhi discusses the chastening of appetite, the refusal of salt and spices, and fasting. As Parama Roy writes, these prescriptions all feature in the ancient Jain religion, which provided Gandhi with a template for his own alimentary ethics.[3] But Gandhi also drew from a political ideology promoted in the mid-nineteenth century by the spiritual Hindu leaders Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda. As

Coetzee relates, both men argued that Hindus had lost touch with their masculinity and sought to remedy this by adopting the same values that seemed to give the British their power (290–91). Roy describes how Vivekananda famously prescribed "beef, biceps, and Bhagvadgita" as a cure for the supposed effeminization of Indian men (79).

Surprisingly, before the 1890s British and Indian commentators largely agreed on the physical and moral inadequacy among Indians, as well as the notion that one of its causes was a meatless diet. In his autobiography, Gandhi recalls schoolboys singing the following song:

> Behold the mighty Englishman
> He rules the Indian small,
> Because being a meat-eater
> He is five cubits tall. (17)

After an initial revulsion, Gandhi adopted meat-eating as a nationalist duty and explicitly couched it in masculinist terms. Meat, he suggested, would nourish the Indian resistance to British rule and propel Indians into modernity: "I wished to be strong and daring and wanted my countrymen also to be such, so that we might defeat the English and make India free!" (18).

Only after some time in London did Gandhi renounce the eating of meat and, as Roy observes, it is no coincidence that he revised his valuation of vegetarianism while living in the heart of the Empire. Gandhi was a respected member of London's vegetarian societies, where he was deemed a representative of a culture with a long vegetarian tradition. Roy argues that the respect Gandhi received in London helped him replace his earlier sense of Indian weakness and inferiority with a kind of affirmative Orientalism and develop a culinary politics that was partly derived from the Jain philosophy of *ahimsa*, or non-violence, and addressed political and ethical concerns (89–95). Vegetarianism and fasting became central to India's struggle for independence because self-rule at a national level seemed meaningless without self-rule at the most intimate, bodily level (26). At the same time, Gandhi stopped wearing a suit and began to dress simply. He exhibited his vegetarian body; both his clothing and diet seemed to Londoners hyperbolic and even

provocative. Gandhi, through his vegetarianism, consciously sought to feminize his body, and by extension the Indian polity (Roy 83–85).

Indian nationalism's ambivalence about whether to embrace meat and masculinity or vegetarianism styled as feminine enables us to understand Arun's father's shock. Not only does Arun seem like a throwback to a time when a culture of non-meat-eating was second nature to some Brahmins, but his veganism also threatens his father's worldview, which is premised on masculinity, progress, and Englishness. Furthermore, what can be seen as a sign of weakness in Arun might turn out to be a sign of strength—a passive resistance to foreign domination that Arun applies to his family in a way scandalously similar to Gandhi's fasts. If the non-linear narrative of *Fasting, Feasting* evokes a sense of circularity reminiscent of the Hindu belief in reincarnation, then Arun's veganism reads as a material return of Hindu customs.

Roy's observation that "[d]iaspora (usually in the West), as the arena of temptation, testing, and sacrifice, is in many ways the most appropriate theatre for the turn, or return, to practices of dietary belonging and dietary fidelity" (11) applies to Arun: it is in the US that his alimentary practice is truly put to the test and reveals its full significance. Part Two of *Fasting, Feasting* switches its focus from Uma to Arun and his stay with his American host family, the Pattons, during his studies in Boston. Mrs. Patton, the mother of a son and a daughter, harbours secret vegetarian desires she has not dared to act on in her meat-eating household. Arun's vegetarianism encourages her to follow his example. Mrs. Patton fashions him as her fellow conspirator, a Gandhi in her backyard, a native sage of vegetarianism and self-restraint amidst a world of excess and consumption.

The revelation of Arun's veganism to the meat-eating Pattons is narrated in words rich in religious overtones. When the aproned Mr. Patton, performing at his mundane altar the evening rite of grilling hamburgers and steaks, offers Arun a piece of meat, Arun instinctively steps backwards: "Some stubborn adherence to his own tribe asserts itself and prevents him from converting" (Desai, *Fasting, Feasting* 166). Mr. Patton's shock mirrors that of Arun's father. Although the Pattons are never identified as Christians and Arun is never explicitly labelled a Hindu

believer, the identity of what Arun calls the "tribe" asserts itself in this moment to both men in religious terms: the eating of meat belongs to Christianity, veganism to Hinduism.[4] It is as if by refusing Mr. Patton's meat, Arun refuses to partake of the Lord's Supper, the body of Christ.

The unfolding narrative suggests that for the male members of the Patton family, Arun's refusal of meat is both the result and source of his weakness. Even Arun associates eating meat with strength and understands his veganism as the reason why he is unable to compete with Mr. Patton's athletic son. The triad of Christianity, carnivorousness, and masculinity finds its opposite in the vegetarian, feminized Hindu body. This is more or less the situation Gandhi faced under British rule, a situation which he initially answered by converting to meat-eating. But he later turned the vegetarian, feminized Hindu body into a characteristic of Indian identity.

Instead of transforming Arun into a heroic, Gandhi-like figure, however, Desai's portrait of Arun points to blind spots in Gandhi's position even while acknowledging its potential. Whereas Gandhi opposed the British Empire, whose appetite for colonies was reflected in its appetite for meat, Arun experiences the contemporary hegemon of Western modernity, the US, as a culture of excessive consumption that repulses him and leaves him hungry. America is "like a plastic representation of what he had known at home; not the real thing—which was plain, unbeautiful, misshapen, fraught and compromised—but the unreal thing—clean, bright, gleaming, without taste, savour or nourishment" (185).

The personification of the simultaneous abundance of food and lack of nutrition is the Pattons' bulimic daughter, Melanie, who is caught in a cycle of gorging herself on French fries and peanuts only to vomit in secret. Tellingly, no one in the Patton family truly sees her drama. It takes Arun to understand Melanie's illness—Arun who knows what it means to be stuffed, even force-fed, while at the same time being starved of what one desires. Arun's impression that hunger is at the centre of American consumption is strengthened by the fact that Melanie reminds him of his sister Uma, whose physical and intellectual starvation finds its counterpart in the inexpressible hunger underlying Melanie's bulimia (Poon 45–46). Looking at Melanie, he sees

> a resemblance to the contorted face of an enraged sister who, failing to express her outrage against neglect, against misunderstanding, against inattention to her unique and singular being and its hungers, merely spits and froths in ineffectual protest. How strange to encounter it here, Arun thinks, where so much is given, where there is both licence and plenty. But what is plenty? What is not? Can one tell the difference? (Desai, *Fasting, Feasting* 214).

The fact that Arun has no political agenda, that he resists for neither consciously religious nor ethical reasons but is guided by bodily instinct, makes him more like Gandhi than it might initially appear. Gandhi was sometimes at a loss to explain the logic and value of fasting except in terms of an existential need. When he did not allow his ill son and wife to eat beef or drink broth even though doctors advised it, for example, he could not rationally explain his actions. For Gandhi, it seems, fasting worked as a revelation, a visionary experience not reducible to hygiene and social benefits, a yearning great enough to vanquish palate and libido (Roy 104–08). Maud Ellmann argues that "something more eschatological" might be "at stake in self-starvation" than a desire for slenderness, the wish for self-control, or political motives, rationales that tend to "explain away the strangeness of this discipline of disengendering" (16). As politically canny as Gandhi's fasts may seem, his self-starvation was at least partly the product of a more obscure source than his will to liberate India from British rule.

While Arun's resistance to meat is reminiscent of Gandhi's resistance to Western ways of consumption, it also sheds a critical light on the role of class and gender in Gandhi's politics. It recalls how Gandhi's nationalism used vegetarianism to fashion men as representatives of a feminized Indian polity. The position of women was thus not only underprivileged but also appropriated by men in order to turn it into a characteristic of Indian identity, adding usurpation to neglect. Moreover, vegetarianism and fasting reinforced the caste system, as the practices were—and still are—perceived as a return to Brahmin laws. The causes of both women and liberation from the caste system thus suffered in favour of national

liberation and an assertion of non-Western ways of life. *Fasting, Feasting* is scathing in its near-satirical portrayal of the Pattons as well as Arun, whose privileged upbringing as a male Brahmin shows in his incompetent cooking and general passivity. In India, the caste system and the traditional role of women serve men like Arun, but when these men go abroad, the novel suggests, their being used to such privileges renders them hungry and helpless.

Even in the US, Arun is overcome by the sensation of his family shoving a textbook under his nose and making him swallow food (Desai, *Fasting, Feasting* 175). Words and food are metaphors for each other, as both are force-fed to him without nourishing him, just as the prayers Uma learns at her Christian school leave a feeling in her stomach that is hard to distinguish from literal hunger. The belief that words can take the place of food is familiar to Christians like Gandhi, who know that "man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live" (*The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, Deut. 8.3).[5] Desai's novel ultimately debunks the idea of the interchangeable nature of words and food. *Fasting, Feasting* shows that the starvation Uma and Arun suffer is the effect of a homegrown misogyny to which Gandhi contributed when he appropriated the position of women for the sake of national liberation, as well as an after-effect of colonialism, an ambition to both emulate and resist the coloniser that converts food—and the words of textbooks—from nourishment into a means of self-assertion.

II. *Half a Life*

In *Half a Life*, Naipaul (intentionally or unwittingly) picks up the thread of Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*. As he weaves it into a narrative even richer in irony, his highly satirical novel throws a critical light on Indian traditions of self-restraint and develops a political agenda quite different from that of Desai's text. *Half a Life* begins with the father of protagonist Willie Chandran telling his son the story of how he, a Brahmin, took a vow of silence in a temple and became a holy man venerated for denying his appetites. The father's picaresque story begins in the early 1930s when he attends an Indian university modelled on the British

system. He has to read English literature he does not understand, a force-feeding reminiscent of Arun's but more clearly marked as a form of colonial violence since the substance he stomachs is literally English. Chandran adores the great names of the Independence movement less for the convictions they carry than the fact that their example promises an escape from the life that is expected of him; his father has destined him to serve the Maharaja and marry the school principal's daughter.

Gandhi inspires Chandran to act against the caste system. He wants to marry a girl of the lowest of the four Hindu castes, a Sudra. Chandran's father is shocked. His son goes on to become a clerk in the land tax department of the Maharaja, where he helps cheats by destroying evidence. When Chandran's misdeeds are finally discovered, he takes sanctuary in the town's old temple in order to dodge punishment: "Like my grandfather. At this moment of supreme sacrifice I fell, as if by instinct, into old ways" (Naipaul, *Half a Life* 26). (Chandran's grandfather was descended from a line of priests and was a priest at a temple himself.) Chandran's impulse is also reminiscent of Arun's falling into old vegetarian ways and, in fact, Chandran also practices a form of self-restraint. He is unwittingly helped by his wife's uncle, a vocal opponent of the caste law according to which Chandran and his wife must not marry: "It occurred then to me to do as the mahatma had done at some stage: to take a vow of silence. It suited my temperament, and it also seemed the least complicated way out. The news of this vow of silence spread. . . . I became at once a holy man and, because of the firebrand and his niece outside, a political cause" (28). The moment reveals that Chandran cares neither about liberation from the British nor about abolishing the caste system. His efforts to fashion himself as a victim of the caste system mobilize protests outside of the temple, and these protests prevent the police from arresting him (28).

The caste system thus helps him, and so does the British Empire when the writer William Somerset Maugham arrives and wants to see the holy man revered for self-restraint (31). (Maugham did travel to India and visited a holy man whom Naipaul used as inspiration for Chandran [Meyers 229–31].) Back in England, Naipaul's Maugham writes a travel book that includes Chandran and later uses this book as material for

The Razor's Edge (1944), a novel Maugham actually wrote that explores the meaning of life and the dichotomy between materialism and spirituality. In India, *The Razor's Edge* changes people's attitude toward Chandran, who is now revered as an "authentic" high-caste servant. The mutual Anglo-Indian deception about Chandran—now seen as a holy man rather than a criminal in both countries—thus helps to reinforce the caste system and manifest the coloniser's power to define Indian identity. Chandran happily accepts this because it serves him well. And he allows himself some liberties in his self-restraint. Although Gandhi had advised complete sexual abstinence, Chandran fathers Willie, the protagonist, with his low-caste wife.

Chandran's actions can be understood as the quirks of an opportunist. However, the fact that the novel includes many references to the Chandrans' family history and features the father's story at great length before launching into the protagonist's story signals that it is making a point about behaviour that repeats itself throughout the generations of a Brahmin family, if not about the history and identity of the Brahmin caste in general. Like *Fasting, Feasting*, *Half a Life* pits a circular sense of time against the narratives of progress inherent to both the project of British colonisation and many Indian nationalists' ideas of decolonisation. When Chandran says that he fell into old ways when he took sanctuary at the temple, he means that he repeats what his grandfather did. The priestly family had been wealthy before the Muslim conquest. When, in the 1890s, the patrons of the temple could no longer support it, there was very little to eat. Reduced to mere skin and bones, Chandran's grandfather left the community. After reaching a larger town, the grandfather, like Chandran, took sanctuary at the local temple where he was fed. He learned to make his living by composing letters for those who could not write and eventually became a clerk at the Maharaja's palace.

Chandran's refuge in the temple repeats his grandfather's escape from hunger. Although temple life means restraint on both men's appetites, it provides them with an income. The novel offers an irreverently materialist account of how the Brahmin ethos of self-restraint, including vegetarianism and fasting, first emerged. I agree with Coetzee who, in a review of *Half a Life*, argues that "Naipaul has diagnosed self-denial as

the road of weakness taken by loveless spirits, an essentially magic way of winning victories in the natural dialectic between a desiring self and a resistant real world by suppressing desire itself" (287). When Chandran uses self-restraint to ensure his survival, he does not abuse a traditional Brahmin practice; he re-enacts the origin of the practice. Naipaul was born to Hindu Indians who immigrated to Trinidad as indentured servants. His life story resembles that of the half-Brahmin, half-Sudra Willie rather than that of father Chandran (King 184). His novel debunks the customary assumption that vegetarianism and fasting have always been essential to Brahmin Hinduism: instead, the text suggests that the practices allow the Brahmins to disguise their material interest in maintaining their status in the face of foreign invasion by posing as holy men. In Chandran's case, the West unwittingly helps by taking fictions for facts: the more severe Chandran's self-restraint, the more pages Maugham writes about the supposedly authentic holy man and the more secure Chandran's position in India is.

The novel's critique is not limited to Brahmin identity. The novel also questions essentialising ideas of cultural purity. The caste system suggests that Brahmins and Sudras have always had their respective statuses, but what seems settled is in fact always already undergoing change. Castes and ethnic groups are shaped and perpetually modified in an open-ended competition for power, space, sex, and security in which some will dominate and some will be dominated. *Half a Life* suggests that history has always consisted of foreign invasions, diasporic movements from one place to another, and adaptation to new rulers in a continuous mixing of cross-cultural influences (King 193).

Gandhi's experiments with fasting can be seen as a prime example of this, as he drew on a global canvas of techniques ranging from physical exercise and enemas to the activities of the Sinn Féin that were in turn employed by the suffragists (Roy 99). *Half a Life* is critical of Ghandian dietary practices; in the novel's conception, they claim to be founded on universal political values but are in fact the strategy of an elite group to maintain their status. In his non-fiction text *India: A Wounded Civilization*, Naipaul is sweepingly dismissive of Gandhi, whose development and formative voyages he describes as

> an internal adventure of anxieties felt and food eaten, with not a word of anything seen or heard that did not directly affect the physical or mental well-being of the writer. The inward concentration is fierce, the self-absorption complete. . . . His experiments and discoveries and vows answered his own need as a Hindu, the need constantly to define and fortify the self in the midst of hostility; they were not of universal application. (102–05)

Such a denial of universal application seeks to question the political thrust of Hindus who, in Gandhi's wake, have exhibited dietary restraint by practicing vegetarianism or fasting. In the light that *Half a Life* casts on these customs, Arun's resistance to American meat-eating in Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* does not constitute an alternative to unrestrained Western appetites. It is instead an atavistic and hypocritical attitude embraced by those unable or unwilling to follow India's transition to modernity. *Half a Life*'s outlook is reminiscent of Vivekananda's and Saraswati's call for adopting British meat-eating and of Gandhi's initial carnivorousness as a form of nationalist duty (Roy 79–80).

It is fair to criticise *Half a Life* for presenting modernity as a Western invention[6] to be adopted by the Third World and for condoning and even welcoming India's colonisation by the British, who allegedly enabled India to abandon its atavistic traditions. *Half a Life* can also be blamed for naturalizing the conquest of cultures as the very heartbeat of history. As Bruce King observes, the novel suggests that people will always want more, that they will always rob others, that there will always be unfair social hierarchies, and that those who do not or cannot protect themselves will either fall victim to those who wield power or flee to other parts of the world (193).

However, the story of Willie Chandran's migration (to which I will turn in due course) shows that *Half a Life* does not uncritically glorify Western modernity. Nor does the novel put the blame for Willie's failures on Brahmin and Hindu traditions alone. Willie's father has lived "a life of sacrifice" (Naipaul, *Half a Life* 36), as he likes to call it, and Coetzee argues that Willie's life story demonstrates the unhappy consequences of being nurtured in a culture of self-denial (287). It is true that

Willie's story is one of failure. But colonisation is as much a cause of that culture of self-denial as the Brahmins' deliberate choice of it. Willie's struggle and failure in London are the results of complex, asymmetrical cross-cultural influences.[7]

As in *Fasting, Feasting*, the novel's invocation of Gandhi highlights the fact that Indian nationalism sometimes embraced the meat-eating of the British in order to be able to oppose them and sometimes embraced traditions largely taken from religious, hierarchical, possibly reactionary Brahmanism. In Willie's story, appetite and renunciation are chained to each other in a way that is reminiscent of Gandhi's initial meat-eating and his later vegetarianism and fasting.

Willie emigrates to London and purposely indulges in a life of unrestrained appetites. The only appetite he is supposed to satisfy abroad—the appetite for learning—is not his own: "The learning he was being given was like the food he was eating, without savour. The two were inseparable in his mind. And just as he ate without pleasure, so, with a kind of blindness, he did what the lecturers and tutors asked of him, read the books and articles and did the essays" (Naipaul, *Half a Life* 58). Reading the words put before him, Willie remains unsatisfied. He is reminded of his father's life story. Earlier, after hearing his father tell his story, Willie asks: "What is there for me in what you say? You offer me nothing" (35). His father answers: "It has been a life of sacrifice. I have no riches to offer to you" (36). As in Arun's and Uma's cases, words promise to nourish the self, but they ultimately do not.

When Willie turns away from his studies, he rebels not only against the former coloniser but also against his father, who started out as a pseudo-nationalist following Gandhi's call yet ended up flattering the colonisers and gladly profiting from Maugham's influence. Willie's resistance is only truly put to the test in the diaspora, as is Arun's. But Willie's endorsement of unlimited appetite positions him in the camp of those above-mentioned Hindu nationalists who associate meat-eating with masculinity and modernity. The sense that he specifically opposes Gandhi's later position is stressed by the fact that Willie's masculine appetite for meat translates into a fierce hunger for women, whereas his father practiced dietary and moderate sexual self-restraint like Gandhi.

Sigmund Freud drew attention to the close association between eating and sexuality. As Maud Ellmann shows, the fact that starvation endangers our physical survival whereas celibacy does not mean that hunger is more natural than sex or less imbued with cultural significance. Freud emphasizes that the two do not differ in this regard when he argues for sexuality's origin in eating (Ellmann 36–39). The relationship between eating and reading—important in *Fasting, Feasting* and *Half a Life*—is metaphorical because both nourish the self. But the relationship between eating and sex—particularly important in *Half a Life*—is far more substantial because it assures both the individual's and the species' survival.

Even without reference to Gandhi or religion, cultural critics observe that societies tend to perceive eating and sexuality as linked, even to the extent that each is able to represent the other. Deborah Lupton, for example, characterizes the relationship between eating and sexuality as follows:

> Both are seen to involve physical desires mediated through culture and both are viewed as animalistic and evidence of lack of self-control. Both are sins of the flesh; the word 'carnality' itself, stemming from the Latin for meat, makes the link between the human body, concupiscence and meat. There is also an intermingling of eroticism and pleasure in the eating process. (132)

Lupton remarks that the conflation of eating and sex is especially typical of Christian societies, but that it also characterises secular societies (132). Her comments help explain why Gandhi, a Christian, closely associates the two. They also cast light on the modern, secularized world that Willie inhabits in post-war London. Even there, sexual temptation and gluttony are seen as related, making it a territory in which Willie can practice carnality in the belief that it is an antidote to his father's abstention from carnivorousness.

Just as the salient point of Arun's vegetarianism in *Fasting, Feasting* is revealed only when compared to Gandhi's vegetarianism, the meaning of Willie's carnality becomes clear only if related to Gandhi. Gandhi's

turn to fasting as a moral instrument occurred along with his decision to practice sexual abstinence, or *brahmacharya*. For him, eating and sexuality were linked; he drew on the Brahmin view that sex is the most energy-depleting human activity. Brahmins aimed at a sublimation of semen,[8] and this was also an idea in the London vegetarian societies Gandhi frequented. Fasting as a form of self-control was thus also a means of curbing one's libido (Roy 94–98).

Willie's father named his son after William Somerset Maugham. He did not imagine that the obscene connotation of Willie's name would eventually make the name a fitting one. In London, Willie's carnivorousness *is* carnality, a chase after women named June, Perdita, Ana, and Graça, a chase that becomes the dominant theme of his life. Willie believes that his insatiable sexual appetite is the cure for the unhappy way of life propagated by Gandhi, whereas Gandhi propagated self-restraint as a healthy alternative to the excessive appetites of the British and of Western modernity in general. Willie believes that modernity is the cure for Gandhi's and his father's weakness. He is convinced that his father should have taught him how to seduce women and feels that Indians forgot the art of eroticism after the Muslim invasion. When he picks up a London prostitute and performs poorly, the woman tells him to "Fuck like an Englishman" (Naipaul, *Half a Life* 121), as if confirming his theory of Indian ineptitude.

Despite frequent humiliations and the fact that no woman satisfies him, Willie's compulsions suggest that his upbringing in a culture of self-denial triggered resistance in the form of an unrestrained appetite. It is in this sense that his carnivorousness is as little a deliberately chosen anti-Gandhian, pro-Western Indian nationalism as Arun's veganism is a consciously Gandhian resistance to that modernity.

III. Conclusion

The many opportunities for feasting in the West tempt Willie and Arun to take their opposite appetites to extremes. Yet this results in an experience of hollowness and unrelieved hunger for both. For Arun and Willie, it is not merely their Brahmin upbringing that is to blame for their perpetual hunger but also the colonial regimes that made

Brahmins embrace a dietary practice that had not always been essential to Brahmanism. Whether Indians adopted meat-eating or practiced dietary restraint, the result was an embattled semantic over-determination of appetite and eating and a situation in which fathers and sons replicated the positions of coloniser and resisting colonised and re-enacted colonisation's legacies within the family.

Postcolonial writers are not exempt from this dynamic of unconscious re-enactment but find themselves in a complicated situation when they are confronted, like Desai and Naipaul, with the appetites of predominantly Western audiences. *Half a Life* captures this dilemma in an arresting episode when Willie, after some years in London, publishes a collection of short stories with the help of a well-connected friend. His writing is a variation on his great-grandfather's letter writing, another repetition between generations; Willie, like his great-grandfather, writes in order to feed himself. Naipaul's irony could not be more acerbic when a newspaper reviewer writes the following about Willie's book: "Where . . . one might have expected an authentic hot curry, one gets only a nondescript savoury, of uncertain origin, and one is left at the end with the strange sensation of having eaten variously and at length but of having missed a meal" (123). The success of Willie's father depended on an English writer's taste for Indian spirituality. Willie fails because he does not cater to English literary tastes. His unwillingness to play to colonial stereotypes—including his father's "holy" self-denial—leaves him starving, because his books do not sell with a British public that relishes "authentic hot curry."

Regardless of whether readers agree with *Half a Life*'s political agenda, the politics of food and appetite in the novel, as well as in *Fasting, Feasting*, are readable only if we "interrogat[e] the interrelated histories of violence, domination, inequality, and injustice" (Young 20)—that is, if we read the text through a postcolonial lens. Like Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*, Naipaul's novel reminds us that the critical focus on postcoloniality, rather than ceding the field to theorizations of world literature or the new materialism, cannot be superseded in a world that continues to require us to revisit colonial history in its many and sometimes unexpected guises.

Notes

1 For example, Döring, Heide, and Mühleisen assert that "there are material markers resisting [culture's] appropriating fictions: bodies that may perform other cultural identities sometimes in subversion and sometimes in excess of written protocol. Eating nourishes these bodies and food sustains their power" (3).

2 de Certeau's approach has, in fact, shaped the methodology of a number of monographs on food, eating, and migrant cuisine. Examples include Fine and Adapton. However, de Certeau's culturalism has drawn criticism for its tendency toward essentialism and romanticized representations of its subjects (Parasecoli 277).

3 The influence of Jain thought on Gandhi is particularly visible in his belief that nonhuman animals have the same moral worth as human animals: "To my mind, the life of a lamb is no less precious than that of a human being. I should be unwilling to take the life of a lamb for the sake of the human body. I hold that, the more helpless the creature, the more entitled it is to protection from the cruelty of man" (Gandhi 208). See also p. 66 of Gruzalski.

4 There is a strong historical link between religion and dietary regimens, as Lupton explains. Judeo-Christian ethics are built upon the tenets of discipline and hygiene evident in ancient writings on dietary routines. Avoiding meat, sweet foods, and heightened flavours or spices are typical ascetic practices thought to prove one's ability to override the temptations of the flesh, including both appetite and sexual desire (Lupton 132).

5 Likewise, the angel of the Lord commands the narrator to eat the sacred book and tells him that "it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey" (Rev. 10.9).

6 For a critique of monolithic concepts of modernity and modernization, see Eisenstadt.

7 As King notes, a distinction easily missed by Western readers of *Half a Life* is that between a religious, hierarchical, reactionary Brahminism and a modernizing Hindu nationalism that crosses classes and castes (185).

8 Roy explains that for Gandhi, as for many Hindus, the "loss of semen through intercourse [was] computed as the equivalent of one day's mental activity or three days' physical labour. But semen can, if properly husbanded, be moved upward through the body to the brain and transformed into *ojas*, spiritual or psychic energy" (97; emphasis in original).

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The Neoliberal Production of Cultural Citizenship in Ruth L. Ozeki's *My Year of Meats*

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Abstract: This essay draws together theories of neoliberalism and immigration to examine their shared interest in individual agency and the power of the nation-state. Though both theoretical perspectives tend to separate subject and object positions, this essay argues that Ruth L. Ozeki's novel *My Year of Meats* (1998) problematizes such a bifurcated understanding of subjectivity by narrating the complex political and economic positionality known as cultural citizenship—that is, a subject's self-determination within the state even as the state's normative structures influence the subject. Through Akiko Ueno, a Japanese housewife, Ozeki shows how an immigrant's subject and object positions cannot be separated from one another within the transnational framework of neoliberalism. The narrative foregrounds the simultaneity of these experiences to suggest that opportunities for freedom and agency are, paradoxically, both possible and impossible. This essay contends that *My Year of Meats* envisions forms of substantive individual and communal resistance to neoliberal values while also identifying how socially-produced cultural citizenship still places immigrants within the purview of the neoliberal nation-state.

Keywords: Ruth L. Ozeki, *My Year of Meats*, neoliberalism, immigration

Ruth L. Ozeki's novel *My Year of Meats* (1998) ends in a confounding manner. Akiko Ueno, a Japanese housewife, seemingly achieves the "happy life" (214) she has always desired by immigrating to the United

States with help from Jane Takagi-Little, an Asian-American filmmaker. When Akiko learns that she is pregnant after her abusive husband John sexually assaults her, she flees to the US, settles peacefully, and starts what she believes is the ideal happy life. The novel has a happy ending in that Akiko asserts her own will to freedom, but it also falls in line with the tired trope of the immigrant story—a problematic narrative that supports the American myth of immigrant freedom. The novel's complex resolution owes to the way Akiko forms her expectations of the US from watching the television documentary *My American Wife!* that is filmed by Jane. Funded by BEEF-EX, a fictional national lobby for the US privatized meat industry, each episode showcases an idealized, normative US housewife—white, attractive, heterosexual—who makes a beef recipe for her family. Jane loathes the homogenous vision that is cast for the show by its corporate backers, so when her supervisor becomes sick and the directing duties fall to her, she decides to film episodes that construct a more diverse vision of American life. The families featured in these episodes grapple with different hardships and violent experiences. Jane's productions reveal that life in the US is not perfect, but this more nuanced image of the US is not what Akiko sees in her viewing of the show. Instead, in watching the documentary, Akiko assumes that the US is simply a place where happy lives are lived.

At first glance, *My Year of Meats* seems to be a story about transnational forms of disconnection between perception and reality, but there is an added dimension to that disconnect worth investigating.[1] Ozeki shows, primarily through Akiko's story, that the myriad subject and object positions involved in global interactions cannot be separated from one another. That is to say, moments of individual agency and instances of the individual being acted upon occur simultaneously, to the point that they are nearly impossible to distinguish. For Akiko, she elects to extricate herself from a harmful situation in Japan by migrating to the US, a decision that is shaped by an attachment to a mythical understanding of American freedom. In this way, *My Year of Meats* contributes to complicated positionalities within theories of neoliberalism and immigration, both of which seek to understand the interplay of subjecthood and objectification. Ozeki's complex narrative spotlights

different artistic, economic, and political conflicts (such as authenticity and constructedness, subjectivity and objectivity, and freedom and subsumption) that cannot be separated into simple binaries.[2] Instead, her novel foregrounds the simultaneity of these conflicts to suggest that opportunities for freedom and agency are, paradoxically, both possible and impossible. I argue that through the character of Akiko, *My Year of Meats* envisions forms of individual and communal resistance to neoliberal binaristic forms of thinking while also illustrating how socially produced cultural citizenship still places immigrants within the purview of the neoliberal nation-state.

Though written twenty years ago and set during the Gulf War, *My Year of Meats* remains a timely read in an era where neoliberal values, isolationist rhetoric, and anxiety over immigration form the basis of the American political landscape under the Trump administration. Ozeki's novel reminds us that the kind of immaterial, socio-cultural production associated with neoliberalism can often continue to flourish despite one's best efforts to resist or work against it. As I will argue, the episodes of *My American Wife!* that Jane directs are co-opted by an American narrative of exceptionalism, despite her careful attempts to complicate that national narrative. My understanding of US exceptionalism owes to the work of Ali Behdad and Donald E. Pease, where Behdad defines it as "the idea that the United States is . . . free of political oppression" for arriving immigrants (26). Pease notes that exceptionalist narratives of America claim that the US is not guilty of imperialist violence, even though "the state administered colonial institutions" from its founding (203). Exceptionalism has become a "political doctrine" and "regulatory ideal" precisely because it helps to globally transmit "the US national identity" (203). Thus, the US is exceptional because its acts of violence at home and abroad are excepted from the national myth of freedom.[3] Pease argues that sustaining this myth requires "far-reaching historical revisionisms" (206); and in *My Year of Meats*, Jane notes that one reason she "ended up in television" is because of her dedication to "practicing revisionist history" that challenges reductive American myths (148). Thus, Jane tries to use *My American Wife!* to showcase a more accurate picture of the US where violence is still a consistent part of the landscape. Even

so, Akiko watches the show and becomes convinced the US is the ideal place to live. The discrepancy between Jane's artistic production and Akiko's reception is important to consider, especially in light of different critics' suggestions that the most efficient means for protesting neoliberal capitalism are already housed within its very structures.[4] Indeed, this is what Jane does by trying to use a documentary supported by the private, corporatized US meat industry to critique that same industry and nation-state. She does everything she can to produce an honest narrative, yet it is structured in such a way that allows Akiko to idealize the US and what it means to live there. Jane, however, cannot share Akiko's belief that the US is where a happy life can be located because of her own experience of sexual assault that occurred there. Even so, Jane does not document gendered violence in *My American Wife!*, nor is it ever clear that she tells Akiko about her own assault. Thus, Akiko's view of the US does not take gendered violence into account, which enables her to read the US in more hopeful terms than Jane intends. Through this misrecognition, Ozeki suggests that any critique of the state can easily be turned toward the state's advantage—in the novel's case, an immigrant's eager acceptance of American exceptionalism.[5]

My Year of Meats, then, addresses two contradictory phenomena: first, the legitimacy and occasional success of attempts to resist neoliberal practices; and second, the imperviousness of neoliberal structures to such resistance. Specifically, Ozeki highlights the concurrent experience of subjecthood and objectification, what has been described as cultural citizenship, and examines it specifically within the context of immigration. Aihwa Ong et al. term "cultural citizenship" as a set of "cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory" (738). Being a cultural citizen means becoming enmeshed in "a dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society," and the immigrant is uniquely affected by the state's normative standards that "define the different modalities of belonging" along racial and cultural lines (738). I argue that this simultaneity of "self-making"/"being-made" is precisely

Akiko's positionality in *My Year of Meats*.[6] Thus, the novel calls attention to certain limits of neoliberal thought. Within neoliberalism, individuals are defined chiefly by their economic potential, which appears to privilege freedom and agency but actually encourages greater biopolitical standardization and data accumulation for the sake of mapping and influencing human behavior.[7] As a result, one's potential to enter the market is more important than one's politics. As Mitchum Huehls argues, neoliberalism as an ideology situates the individual as both a subject and an object—an agent of freedom as well as a standardized unit—but it never represents the individual as fulfilling both roles at once (19). This desire for an either/or construction of the human is one of the chief contradictions within neoliberalism. *My Year of Meats* interrogates this contradiction through the characterization of Akiko and her experience as a new cultural citizen in the US.

I approach Ozeki's depiction of simultaneity in the novel as Henri Bergson outlines the concept in *Duration and Simultaneity*; that is, that the relativity of an event owes to competing interpretations—inner experience of the event versus outer observation of it (34). We often project our inner consciousness onto the world and believe as a result that there is "a time common to all things" (47). This is, of course, not entirely untrue, but common time does not negate variations of perception and experience across that simultaneity of time. Sharon Lynn Sieber argues that depictions of simultaneity in literature have been used to showcase "the falseness or inherent contradictory nature of language as a system of representation" (200). In other words, there is no unified sense of representational experience that literature or other artistic mediums can achieve, especially since time and space are relative. But, then again, interpretive meaning is also relative as its production fluctuates depending on who is doing the interpreting.[8] This is especially true in *My Year of Meats*, where Jane and Akiko view the content of *My American Wife!* in vastly different ways. My following arguments rely on the work of political theorists and neoliberal critics, from Bonnie Honig and Behdad to Huehls, as a way to further understand how *My Year of Meats* identifies and embodies forms of productive (albeit limited) resistance against neoliberal hegemony through cultural citizenship.

My Year of Meats follows how Akiko forms an idealized vision of the US from Jane's episodes of *My American Wife!*. As Jane becomes acquainted with the insidious practices of the US meat industry, she sabotages John's homogenous vision of the US by filming a more diverse set of Americans: Mexican immigrants, parents of a disabled daughter, and a biracial vegetarian lesbian couple. When completing a viewer survey of the show, Akiko gives Jane's diverse episodes higher marks for authenticity than John's normative presentations of American housewives. Akiko is also impressed by Jane's decision to create episodes with content that thwarts John's goal of "show[ing] perfect families" (Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* 129), and he repeatedly complains to Akiko about Jane's subterfuge. Though Akiko consistently lives in fear of her husband, Jane's episodes embolden her to take action. Upon finding Jane's contact info among John's correspondence, Akiko contacts her with the hope that Jane can help her leave John, writing, "*Because of this program, I feel I can trust to you so that I can be so bold*" (Ozeki 214; emphasis in original). Jane eventually facilitates Akiko's escape to the US and her meeting of some of the families featured on *My American Wife!*. These journeys cement Akiko's feeling of belonging in America.[9]

What unsettles the ending of the novel is the disconnect between Akiko's and Jane's views of the US and how these perspectives remain unreconciled. What Jane understands—and what Akiko does not—is that the US is constantly (re)constructing its narrative and image for the world. Jane is the critical native citizen; Akiko is the starry-eyed newcomer. But while the episodes that Jane shoots without John's input are more realistic, the vision of the US is still a careful construction she has edited for affective impact—and it works. Jane's episodes are so moving that Akiko believes them to be depictions of real life. Akiko becomes convinced that America promises a happy life for anyone, just like it has for the people on *My American Wife!*; all she has to do is get to the US to experience the same happiness. Akiko's rosy abstraction of an idealized US life engulfs the narrative, and while the US does offer her an escape from John, she does not consider how life in the US could entail further hardships.

Ozeki has made vague comments on how to approach the happy, irresolute ending of *My Year of Meats*. She says that she gave the novel a happy ending because she believes it is important to imagine how to "change the future" for the better; however, Ozeki admits being "suspicious of the efficacy" of happy endings, even if she hopes they encourage readers to contemplate the political and economic issues long after they have put the book down ("Conversation" 13). It is tempting to read Ozeki's comments as sharing a conviction more recently expressed by Jessica Berman that fiction can encourage "ethical and imaginative freedom and, by virtue of its social situatedness, can also anticipate or rework relationships in the world" (22). These moments are a "redescription," where an alternative narrative of our environment potentially "resists or revises social reality" (25). But I am not convinced this is Ozeki's aim with her novel. Ozeki admits that she has Jane "discuss the shortcomings of happy endings" in the novel to nudge the reader toward "a more complex relationship with that ending" ("Conversation" 13), and we would be wise to follow this prescription. The possibility that Akiko has only happiness ahead of her in the US is especially hard to accept given the novel's setting during the Gulf War, a period of US history not exactly known for its openness and tolerance to immigrants.[10] Yet, on the surface, the novel seems to suggest that Akiko has arrived to a place where only a happy life awaits. This, then, is the productive work that Ozeki's novel does: it showcases how individuals can, on the one hand, resist cultural paradigms of oppression successfully through smaller-scale communal ties and, on the other hand, simultaneously fail to extricate themselves from the larger-scale influences of the state and its social forms of production.

When Akiko comes to the US, she enters as an immigrant whose arrival and belonging is viewed with ambivalence by established citizens. As numerous political theorists have observed, there is no historically consistent American stance toward immigrants. Behdad argues that, on the whole, the US has a "national consciousness" marked by "ambivalence" when it comes to immigration because there are "competing perceptions of national identity" (17). Will Kymlicka understands this ambivalence as stemming from American citizens' willingness to admit

that the US is "polyethnic" while also remaining hesitant to view the US as "multinational," since the latter might require granting certain rights to minority groups (22). Honig notes that this ambivalence stems from how the arrival of immigrants implies that the US has been "chosen" (46), which helps to confirm a sense of its universal allure and launches a national "reinvigoration" over being deemed "choiceworthy" by foreigners (45, 75). In this best-case scenario, an immigrant has the potential to become the "supercitizen immigrant" onto whom American-born citizens can "project [their] idealized selves" (78). However, at the same time, immigrants never cease to pose a threat to the US because of the "undecidability of foreignness"—that is, the difficulty in deciding whether foreigners are "good or bad for the nation" (97). While both sides of the American political aisle admire the supercitizen immigrant, ambivalence never fully goes away because the US can never truly know if it is only witnessing "immigrant practicality"—a newcomer doing and saying what s/he thinks is necessary to survive (53).[11]

Though the different positionalities of the individual immigrant are varied and numerous, the theorists discussed above make clear that the general public is often divided over how to view the immigrant. While the immigrant's industriousness benefits the US, s/he simultaneously poses a threat to natural-born citizens' ways of life. An immigrant either "has something to offer us" or "only wants to take things [i.e., jobs] from us" (Honig 80). This uncertainty over the immigrant is unsettling because it complicates the ability to preserve one-sided arguments about the benefits or detriments of a nation's immigration policies. At the core of the general public's and the state's concerns is the question of which side has the greatest impact—the immigrant on the nation or the nation on the immigrant. That is to say, does the immigrant retain subjecthood or become an object acted upon by the state? As Behdad argues, these two national responses to immigrants—admiration and unease—help to define the cultural identity of the nation (17). America's vacillating openness allows it to be either xenophilic or xenophobic depending on what the economic and social factors of the moment demand, which further allows the US to construct a belief that it can do no wrong when it comes to immigration. It is either a pillar of democracy for all or a

fortress under siege. This contradictory position is buoyed by a "historical amnesia" that represses responsibility for the racially violent history of US immigration while enabling the mythical view of the nation to continue unimpeded, where violence is the exception to the myth of freedom and not vice versa (Behdad 3).

The either/or dyad of American ambivalence toward immigrants is similar in structure to the ambivalence within neoliberalism over subjecthood and objectification, and *My Year of Meats* bridges these closely related political and economic uncertainties. Huehls convincingly argues that the movement back and forth between subjective and objective conceptualizations of the individual "defines neoliberal discourse" (9). While subjective and objective conceptualizations seem contradictory, both play into the value system of neoliberalism and support its laissez-faire stance. Neoliberalism "wins either way" since both images of the individual bolster the neoliberal economic agenda (10): s/he is either a free agent or contributes to a standardized data set. Huehls calls this the "neoliberal circle" and identifies it as a reason why it is so difficult to generate any substantial critique that "doesn't in some way reinforce neoliberalism" (11). He then considers what would happen if individuals embraced the ontological terms that neoliberalism seems hesitant to embrace—namely "the simultaneity (rather than the mutual exclusivity) of subject and object" (19). For Heuhls, this would mean inhabiting the "hybrid ontology that neoliberalism has produced for us" but refuses to represent concurrently (20). Akiko, in Ozeki's capable hands, represents that simultaneity in a novel that imagines the limits (and strengths) of American hegemony in a neoliberal, transnational age.

Ozeki is doing something quite compelling in that her novel carefully subverts our literary and political understanding of simultaneity. Benedict Anderson famously postulated that the form of the novel creates a nationally unifying sense of "meanwhile" as it encourages readers to imagine themselves connected to fellow citizens across time and space (24–25). While Anderson's concept of meanwhile is a unifying metric, one that grows national identities, Ozeki shows that literary simultaneity should be understood as a point of divergence, not convergence. The community of fellow citizens may continue to be imagined, but

what is imagined is not as unified as Anderson would lead us to believe. Instead, Akiko and Jane's different readings of *My American Wife!*, and by extension of the US, reveal that any imagined community is diverse and varied in its interpretive framework. Or, in Jenny Sampirisi's words, narrative exists "as a series of events that happen and fail to happen simultaneously within the uncertain structure of language" (71). The act of writing itself enters "an all-at-onceness" that we should not regard as a moment of either/or or both/and but as "n/either" (73). What Sampirisi describes here recalls Bergson's concept of duration—that the ceaseless flow of past into present as a way to mark the passage of time amounts to a fluidity of experience where the "present [is] ceaselessly reborn" (44). Bergson would likely disagree with Anderson, claiming that imagining a "link among all individual consciousnesses" is not a unifying moment but, rather, the instance when our consciousness should grasp "multiple events lying at different points in space" (45). That is to say, "simultaneity would be precisely the possibility of two or more events entering within a single, instantaneous perception" (45). The kind of nationalistically homogenizing and unifying imaginative moment within Anderson's understanding of meanwhile is, for Bergson, an opportunity to grasp the relativity of meaning within simultaneous events. Or, to return to Huehls, simultaneity is a space to productively explore the "hybrid ontology" of an individual's movement in today's age (20).

It is not coincidental that both discourses of immigration and neoliberalism circle around the simultaneity of individuals as subjects and objects. At stake in both discourses is the sovereignty of the state, and thereby the market, and that tension is visible in *My Year of Meats*. Indeed, *My American Wife!* is more than what it first appears to be—a dramatized infomercial for beef. Ozeki situates the events of the novel at the moment when Japan's economy was set to outpace the surplus value of the US in the 1980s and 90s. This historical moment carried not only a market concern but also implications for the continuance of America's hegemonic power, and *My American Wife!* gestures toward both of these factors. For example, each episode's family is quizzed at the end with a segment called "The Survey," and one of the questions is "Do you think Japan is an economic threat to America?" (Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* 23).

Jane understands the show's broader, privatized goal as requiring her to "inveigle a nice woman with her civic duty to promote American meat abroad and thereby help rectify the trade imbalance with Japan" (35). Tongue-in-cheek though Jane's comment is, it reveals how each episode's subject family is positioned as a global ambassador for the US meat industry. The show's rhetorical situation stems from Europe's 1989 ban on imports of US meat, which led to the US government looking for new markets that were ultimately signed with Japan in 1990, "relaxing import quotas and increasing the American share of Japan's red-meat market" (127). Thus, the show's political imperative is to place both the interviewed US families and the Japanese viewers within the objectifying force of the market for the benefit of the US economy.

Akiko's interaction with the show, however, yields an unintended consequence, for her subjective response to *My American Wife!* interprets the US as an ideal place to live. Her reading of the US in this way marks her growing cultural citizenship. The most compelling episode for Akiko features the biracial lesbian couple, Lara and Dyann. While watching the episode, she begins to cry "tears of admiration for the strong women" who found ways to have a family on their own terms (Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* 181). At this point in the novel, Akiko is not pregnant but wants to have a child someday; however, she abhors John and knows that she does not want to have a child with him. Lara and Dyann's story moves her to write a letter to Jane explaining how the episode has changed her life and motivated her to leave John. Akiko closes the letter by asking Jane where she can go to "live [a] happy life like" the one Lara and Dyann have (214). The connection Akiko makes between the US and a "happy life" is tenuous because, as Emily Cheng argues, it "posit[s] the United States as an unquestioned space of freedom" (203), which problematically allows Akiko to regard the US as a place where women can live liberated lives. But more than that, Akiko unwittingly compares herself and her unhappiness to a constructed narrative. What she perceives to be a better situation is actually a carefully edited composition, pieced together in a specific way to trigger the viewer's emotions. Jane specifically vocalizes this composition while filming Lara and Dyann; as she films, she sees the episode's affective potential unfolding into "an-

other heart-wrenching documentary moment" (Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* 175). Later, while editing the footage, Jane reveals her personal stance on truth and abstraction. She initially believed in a "singular, empirical, absolute" truth, but as she worked more with "editing and camera angles and the effect that music can have on meaning," she came to realize how truth was measured in "ever-diminishing approximations" (176).

Jane's explanation of the truth as an ever-diminishing approximation is also an apt description of US exceptionalism. As previously noted, the historical amnesia of the US sanitizes the nation's problematic immigration history and constructs an approximate story of the nation and its values. It is a muted yet powerful form of forgetting that aids in building a national identity. Likewise, Jürgen Habermas mentions that this sort of "national consciousness" can lead to an "imaginary reality of the nation as an organic development" (116). Rather than believe the US has been carefully composed as an idea, citizens come to believe that the US has naturally developed into the nation it is today. Though Jane includes forms of cultural violence in other episodes of *My American Wife!*, the existence of gendered or sexual violence in the US is left unaddressed in Lara and Dyann's episode. This is not to say the episode is meaningless, but its meaning has been carefully manufactured, and the elisions are significant. While the film crew sets up the cameras to film Lara and Dyann, Jane notices how "the backs of [the couple's] hands brushed and their fingers entwined for a brief squeeze before releasing, quickly, well-trained in circumspection" (Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* 173). This circumspection, though, never appears in the final cut of their episode, but it is a nuance that could begin to show that not everything about Lara and Dyann's life as a lesbian couple is liberated or happy in a heteronormative culture. With that omission, Akiko isn't given the opportunity to consider through the visual framing of the couple's relationship any of the societal hardships Lara and Dyann may have experienced, since the necessity for circumspection does not appear as part of their post-production story. All Akiko sees is a couple living a happy life.

This is not to discount the emotional power of Lara and Dyann's story in the episode. The unedited footage is moving for Jane, too. But as she edits, she realizes that she never actually told the couple, who are veg-

etarians, that *My American Wife!* is sponsored by BEEF-EX. This demonstrates that Jane's episodes, critical as they are of corporatized power in the US, are not outside the influence of neoliberal economics. Jane admits she has to "strive for the truth and believe in it wholeheartedly" while filming even as she knows she is manipulating it (Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* 176). The simultaneity of truth and construction in the final cut of the episode is captured by Jane's assessment of it. She describes it as "a good one, really solid, moving, the best I'd made," but she continues to fine-tune the footage to keep crafting "a seamless flow in a reality that was no longer [Lara and Dyann's] and not quite so real anymore" (179). In *My American Wife!*, that which is "really solid" and deeply "moving" isn't actually real at all. However, the constructed nature of film and television is not the problem here, since those are simply aspects of the medium. The complication comes when, after watching the episode, Akiko believes that the US is where her happy life can occur. Akiko accepts this ever-diminishing approximation of the US on her television as truth, which primes her for her move to America and transition into cultural citizenship.

Akiko's determination that the US is a space of freedom is solidified before she leaves Japan. When she returns home from the hospital after recovering from John's sexual assault, she thinks about the baby growing inside her and "didn't turn on the television, not even once" (Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* 317). This is a significant moment since Akiko has sat dutifully in front of the television for most of the novel, rating the authenticity of the US and its citizens from what she sees on *My American Wife!*. Her decision to turn off the television is a declaration that she has seen enough and has decisively made up her mind about what the US offers. This is further evidenced by comments Akiko makes later to her friend Tomoko, where she still pursues the symbol of the US that others have presented to her. She tells Tomoko that she is convinced her baby is a girl and hopes she "can grow up to become an American Wife" (318), a strong woman like Lara or Dyann. Tomoko interjects, "She doesn't have to be a wife at all, you know," and Akiko responds, "I know. I'm just kidding. Sort of" (318). Akiko's continued attachment to the US as represented in *My American Wife!* is visible in her hopes that her

daughter will be just like the characters on Jane's documentary. Though Akiko reassures Tomoko that she is only kidding about her dreams for her daughter, her comment, "Sort of," makes that reassurance less than convincing.

Yet even for all the ways this conversation with Tomoko seems like a surrender of agency on Akiko's part, it is undeniable that Akiko does assert her agency in her decision to leave John and Japan. While it would be easy to view her decision as undercut by her pre-packaged, romanticized view of the US, Akiko still takes action with her life. While *My American Wife!* influences her decision, there is nothing about Lara and Dyann's episode that somehow announces it is imperative for her to move to the US and only the US. Akiko's actions fit Huehls' description of embracing the "doubled subject-object ontology" that neoliberalism refuses to represent (20); and when literature chooses to represent this dual position, it encourages alternative "forms of value production" (29). This is the compelling complication that *My Year of Meats* presents before Akiko leaves Japan: she is simultaneously an agent and acted upon. *My American Wife!*'s carefully calibrated affective properties clearly have an effect and touch her deeply. In that sense, Akiko functions in an objectified manner as a faceless consumer, a mere number within a larger mass of coveted viewer ratings. But what she does with that experience as a viewer is up to her; through her viewing of the show and her decision to leave Japan for the US, Akiko becomes an agent, determined to fashion for herself a life that is worth living.

This is not to say that there is a transitional moment, where Akiko moves from being an object to an acting subject. She is both simultaneously as the affective propulsion of *My American Wife!* stays with her in the US. As an Asian immigrant, she occupies an unfixed position that can elicit ambivalence from established citizens. As noted earlier, whether or not an immigrant's arrival will benefit the US economically significantly affects the extent to which that immigrant is admired or reviled. Akiko's financial stability is hard to account for, since Ozeki keeps these details vague. On the one hand, she withdraws "two-thirds of the money [from] the joint account" she and John share before leaving Japan (Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* 319), but we are never told how

much money that actually is. On the other hand, Akiko is financially able to afford a last-minute flight from Japan to New York, and she stays with Lara and Dyann for seven months with the intention of nesting until she gives birth. Future plans for earning income in the US after her baby arrives are never mentioned. It seems that her wealth potentially opens doors of autonomy and freedom that otherwise might not be possible for a single immigrant woman.

Wealth is a key component of a scenario such as Akiko's due to its relevance within the model minority stereotype, an immigrant trope in the US that carries its own frictions between object and subject positions. Beginning in the 1960s, the continued view in the US of Asians as the model minority is problematic for its racialized stereotypes of Asians as family-oriented, hardworking, and financially successful, as well as how the narrative of Asians "making it" in America testifies to the ability of the US to take in outsiders and assimilate them into its socio-economic apparatuses (Lee 7).[12] This stereotyping, then, lauds the Asian immigrant's agency and initiative at the same time that it objectifies them as a boon to the economy of the state. Lisa Lowe argues that the latter overpowers the former to the point that the model minority trope is primarily an acculturating move. It robs subjects of their various classed, gendered, and cultural positionalities and then objectifies them into a homogenous, racialized construction (68).[13] For Lowe, it is a form of "discursive fixing" that seeks to "stabilize the identity of the immigrant" in a way that is advantageous to the state (19). But Ong has argued that recent waves of Asian immigrants to the US have complicated the acculturating power of the model minority trope. The influx of already-wealthy Asians does not fit into the typical from-the-ground-up immigrant narrative that the US prefers to tell. Instead, "affluent Asian immigrants plug directly into the upper reaches of American society and thus have an unsettling effect on middle-class whites" (Ong, *Flexible* 174), a description that may fit Akiko's situation. Similarly, Walter Benn Michaels argues that we have misunderstood the model minority trope entirely, proposing that it is not about the immigrant's "commitment to Americanization" but rather about "the successful importation of upper-middle-class status" ("Model" 1022). Within a neoliberal US perspec-

tive, Asian immigrants "succeed not because of their Asian values . . . and not because of their eagerness to assimilate and adopt American values . . . but because of their middle-class values" (1023). Thus, in the US, money matters over culture. But there is another problem here. This scholarly conversation and disagreement over what exactly the model minority stereotype offers Asian immigrants returns too easily to an either/or construction, where the model minority is either an autonomous subject position empowered by wealth or an objectification that limits the individual through racialized assumptions about behavior and work ethic. But Ozeki shows that both can happen at once.

Though a minority, Akiko fits the model type that the US political system prefers, where capital is a key factor contributing to an immigrant's successful American acculturation. Historically, friendlier immigration laws have been passed to increase US gains and stimulate the American economy.[14] The US has been open to capitalist-minded immigrants because their financial success can help to continue the national narrative of "upward mobility" (Honig 74). Here we have both micro- and macro-level forces operating. Akiko uses her access to an unspecified level of wealth to redirect the course of her life—leaving Japan, as I have already suggested, is a clear assertion of her agency. Yet at the same time, her move across the Pacific Ocean is facilitated by state structures that could potentially bestow on her the status of a preferable immigrant. The model minority, then, is not outside the paradigm Ong et al. outline of cultural citizenship; it is at once a form of "self-making and being-made" (738). Indeed, to a certain extent, Akiko will always be a foreigner no matter how much she assimilates. An Asian immigrant specifically remains what Lee calls a "perpetual foreigner," for no matter how many generations of Asians have been in the US, they are still viewed as outsiders whose "patriotism and loyalty" remain suspect (4). Akiko may fit the description of a model immigrant, but that is still an objectified space that her financial autonomy does not automatically preclude her from. But, as Lee notes, just as important as an immigrant's capitalist potential is her level of patriotism and loyalty. While individual agency and finance are key concerns of immigration, the ambivalence over subject and object positions stems from something more

affective in its constitution—namely, devotion. It is through the level of devotion to the immigrant's new country that the dyad within cultural citizenship of "self-making and being made" is further clarified (Ong et al. 738). Indeed, by the end of *My Year of Meats*, it is clear that Akiko's autonomous choices are still simultaneously driven by the national narrative of the US she gleaned from *My American Wife!*.

A key aspect of the neoliberal production of Akiko's cultural citizenship is her expression of patriotism. Once she arrives in the US, her aforementioned romantic view of the nation stays the same and quickly blossoms into full-fledged devotion, though it is briefly challenged by a train ride in the Deep South. While travelling on the train, Akiko sees people living in poverty along the tracks, and the sight hits her "with a shock" (Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* 336). In her mind, Americans are not poor: "Maybe in the past" they were, "or in the movies, but not now. Not these days. Not in real life" (336). Akiko's thoughts amount to cognitive dissonance, for poverty is either a historical moment or a cinematic one. Her belief that poverty is a thing of the past means her image of the US is unrealistically optimistic in an economic sense, so much so that she does not know how to place the poverty displayed before her eyes. In order to reconcile this discontinuity, Akiko treats American poverty as a trope of American movies, which allows her to claim that it no longer exists. In other words, movies are not real or, rather, they show things that are not real anymore. This is an important admission in Akiko's inner dialogue given how devoted she has been to accepting *My American Wife!* as reality. Part of this acceptance stems from the genre of Jane's storytelling. That Jane's work is done as a documentary—and not, say, a sitcom—demands a certain amount of faith from viewers. On the train, Akiko easily dismisses movies as fiction, but she has more trouble doing so with *My American Wife!* since the documentary form ostensibly presents that which is real, authentic, or unscripted. But Jane's documentary is, of course, no less a construction than any other narrativized medium. Though she portrays real families, Jane acknowledges her post-production efforts to force or maximize a certain emotional appeal. This rhetorical and narrative decision on Jane's part places elements of fiction into her work that still announce themselves as nonfiction.

Despite seeing tangible poverty, Akiko redirects her focus to the passengers who board the train, imagining how they must be "taking the train to find their happy life" like she is (336), which preserves her ideal conceptualization of what constitutes "real life" in the US. In other words, Akiko comes close here to identifying how her notion of the real is also a construction; however, by ignoring the poverty she has witnessed and instead choosing to imagine her fellow passengers' similar pursuit of happiness, Akiko expresses her own historical amnesia. She has a vague understanding of American history, since she concedes that there was a time—"maybe in the past" (336)—when Americans were poor. But even when she sees poverty from the train, she chooses to disavow the possibility that people could still be poor "these days." Even on the train, Akiko holds to her understanding of the US that she gleaned from *My American Wife!*, disavowing anything that does not confirm the idealized vision she brings with her from Japan. Just as she misreads Jane's vision of the US in *My American Wife!*, Akiko now misreads the reality of poverty in the US. This scene on the train holds a potential breakthrough moment for Akiko, one in which she might realize that she has been pursuing an idealized construction of the US and not the actual thing itself.[15] The opportunity passes, however, when Akiko decides to reflect on her experiences in the US that have already confirmed her romanticized hopes. This includes her recent Thanksgiving holiday with the Beaudroux family, who were featured on an episode of *My American Wife!*. From Louisiana, Grace and Vern Beaudroux have twelve children, two of their own and ten adopted from East Asian countries. Sitting on the train and thinking of her time with them, Akiko recalls, "[t]hey were authentic, exactly what [I] had seen on TV" (Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* 336). Here she equates edited constructions with authenticity or, more precisely, labels the vision of the US she acquires from *My American Wife!* as accurate and trustworthy.

That Akiko actively constructs and preserves her own romanticized vision of the US is further demonstrated as her train ride continues. The majority of her fellow passengers are African American, and the elderly train attendant Maurice has a friendly conversation with Akiko, informing her that she is riding the "Chicken Bone Special" (Ozeki, *My*

Year of Meats 338). Maurice explains that this name comes from the train's passengers who are often too poor to buy the lounge car's meals, so "these poor colored folk, they gotta make do with lugging along some home-cooked fried chicken instead" (338). The passengers around Akiko share their fried chicken and potato salad with her while Maurice starts clapping and leading the passengers in a chant of "chicken bone" over and over (339). Akiko "shiver[s] with excitement" over the communal camaraderie (339). As a result, she feels "as if somehow she'd been absorbed into a massive body that had taken over the functions of her own, and now it was infusing her small heart with the superabundance of its feeling, teaching her taut belly to swell, stretching her rib cage, and pumping spurts of happy life into her fetus. *This is America!* she thought. She clapped her hands then hugged herself with delight" (339; emphasis in original). Thus far, Ozeki situates Akiko as the agent in her search for the true America through her flight from Japan and determination to travel parts of the US to meet people featured on *My American Wife!*. And although her pronouncement of "*This is America!*" acts as a confirmation of her successful search, Akiko is also being acted upon in this moment. Ozeki's use of the passive voice—"somehow she'd been absorbed"—makes it clear that something other than Akiko's own willed optimism infuses her with patriotic euphoria. Ozeki emphasizes how Akiko's romanticized view of the US, where economic inequality becomes an exception to disregard, swallows her. By being "absorbed into a massive body," Akiko is claimed by the US and her autonomy is challenged, since the excitement "take[s] over the functions of her own" body. After this physiological commandeering, an affective invasion follows, "infusing her small heart with the superabundance of its feeling" that also spreads to her unborn child. Both mother and child have been filled with a patriotic happiness and awe.

The joy and happiness Akiko experiences on the train overshadows the harsher realities of poverty, and she believes that what she is witnessing on the train constitutes American reality and that it is something to be giddy over. Rather than consider why her fellow passengers are unable to afford food on the train, which might reveal some negative socio-economic and racial truth about the US, Akiko sees the

situation around her as a joyous moment. Monica Chiu notes that Akiko's reaction here "soften[s] America's harsher realities" through a "normalizing of difference" (109). Michaels argues that effacement of difference via normalization is precisely the work of neoliberalism; by over-privileging issues of race and identity, the celebration of cultural difference overshadows the urgency of "minimizing economic difference" ("Model" 1023–24). Akiko commits this same socio-economic oversight when first boarding the train. She notices that most of the people on the train are black and assumes they are also "taking the train to find their happy life" like she is (Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* 336).[16] Akiko does not consider that there could be social or economic reasons for taking a train instead of a car or a plane, assuming instead that everyone in America is destined for a happy life. The joyous sing-along moment on the Chicken Bone Special does nothing to counter her assumptions.

It is also important to contextualize that these scenes take place on a train, for the train as literary setting carries historical significance as a place where claims to citizenship and belonging have been challenged or negated. Daylanne K. English notes how train car vignettes are familiar stock scenes throughout African American literature, where the law would seek to "reinforce the noncitizenship status of African Americans" by moving black passengers to the back of the train to make room for white travelers (53). Thus, the train car is a space where the juridical and cultural objectification of people has overruled their individual agency and autonomy as subjects. Lest the reader begin to accept Akiko's agency and autonomy too quickly in this scene, the symbolism of her geographical movement further suggests that she may not be as free (or have as happy an ending) as she thinks since she is on a train in the Deep South traveling north to New York, mimicking a journey purportedly to freedom.

Though these train scenes could appear to problematically metonymize the Deep South with fried-chicken-loving African Americans, the stereotypically racist constructions serve a purpose here. Akiko is surrounded by a bunch of happy-go-lucky African Americans, alluding to the long history of docile Uncle Tom stock characters that have populated

American fiction and placed a shroud over black outrage at centuries of oppression. Akiko's fellow passengers, then, reveal the dynamics of American exceptionalism that otherwise elide the reality of racial inequality and, therefore, support the myth of American freedom. Akiko does not grasp this, viewing their poverty instead as an aberration within an otherwise consistent national narrative of freedom and opportunity. It is no wonder that the black passengers' cheer, congeniality, and chanting (resembling a religious service) all help to reinforce Akiko's patriotic fervor and cultural citizenship. Oblivious to the racialized history of the poverty she views from the train, she is able to maintain her idyllic view of the US, supported as it is by this stereotypical block of fellow passengers.

Ironically, Akiko's thought of "*This is America!*" can be read as her first moment of true clarity about the US in the novel (Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* 339; emphasis in original).[17] In line with the aforementioned theories of immigration, this is America, the nation that takes immigrants and attempts to acculturate them to its larger narrative by convincing them to believe that social and cultural violence or inequality are merely exceptions to the norm. Michaels reminds us that neoliberal values encourage this type of cultural narrative that glosses over economic inequalities to the benefit of the multicultural project ("Neoliberal" 74). Behdad makes a similar argument that American multiculturalism takes a "new cultural politics of difference" and uses it to display "its power of absorption" (12). In the end, it is "a linear narrative that begins with difference but ends in sameness" (13), the sameness being that everyone—citizens and immigrants—agrees to America's myth of exceptionalism. Akiko may have enacted her own agency by deciding to leave Japan and move to the US, but that does not make her immune to the state's effect on her.[18] While Akiko's absorption into the US—her objectification, the "being made" aspect of cultural citizenship—does not negate her autonomous efforts of "self-making," (Ong et al. 738), it does suggest that attempts to extricate oneself from oppressive environments can never be fully realized. The friction of subjecthood and objectification seem destined to continue in their simultaneity, regardless of one's efforts to land fully on the side of freedom.

Though Akiko never strays from the path of patriotic cultural citizenship, she does not fully yield her autonomy either. Akiko asserts her agency by making a decision to change the trajectory of her life. It is important to note that this choice does not fall into the realm of what Jane Elliott terms "suffering agency" (84), a key feature of recent neoliberal novels where characters have the freedom to choose but only between deplorable options. Instead, Ozeki uses the characterization of Akiko to show something more complex than just a buffet of bad alternatives. The life Akiko embraces by moving to the US is certainly an improvement on her situation in Japan. Her decision to leave is an assertion of her self-worth and a resolution to survive, both for herself and her unborn child. The problematics of American exceptionalism aside, Akiko's options are better in the US than in Japan, and it is easy to forget that there is not always something implicitly hegemonic in the possibility that one place could offer greater safety and security over another. After all, Ozeki is writing about one individual; Akiko is not a stand-in for Japan any more than Jane is for the US.

How much an individual's choices are self-determined and to what extent they are driven by larger-scale social and cultural conflicts is difficult to map, which is why *My Year of Meats* is challenging reading. As mentioned earlier, Ozeki places Akiko's East-to-West movement and the production of *My American Wife!* within the context of Japan's economic growth in the 1980s and 90s that threatened the global financial power of the US. As Giovanni Arrighi has carefully shown, capital typically has moved from declining centers to rising centers, where the latter expands capitalist power to a greater extent than its hegemonic predecessor could (15). But this did not happen between Japan and the US. Japan found it difficult to redistribute assets from the US to its own economy because "the world's richest and most developed continental power proved to be not as devoid of control over foreign business," as Japan soon found out (Arrighi 18). Additionally, at this same point in American history, the US was asserting its imperial/military strength in Kuwait and against Russia. I mention these events to note that the novel's trajectory is inseparable from the tangles of neoliberal economics and imperialism that join Japan to the US and the US to much of the world, and Ozeki clari-

fies how these larger political and economic concerns affect people's subjective decisions. They give cause for the creation of *My American Wife!* and are objectifying forces, but they also have the potential to create space for subjective, agential responses such as Jane's subversive episodes and Akiko's decision to leave John. Though Jane's and Akiko's actions do not challenge the macro-level conflicts that Arrighi describes, Ozeki envisions how their accomplishments are not inconsequential, either. By the end of the novel, John is abandoned and his show cancelled after Jane sends damning, previously unaired footage of *My American Wife!* to major news outlets. In it, she captures the use of banned drugs on a cattle feedlot, revelations that will not please Japanese investors. Jane also stays in contact with Lara and Dyann and coordinates Akiko's ability to stay with them until she has her baby, thus helping Akiko replace the isolation she endured in Japan with a community of supportive women. But lest the reader take these events to mean that the political and economic landscape has significantly changed, Ozeki makes sure to leave Akiko's subsumption into patriotic fervor on the train as one of the novel's final images. It is another instance in which her novel makes it impossible to separate the subject and object positions the characters occupy.

Critics are often quick to dismiss *My Year of Meats* as didactic. Perhaps this is not surprising given that the novel preaches to readers how they should feel and think about the US meat industry. By including fabricated news articles and faxes in the novel, Ozeki quickly disseminates factual information about questionable practices within food and drug corporations, which can come across as gimmicky efforts to break from the rigors of narrative. But this didacticism is a surface ploy that actually functions as an expertly crafted framing device. Consider that Ozeki positions a heavily didactic text (*My American Wife!*) that the characters interact with within a larger, seemingly didactic frame (*My Year of Meats*) for her readers to encounter. Read alongside Akiko's story, *My American Wife!* falls short of its intended political effect, since Akiko does not grasp the nuanced vision of the US that Jane hopes to give the show's viewers. I argue that readers should view this as a self-referential exchange where Ozeki also queries the effect of *My Year of Meats* in the neoliberal moment. In other words, does this novel do anything? Should

readers expect that art and entertainment do something? Ozeki's answer, via the character of Akiko, seems to be yes to both questions, albeit not without the qualification that artistically-generated social change may only happen in small ways. For example, *My American Wife!*, for all its problems, constructed presentations of reality, and connections to neoliberal corporate America, is transformative for Akiko in positive ways. The documentary does nothing to holistically change more macro-level political concerns, but it is a vehicle through which Akiko's life is changed for the better. *My Year of Meats* seems to suggest that that's probably enough.

By the novel's conclusion, nothing has successfully challenged for Akiko her romanticized view of the US. It is telling that she is subsumed by the nation on her train ride as she delightedly accepts an idealized conceptualization of the US. As she sits on the train, moving from the Deep South to the North in a reiteration of a historical and mythic journey out of bondage to freedom, she enters a scripted future. In other words, it seems that Akiko's story has been absorbed into the American myth of immigrant freedom. Certainly, stories can be co-opted and probably always will be to some extent.[19] But what Ozeki presents in *My Year of Meats* is a smaller vision of possible hope within larger political concerns: two women pushing against a violently masculine, imperialist, and neoliberal world by taking the reins of representation and, in the end, using art to forge a small community of femininity that tries to protect and provide for future generations. Ozeki's novel, then, suggests something rather hopeful, if also cynically realistic, about the hard but worthwhile nature of liberating work within and outside the arts. All things are not rectified by the end of *My Year of Meats*, but small, restorative victories can still be had.

Notes

1 Other scholars have written about the novel from a more transnational approach. See Johansen's "The Political Allure of the Local" and Palumbo-Liu's *The Deliverance of Others* (Chapter Four).

2 In other words, *My Year of Meats* moves beyond reductive understandings of postcolonial and neoliberal experience, where descriptions of political envi-

ronments are too easily understood along either/or binary splits. Within postcolonialism, that could be binaries of West/East, center/periphery, colonizer/colonized, or European/Other. Various critics have noted that engagement with subaltern communities is one way to work against these paradigms, though there is also the risk of reinscribing the Other in Us-versus-Them binaries by speaking for the subaltern with one's academic research (see Coronil, "Listening to the Subaltern"; hooks, "Marginality as a Site of Resistance"; and Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?"). Within neoliberalism, reductive binary splits could be freedom/socialism, private/public, subjecthood/objectification (for a classic representative example of these reductive theoretical models in practice, see Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom*).

Similarly, I am aware of the potential irony within the methodological approach I take to Ozeki's novel—critiquing US exceptionalism via a literary text that is mostly taken up with US concerns, a sort of recentering of American ethnocentrism in the very act of criticizing it. This same slippery slope has previously been identified within postcolonial theory—that it only recenters the West as it critiques it. This, however, is precisely one of the main problems Ozeki spotlights with her novel: how even the best intentions to protest or resist dominant power structures may only end up strengthening them. Jane's documentary is a case in point, since it critiques American exceptionalism only to eventually impress another immigrant with the social construction that is American freedom.

3 To combine some of these terms, Ong also points out how neoliberalism often functions in an exceptional manner. Though we tend to think of the political notion of exception from Schmitt as "mark[ing] out excludable subjects who are denied protections," Ong notes that "the exception can also be a positive decision to include selected populations and spaces as targets . . . associated with neoliberal reform" (*Neoliberalism* 5).

4 See Hardt and Negri's *Empire*, Feher's "Self-Appreciation," and Ferguson's *Give a Man a Fish*. Theorists also extensively debate whether neoliberalism is a global ideology or a nationally rooted form of capitalism, with many arguing that neoliberalism disavows the state system by replacing it with the market. However, Slobodian most recently claims in *Globalists* that a long historical view of neoliberalism shows how it requires both global entities and regulatory state structures to succeed on an international scale.

5 As different theorists have noted, this co-optation is one of the hallmarks of neoliberal ideology—its adept knack for producing and preserving a rhetoric of common sense that makes it seemingly impervious to transformative criticism. See Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Brown's *Undoing the Demos*, Levinson's *Market and Thought*, and Robbins' *Perpetual War*.

6 Rosaldo has been credited with coining the term "cultural citizenship," defining it as the minority's "right to be different and to belong in a participatory demo-

cratic sense" (402). His theorization, though, does not sufficiently account for the overwhelming influence of the nation-state on a foreigner or immigrant like Ong's does. More recently, in "Globalization, National Cultures and Cultural Citizenship," Stevenson has further problematized the idea that "cultural citizenship" is as closely tied to the nation-state as Ong argues. He conceptualizes a more cosmopolitan understanding of the outsider's level of agency as he or she works to connect the "self and society" (43).

7 These aspects of neoliberalism are discussed at length by both Foucault and Brown.

8 Ogden explains how this kind of understanding of simultaneity might benefit literary criticism. He calls for a "Quantum Criticism" inspired by the way quantum mechanics "creates conceptual paradoxes" by representing "all the available knowledge about the potentialities of a system in the quantum realm" (80, 83). Literary criticism in this vein would seek to understand how the truth or "state of things" is "multiple and simultaneous" (85). It is an examination of how meanings "interfere" and "overlap" with each other (86).

9 Some scholars have suggested that Jane and Akiko, as a sort of feminist pairing, are successful in liberating themselves from patriarchal paradigms. See Ladino's *Reclaiming Nostalgia* (Chapter Six) and Black's "Fertile Cosmofeminism." For scholars who disagree with such a reading, see Palumbo-Liu's "Rational and Irrational Choices" and Chiu's "Postnational Globalization."

10 In 1986, just a few years prior to the events of the novel, the Reagan administration approved the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which responded to public calls for greater control of the Mexican border. This act made it illegal to hire undocumented workers for the first time; however, the law also provided loopholes "that made it possible for growers to employ temporary Mexican workers" without the threat of prosecution (Behdad 21).

11 Honig's arguments certainly call to mind early theorizations of mimicry as a form of political resistance in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*.

12 The myth and stereotype of the model minority is predicated, among other qualifiers, on the financial success of Asians, and the Census Bureau reports that as of 2017 the median household income for Asian Americans was $81,331 compared to $68,145 for white Americans (Semega et al.). One way to understand this aspect of stereotyping is through Honig's arguments, mentioned earlier, that economically savvy immigrants are viewed as less of a threat in the US. Though the model minority trope contains racialized assumptions, it is a form of stereotyping that regards the Asian immigrant as a safe newcomer.

13 See also Wu's *The Color of Success*.

14 This has been true at times of the American stance toward Asian immigrants. See Hsu's *The Good Immigrants*.

15 The suggestion that a nation is an actual thing itself can be problematic, given Anderson's theorization of the nation as an "imagined community" (6). To say that the US can be an actual thing for Akiko to encounter simply means that there is a type of experiential knowledge one gains only by living in an actual physical place (for example, the knowledge that poverty does, in fact, still exist in the US). Akiko has only recently moved to the US, so she can continue to dismiss poverty as something not real, rather than accept that it might be part of some people's national experience. While on the train, her televisual understanding of the US still holds court.

16 Akiko's projection of happiness onto her fellow passengers calls to mind Bergson's argument about how the sense of our own inner duration can lead us to misinterpret the world around us:

> To each moment of our inner life there thus corresponds a moment of our body and of all environing matter that is "simultaneous" with it; this matter then seems to participate in our conscious duration. Gradually, we extend this duration to the whole physical world, because we see no reason to limit it to the immediate vicinity of our body. The universe seems to us to form a single whole; and, if the part that is around us endures in our manner, the same must hold, we think, for that part by which it, in turn, is surrounded, and so on indefinitely. (45)

17 It is also worth noting how similar Akiko's exclamation here is to the main refrain "Ain't that America!" in the song "Pink Houses" by John Mellencamp, which both sides of the US political establishment have used at campaign rallies. Similar to Akiko's dismissal of the poverty around her, the first verse of "Pink Houses" describes a vision of American black poverty, only to move on to the chorus and exclaim that America is "something to see" and the "home of the free."

18 As noted earlier, arguments like Ladino's and Black's seem to suggest that Akiko's move to the US is a wholly successful and liberatory venture and not one fraught with problems.

19 See Brouillette's *Literature and the Creative Economy*, where she examines the extent to which marginal and minority writers in the UK address their fraught complicity in their art being co-opted into bolstering neoliberal economies.

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Book Reviews

Joel Burges and Amy J. Elias, editors. *Time: A Vocabulary of the Present*. New York UP, 2016. Pp. ix, 372. CAD $38.80.

The contributors to *Time: A Vocabulary of the Present*, edited by Joel Burges and Amy J. Elias, theorize time through pairs of linked keywords. Each chapter scrutinizes a binary opposition around which modernity has organized time: the past versus the future, clock versus lived time, embodied versus disembodied time, or the serial versus the simultaneous. There are twenty such pairings in all, each examined by a well-known scholar. The volume is not a guide to existing debates, nor a glossary of key terms, but rather an astonishing collaborative theoretical project—a compendium of highly original essays derived from the dialectical pressure exerted by the binary terms. The essays are organized into three sections: time as history (which largely challenges the theoretical premises of history as it is currently studied in academe), time as measurement (which does theorize clocks but also considers how time structures meaningful professional and domestic labour), and time as culture (including media, computing, recorded music, mathematics, and sampling). They draw on a wide range of theoretical texts and enter into frequent conversation with thinkers such as Theodor Adorno, Reinhart Koselleck, Paul Ricoeur, Gilles Deleuze, Brian Massumi, Johannes Fabian, Harold Bloom, and, indeed, Pythagoras. The essays share a commitment to finding, in contemporary life, multiple and overlapping temporalities at work that can be considered ideological formations. To this end, Burges and Elias urge us to approach "the contemporary" etymologically, as a set of "times joined together" (4), and thus toward a "multiplicity" of times always concurrently operational even if not sufficiently aligned to be described as "concurrent" (12). This sophisticated volume will be of interest to scholars across many disciplines, but will be especially important for those working in history, literature, anthropology, American studies, and cultural studies; it would be an ideal text for a graduate course in time studies within any of these disciplines.

The contributors are true leaders in their fields, which span film studies, cultural studies, creative writing, ecocriticism, literary modernism, and video art. Some, such as Paul D. Miller (also known as DJ Spooky, That Subliminal Kid), Sandra Stephens, Ursula Heise, and James Phelan, are such towering figures that they can be considered scholarly celebrities. Without exception the work is richly theorized and adventurous, particularly Rachel

Haidu's discussion of influence as a form of transmission and Miller's paean to Pythagoras' mysteriousness and ubiquity. The essays draw examples from film, visual art, and music, as well as cultural phenomena like corporate slogans, the avian flu pandemic, the shortening of the second in 1972, and 1970s approaches to child rearing. While a few of the essays reach back to the beginnings of capitalism or the long reception history of mathematics to make their cases, most focus on the twentieth century, examining modern and contemporary culture especially.

The contributors analyze these cultural texts through and against the binary pairings that have inspired each essay. Some of the pairings are foundational (e.g., Elias on past/future and Audrey Anable on labor/leisure), while others are more unexpected—for instance, Mark McGurl focuses on how time is gendered through the binary real time/quality time, and Anthony Reed argues that the binary authentic/artificial is, at root, a temporal division. The pairings compel the contributors into dialectical readings that frequently produce conceptual breakthroughs. Burges' essay, for instance, offers an Adorno-inspired reading of the 2012 Disney film *Wreck-It Ralph* and suggests that innovation and obsolescence are concepts in perpetual conflict rather than co-constitutive markers of innovation and progress (82). Elias, meanwhile, tests the past/future binary and discovers that duration (rather than synchronicity) is the opposite of the diachronic (35). Elizabeth Freeman's essay on the synchronic/anachronic binary—one of the collection's finest—urges us to think about the relationship between those terms, understand why they were never truly opposite, and consider how that non-opposition can help us "conceptualize freedom" (129). Thus the volume leverages its pairings to generate meaningful new thought.

There are many other highlights that deserve mention. Reed, in perhaps the volume's most impressive essay, discusses how the "racialized spatiotemporal schema" conflates space and time through "the ideology of cultural distinctness" (294). He shows how the naming of certain cultural productions as "authentic" enforces bourgeois white privilege, and how recording technologies have been complicit in that ideological task. Yet Reed, via the concept of "semblance" and an extended reading of the song "Um Ricka" (2009) by K'naan and Wale, argues that the mixtape (as genre) can nevertheless activate a "nonclosure of culture" (302). Some essays are admirably clear, as when Phelan, in a decisive textbook-like essay on the narrative techniques of panalepsis and prolepsis, gives examples from contemporary fiction to illustrate how these categories of narrative temporality borrow from Gérard Genette's work. Phelan suggests that narrative fiction changed in the wake of postmodernism in the 1960s, eliminating any one narrative strand's claim

to primacy (249). Other essays are disorienting and challenging, as with Michelle Stephens and Sandra Stephens' consideration of "embodied/disembodied." Drawing on Deleuze and Massumi, they analyze the latter Stephens' video installations as a way of testing the ideological limits of scopic regimes. While I am skeptical of their claim that the disembodied body "evades ideology" when it is captured on film (257), they persuasively show us how to think about embodiment and disembodiment in a temporal, rather than spatial, way. Other acmes of the volume include Jesse Matz's overview of time in Ricoeur, Paul de Man, and Deleuze (226); David James' complex and subtle take on modernism, modernity, and postmodernism; Mark Currie's analysis of the Derridean trace in a discussion of two HSBC slogans; Heather Houser's advisory about the temporal demands of climate change and the ideological impact of carbon calculators; and Jared Gardner's encomium to Einstein's thought, as explained through comics and cinema. All of these are outstanding essays.

I do harbor a few small concerns, as is inevitable in a book this richly stocked with new ideas. The foremost of these concerns is about the insistent modernism of it all. The volume proposes it will "unlock the historicity of time" and promises to show how its paired keywords "grow from historical transformations" (1–2), and yet, by and large, when the essays seek out historical examples, they are drawn only from the early twentieth century: the Titanic, literary modernism, Einstein, or the passenger pigeon. This, despite Koselleck's and others' suggestions that time became modern in the eighteenth century. The emphatic presentism of the collection is especially unfortunate given the editors' preemptive statement that they "are not interested in engaging debates about how to define 'the present' or 'the contemporary' as a period marker" (2). Such a limited historical range risks distorting the findings in these essays and will unnecessarily, but sharply, delimit the usefulness of this book for researchers in other fields. A second problem crops up when an essay latches too hard onto its examples, until it becomes more an essay on that one example than on the paired keywords more broadly. For instance, Anable's essay on labour and leisure gets caught up in a long disquisition on mobile phones and "mobile time," as characterized by the intensifying demand for productivity, metatasking, and the mobile phone as a timekeeping device. The essay, I think, would be more effective if reframed as an essay on "mobile time"—a much smaller topic—than the vast subject of labour and leisure. Despite their variety of topics and approaches, the essays also risk repetitiveness, as we see in Part II, in which each essay seems to find that the given terms might appear to be opposites, but actually there is no way to draw a division between them—an argument made by Anable, Gardner,

McGurl, Elias, and others. Finally, I have some quibbles with specific claims from individual essays: is Christianity really best understood as "a technology," as Stanley Hauerwas would have it (281), as opposed to, say, an ideology, myth structure, philosophical system, or cultural institution? But such quibbles will invariably arise when reading a generative and ambitious book that challenges us to think in broad conceptual terms about modernity.

All in all, *Time: A Vocabulary of the Present* is an outstanding and cohesive collection filled with insights and provocations. It will merit frequent re-readings from a number of perspectives as time studies continues to evolve as a multi-disciplinary field. Burges and Elias worry that "the terms 'past,' 'present,' and 'future' seem too static, too thin to express our full experience of temporality. They capture neither our sense of the ephemerality of the instant nor our anxieties about the long unfurlings of time that exceed human lifespans and comprehension" (1). Their volume represents an important step toward developing new and more critical ways of thinking about time.

David Sigler

Shilpa Bhat Daithota. *Indians in Victorian Children's Narratives: Animalizing the Native, 1830–1930*. Lexington Books, 2017. Pp. xxxi, 103. US$90.00.

Shilpa Bhat Daithota's *Indians in Victorian Children's Narratives: Animalizing the Native, 1830–1930* is the most recent installment in Lexington Books' series Children and Youth in Popular Culture. It examines the impact that Eurocentric discourses had on colonial children's literature during the century preceding the Purna Swaraj Declaration (1930), which heralded the advent of political independence in India. Interested in the allegorical nature of animal stories, Daithota understands nineteenth-century children's literature as legitimizing Western economic and cultural hegemony, both by mythologizing British imperial adventure and by dehumanizing indigenous Indians. *Indians in Victorian Children's Narrative*s explores how animal imagery rehearsed "tropes of the 'sub-human native'" (xx), indulged in racist domination as a pleasure, and encouraged young Britons to envision the colonial subjugation of India "as a vocation" (xxi).

One strength of the monograph rests in the variety of materials Daithota considers "to understand the psychosis of whiteness that ran as an undercurrent in the literature of the period" (xxx). Surveying exhibition pamphlets, alphabet books, nonsense poems, didactic tales, and adventure novels, she

examines the work of an eclectic range of imperial propagandists, including Mary Frances (Mrs. Ernest) Ames, Edward Lear, Samuel Griswold Goodrich, G. A. Henty, Alma Buley, Rudyard Kipling, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Edith Nesbit, Barbara Hofland, and Sara Jeanette Duncan. One rather surprising omission, however, is Helen Bannerman, whose first book, *Little Black Sambo* (1899), likely owes something to Goodrich's "The Umbrella and the Tiger" in *Peter Parley's Short Stories for Long Nights* (1837). In addition, while Daithota notes that Goodrich is American and Duncan Canadian, she does not similarly position Ames as Canadian or Buley as Australian. This oversight is a missed opportunity since it obscures the extent to which white colonists globally imagined India in children's literature. Her discussion of several works would be enriched, moreover, by contextualizing their authors' familiarity (or lack thereof) with South Asia. For example, *The Jungle Book* (1894), though written in Vermont, was informed by Kipling's first-hand knowledge of India, where he spent the first five years of his life and where he later returned to work as a journalist. Given this experience, Kipling's attitude toward India unsurprisingly possesses a complexity that differs from that of Burnett who, although she "neither visited India nor came from a family with Indian connections" (Buettner 27), chose to begin *The Secret Garden* (1888) and *A Little Princess* (1909) in the east. Similarly, some consideration of Lear's own experience as a traveler would help to provide a more nuanced analysis of "The Story of the Four Little Children Who Went Round the World" which, appearing in *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany, and Alphabets* (1872), was published a few years before the painter embarked on the thirteen-month tour of the subcontinent documented in his Indian journal. As Ann Colley notes, Lear benefited significantly from acts of imperial power and control in his artistic career, but in his work for children, he also satirized the trophy-taking impetus "to show off colonial authority" (90) and "tame the exotic other by converting it into a domestic commodity" (91).

Taking a chapter-by-chapter approach to various genres of colonial children's literature, *Indians in Victorian Children's Narratives* implicitly traces young readers' exposure to imperial ideologies from infancy to adolescence. Since individual chapters often treat texts in reverse chronological order, however, the organization of the whole tends to obfuscate the historical development of Eurocentric discourse from the 1830s to the 1930s. The discussion of imperial primers is typical insofar as Ames' *ABC for Baby Patriots* (1899) precedes *Colonial Alphabet for the Nursery* (1880). Yet although Daithota usefully demonstrates how such works align imperial pedagogies with literacy education, occasional errors detract from the argument. For example, she states that the illustration for "A" ("Army") in *ABC for Baby Patriots* shows a

row of "British citizens" arrayed against a row of "'native' soldiers" impressed into colonial service (Daithota 17). In actuality, the illustration shows the kilted troops of a highland regiment in black ostrich feather bonnets opposite the Grenadier Guards in bearskin hats. This depiction of Scottish forces on the left and English on the right—both adorned in headdresses fashioned from products of empire—suggests the combined might of the United Kingdom. Likewise, instead of depicting "a single British soldier threatening to shoot an entire row of 'natives'" (18), the illustration for "D" ("Daring") emphasizes British disdain for other European imperialists, since it shows the opposing combatants in the red trousers that distinguished French uniforms prior to World War I. In other words, the illustration positions Britain's enemy as French, not Indigenous. Undeniably racist and jingoistic, *ABC for Baby Patriots* thus speaks less to Britain's oppression of India than to a lingering Francophobia. Indeed, Ames not infrequently justifies British superiority by alluding to the Napoleonic era. In fact, Peninsula (1814) and Waterloo (1815) top the list of "Battles / By which England's name / Has for ever been covered / With glory and fame" (Ames 8). That the end of the Napoleonic Wars allowed Britain to consolidate its power globally perhaps accounts for the symbolic depiction of Africa enchained to Europe in the illustration for "K" ("Kings"). A celebration of British dominance, the illustration places the twice-exiled Napoleon in front of (and hence antecedent to) the Zulu chieftain, Cetshwayo kaMpande, deposed and exiled in the aftermath of the Anglo-Zulu War (1879). Napoleon's neoclassical hairstyle and Cetshwayo's physical size identify the political objects of the caricature.

Despite its shortcomings, *Indians in Victorian Children's Narratives* nonetheless demonstrates how nineteenth-century children's literature operated to sustain colonialism in India by providing "lessons in aggression" (89). The materials selected for discussion convincingly illustrate the exploitative violence of the British imperial imagination.

Sharon Smulders

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Patricia Smart. *Writing Herself into Being*: *Quebec Women's Autobiographical Writings from Marie de l'Incarnation to Nelly Arcan.* 2014. Translated by Patricia Smart, McGill-Queen's UP, 2017. Pp. 336. CAD$34.95

Patricia Smart's award-winning, self-translated book, *Writing Herself into Being: Quebec Women's Autobiographical Writings from Marie de l'Incarnation to Nelly Arcan*, examines the development of Quebec women's sense of self through different modes of life narrative, including spiritual autobiography, private diary, epistolary correspondence, and autofiction. The book offers fascinating portraits of women who turned to personal writing to make sense of their individual struggles and the world around them. In so doing, each chapter poses the same question: How do women negotiate their autonomy and agency in a world that systematically constrains, if not outright denies, their subjectivity?

Writing Herself into Being is textured with detailed biographical and contextual information, well-researched critical readings of the selected texts, and a historicizing care that avoids oversimplifying these women's experiences and autobiographical practices. In Part One, "Living and Writing for God: A Mystical Era," Smart begins her conversation on Quebec women's life writing with Marie de l'Incarnation and her introspective writing, which provides a model of "feminist writing whose echoes [are] felt in the correspondences, diaries, and autobiographies of women who . . . follow" (65). Part Two, "Writing for the Other: Correspondences (1748–1862)," addresses Elizabeth Bégon's and Julie Papineau's respective epistolary relationships with their relatives. Their letters show how the line between diary entries and letters can sometimes blur and how their writings "give a sense of the narrowing of women's role brought about by the ideology of 'separate spheres'" (72). Part Three, "Writing for Oneself: The Private Diary (1843–1964)," is divided into three chapters, the first of which explores how the diaries of young girls create a space for self-expression and serve the function of "confidant" as the girls search for love (145). The second chapter discusses the lives of Henriette Dessaulles and Joséphine Marchand, and the third investigates cases of married women who use their personal writings to resist the silencing of women's voices. This section successfully reveals how "diary writing could be a literal 'life saver' for married women" (165), as well as how this form of life writing contributes to women's autonomy and self-affirmation. Part Four, "Writing Oneself into History: The Age of Autobiography (1965–2012)," contains four particularly fascinating chapters that address, respectively, the

pivotal autobiographical novel written by Claire Martin, personal writing in contexts of poverty, "women imprisoned in the maternal role and . . . the consequences of that imprisonment for the lives of their daughters" (255), and finally Nelly Arcan's poignant autofiction. Each chapter addresses the "fictional dimension of . . . autobiography" (191) and reiterates the difficulty of women's self-expression by examining the complicated dynamic between the "liberating effect" (191) of autobiographical fiction and "fatigue" (208) or the "need for self-destruction" (192)—both consequences of patriarchal oppression. These elegantly linked parts and chapters provide a historical portrait of women's life writing in Quebec and uncover the writers' individual and shared struggle to express themselves beyond religious, patriarchal, and class-based ideologies.

Smart's ninth chapter focuses on women writers who come from poor backgrounds such as France Théorêt and Adèle Lauzon. Smart suggests that these women were some of the first in Quebec to be "paying particular attention to the complex interweaving of social class, language, culture, religious background, and gender identity in the often painful journeys of their protagonists towards self-expression" (190). However, this exclusively class-based analysis of autobiographical writings may leave readers wondering what such an analysis of life writing would look like through a more intersectional lens—that is, by also considering writings by Indigenous women, women of colour, and members of the LGBTQQIP2SAA community, who are more at risk for experiencing situations of precarity. As Myra Bloom rightfully observes,

> Smart's decision to highlight lesser-known figures while omitting famous writers like Marie-Claire Blais and Nicole Brossard (both pioneering contemporary lesbian writers), is admittedly a strength and a weakness of the book. Smart illuminates much esoteric and otherwise understudied material but thereby ends up painting an incomplete group portrait of Quebec's female autobiographers. (25)

Indeed, while *Writing Herself into Being* is a timely contribution that confirms the importance of recognizing and valuing women's self-presentation and testimony, it also points to the immense terrain left to explore in terms of life writing and autobiography in Quebec.

Readers might also question why such an important work on women's life writing does not make more explicit use of established feminist theorists in the field such as Shari Benstock, Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, and Leigh Gilmore. While some chapters and the bibliography are rich with theoretical material by women (Luce Irigaray, Barbara Havercroft, Bella Brodzki,

Françoise Collin), Smart's discussion of autobiographical writing mostly relies on Philippe Lejeune's famous theorization of the "autobiographical pact," which he describes as a contract between author and reader that ensures authorial sincerity (19). In addition to Lejeune's important work, Smith and Watson's feminist scholarship on "autobiographical relationality" (141) would have contributed greatly to Smart's eloquent tribute to the literary and historical potency of Quebec women's life writing practices, especially since she notes that women's "sense of identity" is often configured as "more relational and less strongly individualized than that of men" (196). Such a configuration of relationality has a long genealogy in feminist life writing theory, and a more direct engagement with such theorizations would have clarified Smart's framing of a relationality "so important to women" that she briefly addresses in her introduction: "Theoreticians of women's autobiography have argued . . . that women's identity has been constructed in terms of her relationships rather than in isolation from them" (8). That being said, by engaging with a multitude of texts, Smart skillfully corroborates how the "negotiation among personal histories and the competing demands of individual and collective stories suggests a view of relationality as an ongoing process among modes of storytelling rather than a fixed form" (Watson 23). Indeed, in each chapter, Smart details how her selected autobiographical texts speak to "the receding point where the personal, the collective, and the universal come together" (279), showing the rich variety of life writing forms through which women trace and negotiate the relational tensions of self-affirmation and agency.

Smart's thorough archival research and rich analysis of Quebec women writers' struggle for autonomy, relationality, and self-expression is impressive. In line with some of her best-known critical work, such as the seminal *Writing in the Father's House: The Emergence of the Feminine in the Quebec Literary Tradition* (1991) and *Les Femmes du Refus global* (1998), Smart continues the necessary work of shedding light on women's fight for autonomy and recognition through cultural production.

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Libe García Zarranz. *TransCanadian Feminist Fictions: New Cross-Border Ethics*. McGill-Queen's UP, 2017. Pp. ix, 178. CAD $85.00.

Near the beginning of *TransCanadian Feminist Fictions*, Libe García Zarranz proposes that her book, which draws on assemblage theory, may be thought of as an assemblage itself insofar as it brings together disparate writers, theorists, and cultural phenomena (18). The monograph does indeed read like a weaving together of twenty-first-century theoretical, critical, creative, and geopolitical threads. Using concepts such as assemblage, affect, bodies, and borders, García Zarranz engages with works by Dionne Brand, Emma Donoghue, Hiromi Goto, and Larissa Lai. The book covers a welcome variety of genres, offers refreshing readings of some less critically discussed texts, and deftly handles cutting-edge theory. It constitutes an important contribution to Canadian literary studies even as it defies the field's national and disciplinary boundaries.

TransCanadian Feminist Fictions is divided into three main parts and is bookended by a preface and introduction to start and a "coda" and conclusion to close. Given that each chapter comprises about a dozen pages, it is not a particularly long monograph, but it covers a lot of ground and attends to both momentous concepts and crucial details. From the very beginning of the book, García Zarranz situates her close readings of literature and theory vis-à-vis twenty-first-century global geopolitics. Though readers are intermittently reminded of the various post-9/11 global crises that form the backdrop of the book's literary analyses (such as refugee crises and terrorism), the text's

concern with borders extends beyond those of the nation-state. Part One examines not so much how bodies cross borders but how bodies are permeable and entwined with the non-human (or more-than-human), whether technological or ecological. This approach is grounded in a material feminist understanding of transcorporeality, one of the theoretical threads that runs throughout the study. Brand's long poem *Ossuaries*, for instance, is presented as "a material feminist critique of the ethical and political impact of current hegemonic structures and practices of power," a critique made apparent, García Zarranz argues, through the poem's representation of the "permeability of boundaries between the human body, technology, and the natural world as a site of interconnectedness, agency, and dependency" (25). Ideas of toxicity, queer time, and bearing witness all figure in her interpretation of Yasmine, the central figure in *Ossuaries.* Later, García Zarranz revisits Brand's work by reading *Inventory* in relation to biopolitics and assemblage theory, the focus of Part Two, and *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes on Belonging* in relation to pathogeography and affect theory, the focus of Part Three.

Goto's novels respond most buoyantly to the theoretical and methodological lens of this book: it seems particularly synergistic to use concepts of embodiment and necropower assemblages to describe, for instance, a morbid wasteland where characters who are half human, half eel are tempted to cannibalism. García Zarranz's focus on Goto's young adult fiction—*The Water of Possibility*, *Half World*, and *Darkest Light*—provides an important addition to criticism on this author, which has often devoted more energy to her other fiction. In addition to Goto and Brand, *TransCanadian Feminist Fictions* examines the work of Donoghue, whose novel *Room* is a much-acclaimed international bestseller. Intriguingly, García Zarranz proposes that *Room* teaches us about citizenship. She argues that the child who escapes from captivity is "equipped with an alternative corpo-affective system" (53) that models a nonconforming type of "corporeal citizenship" (48). García Zarranz also turns to a handful of Donoghue's short stories from *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* and *Astray*, many of which have historical settings and historiographical concerns. Mobility is a keyword for her reading of *Astray*, as García Zarranz points out how characters, human and animal, cross borders toward new ways of being (124), while concepts of biocapital and freakish bodies frame her analyses of stories from the former collection. All of these close readings are characterized by her attention to literary detail and her capacity to draw on an impressive range of theoretical concepts.

In addition to these analyses of Brand's, Goto's, and Donoghue's work, the text's final chapter considers Lai's long poem "rachel," based on an android character from the film *Blade Runner*, as an example of feminist posthuman-

ist ethics (147). As evidenced by the book's title, ethical concerns are important throughout. Convinced that literary and artistic expression have the capacity to lead the way through crises and toward greater liberation, García Zarranz reads these feminist, anti-racist, queer texts as prophetic teachings (155). Through her theoretical lenses, for example, Goto's *The Water of Possibility* is not only a young adult novel that engages with gothic tropes but a story through which readers grapple with the possibilities of sovereignty and solidarity. The "new cross-border ethics" is a post-anthropocentric "ethic of dissent" (142) grounded in "unexpected alliances" (154) and marginalized experiences. *TransCanadian Feminist Fictions* is an assemblage that names and illuminates these textually embodied ethics and signals the emergence of new ways to read and be together.

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