

At The Interface
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Constructing Good and Evil

Edited by

Laura Torres Zuñiga and Isabel M^a Andrés Cuevas

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Constructing Good and Evil

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Constructing Good and Evil

Edited by

Laura Torres Zuñiga and Isabel M^a Andrés Cuevas

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Introduction

Laura Torres Zuñiga and Isabel M^a Andrés Cuevas

No matter which temporal or spatial location we analyse, or in which area of life, the truth is that evil seems to be present wherever man is. Furthermore, be those men outstanding figures of any type of authority, or may they belong to the lowest strata of the social scale, the fact is that the roots of evil reach all of them by any or other means. The chapters in this volume collect part of the discussion that took place in Salzburg in 2007 during the 8th *Perspectives on Evil and Human Wickedness Conference*, in which this evil nature presided over the different panels and roundtables.

Firstly, a fundamental question when aiming to wrestle against evil is to decide upon the nature of evil itself. How can we combat an enemy whose size, reach, or identity we ignore? **The Essence of Good and Evil** has no doubt been at the core of religions all throughout history. All cultures and civilizations have inquired about the meaning of good and evil, as well as about their presence in man. Often, the possibility of these constituting a bipolar structure whose extremes were capable of residing at a time in human beings has also been contemplated. All these premises have remained at the centre of Chinese philosophy throughout the centuries. By means of his analysis of the linguistic representation of good and evil in their various manifestations, *Yuet Keung Lo* studies how Chinese culture aimed at resolving the identity of both issues, at the same time as he questions the extent to which they are separate realities.

Dealing with good and evil in ancient Egyptian religion, *Robert W. Butler* interprets the Great Hymn to the Aten to reveal the theodicy behind pharaoh Akhenaten's introduction of the cult to the sun's disk. Butler then reveals that what is usually considered a positive step towards monotheism, is really the enforcement of a religious totalitarianism that for the first time divided the universe into absolute and mutually exclusive concepts of good and evil. *Jennifer L. Baldwin* is also worried about theodicy (or 'If God is all good and all powerful, why is there evil in the world?') in our contemporary world. She traces the failure of traditional theodicies in explaining the existence of evil to their retaining the theological categories of omnipotence, *creatio ex nihilio*, and redemption. The works of theologians John Caputo, Catherine Keller, and Flora Keshgegian dismantle these three pillars and offer a new perspective that Baldwin applies to better understand and respond to the evil of childhood sexual abuse.

Just like Baldwin moves from the theory to more pragmatic grounds, some of the contributors present examples of issues that directly appeal to us as participants or evaluators of evil. For instance, would we consider an unintentional car accident with victims to be evil, or just bad? And an unsuccessful bomb detonation without casualties? The importance of these combinations of intentionality and outcome in evil-doing is what makes *Andrew Hryhorowych* problematize ethicist Claudia

Card's Atrocity Paradigm. Whereas Card focuses on the victim (rather than on the evildoer) and makes eventual harm a requisite for an action to be evil, Hryhorowych argues that even the existence of potential victims is enough to label an action evil. Another practical question is which acts we should forgive and which should be considered 'unforgivable.' Also considering intentionality a crucial element when defining acts that rise the issue of forgiveness, *David White* creates his own paradigm of conditions for a person to deserve our pardon. He emphasizes sincere repentance, apologies, and compensatory action, but questions our capability of offering forgiveness when we have been too seriously wronged even if these stipulations are fulfilled.

Once we have established the nature of good and evil, we can see that one of the major realizations of the phenomenon of evil has invariably been the **Construction of an Evil Identity** around those whom we perceive as different from us. Nowadays, South Africa – *Ursula Scheidegger* notes – represents a clear example of how, despite the considerable transformation of the socio-political and economic changes of the nation, the persistence of racial prejudices and social segregation suffocate the possibility of real change towards the Rainbow Nation. In certain cases, though, it is precisely as a result of the latest developments and technological transformations that the growth of social discrimination is buttressed. In their chapter, *Manjeet, Ishan, and Ishita* Chaturvedi detect the role of the Internet as a fertile soil favouring the formation of an authentic hate community which uncontrollably spreads its cobweb through the cyberspace. *Gabriel Cavaglione* explores another type of construction of evil identities in his analysis of the way Israeli newspapers propagate and reproduce cultural beliefs about mothers and fathers who commit filicide. Far from being impartial, the press emphasizes extenuating circumstances based on mental disorder or social distress in cases of female perpetrators, whereas fathers are depicted as evil murderers in cold blood, due to a complex web of cultural and biological premises that Cavaglione examines.

Frequently, though, it is those in charge of deciding upon which measures are to be applied in order to annihilate evil that perniciously perpetuate the embodiment of this malignant source of power. Furthermore, the fact that the administrators of justice and punishment are not free from the alluring influence of evil not rarely results in a solution equally poisoned by its germ. Retrieving the notion of *conceptual metaphor*, *Phil Fitzsimmons* examines the degree to which a deliberate incarnation of evil in the figures of Muslim terrorists, as well as a subsequent monsterization of the latter, has been promoted by the US government. Upon this process of identification and de-abstractization of the source of evil, Fitzsimmons argues, any measures to annihilate evil could be utterly justified in the name of a carefully constructed idea of liberty and communal solidarity.

This notion of the manipulation of the idea of evil by authorities regarding the aftermath of 9/11 is also examined by *Fred Karns*. In his chapter, Karns explores how the concept of evil associated with certain actions or individuals may become

a comfortable device for governments to administer the citizenship a most convenient and purchasable idea of good and evil.

The gruesome effects of terrorism after 9/11 and the posterior waves of massacre all over the world make this problem disgracefully relevant. At which cost should we fight against evil? Are we trying to protect ourselves from terrorist attacks at the expense of our own freedom? Regardless the degree of fantasy, the magnitude of the measures with which evil is to be combated, especially by authorities, poses a no less controversial question. *Margarita Carretero-Gonzalez* analyzes the dialogue between both sides of this reality as presented in the film *V for Vendetta*. In the light of this dialogue, Carretero-Gonzalez inquires about the worth of what turns out to be a collective sacrifice as a preventive measure.

As Carretero shows, fictional works are the perfect showcase for complex constructions of evilness, and a group of chapters in this volume analyze how **Cultural Products**, like photography, film, or literature, overtly present or subtly suggest the misdoings of human wickedness. *Ann Danilevich* chooses photographer Melanie Pullen's *High Fashion Crime Scenes* as an example of the current aestheticisation of murder in mainstream media. Pullen uses *haute couture* clothing and scenic settings to distract the viewer from the crime itself and transform the picture into a glamorous, voyeuristic reconstruction dissociated from the brutal reality of the act, something we can also find in television shows like *CSI (Criminal Scene Investigation)*.

Cinema has also often served to reflect on the unaccounted potential of evil to spread its influence. In *Cabaret*, as *David Isaacs* argues, the indolence and the indulgence that rule over the lives of its main characters suffice to foster the blooming of the entangling branches of evil. In the light of this, attempting to ignore its existence, as occurs in *The Sound of Music*, represents what Isaacs believes as a refutable alternative to avoid it. In more recent times, Lars Von Trier's film *Dogville* is a controversial case too where spectators witness the use and abuse of a woman by a whole village only to discover at the end that they have been fooled by the apparent innocence of the martyr. *Anders Johansson* draws on Alain Badiou and Fedric Jameson to describe this film as a meta-drama where both the implicit idealism of cinema and the silent contract between director and spectator are dismantled, and where our distinction between good and evil becomes a blurred limen.

On other occasions, it is not a fictitious, but an allegedly historical film that is used as a vehicle to project the presence of evil throughout the development of a nation. Yet, the tools of this projection are neither protected from the lurking presence of evil, which conditions a deformed and biased representation of its embodiment in the historical events. Thus, what happens – *Ann-Marie Cook* wonders – when a crooked image of certain peoples and social groups is offered for the sake of political propaganda? In her analysis of four films based on the

genocide in Rwanda, Cook thrives to de-mythologize what she considers as a perniciously disguised view of the real phenomenon.

That warfare can be the occasion for evil acts is nothing new, but *Mercedes Díaz Dueñas* reveals a current trend in Canadian fiction that equates Europe with the source and site of evil and destruction through the testimonies of characters involved in the two World Wars. Novels by Margaret Atwood, Anne Michaels, Michael Ondaatje and Jane Urquhart have forsaken the former idea of the Old World as the origin of culture and tradition and they reflect instead a rejection of their bond to the British Empire as the reason for the Canadian involvement in those dehumanizing conflicts. This insistent negative image of Europe helps Canadian authors affirm their own identity, Díaz Dueñas's postcolonial analysis contends. From that Old World, British novelist Angela Carter was also creating her own subversive conception of evil, as *Aytül Özüm* explains. In her collection *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter appropriates fairy-tales like 'Bluebeard' or 'Snow White' to deconstruct and reverse their representations of gender, and presents female characters as wicked and lustful as their male counterparts. Özüm shows how these evil women awake from their role as victims through a perverse sexuality in what constitutes a rather controversial move for some feminist critics.

By and large, it is undeniable that the deep roots of evil can reach inconceivably far. Hence, whereas it is essential to achieve an understanding of its origin, as well as to be aware of its possible manifestations and means to eradicate it, the subject of evil may be a double-edged weapon. As we attempt to comprehend the nature of evil, we risk being captivated by its halo of mystery, or become fascinated by the alluring attraction of its transgression of moral values, a process of degeneration that Gothic literature usually explores. Whereas *Sonia Ouaras* describes this uncanny though enthralling surrender to human corruptibility in the decadent literature of Victorian England, *Maria Antónia Lima* warns us that, even in the case of contemporary horror fiction, the desire to fascinate readers by writing on the issue of evil may result in fatal consequences for the writer, who, almost inadvertently, ends up by being entrapped by the enthralling power of darkness. Should we then worry if we think perhaps evil is not that wrong?

Part 1

Essence of Good and Evil

The Idea of Evil in Early China

Yuet Keung Lo

Abstract

The idea of evil is often intimately linked to a religious tradition, and the Judeo-Christian tradition is one of the most prominent examples. In contrast, early Chinese culture perhaps presents a counter-example that may shed light on the nature of *evil* as there was never a monotheistic religion in ancient China. This chapter attempts to ascertain if there was an idea of evil in early China, and, if so, what it actually meant. Specifically, it analyzes some of the most influential doctrines on human nature which debate whether it is good or *evil* as the understanding or presupposition of human nature often guides and informs actual human conduct. What did early Confucian philosophers mean when they argued that human nature is good or *evil*? On the other hand, when the Taoists fundamentally abandoned the duality of good and *evil* in their understanding of human nature, what did they have in mind with regard to the constitution of *evil*? In this connection, a family of terms that are associated with mistakes, errors, crimes, or transgressions will be examined as they will provide a conceptual map of contraventions that can help us unravel the meaning of *evil* in early Chinese culture.

Key Words: Good, evil, early China, human nature, Confucianism, Taoism, transgressions.

1. Early Chinese Views of Human Nature

While the notion of human nature was present in ancient China, a conscious and systematic examination of it was not forthcoming until the fifth century BCE. Confucius (551-479 BCE) himself said, '(b)y nature human beings are similar; by practice they become far apart.'¹ Even though it is not clear how Confucius actually understood human nature (*xing* 性) in this statement, it seems certain that he did not think that human nature itself assumed an essential ontology. In other words, human beings are not endowed with a predetermined nature, much less one conceived in moral terms. They are born neither good nor evil. Confucius was evidently more concerned about the power and influence of cultivation on the shaping of humanity. In fact, he believed that human beings are susceptible to positive changes (*yi* 移) in their personhood and character. The only exceptions, if any, are people of highest wisdom and those of utter stupidity.² Needless to say, the key to change lies in acquired practices. In fine, Confucius did not believe that human nature has an ontological permanence in itself; his view on human nature is basically phenomenological.

Confucius's disciples of the first and second generations in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE began to talk about human nature in terms of good (*shan* 善) and *evil* (*e* 惡) and thus human nature acquired a moral character. Apparently, while some argued that there are both good and *evil* inherent in human nature,³ some firmly believed that good human nature is constant in people and that it is not the result of education.⁴ Yet, it is not clear what good and *evil* actually means in this Confucian notion of human nature as textual evidence is lacking.

The idea of good with regard to the notion of human nature was first given a straightforward explication by Mencius (390-305 BCE), who was a disciple of Confucius's grandson Zisi and may thus be considered a third-generation disciple of the Master himself. Mencius was known in his time for his doctrine that human nature is good (*xing shan* 性善). His classic explanation for his position goes as follows:

My reason for saying that no man is devoid of a heart sensitive to the suffering of others is this. Suppose a man were, all of a sudden, to see a young child on the verge of falling into a well. He would certainly be moved to compassion, not because he wanted to get in the good graces of the parents, nor because he wished to win the praise of his fellow villagers or friends, nor yet because he disliked the bad reputation he might get [if he was not moved to compassion]. From this it can be seen that whoever is devoid of the heart of compassion is not human, whoever is devoid of the heart of shame is not human, whoever is devoid of the heart of courtesy and modesty is not human, and whoever is devoid of the heart of right and wrong is not human. The heart of compassion is the germ of benevolence; the heart of shame, of dutifulness; the heart of courtesy and modesty, of observance of rites; and the heart of right and wrong, of wisdom. Man has these four germs just as he has four limbs. For a man possessing these four germs to deny his own potentialities is for him to cripple himself... If a man is able to develop all these four germs that he possesses, it will be like a fire starting up or a spring coming through.⁵

Regardless of the validity of Mencius's argument, it is clear that the Mencian notion of 'good' refers to an innate moral sense. This is what Mencius meant by the four germs – the heart of compassion; the heart of shame; the heart of courtesy and modesty; and the heart of right and wrong. The four germs must be cultivated so that the four hearts will be able to come to fruition and blossom into benevolence, dutifulness, propriety, and wisdom. It should be noted that the term *shan* (good) is one of the most frequently used in the book of *Mencius* and it

appears 114 times. Interestingly enough, its opposite term *e* (bad or *evil*) as a noun or an adjective appears only 15 times in the same work.⁶ While the notion of good is repeatedly elaborated and indeed characterizes the fundamental spirit of Mencian philosophy, what constitutes *evil* is never explicitly explained. Other than its generic use (seven times) where its specific connotation is not self-evident, *e* is used eight times to describe people, colours, or sounds. As much as colours and sounds are not inherently bad, neither are human beings. Evidently, the Mencian theory of human nature is preoccupied with the positive potentialities in human nature and how they can materialize into moral conduct. The question of *evil* thus was never the focus of Mencian philosophy. At most, it lies only in the background. Most important, Mencius always emphasizes that goodness must be cultivated, or in Mencian parlance, goodness is a practice (*wei shan* 為善, literally, doing or making goodness). It is worth noting that Mencius never does mention the idea of *wei e* 為惡 (doing or making *evil*). To Mencius, it would seem that *evil* is not the result of one's own making; rather, it is the natural consequence of one's failure to do goodness. That is why *evil* itself is never defined. Even though Mencius differs from Confucius in that he valorizes the innate moral sense and characterizes human nature as *good* that contains it, he, like his spiritual mentor, emphasizes human agency in the practice of goodness. *Evil* can materialize itself only when human goodness leaves a void.

Xunzi (340-245 BCE) was the most learned, if not most influential, Confucian philosopher before China was unified for the first time in 221 BCE. He was known for his doctrine that human nature is *evil* (*xing e* 性惡) and that goodness is the result of conscious activity. Xunzi said:

The nature of man is such that he is born with a fondness for profit. If he indulges this fondness, it will lead him into wrangling and strife, and all sense of courtesy and humility will disappear. He is born with feelings of envy and hate, and if he indulges these, they will lead him into violence and crime, and all sense of loyalty and good faith will disappear. Man is born with the desires of the eyes and ears, with a fondness for beautiful sights and sounds. If he indulges these, they will lead him into licence and wantonness, and all ritual principles and correct forms will be lost. Hence, any man who follows his nature and indulges his emotions will inevitably become involved in wrangling and strife, will violate the forms and rules of society, and will end as a criminal. Therefore, man must first be transformed by the instructions of a teacher and guided by ritual principles, and only then will he be able to observe the dictates of courtesy and humility, obey the forms and rules of society, and achieve order. It is obvious from this, then, that

man's nature is evil, and that his goodness is the result of conscious activity.⁷

For our purpose, it is not so important to know that Xunzi entertained a theory of human nature that seems diametrically opposite to Mencius's as to analyze his etiology of evil. Xunzi acknowledges the fondness for profit or gain, feelings of envy and hate, and sensual desires as inborn or natural in human nature, and he identifies them as the primary causes of *evil*. Yet, Xunzi does not consider evil itself to be innate. Evil is constituted and only occurs when human beings give free rein to their inborn fondness for profit, natural feelings of envy and hate and instinctual sensual desires. Evil does not have its own ontology; it does not come into being when goodness reigns as a result of human conscious activity. Conscious activity as such is the efficient cause of good, and its lack will lead to evil. Evidently, Xunzi's theory of human nature, like that of Confucius, is phenomenological and firmly grounded in experience.

As noted above, while Mencius argues for an innate moral sense in human nature, he emphasizes human agency in turning innate germs of goodness into actuality. Xunzi does not believe in an innate moral sense but he never questions the ability of human beings to hold in check their natural self-serving propensities in the interests of personal good and community welfare. As he puts it,

[w]hen you see good, then diligently examine your own behaviour; when you see evil, then with sorrow look into yourself. When you find good in yourself, steadfastly approve it; when you find evil in yourself, hate it as something loathsome.⁸

Xunzi believes that human beings are capable of recognising what is good and what is not good, and that they are able to examine themselves in light of what they observe and improve themselves as a person. For Xunzi, human beings are born with the ability to recognize what is good for their survival as a species. Oddly as it may seem, Xunzi and Mencius are not exactly opposite to each other; both exhort us all to moral goodness, although they appeal to a different innate asset in us for their exhortation.

Taoism generally prizes the natural over the artificial; it concerns itself with nature and is interested in human beings as one of the myriad creatures of the universe. Taoism does not seek to understand human nature in terms of good and evil as they are merely conceptions of human valuation. Further, as Taoism is often characterized with a strain of relativism, it is little wonder that it does not offer an explicit doctrine on human nature. Laozi said, '(t)he whole world recognizes the beautiful as the beautiful, yet this is only the ugly; the whole world recognizes the good as the good, yet this is only the bad.'⁹ If good and evil were indeed inevitable in understanding and describing human nature, the Taoist would recognize them as

a pair of bipolar opposites which actually constitute a holism that is nature itself. Simply put, good and evil are not inherent in nature; they are entirely artificial.

To conclude, neither the Confucian nor the Taoist theories of human nature admit of the essential existence of evil in the universe. While this is not the place to further investigate the reasons behind such a common feature in early Chinese views of human nature, suffice it to say here that early Chinese believed in a self-generative, organismic universe where

there can be no parts wrongfully present; everything that exists belongs, even if no more appropriately than as the consequence of a temporary imbalance, a disharmony. Evil as a positive or active force cannot exist; much less can it be frighteningly personified.¹⁰

2. Terms of Transgression

The idea that evil is literally *man-made* can further be revealed in a variety of conceptual terms that denote and connote transgressions in early China. The Chinese term most commonly translated as *evil* is *e*. According to *Shuowen jiezi*, a second-century lexicon that explains the etymology of ancient Chinese graphs, *e* is glossed as *guo* 過, which means transgression or error.¹¹ *E* can also function in a verbal sense (pronounced differently as *wu*), which means *to loathe* or *to despise*. The two senses of *e* are actually cognate - when a person commits a transgression, the inhumane conduct or inappropriate decision that caused it rather than the person himself is considered despicable. Clearly, *evil* is considered man-made.

Indeed *guo* is the most common term for transgression; it literally means *to pass by* or *pass over*.¹² From this basic meaning, *guo* also connotes the sense of overshooting. In this derived meaning, *guo* is often used in connection with *bu ji* 不及 (undershooting), both refer to the act of missing the mark and are considered human error alike. As Confucius put it, overshooting is the same as undershooting.¹³

A common synonym for *guo* is *qian* 愆. The composite graph *qian* consists of three components - a path (行), water (水, written as 氵), and heart (心).¹⁴ The water graph is placed in the middle of the path graph indicating that the path is flooded. Evidently and graphically, something goes amiss. It is crucial that the heart graph, which is placed beneath the path graph and the water graph, is integral to the composite graph *qian*. Its presence connotes that the cause for the trouble originates with the human heart.

Shi 失, another common word for error, literally means *to let go* or *to let something slip out of hand*.¹⁵ This basic meaning also gives rise to the derived meaning of *to lose*. Whether it is letting go or losing possession, the semantic force lies in the agent rather than a power from outside.

Finally, it should be mentioned that *guo* is often used in conjunction with *zui* 辜 and indeed the two graphs form the binome *zuiguo*, which means *offence, guilt, or crime*. *Zui* literally means *to commit a crime*¹⁶ and thus it is a legal concept. Criminal offense means the violation of some rule set by a legal authority external to the offender himself. Needless to say, criminal offense can only be committed by human beings. It is interesting to note that when the Judea-Christian concept of original sin was introduced in China, Chinese scholars were hard pressed to come up with a proper translation as the idea of sin in fact did not exist in their culture. Early Chinese did not seem to have ever entertained the notion of a creator God, neither did they have any creation myth in their cosmological beliefs.¹⁷ Thus, to the early Chinese, man would not violate any rule or law imposed from outside. In the end the binome *yuanzui* 原辜 (literally, *original offence*) was created and has been in use in Chinese Christian literature ever since.

3. Concluding Remarks

The cognate relationship among the terms of transgression suggests that *evil (e)* was considered to be man-made and thus not perceived to have its own ontology. It was unequivocally understood as the result of man's own errors in judgment. When Buddhism was introduced to China in the first century, the Buddhist doctrine of tenfold evil or vice (*dasākuśala*) was novel to its Chinese audience. The so-called ten evils refer to killing, stealing, adultery, lying, double-tongue, foul language, sweet talk, greed, anger, perverted views. The term early Chinese Buddhist translators adopted to render such a notion of moral evil was none other than *e*. While the ten evils concern morality, they now take on a religious character as they would all create bad karma for the person who commits them, and he may suffer in his next life. In his reincarnation, this person will be born with karma inherited from his previous life, yet, karma is not necessarily evil in nature, and more important, it was created by him in the first place. Karma, after all, is controlled in one's own hands. In this connection, we may appreciate why Buddhism had a much easier experience than Christianity in being accepted and assimilated in Chinese culture. It was difficult to find a place for original sin in the scheme of things in traditional China.

Notes

¹ D.C. Lau, *The Analects*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1979, p. 143.

² *Ibid.*, p. 143.

³ It is possible but not likely that they argued that some people are endowed with a good human nature while some are born with an evil one.

⁴ L. Li, *Guodian Chujiang jiaodu ji*, Beijing University Press, Beijing, 2002, p. 107.

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- ⁵ *Mencius* 3.6. Translation modified from D.C. Lau, *Mencius*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1970, pp. 82-83.
- ⁶ The graph for *e* actually appears 80 times, but 65 of the occurrences are either used as an interrogative adverb which means *how* or as a verb which means *to loathe* and as such the graph, in these two grammatical roles, is pronounced as *wu* instead.
- ⁷ B. Watson, *Hsün Tzu: Basic Writings*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1963, p. 157.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- ⁹ D.C. Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1963, p. 58.
- ¹⁰ F.W. Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China*, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 1971, p. 24.
- ¹¹ Y. Duan, *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, Shanghai Guji, Shanghai, 2000, p. 511.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- ¹³ *Analects*, 11.16.
- ¹⁴ Duan, *op. cit.*, pp. 510-511.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 604.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 741. The form of the graph has later changed and is now written as 罪, but its meaning remains the same. See also p. 355.
- ¹⁷ Creation myths did not come about until after the third century in China possibly under the influence of Buddhism, by then Chinese civilization had long developed its basic character without a belief in a creator God.

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Akhenaten, the Damned One: Monotheism as the Root of all Evil

Robert W. Butler

Abstract

Akhenaten's religion of the Aten in ancient Egypt has often been interpreted as a positive development in the history of mankind, the first step towards ethical monotheism. But for the people of ancient Egypt it was a horrifying experience, in which traditional ties to ancient deities were severed by force. The pharaoh's authority enforced grudging obedience to the new cult during his lifetime, but violent unrest after Akhenaten's death and the pharaoh's subsequent erasure from history suggest that most of his subjects regarded him as the original architect of monotheistic evil.

Key Words: Akhenaten, monotheism, Egypt, Aten, evil, theodicy.

1. Akhenaten 'the Damned'

Early in the reign of Ramesses II, about 1300 B.C., a tax claim was filed in the city of Thebes.¹ The case itself was routine and uninteresting; but the timing of the claim, preserved accidentally in a court transcript, revolves around a man who is never named – he is referred to only as 'the damned one' and 'the rebel.'² This unnamed individual was not the subject of the lawsuit; he was Akhenaten, the former pharaoh of Egypt, a man now so hated that his name could not even be uttered in public. How did the one-time ruler of the greatest empire of the ancient world become invisible in his own land?

The obvious reason, of course, is the religious revolution he imposed on Egypt: the acknowledgement and worship of a single deity represented by the sun's disk, the Aten.³ Created by the pharaoh's insights, upheld by his armies, and overthrown by his successors, the worship of the Aten has variously been interpreted as a precursor of modern religious truth, as the feverish dream of an unbalanced philosopher, or as the coldly calculated plot of a paranoid dictator.⁴ But few have examined what the new religion of the Aten meant in terms of theodicy, of explaining evil.⁵ This chapter will consider Akhenaten's experiment as a watershed in the history of evil: it was the first time that consciously imposed suffering was associated with a particular deity, applicable to all humans instead of only a randomly selected few.

2. Background and Reign

Akhenaten's reign (1358-1340 B.C.) came at the beginning of the New Kingdom, a transitional moment for Egypt.⁶ The rule of the hated foreign conquerors, the Hyksos, had been overthrown; a powerful dynasty from the south,

under the protection of its chief god Amun, had created an empire. The father of Akhenaten, Amenophis III, was a warrior king, who kept the priesthoods under control and groomed his firstborn son to follow in his footsteps. But the elder son died unexpectedly and the younger son became the new ruler, Amenophis IV – later called Akhenaten.

At the same time that the nation's political life was in transition, traditional Egyptian religion was changing as well. Egyptians believed in numerous gods, goddesses, and godlets; but they also believed in a concept called *ma'at*, which can be loosely translated as 'balance.' In this religious concept, humans cooperated with gods in keeping the universe running smoothly. Religion was closely linked to the daily life of the people; in addition to divine help in the face of life's many dangers, the economies of local cities and temples were interrelated since offerings returned to the community in the form of sacrifices, festivals and employment. Of course some gods were more important than others, and historians suggest there was an emerging monotheistic impulse centered around the sun god. At the local level, however, there is no doubt that diverse gods and devout worshippers linked in time-honored rituals maintained the order of the universe, as they had always done.

Akhenaten's position at his accession, then, mandated a rather delicate balancing act. It was necessary to act as a god, to maintain *ma'at*, to dominate the ruling elite and to lead the army. It was also necessary to safeguard empire and to keep eye on powerful priesthoods, especially that of Amun. Above all it was important to continue the dynasty's grip on power. To guide and guard Egypt was a huge responsibility; his father's successful footsteps demanded very big shoes big to fill them.

Almost at once, Akhenaten began to introduce the worship of a new deity, the Aten.⁷ In a boundary stela which dates from the first months of his reign, the new pharaoh records his devotion to the sun god, specified as 'Re-Harakhte who rejoices on the horizon in his aspect of the sunlight which is in the Disk [Aten].'⁸ The text goes on to mandate a corvée of forced labor throughout the nation, in order to build temples to the Aten; and in the next several years, many such structures, using simple, mass-produced (and architecturally crude) blocks were erected in the major towns and cities of Egypt. By the third year, the deity's name was altered to eliminate references to other solar gods; he became known simply as the Aten, or Disk, the name was encircled in a cartouche, and the pharaoh changed his own name to reflect his devotion (from Amenophis IV to Akhenaten). In this year as well, a new, more naturalistic – some would say 'mannerist' – artistic style was introduced, as well as portrayals of the royal family in intimate scenes. By the fifth year, Akhenaten announced that a new capital was to be built, called Akhetaten, dedicated to the Aten and his chief prophet and son, the pharaoh. At the same time other religious foundations were closed down, their wealth seized, and devoted to the building of his new city.

In the eighth year came an acceleration of the pace. The names of other deities began to be chiseled off existing monuments. Official documents were written phonetically instead of with hieroglyphs, in order to avoid using any other deity's name.

In the twelfth year of the reign, as the streets of Egypt teemed with *foreign* troops (Syrians and Nubians from the provinces) guarding the pharaoh and restraining his subjects, Akhenaten decided to hold a magnificent celebration at his new capital. Its 730 individual altars (two for each day of the year) were filled via confiscated temple holdings, tax revenues from the poor, and forced contributions from the rich. Domestic notables and foreign dignitaries lined up to watch Akhenaten, pharaoh of Egypt and living son of the god Aten, drive his famous chariot down the whitewashed boulevards of his capital.⁹ It must have been an inspiring spectacle, designed to – what? Divert a weary nation? Silence the rumblings of discontent? Overawe foreign ambassadors? Perhaps all of these...

If so, the attempt was a failure. Two years later Akhenaten's house of cards began to collapse. A plague swept in from the east, devastating the country and killing many of the royal family. Rebellion in Nubia was eventually subdued, but rebellion in Syria was not; the empire's possessions in the north were lost.¹⁰ Meanwhile, resistance to the new order could be found even in the capital; forbidden magic amulets continued to surface, and prayers to banned deities could be found scribbled in obscure corners of tombs.¹¹ Akhenaten's reactions to all these disasters are unknown. Indeed, he may have been in shock, incapable of responding as his life's work – his obsession – vanished. The country was drifting. Pharaoh did not lead the army; no response came to distant pleas for help; no plans were made for a successor. Perhaps most significantly, the evolution of the Aten's theology had come to a halt; the prophet seemed incapable any longer of hearing his god. In the chaos of these years, we do not even know when or how Akhenaten died; but no references exist beyond his 17th year on the throne. Akhenaten simply disappears, like the sun obscured by clouds.

In the aftermath of its founder's death, the religion of the Aten quickly vanished. Within three years his son, Tutankhaten, had reopened the old temples and was frantically re-supplying them with the statues and ritual instruments his father had confiscated or destroyed. In ironic counterpoise to the father's name change, the son altered his name to one that honored the old gods, and would become famous centuries later when his undisturbed tomb was opened – Tutankhamen. As for Akhenaten himself, the judgment of Egypt on his Aten cult becomes clear when one reads the text of Tutankhamen's 'Restoration Stele:'

When His Majesty came to the throne, the temples and the towns of the gods and goddesses from Elephantine [Aswan, at the First Cataract] to the marshes of the Delta coast were fallen into decay, their shrines ruined, reduced to mounds overgrown with

thorns. Their sanctuaries were like something that never existed, and their precincts were a footpath, for the earth was derelict. The gods had turned their back on this land. If an army was sent to Syria to widen the boundaries of Egypt, there was no victory. If one prayed to a god to entreat something from him, he would not come, and if one petitioned any goddess similarly, she would not come. Their hearts were weary within them, and they annihilated what had been made.¹²

The Restoration Stele seems a suitable moment to consider Akhenaten and his reign in the light (or should one say dark?) of evil. From this perspective, three topics emerge:

- the imposition and enforcement of Atenism;
- the resistance of the populace to Akhenaten’s new cult;
- the explanation for evil in Aten worship, or its theodicy.

3. Imposition and Enforcement of Atenism

The religion of Aten sprang from the pharaoh alone. Despite earlier references to the Aten as another name for a solar deity, only Akhenaten could have declared that this god would be worshipped in splendid isolation. All dogmas, all decisions were his; for better or (more usually) for worse, Akhenaten is the key to Atenism.

A gigantic *sed* festival, three years into the reign, introduced the exclusive creed with a new hyper-realistic style of art.¹³ A few years later, that art constantly showed Akhenaten in the presence of soldiers. Armed force was a significant factor in the establishment of Aten’s religion. Soldiers quarried stone and built new temples, closed and desecrated old ones, chipped divine names off religious inscriptions and artifacts, and collected tithes and taxes for the pharaoh’s new worship. Increasingly, as the reign went on, they also surrounded and safeguarded the royal family. As one of the three chief props of Akhenaten’s regime (the other two were a cynical bureaucratic corps of ‘new men,’ and the wealth available from now-closed temples), only the army could provide sufficient manpower for obliteration of divine names on a nationwide scale.

The bureaucrats, too, assisted in the enforcement of Atenism, though here it seems to have been out of pragmatic self-interest. ‘Offer praises to the living Disk [Aten] and you shall have a prosperous life,’ wrote the king’s vizier, Ay; the phrase carries a cynical air and seems to have been meant literally.¹⁴ ‘Go along to get along’ could have been the Aten’s shorter catechism. Similarly, moral behavior changed as well; no longer did religion encourage ethical acts, now it only encouraged obedience to Akhenaten. Thanks to Akhenaten’s religious/political link, ‘evil’ in this instance becomes defined, not just as opposition to the divine father Aten, but opposition to his son Akhenaten as well. Such church/state

repression seems to have been unknown on this scale before. Akhenaten's insistence on uniform worship led to uniform repression, and eventually uniform hatred.

Acceptance of Atenism was achieved, then, via force, bribery, and corruption on a national scale.¹⁵ Akhenaten clearly intended the imposition of his new creed to be complete and inescapable. Such heavy-handed military activity, accompanied as it was by corrupt bureaucratic officials, could only have been viewed as evil by Egypt's long-suffering populace. Almost certainly it helped inflame the resistance movement which it failed to suppress and which, in the end, outlived the god – and the king – it so hated.

4. Resistance

Religiously speaking, Akhenaten's new cult contradicted two millennia of tradition. Although the religious *tithe* or tax was still collected, none of it was now redistributed back to the people as had once happened via local temples. There was no aid for life's traditional problems, no promise of an afterlife – only obedience and uniformity was left. Egyptian religion was not only polytheistic, it was processional or process-based: human participation in divine rituals, and attention to moral and ethical guidelines, drew the gods close and kept chaos and its accompanying evils at bay.¹⁶ Atenism forbade the all-important cooperation with the divine; the result was smoldering resentment. When invasions and plague struck late in the reign, they could only be seen as confirmation of the traditional vision of the universe, and as punishment for abandonment of the gods.

But even earlier, there had been significant resistance. In the country at large, 'bad things' contrary to the Aten's wishes were acknowledged as the new capital arose: 'it was worse than those things I heard' claimed an official speech on the founding of the city.¹⁷ A few years later, when Akhenaten closed the temples of other gods, 'the motor of Egypt's economy' shut down and desperation set in.¹⁸ At the pharaoh's death, popular fury was at last unleashed. Buildings and monuments at the capital were quickly vandalized, but only to the height of an average man's reach – suggesting a spontaneous reaction that did not even stop to grab a ladder.¹⁹ Shortly thereafter, Akhenaten's tomb was desecrated; his coffin's face-mask and name-cartouches were violently ripped away, in an effort to destroy the king's soul for all eternity.²⁰

When the city was officially demolished, some two decades later, pharaoh Horemheb (who had once been one of Akhenaten's administrators) took great care to break the surplus bricks and even to smash abandoned crockery. The remaining walls and buildings were then destroyed by fire in order to complete the destruction of the city. Such violent response betokens an anger that was unlike anything before or after; never again in Egypt was a royal palace, let alone an entire city, so completely, so relentlessly, destroyed.

Even at the center of Atenism, in the king's own ruling circle, there had been opposition: discreet, erudite, hidden. Akhenaten berated some of his entourage for listening to *evil* rumors.²¹ The old gods maintained some worshippers; statues of hearth gods and a lament to Amun have been found among elite burials at the capital. There is even a set of small monkey figures in recognizably Akhenatenesque poses (one drives a chariot), and a fragment has been found which recounts an old story about the assassination of an earlier pharaoh.²² Perhaps Akhenaten did well to keep soldiers round him at all times; outside the closest circle of his friends and advisers, he may not have been able to rely on anyone's loyalty.

5. Theodicy

Little enough survives of the Aten's theology, and almost no theodicy. Most accounts of the religion simply omit the subject. The portrayal of sunlight as the essence of Aten, and the limited mention of suffering in its creeds, have led many scholars to claim that Atenism did not include any awareness of evil. This conclusion is mistaken, since in fact a theodicy can be discerned.

In the Great Hymn to the Aten (believed to have been written by Akhenaten himself), a discussion of generalized evil appears in the second stanza. Without the Aten, that is, at night, theft, violence and blindness rule humanity. When the Aten sets, the world dies: 'darkness is a shroud, and the earth is in stillness, / For he who made them rests in his horizon.'²³ Clearly, evil exists, overpowered by Aten as the sun overpowers the night.

In addition, there were many things the Aten forbade. The pharaoh was angered at his followers listening to 'evil stories' about traditional burial practices; and opposition to Aten, inscribed on a boundary marker at the capital, served as part of the reason for establishing a new city in an isolated, undefiled location.²⁴ Even the nature of the Aten – light – could be construed as evil to some, for light can be harsh, even pitiless. At least one foreign ruler wrote to Akhenaten in anger, protesting at the way his ambassadors were expected to stand waiting in the hot Egyptian sunlight for the pharaoh to appear.²⁵ And if the light of the Aten was so benign, why was it necessary to impose and support it by force, and to persecute its opponents? Even if its exact shape remains unclear, evil plainly threatened the universe that Aten had created.

This last point is perhaps the most important. Aten's theology and its understated theodicy, and particularly the pharaoh's actions enforcing it, demonstrate a universe divided for the first time into absolute and mutually exclusive concepts of good and evil.²⁶ What pleased the Aten was mandatory; what the Aten frowned upon, was forbidden. This knowledge was delivered to humanity by the Aten's son, the pharaoh – Akhenaten. Theodicy, in this case, was not an idle philosophical exercise; it was a direct order from the ruler of the nation.

Akhenaten's new theology did indeed create a new theodicy, one that was to be repeated endlessly for the next three millennia. By uniting politics and religion in

such a fashion – by acknowledging responsibility for Aten – Akhenaten created a universe in which religious resistance meant political punishment. Instead of a traditional diversity of gods and rites, the pharaoh allowed only one deity, only one definition of good. All dissent by definition was now evil. And evil was no longer attributable to bad luck or malevolent spirits, but to opposition to the good god; and so, as we have become all too familiar with in the modern world, it had to be eliminated. Consciously directed evil, whether as opposition to Aten, or punishment by the pharaoh, now arose from a single source. In the coming millennia, this scenario to be repeated endlessly. But Akhenaten, Pharaoh of Egypt, was the first, the original architect, of monotheistic evil.

6. Conclusion

In the end, perhaps, traditional Egyptian religion may have been right after all. Perhaps, without an ethical framework on which to build, humanity tends to drift toward moral chaos and despair. That is a subject for another chapter, another time; but certainly, a *black hole* of ethical vacuum offers little to attract anyone. In the end, too, the story of Akhenaten may not so much be a rejection of monotheism, as the rejection of religious absolutism. Absolute truth, pursued too far, becomes absolute tyranny. That may be the ultimate lesson from the whole affair: humanity may seek the Truth, but should be wary of claims that it has, at last, been found.

Notes

¹ This chapter is the result of work aided in part by Elmhurst College and the Donald W. & Betty J. Buik Fellowship; I am grateful for their support.

² D. Redford, *Akhenaten: The Heretic King*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984, p. 231. See also the short notice by A. Gardner, 'A Later Allusion to Akhenaten', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 1938, p. 124.

³ For a brief introduction to the vague nature of the evidence surrounding Akhenaten, see the relevant entry in T. Wilkinson (ed), *Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, Thames and Hudson, London, 2005.

⁴ See for example D. Nardo (ed), *Rulers of Ancient Egypt*, Thomson Gale, Detroit, 2005.

⁵ Some scholars insist that it is not possible to talk of theodicy in ancient Egypt, since gods did not cause evil; they only prevented it from happening. This still suggests a responsibility for events which I believe should be called by the name of theodicy. See for example E. Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, trans. J. Baines, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1982.

⁶ Numerous sources exist to follow Akhenaten's era, but they often disagree with each other regarding specifics. The *Cambridge Ancient History*, 3rd ed, is a good

starting point. Others include works by C. Aldred, *Akhenaten: King of Egypt*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1988; D. Redford, *Akhenaten: The Heretic King*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984; N. Reeves, *Akhenaten: Egypt's False Prophet*, Thames and Hudson, London, 2001. An older work that is broader in its contextual coverage than most new studies is A. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, London, Oxford University Press, 1961. Precisely when Akhenaten reigned is still in question; leaving aside the thorny question of a co-regency with his aging father, beginning dates from 1377 B.C. to 1353 B.C. have been suggested, though all agree on his position in the 18th dynasty and the length of his reign – seventeen years.

⁷ It is interesting to note, as Assmann puts it, that here is the only example we have of a prophet whose message was not reinterpreted by later commentators: J. Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt*, Metropolitan Books, New York, 2002. Nevertheless, it is clear that some of the Aten concepts did evolve during the reign.

⁸ *Cambridge Ancient History*, II pt. 2, p. 53.

⁹ Redford, p. 186; Reeves, p. 154; Aldred, pp. 279-281.

¹⁰ Redford, p. 187; Aldred, pp. 282-283.

¹¹ E. Hornung, *Akhenaten and the Religion of Light*, trans. D. Lorton, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1999, pp. 110-111.

¹² J. Ray, *Reflections of Osiris: Lives from Ancient Egypt*, University Press, Oxford, 2002, p. 60.

¹³ Hornung, *Light*, p. 39.

¹⁴ Redford, p. 180.

¹⁵ Ray, pp. 72-75.

¹⁶ Assmann, pp. 205-206.

¹⁷ Reeves, p. 110. Precisely what occurred is unknown but Reeves suggests the monument records Akhenaten's actual words, responding to serious unrest.

¹⁸ Reeves, p. 155. Ray, pp. 64-65, has an excellent portrayal of the importance of temples to Egypt's economy and society, and of the decay that would have set in when they were closed. The 'Dissolution of the Monasteries' in Tudor England pales in comparison.

¹⁹ Redford, p. 228.

²⁰ Reeves, p. 81. No one is sure when the damage occurred, but mere grave robbers would not have bothered. Since Akhenaten began to be written out of history less than twenty years after his death, the desecration is likely to have occurred sooner rather than later, when his name was still recognized and the populace furious enough to vent its hatred.

²¹ Aldred, p. 245.

²² Hornung, *Light*, pp. 110-111; Reeves, p. 106.

²³ J. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East Vol. 1 - An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1958, pp. 227-230; viewed on August 30, <http://touregypt.net/hymntoaten.htm>.

²⁴ Hornung, *Light*, p. 49.

²⁵ Reeves, p. 122. From the Amarna Letters.

²⁶ Only Assmann makes this a central point of his analysis. But he also insists that Akhenaten was philosophically motivated to recognize the true source of all life – the light of the sun – and, like Einstein and Heisenberg, intended his reflections to be a universal revelation for all mankind. These positions are generally rejected by other scholars.

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Theodicy Reconsidered

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Abstract

Defining and understanding evil can be extremely difficult. For the purpose of this project, I will define 'evil' as any experience that leads to the fragmentation of the human person in relation to God, self, and community. Experiences of evil disrupt relationship with God, self, and community and lead a person and/or community to question the very ground of their existence and faith in the divine. These experiences are the bedrock of theodicy. Theodicy is stated as 'If God is all good and all powerful, why is there evil in the world?' Thus far, traditional theodicies have been insufficient in acknowledging the depth of evil and providing a meaningful framework for living in and through evil because they have retained theological categories of omnipotence, *creatio ex nihilo*, and redemption. In this chapter, I will examine the recent scholarship of John Caputo, Catherine Keller, and Flora Keshgegian in which they deconstruct traditional notions of omnipotence, *creatio ex nihilo* and redemption, respectively, and provide an alternative theological response to experiences of evil that rupture relationships. I will then apply the alternative response to an experience of abuse to determine its potential to mend the fragmentation caused by evil.

Key Words: Theodicy, Catherine Keller, John Caputo, Flora Keshgegian, sexual abuse, *creatio ex nihilo*, omnipotence.

1. Introduction

Finding language to adequately express and name our human experiences can be a significant challenge. As linguistic creatures, human beings need language that can convey the heights of joy, the depth of sorrow and everything in between. We need adequate language to describe the joys and pain of childbirth. We need words to speak in order to tell when we are being violated and abused. We need categories that will allow us to make some sort of sense out of genocides. We need adequate language because without it we can not make sense of our experiences, resist those who seek to do us harm, or protect those who are vulnerable.

When it comes to the subject of evil, many people are able to identify and feel comfortable using the word 'evil' to describe genocides. However, it is often difficult to articulate exactly why it is evil. Is it evil because of the tremendous theft of life? Is it evil because people experience immense suffering and pain? Is it evil because it could be avoided? Or is it a combination of all of these factors and more? In the last five years, the American media has used the word 'evil' to describe a variety of events: the terrorist attacks on September 11th, Hurricane Rita

that drowned cities along the Gulf Coast, FEMA's abysmal response to the destruction of New Orleans, AIDS, smoking, drunk driving, George W. Bush, homosexual persons, torture. . . and the list could go on and on. Now, I am not indicating whether or not the items just listed should be included or excluded. I am simply highlighting some of the difficulty inherent in our use of the word 'evil' and our need to use care and intentionality when ascribing the word 'evil' to a situation.

So, let us look at a few definitions of 'evil.' There are two traditional categories of evil: natural evil and moral evil. More recent scholars have added a third category: cultural or structural evil. Accordingly, natural evil describes events that are a part of life in the natural world, examples include violent storms, drought, disease, earthquakes, and natural death. Without diminishing the suffering that occurs in cases of natural evil, I hesitate to call natural disasters 'evil.' Moral evil is the second major category for discussing evil. Moral evil designates that which human beings intentionally do to violate or harm each other. Human agency is the key designation of moral evil.

An awareness of cultural or structural evil is helpful in distinguishing acts of individuals from systems of oppression. While moral evil and cultural evil are always interrelated, human beings intentionally engage in occurrences of moral evil but engage in cultural evil without reflection or intention. Nel Noddings writes,

Human beings frequently participate in the practices of their culture without reflective evaluation. Cultural evils have a way of embedding themselves in the tissues of society. They resist elimination and instead undergo transformation; sometimes the transformation is merely cosmetic and sometimes it is moderately significant, but the evils remain potent.¹

Cultural evils often take the form of -isms: sexism, racism, heterosexism, and consumerism are a few examples.

2. What Are Our Options?

I think that when we talk about the category of evil, we are talking about theology. Evil is primarily a theological category rather than an aesthetic or linguistic category, which leads us to the questions of God, sin, Satan, and the world. Theodicy is the word traditionally used for an argument that attempts to show that God is righteous or just despite the presence of evil in the world. That is, it tries to show that God can be omnipotent and perfectly good despite evil.² Some theologians retain the omnipotence of God and place responsibility for evil in the hands of human beings. Some question the notion of the omnipotence of God. Some say that evil occurs because God choose either to be absent or

incomprehensible. One element they share with each other and nearly every other articulation of theodicy is a commitment to explain evil in a way that justifies God. In each case, God is justified. God is judged without sentencing when human beings put God on trial. God is excused when we declare that evil is the fault of immature or ignorant humanity. God is released from responsibility when we state that God is above explanation. Any way you slice this pie, theodicies are about protecting God at the expense of the people who experience evil.

3. New Turf?

As I move into this section of the chapter, I know that I am treading on less familiar ground. And in a way, the uncertainty of this ground is exactly why I choose to move in this direction. I often experience disappointment or anger when I reflect on traditional theological explanations for evil and suffering in world. I wonder why theologians are so interested in protecting God and in the process of protecting God hinder the integration and processing of traumatic events. I believe that traditional theodicies have been insufficient in acknowledging the depth of evil and providing a meaningful framework for living in and through evil because they have retained traditional theological categories of omnipotence, *creatio ex nihilo*, and redemption. These three pillars of theology are essential in retaining a hegemonic theological position that will never succeed in integrating systematic theology with experiences of evil because they are grounded in an understanding of God that is ultimately unhelpful to trauma survivors.

I begin with insights from the recent work of John Caputo. In his most recent text, *The Weakness of God*, Caputo denies the efficacy of an ontological God.³ Caputo writes,

We make sense under conditions that threaten to undo the sense we make, and that our beliefs and practices enjoy only a provisional unity and tentative stability that is in principle liable to unravel at the most inconvenient times.⁴

While this unraveling may be inconvenient for strong ontological theology, it is precisely the aim of Caputo's weak theological enterprise. Time and time again, he unravels traditional notions of God and *short-circuits* them using deconstruction. Divine omnipotent power is the focus of Caputo's deconstruction. Once strong theological notions of divine power are dismantled 'kingdom: becomes the 'kingdom of the kingdom-less' ruled by the power of the power-less who preference justice over law. God is not a sovereign, other being living and ruling from on high. God, for Caputo's weak theology, becomes the matrix and spark of all life. This short circuiting rejects notions of what Caputo calls an onto-theo-historico-politico-cosmo-logical God. The *power* of the weak God is the power of the promise and call. 'The voice of God, the Word of God, the Spirit of God, is the

call that calls to us without causality, power, or prestige, calling upon what is best in us.⁵

Caputo rejects an ontological understanding of God in favor of a God of weakness who calls to creation beckoning it fulfillment and life. However, this God of weakness only has the *power* to draw and call. Caputo's weak theology of the event operates more along the lines of influence and persuasion. Caputo repeatedly uses the language of call and proclamation to connote the vehicle of weak theology's influence. A weak God does not have power to manipulate or force anything or any creature. Therefore, God is understood as a vital force which moves in, with, through, over, and under everything in creation.

The second pillar of traditional Christian theology that needs dismantling is the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. Catherine Keller offers a captivating critique of *creatio ex nihilo* in her text *Face of the Deep*.⁶ She provides a beautiful analysis of the two creation accounts in Genesis beginning with exploratory surgery into the *tohu wa-bohu* and *tehom* of the creation accounts. Deconstructing the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, Keller emphasizes the role of the barren earth, lifeless waters, and sweeping wind in creation. Creation is not about being but life that emerges from the elemental watery womb of the deep. In his discussion of Keller's work, Caputo writes:

God is not responsible for the fact that the elements are there, but for making them stir, making them live, by staking out great expanses that God fills up with living things. Creation is not a movement from non-being to being – which is what makes the hearts of metaphysicians everywhere skip a beat – but from being to beyond being, from a mute expanse of being to the bustle of living things, from barrenness to the bloom of life, from silence to the word that makes the empty full and the barren buzz with life.⁷

Life, not being, is the fruit of creation. God was not the omnipotent creator speaking into the vacuum; but the artist and potter giving life and breath.

Keller looks specifically at the two creation accounts in Genesis. In the first account, Elohim peacefully, rhythmically proclaims that it is good. Creation is good. In the second narrative, Yahweh anxiously calls creation and humanity guilty. The second narrative provides a redaction to the good of the first. The two stories together allow a weak theology, like Caputo's, to affirm the goodness of the creation without turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to experiences of evil. Elohim's affirmation of creation is balanced by the Yahwist's apprehension. Goodness is present alongside the potential for evil. The yes-but of the creation narrative provide a richer answer to the question and experience of evil than the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. Omnipotent divine fiat expounded in *creatio ex nihilo* is

ultimately more destructive (not to mention non-sensical in light of modern cosmology and astrophysics) than attending more closely to the biblical narratives that speak of barren earth, lifeless waters, and sweeping wind of *tohu wa-bohu* and *tehom* as partners with God in creation.

The third pillar of traditional Christian theology under evaluation is comedic redemption. In her new text, *Time for Hope*, Flora Keshgegian challenges Christian interpretations of history that minimize the reality of traumatic experiences in an effort to maximize the good news of ultimate redemption.⁸ Keshgegian reflects on Christianity's tendency to view time as linear and comedic. She states,

Theologians have most often told the story of Christianity as a comedy, a divine comedy. To view the story of Christianity as a comedy does not mean it makes us laugh or that it is funny, but that everything is resolved in the end. There is a happy ending. In a divine comedy, God is the one who will effect the resolution. God will bring everything to a happy conclusion, at least for those who are included in God's plan of salvation.⁹

Comedic conclusions answer all the questions and provide a happy ending.

Theologically, comedies depend on an omnipotent God who is directly involved in time and history. Time is linear, unbroken and progressive. Redemption is promised at the *telos* of history. Creation is restored or made anew. The lame shall walk, the blind shall see, and the dead will be alive (minus the effects of decomposition). She writes, '[a]s long as God is active, history is a comedy, divine and human.'¹⁰ God's omnipotent and omnipresent activity in a linear and progressive history is the basis of comedic hope. Moreover, comedic narratives that seek to push to the resolved end do not take suffering seriously enough. Suffering drives theologians, in fact all human beings, towards hope that promises resolution, restitution, and redemption. However, Keshgegian denies the hope that all sufferings can be redeemed or resolved.

Keshgegian emphasizes the reality that trauma/evil is not necessary to human experience. While people are traumatically injured by others, this injury is not a given part of human experience. Keshgegian differentiates natural experiences of loss i.e. natural evil, and trauma i.e. moral and cultural evil.

To say that traumatic injury is historical is not only to recognize the role of human agency, but also to suggest that the injury does not have to occur. It is not a necessary or given part of human existence, such as aging and death. We human beings all have to die. But we do not have to experience trauma in our lives. Trauma is not a given of human existence. Any death is a loss that calls for mourning. However, the losses generated by trauma

are of a different order than the losses that are a necessary – and natural – part of finite human existence.¹¹

For Keshgegian, traumatic events are unnecessary historical occurrences that rupture relationships, narratives, and time. Traumatic events are remembered out of time. Consequently, coping mechanisms, such as dissociation and denial, allow the individual to place the traumatic experience *on hold* in order to continue life. However, experiences that are placed *on hold* can interrupt present time in the form of flashbacks. Consequently, ‘trauma time is discontinuous and non-linear’ and resists traditional notions of redemption.¹² The relationship between past and present, now and then is disrupted and blurred. This means that the past:

remains outstanding, in the sense that whatever happens in the present or future cannot undo or repair that past. It stands forever as judgment not only on notions of linear progress or even of sequential time, but also on our collective life story as a comedy.¹³

The comedic narrative depicting linear progressive time collapses under the weight of trauma. For Keshgegian, comedy fails. Moreover, traditional Christian narratives that flow from the comedic form fail to offer viable avenues for redemption and hope in light of the darkness and vacuum of traumatic black holes.

4. Is It Honest?

In the last section, I utilized the recent scholarship of John Caputo, Catherine Keller, and Flora Keshgegian to critique three pillars of traditional Christian theology that, I believe, hinder our theological understandings of experiences of evil. Contrary to traditional theodicies, I have no interest in protecting, justifying, or explaining God. Evil, as I understand it, is very theological but is not about God. It is about the people who experience evil. Therefore, I am only interested in providing a theological response that is helpful for mending the fragmentation that occurs as a result of evil. In this section, I will articulate why a dismantling of an ontological God, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, and a comedic redemption is necessary for overcoming the evil of childhood sexual abuse.

One of the most fundamental and pressing questions for survivors of childhood sexual abuse is echoed by other survivors of trauma. Survivors often ask where God was when they were being abused and why God didn’t intervene to stop the abuse. This question presupposes an ontological God who is able to and interested in preventing abuse. As long as our concept of God remains firmly rooted in notions of God as personal and ontological, human beings will always need to ask ‘where’ and ‘why.’ The problem is that God is not a being that lives in heaven. Caputo’s weakness of God and understanding of God as call and event is a helpful

and comforting alternative. In a way, Caputo's 'weak' God is more present in the midst of life experiences than a strong ontological deity. This God infuses all of life drawing it towards resistance, survival, wholeness, and integration. This understanding bypasses the sticky questions of 'where' and 'why' and diffuses the first given in the question of theodicy... 'If God is omnipotent.' God is not omnipotent because God's power is in the gentle power of persuasion and invitation rather than in the strong power of force and mandate.

The second part of the 'if' of theodicy centers on God's 'perfect goodness.' Survivors of childhood sexual abuse have a tendency to separate the world into strict categories of *good* and *bad*. As children, this form of splitting was a beneficial coping and defensive tool; however, a need to be *perfect as God is perfect* manifests itself later in self-destructive forms (e.g. self-injury, eating disorders, abusive relationships.)¹⁴ Moreover, the drive towards perfection is fueled on one hand by the need to atone for the *badness* of being abused and the desire to be redeemed on the other. Comedic renditions of redemption move survivors to a false theology of redemption that dissociates the survivor's spiritual identity from their bodily experiences. A theology of redemption with an eye and ear open to the effects of trauma provides a way for survivors of childhood sexual abuse to mend the spilt between all good (like God) and all bad (like their experience of abuse.) Providing space for traumatic experiences within our narratives of creation and redemption dismantles the need to proclaim the perfect goodness of God as an ideal to which human beings should aim. Additionally, acknowledging the reality of evil and trauma in the world allows a non-ontological God to call survivors of childhood sexual abuse to an understanding of redemption in their lives rather than in their afterlife.

Keller's re-interpretation of the creation narratives provides a fruitful vehicle for understanding the presence of evil in the world. The two creation narratives present creation as good yet potentially dangerous. The *yes-but* of Elohim and the Yahwist lay the foundation for understanding evil. Additionally, a renewed interpretation of *tehom* and *tohu wa-bohu* as the chaos and watery elements that Elohim formed and vivified allow survivors of sexual abuse to learn to tolerate ambiguity in life. Nothing is all good. Nothing is all bad. Everything has creative and destructive potential. Of course, the bad news is that sometimes individuals get caught in the midst of destruction, or evil. Finally, I want to conclude this section with a statement from Caputo that integrates several thoughts on omnipotence, evil, and responsibility.

Omnipotence leaves God holding the bag and forces us to offer lame excuses for God to the effect that evil is a little nothing that has leaked into being and that God is only responsible for the being, not the leak, while we, wicked things that we are, are almost all leak, so that a flood is a fitting way to end it all. We

keep shifting the blame between God and humankind, having not noticed that the creation narratives were providing for the situation all along by describing a built-in limit in things that was nobody's doing, even as it could be everybody's undoing, and even as it holds out the hope of everybody's redoing.¹⁵

While it may seem like an easy out to some, I find some comfort in the realization that sometimes shit happens. Evil exists in the world in spite of God's calling presence and our human hope for a redemption that makes sense of our experience. The only place to place responsibility for the reality of evil is in the hands of all of us. It is our theological, ethical, emotional, intellectual, and bodily task to live within the bounds set by the creation narratives in a way that fosters 'hope for everybody's redoing' without minimizing the 'undoing' that was done.

In conclusion, I ask 'What is evil?' Evil consists of the actions human beings engage in that lead to the fragmentation of another from their self, community, and God. Evil is primarily theological; but not in the sense that it is all about God. Evil must be addressed theologically because experiences of evil cut and fragment people to their very core. We must resist the temptation to flee from evil and find the courage to sit with survivors of evil in the midst of great darkness and fear in the hope of finding integration and light.

Notes

¹ N. Noddings, *Women and Evil*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989, pp. 104-105.

² S.T. Davis (ed), *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1981, pp. 2-4.

³ J. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2006.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶ C. Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*, Routledge Press, London, 2003.

⁷ Caputo, p. 59.

⁸ F. Keshgegian, *Time for Hope: Practices for Living in Today's World*, Continuum Press, New York, 2006.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ See Matthew 5:29.

¹⁵ Keshgegian, p. 76.

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The Metaphysics of Evil

Andrew Hryhorowych

Abstract

Most contemporary moral philosophy is secular. As a result, many ethicists do not use the term 'evil' in their work. Instead, they label actions as good, bad or neither good nor bad. Recently, the use of the term 'evil' has become increasingly common in the literature. In my chapter I argue against an aspect of a particular theory of evil. The most complete contemporary theory of evil is Claudia Card's The Atrocity Paradigm. In her book of the same name, Card defines evils as '[f]oreseeable intolerable harms produced by culpable wrongdoing.'¹ Card defines evils as events; intuitively, moral weight should be placed on actions, not events. Card emphasizes events because she feels it is important to focus on the victims, not the evildoers. Although her intent is admirable, I believe it is problematic. An example can clarify why this is so. If a person falls asleep at the wheel and hits and kills a pedestrian, the driver is culpable but the result is a tragedy, not an evil. If a person who is driving intentionally hits and kills a pedestrian, the person is not only culpable but also guilty of committing an evil act. Using Card's definition, both events would be considered evils. I argue that this line of reasoning is confused. A person's intention should play a role in whether or not her action is evil. In the first example, the driver does not intend to fall asleep at the wheel and as a result the action is merely bad (more specifically, driving while sleep deprived is bad: falling asleep is neither good nor bad). In the second example, the driver decides to murder the pedestrian: the action is evil. I believe emphasizing the actions that lead to the event is the correct way to understand evil.

Key Words: Evil, ethics, action, intention.

In contemporary analytic philosophy, the study of ethics is secular. In order to have a meaningful dialogue amongst all philosophers, theists and non-theists alike must put their personal beliefs aside and concentrate on what can be considered logically right or wrong, good or bad. Because of this, the topic of *evil* has, for the most part, been left to those who study the philosophy of religion. Recently, however, *evil* has been discussed by ethicists. In her book, *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil*, Claudia Card examines the meaning of the word 'evil' and puts forth a theory of evil.

Card defines evils as 'foreseeable intolerable harms produced by culpable wrongdoing.'² Evils, then, are events. People are not evil. Things are not evil. The effects of a person's actions are evil. For Card, 'the nature and severity of the harms, rather than perpetrators' psychological states, distinguish evils from

ordinary wrongs.’³ It is important to note that Card does not deny that an evildoer’s psychological state at the time of her action plays a role in distinguishing evils from ordinary wrongs.⁴ But the focus of her theory is on the victims⁵ of evils, not on the evildoer. The impact left by the wrongdoer does the most work in determining whether or not the event caused is an evil. I find this problematic. Before examining this further, I will spend some time to clarify Card’s view.

Card’s definition is supposed to be uncontroversial. The fact that evils must be *foreseeable* is supposed to mean that natural events, such as hurricanes and earthquakes, are not evil. In other words, in order for an event to be evil, it must be a foreseeable product of one’s actions. Hurricanes, tsunamis, and earthquakes are undoubtedly tragedies, but not all tragedies are evils. Now, if the state knows that a certain natural disaster is likely and fails to take the necessary precautions, this lack of preparation can be considered evil. But the disaster itself is not.

Requiring that evils must be the result of *culpable wrongdoing* is also important. It ensures that an evil cannot happen accidentally. To be more precise, it ensures that evils are the result of intentional actions.⁶ This does not mean that the perpetrator of an evil must intend the harm. It simply means that the perpetrator had the power to act otherwise and she should have acted otherwise. Suppose a person, after a night at the bar, decides to drive home despite having had too many drinks. The drunk driver fails to see a pedestrian and hits and kills her. The driver may not intend to hit the pedestrian but the driver is still culpable. Driving while drunk is an intentional action; as a result, the killing of the pedestrian can be considered an evil. An argument can be made that such an event should be considered bad, not evil. But what is important at this point is to see that such events can be considered evils by Card’s definition.

The most important part of Card’s definition of evil is the fact that events require both wrongdoing and harm in order to be considered evils; ‘neither wrongdoing nor suffering alone is sufficient for an evil.’⁷ She is right to argue that an immoral action is not necessarily an evil action; equating the two is a mistake. Many, if not most, immoral actions are bad but not evil. As Card says, ‘[m]any wrongdoings are trivial. Evils never are...’⁸ Some believe this view is mistaken and make the following argument: that something is an evil can be demonstrated by the fact that it violates a moral principle. This is a mistake. It is too simplistic to take a Kantian approach and say that ‘one ought not to lie’ is a moral principle that, when broken, constitutes an evil.

Lies can be evil, good, bad or neither good nor bad. If my grandmother gives me an ugly sweater for Christmas and asks me if I like it, lying to her is not an evil act; it is an act of good. It makes her happy. If I run into an acquaintance on the way to class and she asks me how I’m doing, I may very well say that I’m doing well even if I am not doing particularly well at that time. This lie is neither good nor bad. If I am having a heated argument with a friend, I may lie and say things just to upset her. This is an example of a lie being bad but not evil. Finally, a lie

can be an act of evil if it produces an intolerable harm, a harm that is extremely difficult to overcome. These types of lies are prevalent during wars. For instance, in order to give herself a better chance to live, one neighbour might give another faulty information, information which ensures that the second neighbour will die, but which might give the first neighbour more time to escape. Evil lies are also prevalent in what Card calls ‘terrorism in the home.’⁹ Abusive parents often tell numerous lies that deeply scar their children. The point of these examples is to show that a theory of evil cannot rely on wrongdoing alone. What is slightly less clear is whether the existence of intolerable harm is necessary for an event to be evil. In what follows I will argue that intolerable harm is not necessary in order for an event to be evil. But first, I will return to the issue of Card’s focusing on victims of evils rather than on the actions of the perpetrators of evils.

We are now ready to see why Card’s focus on victims is problematic. Consider the following example: a person decides she wants to build a bomb in order to blow up a high school. She builds her bomb and finds a way to hide it in the basement of the school. But suppose she made a mistake while building the bomb. The bomb never goes off. Furthermore, the bomb is never found. There is no panic. No one is emotionally traumatized. No one is hurt in any way, physically or emotionally. According to Card’s definition of evil, the woman building the bomb did not commit an evil action. Building the bomb makes the woman culpable for the results of the bomb’s explosion or discovery. This makes her action, the building of the bomb, at least bad, but since there was no intolerable harm, there was no event that could be called evil. This conclusion seems wrong. If a person intends to do intolerable harm to one or more people, that person intends to do evil. Once one begins taking steps to carry out this evil intention, it seems to make sense that one has started acting *evilly*. But at what point does one’s acting evilly become an evil action? This requires some further attention.

In G. E. M. Anscombe’s landmark book *Intention*, Anscombe examines the groundwork that must exist in order for intentional action to take place. She considers an example that is useful for our purposes:

A man is pumping water into the cistern which supplies the drinking water of a house. Someone has found a way of systematically contaminating the source with a deadly cumulative poison whose effects are unnoticeable until they can no longer be cured. [The man who has poisoned the water supply has] revealed the...fact about the poison to the man who is pumping.¹⁰

Suppose the people who live in the house end up drinking the water and dying as a result. Anscombe asks, ‘[w]hen did our man poison them?’¹¹ Note that by ‘our man,’ Anscombe means the man doing the pumping.

Anscombe's question is an important one. If we can figure out when exactly the man poisoned the family, we'll be able to point to it and say, '[h]e caused them to die at this time and is therefore guilty.' If we cannot point out when the man poisoned the family, then the most we can say is that he acted evilly. And we want to say that he committed an evil act, that is, we want to point to an action that shows him doing the poisoning. Now, it would be odd to say that he poisoned them when they drank the water; the man might be doing something completely unrelated at that time. It is also not apparent that the man poisoned them when he performed the act of pumping the water. After all, while the man is pumping it is still possible that the people will not drink the water. If they do not drink the water, the act of pumping cannot be the same as the act of poisoning them. Anscombe concludes that the act of pumping can be described as the act of 'poisoning the household.'¹²

I believe a better way to put it would be to say that the act of pumping caused the poisoning of the people living in the house. By saying the pumping caused the poisoning of the people, instead of equating it with the poisoning itself, the idea of culpability remains while still allowing for an explanation of how, in certain cases, the people living in the house may not be poisoned. If they drink the water, the pumping caused their being poisoned. If they do not, poisoning did not take place; it was an attempted poisoning. So technically speaking, the man pumping the water did not poison the people living in the house. His actions allowed them to be poisoned; he laid the necessary groundwork for the poisoning, but the people poisoned themselves by unknowingly drinking poisoned water. It should be noted that the man who poisoned the water is just as culpable as the man who pumps the water. He also laid the necessary groundwork for the poisoning.

Let us now return to my example of the woman attempting to bomb the school. Using Card's definition of evil, the bomber's failed attempt does not constitute an evil. Since no harm was done, the event fails to meet Card's criteria. But using my interpretation, the action is evil. And this seems right. The woman attempted to bomb the school; she attempted to kill everyone inside; she attempted to cause intolerable harm. She laid the groundwork necessary for the evil event to take place. Even though the evil event does not take place, her action is evil.¹³ Card's mistake, I think, is not allowing intended harm to play enough of a role. For Card, intended harm is only relevant if it shows that the perpetrator is culpable for her actions. I believe making this adjustment makes Card's theory more tenable.

It must also be noted that intended harm alone is not enough to label an action evil. Suppose I wish to do great harm to my friend. My friend happens to build and cherish model ships in bottles. I decide that the best way to do great harm to my friend is to grab her favourite model and smash it on the ground. Suppose I do so. Suppose further that she is indeed angry, but not nearly as upset as I hoped she would be. She enjoys building model ships but does not feel strongly enough about them to be devastated if I break one. This is a case where I intend to do evil,

manage to carry out the act, but fail miserably in determining the best way to cause an intolerable harm. My action cannot be considered evil since there is not even a potential victim of an intolerable harm. There is only a victim of a minor harm, making my action bad. There must be a victim or potential victim of an intolerable harm if the action is to be considered evil.

The actions that lead to an evil event should be emphasized when discussing evil. They cause the event. Another example illustrates this point further. If a person falls asleep at the wheel and hits and kills a pedestrian, the driver is culpable but the result is a tragedy, not an evil. If a person who is driving intentionally hits and kills a pedestrian, the person is not only culpable but also guilty of committing an evil act. Using Card's definition, both events would be considered evils. I believe that this line of reasoning is confused. A person's intention should play a role in whether or not her action is evil. In the first example, the driver does not intend to fall asleep at the wheel and, as a result, the action is merely bad (more specifically, driving while sleep deprived is bad: falling asleep is neither good nor bad). In the second example, the driver decides to murder the pedestrian: the action is evil.

One may object by arguing that there is no salient difference between driving while sleep deprived and driving while drunk. In the examples discussed earlier, the objector would say that we should either find both actions evil or both actions merely bad. And the objector would have a point. There seems to be something wrong with the theory if one action is evil (causing death due to driving drunk) while the other just bad (causing death due to falling asleep at the wheel). But this is a problem with deciding where the line is between bad and evil. I find that, intuitively, falling asleep at the wheel and causing the death of a pedestrian is bad but not evil. I am less sure about the drunk driver, although reason seems to dictate that I must also find that action bad if I find falling asleep at the wheel bad. I am willing to concede here. But the point I was making with the drunk driver example is that Card's theory allows intentional actions that have unforeseen results to be labelled evil. Perhaps driving drunk and accidentally killing a pedestrian is not evil. But bombing an embassy and accidentally destroying a nearby school, killing everyone inside, surely is evil. An adequate theory must account for such cases. Although trying to establish where exactly the line is between bad and evil is an important and interesting project, it is beyond the scope of this chapter.

I have argued that Claudia Card's theory of evil missteps by focusing on the victims of atrocities rather than on the evildoers. Her theory requires a victim. I believe the existence of potential victims is enough to label an action evil. Care must be taken not to put too much weight on intention; if I intend to kill someone but fail to take action for whatever reason, it would be very odd to say I acted evilly. Thinking evil thoughts should not be considered evil. But requiring that an action causes harm if it is to be called evil seems to be problematic.

Notes

¹ C. Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000, p. 3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵ Card prefers to use the term ‘victim’ rather than ‘survivor’ out of respect for those victims that do not survive atrocities. Those that do not survive do not lack some special quality such as courage: they were simply not as lucky as the survivors.

⁶ It should be noted that in action theory a failure to act when one is free to act is generally considered an intentional action. For the purposes of this chapter, I will assume that this commonly held belief is correct.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁰ G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, p. 23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹³ Actions are, of course, also events. What differentiates my view from Card’s is the type of event I call evil. I feel only actions should be labelled evil; she does not.

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You've got to Change Your Evil Ways: The Limits on Forgiving Evil

David White

Abstract

A discussion of forgiveness raises a whole variety of issues. In this chapter I will comment briefly on some, merely note others, and focus on one question: Are there acts so evil that they justify being called 'unforgivable'? I will argue that as a theoretical question the answer is 'no,' while as a practical question the answer sometimes is likely to be 'yes.' But before getting to this question, there are a few preliminary questions we need to address.

Key Words: Forgiveness, wrongdoing, acknowledgement, apologies.

1. What Exactly does it Mean for One Person to Forgive Another?

This is itself a complex and controversial question. In fact, some have even suggested that there is no single defining description of forgiveness and instead that there might be many similar, but distinct things it could be.¹ In my view forgiveness involves two elements. The first element is ceasing to use a particular action (or series of actions) of someone as a basis for a moral evaluation of them. It is important to note that this is not the same as expressing our approval of that action or actions. When, for example, a former petty criminal reforms himself and dedicates his life to helping kids stay out of trouble we can judge him to be a good person *now* while still saying he was a bad person *then* and his past actions were wrong. Forgiveness merely means our present judgement of his character is no longer based on his past crimes.

The second element of forgiveness is ceasing to base a negative emotional reaction (such as anger or resentment) on a particular action (or series of actions) of someone. Now this element might be controversial because our emotions are not so simply under our control. I can try to stop being angry at someone, but it generally cannot be achieved through a simple act of will. But it does seem reasonable to say of someone who has ceased to be angry or resentful toward someone who has wronged them that in some sense they have forgiven, even when they wish to hold on to those emotions. Conversely, a person who cannot let go emotionally might say, 'I want to forgive you, but I can't'. There might, then, be an involuntary aspect to forgiveness. But in general, if one genuinely has ceased to morally evaluate a person based on some past action, one's negative emotions are likely to change as well.

2. What Sorts of Actions Require Forgiveness?

Whether or not someone has been forgiven is only a pertinent question in certain kinds of situations. There are two basic circumstances in which the issue of

forgiveness arises. (1) When one person intentionally harms another person in some way or intentionally morally transgresses against them. I include in this category cases where one foresees harmful consequences to one's actions and, whether one *wants* them to come about or not, one proceeds to act anyway. (2) When one person intentionally puts another person at risk for harm even when no harm results. So, for example, if I try to throw a rock as close as I can to your valuable stained glass window without hitting it and I don't hit it, you might legitimately be angry at me and judge me negatively, thus making the question of whether you forgive me a relevant one.

Sometimes we talk about situations where harm is caused unintentionally as ones where forgiveness is relevant. If I accidentally knock over a valuable vase of yours breaking it, we might expect me to apologize and ask for forgiveness that you can then give. But this is a mistaken use of forgiveness. We do quite naturally feel badly when we cause harm, even when it is unintentional. We socially expect people to express those feelings and hope the person harmed will respond in a positive way. Our desire to have and maintain a positive social environment justifies such exchanges. Offering an apology and asking for forgiveness, then, can be one way of making clear how badly we feel. By taking on a greater responsibility than one actually has, one firmly commits oneself to maintaining the social fabric. But if one person inadvertently steps on another person's toes and then asks for forgiveness, we take 'forget about it' as a more appropriate response than 'I forgive you.' Real forgiveness only applies to situations where harm is expected or intended.

3. What Makes a Person Deserving of Forgiveness?

Before I try to answer that question, let me make it clear what I take the question *not* to be asking. We can ask the question, 'When is it appropriate for a wronged person to forgive?' But there might be cases where it is appropriate to forgive even when forgiveness is not deserved.² Holding on to one's negative emotions can be destructive. Feeling the need to let go of the past and move on with one's life can be powerful reasons to forgive a wrongdoer even when that person does not deserve it. Forgiveness, then, can be a means to prevent additional harms from being caused by the original offence. But conversely, there might be circumstances where a person is deserving of forgiveness, yet the person who was wronged is not capable of offering it.³ In fact, to expect such a person to offer forgiveness could even result in compounding the harms they have received. So it could well be the case in some circumstances that forgiveness is deserved, but yet it is acceptable to withhold it. Thus both questions of when it is appropriate to forgive and when it is inappropriate not to forgive are distinct from the question of when forgiveness has been earned.

So now let's answer the question: What makes a person deserving of forgiveness? There are five conditions that must be met. Firstly, the person needing forgiveness must accept the fact that they have done something wrong and are in need of forgiveness. Ideally the person will not only accept it, but acknowledge it

in some way. That acknowledgment might be to the person who was wronged, it might be public, or it might be to some other person or people. Depending on the specific circumstances involved, only some of these alternatives might be possible and appropriate.

Secondly, the person needing forgiveness must offer a sincere apology. This is distinct from acknowledgment, since a person can acknowledge wrong without apologizing (for example, when one is not responsible for the wrong). Also, while an apology is typically best directed to the person wronged, acknowledgment to a wider audience might be required.

Thirdly, to deserve forgiveness one must experience an appropriate affective response, such as guilt, shame, embarrassment, remorse, or even anger at oneself. Such feelings need not be all-consuming nor need they be permanent. In fact, forgiving oneself requires abandoning them. But to deserve forgiveness from anyone, one must first experience some such affect.

Fourthly, to deserve forgiveness one must take all reasonable steps to repair any damage that has been done or to compensate for it. If I steal \$100 from you, I should offer to pay it back. If I upset you by insulting you, perhaps I should do something to make you feel happy as compensation. Where wrongs are more serious, compensation might include accepting legal punishments. The person wronged might choose to reject offers of repair or compensation for many reasons, so deserving forgiveness only requires that a sincere offer is made, not that repair or compensation actually takes place.

Fifthly, to deserve forgiveness one must seriously consider what one can do to prevent repeating the same transgression again and take steps to ensure that it does not happen again. If I tend to say things that hurt people's feelings, then I need to at least try to minimize it happening again in order to deserve forgiveness. If a husband has committed adultery, then to earn forgiveness he must at minimum sincerely resolve not to do so again and avoid situations where he feels he can be tempted.

One significant worry about the five requirements for deserving forgiveness is that most of them can be difficult to measure. Whether or not one has acknowledged their wrong and taken steps to repair damage or compensate for it might be easy to determine. But whether the appropriate emotional responses have been experienced, whether apologies offered are sincere, and whether or not someone has really resolved to change their ways are all much more difficult to judge. As a result a person who is just conning us might appear to deserve forgiveness. Similarly, a person who really is deserving of forgiveness might not be so judged because of doubts about his sincerity. Those doubts might be justified by the person's past conduct, but they can still lead us to error. And whichever way we err, we can easily make mistakes in trying to apply the criteria offered here. But rather than see this problem as a reason to rethink the criteria, I would argue that it is simply an unfortunate, but inevitable, consequence of them. So instead of trying to find ways to minimize the possibility of erroneous judgements of forgiveness-worthiness, we should ask how to deal with the fact of uncertainty here.

A general rule of thumb that seems reasonable to apply here is to err on the side of judging *against* a person's deserving forgiveness. This is especially true in cases where the wrong reflects some element of dishonesty in the person's conduct. While it is unfortunate when a person who is sincerely remorseful is disbelieved, the simple fact is that their past actions have justified the scepticism of others. It is merely one of the consequences of their actions for which they are responsible. And since giving the benefit of the doubt to them makes it too easy for a victim to be re-victimized, it is reasonable to proceed cautiously.

Furthermore, the frequency of a person's need for forgiveness is a reasonable factor in how much certainty we should require. When a person frequently commits offences against others requiring forgiveness, it becomes reasonable to doubt that they really feel badly about them or that they have done anything to try to minimize them. This is not a foolproof test, but it is a reasonable general consideration. Additionally, the severity of harm that a person's actions caused should influence our readiness to determine that someone deserves forgiveness. The more serious the harms, the more cautious we should be about accepting assurances of remorse and change. The consequences of too quickly forgiving someone who perpetrates great harms can be severe, and so caution is warranted.

There is, however, one consideration that might make us prone to more quickly accept that a person is worthy of forgiveness. This is when the transgression is not among the most severe sort and where one has an existing positive relationship with the person. Even if there is some reason to not be entirely convinced that a friend feels all that badly that he missed your birthday, you might accept his apology and offer forgiveness because the relationship you have has great value. In such a case, one might prefer to give a friend the benefit of the doubt than risk the friendship.

4. Conclusion

We can now return to the question with which we began: Are there acts so evil that they justify being called 'unforgivable'? If a person acknowledges their wrong, offers sincere apologies, feels appropriately badly, offers compensation, and takes steps to ensure the wrong is not repeated, is there any wrong that would be so evil that it cannot be forgiven? As we have previously discussed, there might be good reasons that someone who has been seriously wronged is emotionally not capable of forgiving. And it also can be the case that there are usually lingering doubts in the worst cases about the sincerity of apologies and reports of feelings. But it seems reasonable to say the person is deserving of forgiveness in cases where those are sincere even when the person wronged cannot grant forgiveness.

If any human actions can be called evil, then one would presume that torture, murder, and acts of genocide would be among them. People who have engaged in such actions, especially if they have done so repeatedly over a long period of time, might become psychologically incapable of remorse. There is good reason to think that sociopaths, people who generally lack any concern for the wellbeing of others, cannot come to develop the appropriate feelings. And when values like racial

hatred that is so extreme that it allows you to kill without a second thought become deeply accepted, one wonders what kind of transformation would have to take place in order for such a person to feel badly for what he has done. Arguably fully accepting that what one did was wrong would be too horrible to believe. Who could live with himself believing that he had done such terrible wrongs? But it is important to note that these are all observations that lead us to believe some people are not capable of becoming someone who deserves forgiveness, not that the actions themselves are unforgivable. And insofar as that is true, it means that in principle no action, no matter how evil, is unforgivable, but as a practical matter some people are.

There is one concern I want to raise about this conclusion. While I do believe that there are people incapable of the transformation that would be necessary to deserve forgiveness, I want to caution against too quickly judging people to be in this category. Karla Faye Tucker murdered two people in Texas while robbing them. She later claimed to have so enjoyed the killing that she had multiple orgasms while doing it. She was sentenced to death for the crime. In jail, she became a born-again Christian. By all accounts, she was a changed woman. Many religious and political leaders, including Pope John Paul II, asked for her sentence to be commuted. They, and she, agreed that a life sentence was appropriate in this case, but that forgiveness was deserved as well.

Stanley Tookie Williams was a founder of the Crips gang in Los Angeles. He committed many crimes and was eventually arrested and sentenced to death for the murder of two people. While in jail, he renounced the Crips and became an anti-gang activist. He focused on efforts to keep kids from joining gangs, including writing children's book for that purpose. He was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts.

But perhaps the most extreme and moving case is that of Ishmael Beah. For three years he committed countless acts of violence in the Sierra Leone civil war. These included torture and murder. He did so without feeling anything for his victims suffering and often enjoyed watching them die. At the age of fifteen he was taken from the conflict by UNICEF and his road to transformation began. He was brought to the United States and given a stable home. Eventually, he went to college and has now written a book about his experience as a child soldier. Yes, he was just a boy when he did these things, but we know all too well that fifteen-year-olds can perpetrate great acts of violence. One also might wonder just how much longer he would have had to stay with the soldiers before changing would have become impossible. Extreme transformations might be the exception rather than the rule, but there are many cases to lead us to believe that we can never know when they still might be possible.

Notes

¹ M. Walker, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations After Wrong-Doing*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006.

² E. Cose, *Bone to Pick: Of Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Reparation, and Revenge*, Atria, New York, 2004.

³ J. Murphy, *Getting Even: Forgiveness and its Limits*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003 and Walker, op. cit.

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Part 2

Construction of an Evil Identity

Building the Rainbow Nation: The Practice of Transformation and Reconciliation

Ursula Scheidegger

Abstract

South Africa is an example of a relatively successful transition. Comprehensive change was attained without the breakdown of law and order, the decay of institutional capacity, and the loss of state control. The pervasive transformation process not only promoted new values and ethical and moral standards but also rearranged social hierarchies and the access to power and resources. However, the various population groups are affected by the changes in very different ways. Worldviews, social barriers, and prejudices are more resilient to change; they were shaped by history, state ideology, and socialisation. These personal experiences influence perceptions of personal realities and opinions of other population groups. Due to the magnitude of inequality, the empowerment of one group comes at the expense of another. Inevitable biases in resource allocation and legislative measures in favour of previously disadvantaged population groups emphasize race and perpetuate racial categories. This is a challenging environment for overcoming the evils of the past, for reconciliation and the accommodation of diversity, and for building a just and free society, as depicted in the metaphor of the rainbow nation.

Key Words: Apartheid, democratisation, diversity, inequality, multi-culturalism, race, reconciliation, segregation, social justice, transition.

South Africa is an example of a relatively successful transition. Comprehensive change was attained without the breakdown of law and order, the decay of institutional capacity, and the loss of state control. The first democratic elections in April 1994 marked the formal end of apartheid. However, the democratisation process does not result in the transformation of society. On the contrary, the legacies of the past are reflected in three patterns of fragmentation with different expressions of inequality: racial segregation, socio-economic divisions, and intercultural disparities, which are the consequences of different traditions and lifestyles.¹ Hence governmental policies and programmes not only aim at restoring justice and rights and promoting a democratic culture, but also at reconciling alienated populations.

This chapter discusses achievements and limitations of democratisation, a process that required compromises from the apartheid government and the liberation movement. It does not intend to discredit the merits of the South African transition. Rather the chapter provides a critical reflection on social dynamics around transformation and change because the various population groups are

affected by the transition in very different ways. Its empirical part is based on fieldwork in formerly white neighbourhoods in Johannesburg, which experienced considerable demographic changes in the past years. Interviews were conducted with representatives of different community-based organisations, institutions of faith, educational structures, political and administrative personnel, and individual residents. Questions focused on desegregation, socio-economic changes in particular governmental strategies of redistribution, and the accommodation of cultural diversity. The chapter argues that perceptions of a threatening socio-economic environment and insecurity obstruct and undermine the reconciliation and integration process and contribute to low levels of tolerance and trust. References to the different racial groups are done in the terminology commonly used in South Africa.

Transition processes are characterized by uncertainty, instability, the asymmetric distribution of risks and benefits, the politicisation of demands and grievances, a power vacuum, popular mobilisation, and high emotions. The value of the status quo is low and deteriorating. As a consequence, new values are shaped and new social hierarchies and positions of influence and power emerge in response to the new political and social order.² In South Africa, the apartheid government and the liberation movement played an important role during this process by negotiating new political arrangements, by mediating conflicts, by promoting diversity as a national resource as depicted in the metaphor of the Rainbow Nation, by addressing the legacies of apartheid, in particular the different manifestations of inequality, and by reconciling the past with the present through the institution of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

During transitions there are tensions between competing social groups, those promoting change in contrast to those trying to obstruct or prevent it. Hence, the various social structures contribute in a constructive or subversive way to the mediation of new political, economic, and social arrangements and are affected by these changes in different ways. Fundamental value changes also result in new ethical and moral standards and modified perceptions of right and wrong, and in this context people have different visions of entitlements, responsibilities, personal freedom.³ Furthermore, there are no clear-cut boundaries between the old and the new; there are continuities from the past and new spaces opening in the future.⁴ The changing environment promotes new identities, re-arranges social relations and hierarchies, and people have to make adjustments. In contrast, worldviews, values, prejudices, and attitudes are more resilient to change and are shaped by history, state ideology, socialisation, and personal experiences. They influence perceptions of personal realities, behavioural patterns, and the quality of relations between the different population groups.

Additional challenges contributing to social tensions and conflicting interests during the transition included the contrasting personal experiences of victims and beneficiaries of apartheid. Dysfunctional structures of socialisation are the legacy

of migrant work, apartheid's Group Areas Act and today's HIV/AIDS crisis. The continuous presence of violence and death and the intolerable scale of crime affect levels of trust and tolerance and perpetuate racial prejudices. Strictly enforced social hierarchies and boundaries and racial segregation during apartheid still prevent the acknowledgement of the interdependence between the various groups of society and the development of a sense of social responsibility towards less privileged people across social divisions.⁵ Due to the magnitude of inequality and slow economic growth and hence scarcity of resources, gains by one group are made at the expense of another. The imperative to overcome racially defined privileges and burdens and the necessity for redressing emphasize and politicize race and ethnicity.⁶ Finally, there is still little belief in the effectiveness of the state and its democratic institutions because of the current imbalance of power, inefficiency, corruption, and incidences of arrogant leadership.

I focus in this chapter on the institution of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and its mandate to reconcile a divided nation during the uncertain and emotionally charged environment of the transition. During the TRC hearings, perpetrators of human rights violations and politically motivated crimes were requested to publicly disclose their offences in exchange for amnesty. Personal stories of victims told in the safe space created by the TRC were considered to help healing wounds by validating individual experiences of previously voiceless people.⁷ The focus was on forgiveness as the morally superior option than the punishment of perpetrators and it was assumed that this process would eventually lead to reconciliation. In addition, voluntary confessions and repentance by perpetrators and forgiveness by victims would contribute to establishing a new moral order and reconstructing nationhood under the guidance of the TRC.⁸ However, is there a causal connection and is reconciliation the inevitable outcome of truth telling?⁹

The mandate of the TRC was narrowly defined and investigations only dealt with political conflict and violence; neither systemic exploitation nor structural violence, for example, poverty and the denial of basic rights and dignity, were comprehensively addressed. On the contrary, the vast majority of corporate representatives testifying at the business hearings of the TRC denied the fact that business benefited from apartheid.¹⁰ In addition, a wider mandate of the TRC also exploring institutionalized discrimination would have permitted to confront the denial of moral complicity by beneficiaries of apartheid.¹¹

Impunity for perpetrators begs the question of which measures would be in the best interest of the victims in order to rectify the evils of the past and restore justice. The TRC recommended various forms of reparations; however, it was the responsibility of the government to implement them. A once-off payment below the recommendations of the TRC benefited a minority of victims who were able to present their cases to the TRC and did not apply to victims of structural violence, discrimination, and exploitation. In addition, due to the emphasis on forgiveness

the TRC underestimated the expectations of victims for monetary compensation.¹² Arguably, persecution and punishment of perpetrators do not serve the immediate needs of victims¹³ nor are reparations a compensation for loss and hardship. However, the encouragement of symbolic restitution and the emphasis on forgiveness demanded another sacrifice by victims often in a context where perpetrators showed little repentance or refused as former agents of the state to assume personal responsibility.¹⁴ Furthermore, comprehensive reparations would not only benefit victims of apartheid but also – as Wole Soyinka argues – ‘serve as a cogent critique of history and thus a potent restraint on its repetition’¹⁵ and involve the acceptance of a moral obligation by beneficiaries in a context of little evidence of remorse by perpetrators and thus also no credible transformation.¹⁶ Otherwise the amnesty granted to perpetrators in the name of reconciliation does a disservice to the victims the TRC claims to present.¹⁷

Another important issue concerns the question whether the imperative of reconciliation as a condition for nation-building and the integration of alienated populations was promoted at the expense of justice, in particular social justice.¹⁸ How valid is the assumption that reconciliation would result in the promotion of new values and the restoration of the rule of law and the respect for the legitimacy of the law in the face of arrangements that let political assassins get away with murder?¹⁹ Furthermore, the institutional context of the TRC did not provide a built-in mechanism of mandatory reciprocity.²⁰ In contrast, social justice would reach out to ordinary members of society²¹ and is an imperative stipulation of the new political, economic, and social order because it is the only way to establish a society that is distinctively different from the past.²²

Even if the contributions of the TRC to reconciliation and the integration of alienated populations were less satisfying than its supporters and the international community would like to claim, it started a critical process that has to continue, because the past still affects values, prejudices, and attitudes and social relations are burdened with our history.²³ The TRC’s limited mandate and the impossibility of addressing structural and systemic aspects of apartheid and moral complicity contribute to the perpetuation of practices and attitudes rooted in the past. Hence it is also necessary to consider if the government was able to rule against powerful interest in society during the negotiations of the transition²⁴ or if reconciliation masks the continuation of privileges.²⁵

At the beginning of this chapter, I argued that a threatening socio-economic environment and insecurity affect levels of trust and tolerance, obstruct the reconciliation and integration process, and influence the quality of human relations. The incomplete transition process is reflected in the scale of inequality and the proportion of underprivileged and destitute South Africans, structural conditions that contribute to crime and violence and to risk behaviour and deviance of desperately poor and hopeless people with nothing to lose. As the interviews show, privileged population groups consider the social time-bomb a threat. However,

they are reluctant to acknowledge that today's social conditions are a legacy of the past and deny as beneficiaries of apartheid moral complicity because they were not in favour of apartheid but also not in a position to change anything. The way reconciliation is promoted by the TRC makes it easy to refuse responsibility and repress guilt, but does not resolve insecurity and threats emanating from social conditions that have not changed. It influences the quality of social relations and the ways people respond to desegregation, redistribution, and the accommodation of cultural diversity.

Despite the abolition of the Group Areas Act nearly twenty years ago, racial segregation continues. The trend is for people who can afford it to move out of the township, in contrast nobody moves from formerly white residential areas into the townships. The uprising and violence in the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s still contribute to a negative image of the townships. During the interviews, many white respondents admit that they avoid entering the townships or have never visited one. On the other hand, there is a general assumption that the value of properties drops if the number of black residents in an area increases and white people move away, some of the formerly white neighbourhoods have today 80 to 90 per cent black residents. Furthermore, crime contributes to low levels of trust and insecurity. Most of the crime, in particular violent crime, is committed in the townships and often among people known to each other; alcohol and social tensions are the biggest problem. However, popular perceptions of crime perpetuate racial stereotypes by considering whites the victims and blacks the perpetrators. In fact, kingpins of organized crime and syndicates are usually not black. Insecurity also contributes to the increase of gated communities; many respondents consider the limited access to residential areas an adequate strategy against crime. However, gated communities not only produce insular subjectivities, but also perpetuate prejudices and paranoid attitudes towards strangers.²⁶

Socio-economic divisions are difficult to address because the various population groups differ in their expectations, priorities, and demands on the state, there are conflicting interests between disadvantaged groups advocating change and privileged groups reluctant to give up advantages. More equity in public spending and the necessity to overcome the legacies of the past, for example, the backlog in infrastructural investment in formerly disadvantaged areas changed priorities in the allocation of public resources. In addition, a system of cross-subsidies obliges wealthy communities to support poorer communities. Hence, many respondents complained about investment that only favours disadvantaged communities at the expense of formerly white neighbourhoods, where the infrastructure is decaying. For example, a respondent stated that they pay an incredibly high amount of taxes, but their money is subsequently used elsewhere. One of the politicians stated in the interview that there are concerns about vulnerable groups, but the sharing of wealth is a difficult issue or, as one administrator argued, that everyone agrees upon the necessity to catch up with

development deficits, but in reality nobody is willing to contribute. There is no solidarity with the poor, and nobody acknowledges that the plight of the poor is still a result of apartheid.

Cultural diversity is a feature of modern societies; however, in South Africa, racial segregation limited the exposure to and interactions between the different population groups, their culture, and ways of life. In today's climate of insecurity people are not very courageous or adventurous and rather socialize with people coming from a similar background and are thus more predictable in their values, behaviour, and attitudes than people coming from a different context. The family size is a matter of contention, as respondents argue, because in contrast to the prevalence of nuclear families among whites, African families often include three generations and in addition, provide accommodation for family members from the countryside studying or working in town. Overcrowding contributes not only to rising noise levels but also causes property values to drop. In addition, it is difficult to assess who lives in the area and who does not belong to the area and might be a criminal, which increases insecurity. Different respondents showed little hope that integration is possible, because the history of the various population groups is *utterly different* and questions the possibility of bridging these cultural divides. Festivities and celebrations are another cause of contention; besides the noise levels, they are attended by unmanageable crowds of people. Further conflict arises from traditional practices and customs; for example, the slaughter of animals. On the other hand, various respondents stated that they do not mind if their neighbours belong to another population groups but often there are expectations that newcomers have to adapt to the existing way of life and customs of the neighbourhood.

Usually, at the end of the interview, I asked about personal experiences of change, a question critically highlighting the dilemma of the transformation. In neighbourhoods that were during apartheid reserved for whites only and which have since the abolishment of the Group Areas Act experienced substantial demographic changes, new residents of colour affirm that their lives have improved, while most white residents claim that the neighbourhood is deteriorating.

To conclude, did the TRC succeed in bridging social divides and reconciling alienated populations with different expectations, hopes, and visions of the future? The exposure and condemnation of human rights violations and atrocities committed by individuals and collective state agents is an achievement. However, an extended mandate including structural violence and systemic discrimination and exploitation would have the TRC allowed to confront moral complicity and vindicate a moral obligation to rectify the injustices of the past and to put an end to practices and attitudes rooted in the past. Profound reconciliation transcends the symbolic embrace of perpetrators by their victims and requires many sacrifices not only from victims but also from beneficiaries, and thus promotes more awareness

of the interdependence of all groups in society. In this respect, the TRC was not outspoken enough and failed to challenge powerful interests in society. In the long run social justice is less costly than increasing measures of protection and defence against a threatening, instable, and insecure socio-economic environment. Furthermore, social justice contributes to stability and social cohesion, conditions that promote tolerance and trust, the virtues of the Rainbow Nation.

Notes

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² M. Diani, 'Social Capital and Movement Outcome', *Beyond Tocqueville: Civil Society and the Social Capital Debate in Comparative Perspective*, University Press of New England, Hanover, NH, 2001, p. 209.

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⁴ V. Taylor, 'Epilogue: Contesting the Terrain in Paradoxical Landscapes?', *Voices of the Transition*, E. Pieterse and F. Meintjies (eds), Heinemann, Sandown, 2004, p. 354.

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⁸ T. Lodge, *Politics in South Africa, from Mandela to Mbeki*, D. Philip (ed), Cape Town, New Africa Books, Oxford, 2002, p. 178.

⁹ M. Mamdani, *When Does Reconciliation Turn into a Denial of Justice?*, HSRC Publisher, Pretoria, 1998, p. 13.

¹⁰ S. Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa 1652-2002*, University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2002, p. 66.

¹¹ Lodge, op. cit., p. 200.

¹² G. Simpson, 'Tell No Lies, Claim No Easy Victories: A Brief Evaluation of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission', D. Posel and G. Simpson (eds), op. cit., p. 243.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

¹⁴ G. Slovo, 'Making History: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission', *OpenDemocracy*, 5 December 2002, Viewed 28 January 2007, http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-africa_democracy/article_818.jsp.

¹⁵ W. Soyinka, *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 1999, p. 83.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80 and p. 29.

¹⁷ Posel and Simpson, *op. cit.* p. 11.

¹⁸ Mamdani, *op. cit.*, p. 12; Simpson, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

¹⁹ Posel and Simpson, *op. cit.* p. 11.

²⁰ Soyinka, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

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²³ K. Kometsi, 'The Lens of the Self in Black and Coloured: A Reflective Description', *Psycho-Analytic Psychotherapy in South Africa*, Vol. 12, n° 1, 2004, pp. 37-51.

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²⁶ E. McLaughlin and J. Muncie, 'Walled Cities: Surveillance, Regulation and Segregation', *Unruly Cities?*, S. Pile, C. Brook, G. Mooney (eds), Routledge, London and New York, 1999, p. 121.

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Hate Communities in Cyber Space

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Abstract

We studied samples of messages of discussion groups in the cyber space initiated or developed to express hate. We found out that the online groups' discussions actively centred on blame game, abuses, and at times indulged into holding out extreme threats. The group evolved into a hate community (a communal being) for expressing hatred against individuals, groups, communities, and even nations. They spread hatred against religions, ideologies, cultures, and peoples not merely as *gossip* but quoted texts and modern media sources to substantiate their narratives as *facts*. Chosen threads and entailed messages on the basis of their commonality, novelty of hate idea or expression, and frequency of exchanges between the haters and those being hated were observed to be creations of the people, who harboured hate, released their emotion through Internet discussions against the hated who were out of there if not in the group, and got applause. The threads and messages solidify as collective consciousness where finally the alternate arguments are weeded away as profane. The people unknown to crime distribute the seeds of hatred in a cyber reality where they thrive as hate community, free from counter-insurgencies.

Key Words: Hate communities, online communities, evil, immersion method, collective consciousness, religion, discussion forums, thread, narrative, construct.

An *online community* can be referred to as a group of people who may or may not communicate always via the Internet, for example, a newsgroup where a discussion about a particular subject is written to a central Internet site and then from there is distributed to the members. Most of the members subscribe to such newsgroups through their emails and then it depends on them whether they respond to them or not making it a comparatively slow process of interaction at times. In general terms, it can be used to refer to social groups interacting through the Internet. Different online communities have different levels of interaction and participation. This ranges from electronic mailing lists which are generally found to be informational or adding comments to a blog or message. Here primarily we have studied online communities where messages can be read in real time as soon as they are submitted to the community and then can invite instant reaction from readers.

A *discussion board* is also known by other names such as discussion forum, online group, and online forum is a term used to refer to any virtual bulletin board where users can share and discuss information and ideas. Many websites offer such

forums where a member or user can leave messages and also can expect responses to his/her messages.

A *thread* is a term used for a collection of posts on a particular topic. It starts with the submission of an initial message by a member and then reciprocal messages by others. The set of all the responses in a newsgroup, mailing list, or discussion board, starting from an initial post, is referred to as an online thread.

In most cultures *evil* refers to describing thoughts and actions that bring certain harm (directly or indirectly) from a single entity to multiple entities like affecting situation or masses. It can be seen as creating chaos or nuisance in peaceful and constructive activities of life. Evil can take many forms to cause harm to an individual or a group and can be best represented in the human society in the form of hatred. Evil when coupled with hatred tries to express itself. In the present scenario Internet has developed as a cheaper means of not only freedom of expression of evil ideas but also their propagation. Whatever form an evil thought can take, be it jealousy, violence, terrorism, international relations, etc., and the hatred it represents, Internet is the only modern medium where it can travel and be accessed freely among the hate-mongers and the hated all over the world. It has become all the more easy to express evil views by the presence of numerous discussion groups that develop into hate communities although they were not necessarily formed for this purpose.

What is *hate community*? It is that whose text or narrative constructs such words, language which is abusive, involves deceptive reasoning to influence others and to add new recruits to one's own prejudices or beliefs against an individual or a group, and that necessarily intends harm directly or indirectly or verbal. Members of a hate community express anger, cursing, swearing, emotionally charged statements, most of the times subjective, outcry of war, offence, and defense. The most populated hate community is religious. The hiatus between religion and hate is a strange relation which is computer mediated. Hate community is formed not only for the purpose of demonizing the hated but also of propagating beliefs and getting new recruits to generate a stronger solidarity. One of its main purposes is perpetuation. The discussion that starts as implicit hate gradually takes the form of verbally expressing as much hate as possible like abuses, etc.

The expansion and diversification of Internet services have brought about online discussion groups to connect with each other and form social networks to exchange communication and other types of relationships. The communicators are common people employing their time for interconnecting in the cyber world for intercommunication. Being in a public activity - purposeful and interactive - thus a part of Internet is recreated by them as cyber sphere where opinions are expressed and new ones are made. The technology of Internet has provided opportunities to shrink spaces and get in touch with each other without moving places. Their ideas, views, and emotions connect them with each other beyond all preset limits and conventional norms of behaving. It is a free world in a pretty real sense when it is a

cyber world. People who inter-communicate on this plane are evolving into an open society accessible to everybody. The participants are from all walks of life representing a cross section of members almost from all countries. Then there are hi-tech service providers to facilitate virtual participation.

In order to gauge the not so benign expressions of the frequent cyber visitors, we selected some samples of activity of discussion groups thriving on Internet services that were formed or have developed to express hate. Using the Immersion Method to participate and study, two of us joined a couple of discussion groups, which centred on hate, and established ourselves as regular members.

Over time, we found out that some of these communications were fruitful, entertaining, and informative, and on occasions provided and sought cooperation too. Routine and normal cyber facts of human interaction appeared to be without any pathology. This however was not all that happened to keep the discussions going. The study observed *threads* of the members of hate communities and followed the designs and patterns of their *narratives* that weaved the hatred. Samples of threads and entailing messages were chosen on the basis of their commonality, novelty of hate idea, or expression and frequency of exchanges between the haters and those being hated.

The most revealing fact was that there was not much to account for the innocuousness about the people who were frequently engaged into raising issues, joining issues, issuing rejoinders on a singular central point of discussion in cyber sphere - hate. We further found out that the online groups' discussions actively centred on blame game, abuses, and at times indulged into extreme forms of holding out threats. In intent and purpose, the group evolved into a hate community (a communal being) for expressing hatred against individuals, groups, communities, and even nations. They have been found out to be spreading hatred against religions, ideologies, cultures, and peoples not merely as *gossip* but quoted texts and modern media sources to substantiate their narratives as *facts*. But everything happened in cyber space.

Internet circulates people's opinions instantly and turns on more ways to communicate reactions globally enabling a safe mode of exchanges between remote and disparate populations. Be they personal or private opinions, pro or anti ideas that are assembled online with new found boardroom wisdom to communicate hatred and strong dislikes, they are no longer restricted to acquaintances, but involve a majority of people who are or might be unknown to one and another as real beings, although their presence is observed and felt because of their pushed on viewpoint. In many cases, the real pushers could be hiding behind pseudonyms as we suspected during our participation. The practice was so much easier for anyone to publish mind material through online discussion groups and succeeded in catching wide attention without involving any significant expenditure.

The great divide is getting wider between entities of *us*, those who are cyber followers of the *thread* and thus start or evolve into a Hate Community and the *others*, those being hated tooth and nail as they adhere to a different religion, ethnicity, politics, nation, state, even gender, or the colour of skin, to cite the most glaring exemplars. Although religious stereotypes and prejudices topped the list in our observation, the alarm bell started ringing when we found out *fundamentalism*, *extremism*, *fascism*, and even Nazism gradually occupying significant space in cyber sphere. Interestingly, the oxymoron phenomenon happened showed the formation of the community was due to the technological (opportunity) addition of some people only to initiate and/or reinforce the divisions with many others. The wings of Internet are thus now used to fly high and low to search the prey.

As if to add insult to injury, the Internet further provides raw material in the form of news and events and its search engines supply additional information which the community members processed to produce more hate.

Different countries have different levels of tolerance corresponding to the laws of the respective lands but in the cyber space the laws are ignored as the online hateful posts have unrestricted flow. But in some countries, judicial cases have been filed in courts against such *unlawful* hatred.

How does the community sustain itself? How do people turn into digital haters and spread hate with electric speed? Who is being hated? There is free recruitment (joining) policy but continuity is exclusively on the basis of like-mindedness of members. Some of the profiles are checked and verifications made. Anything could be expressed but the moderator of the discussion group keeps a close watch for the utterances, modifies them, and brings everything to fall in line with the hate thread. Whosoever deflects or pushes *the rationality* or any alternative rationalization is finally, after few warnings, ex-communicated. In fact the person was put on unknowingly; some might be smart enough to know the policy, on probation before getting the permanent membership. Another action that has been seen is haters keep a watch for other communities so that the hated might not start discussing opposing views online somewhere else. If that is done they try either to overpower the hated/defenders by arguments and hate speech or to ban such discussions by recouring to tools already present in discussion/networking websites. They also invite others with similar outlook to counter the later and as a spontaneous reaction others also start actions against the hated.

The community depends on common targets to be hated by all and, of course, for the target every member is allowed to innovate, supply new facts from media, history, or otherwise, and strengthen the argument of the thread, but the common and minimum denominator is to maintain hatred through posts. Personal experiences could be quoted in messages. This is not a game where a neutral referee audits between two parties and declares the winner, but rather a monotonous long drawn, repetitive mongering goes on and on where all WMDs are thrown in the open space (cyber). A sample of message contents, analysed by

us, showed holier-than-thou or community members displaying an attitude of greater virtue, the others (the hated) are responsible for their sufferings, and the history was rewritten to malign their people kind of messages building up a thread of hate.

Lately, image input in hate expression has gained popularity in the war of hate communities as arguments are collaborated by little genuine, much fake, and many times, out of context visual quotes. Even the new Internet services providing visuals have been used, and there images have been misconstrued to assert a point or substantiate argument. Hate is also a nagging device in chat, but becomes cruel and obscene when images compose the collage of hatred. These online communities are far away from e-commerce, etc. although lots of people attend their discussion boards. But talking of evil, the cyber criminals may have used steganography to post their message in the crowd of words.

The people, who harboured hate, released their emotion through Internet services against the hated that were out of there if not in the group and got applause. The messages gained momentum and became collective consciousness where finally the alternate arguments were weeded away as profane. In the cyber world the fate was predictable. The people not known to be practising crime fell in line to distribute the seeds of hatred in a cyber reality - an exemplar of *cultural* solidarity to crush other cultures, make them extinct if they do not toe in the community's line. In cyber space these cultural solidarities of haters thrive as hate community, free from counter-insurgencies. Among the hate communities in cyber space, the job satisfaction or the sense of achievement is unique for the victorious. To hate is an end in itself. The following defines what we have summed up from a sample of arguments propounded by online members expressing hatred as a major purpose in life:

I exist to hate and the happiness that I derive is the victory. We are a group in the cyber world because we share a combination of hate arguments, accusations, abuses, hues, and cries, blame pulp fiction against a set of common targets so much required that so naturally makes us a legitimate authority because we are a community almost divine!

Is the hate community packaging evilness lurking in the hearts of loads of people from students to office goers, housewives to online callers, hiding their real identity, betraying emotions spinning hate, or are there any professionals involved to brainwash the gullible? Individually or in one-to-one interaction, these people could be quite ordinary with a balanced self, having no ambition to be bad or to personally harm somebody. It would be outrageous to call them an infantry on war. Their like-mindedness or more truly, their *dislike*-mindedness becomes a base of exciting identity when they are sensitized as belonging to the community. Hate

spinning, so far understood to be airing pent-up feelings, prejudices, stereotypes, heard or felt experiences, is now a virtual power exercise to target others' religions, faiths, ethnicity, identity, belief systems, legends, heroes and prophets, skin, gender, ideology, and scientific temper. In the cyber sphere, the progress of social sphere is also annihilated through the hate version of critical construct.

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Bad or Mad? Parents who Kill and Press Coverage in Israel

Gabriel Cavaglione

Abstract

This chapter explores the way Israeli newspapers disseminate and reproduce cultural beliefs about the personalities of mothers and fathers who kill. Based on textual content analysis, it examines 66 articles from the three most popular Israeli daily newspapers that reported six cases of filicide by mothers and twelve cases of filicide by fathers, between 1991 and 2002. The press coverage during the first few days, at the critical initial stages of the process of definition and designation of the events, receives more in-depth treatment. Analysis of these eighteen cases shows that the press, drawing on retrospective interpretation, tended not to use descriptors reflecting purported madness or social distress of the male perpetrators. On the other hand, it discussed extenuating circumstances based on mental disorder or social distress in cases of female perpetrators.

Key Words: Media coverage of crime, filicide, infanticide, neonaticide, cultural construction of deviance, gender and violent crime.

1. Introduction

Killing is a horrific act, particularly when parents are the perpetrators and children are the victims. This act not only challenges many of our fundamental expectations about the roles of parental caring, but also prompts a sense of confusion, because it constitutes a strong warning about the unreliability of parental instincts as a protection for children.¹ In Israel, after 2-year-old Hodaya Kedem was killed by her father, a well known columnist and TV personality wrote in one of the major dailies:

What should you say to your toddler if he asks: ‘Dad, are you capable of murdering me, too?’ For sure, you will hug him tight, and say: ‘Of course not.’ It would be easier if you could say that people who kill their children have sharp fangs, or a tail concealed in their pants [...] or a strange look in their eyes [...]. Or at least you could say that these parents are crazy [...] and there are very few crazy individuals in the world [...] but this information cannot relieve his anxiety.²

The Israeli press described Hodaya's murder as ‘the crime of the century,’ and considered it to be the latest and gravest of a crime wave of filicide committed by parents that had reached alarming levels since 1999. Several reporters described

this crime wave as part and parcel of an axis of human evil. Killing by parents was portrayed by the press as a manifestation of a new inexplicable epidemic of copy-cat violence, probably caused by a weakening of the mechanisms of formal social control over violence in general and domestic violence in particular. A whole range of ideological, social and cultural forces shape reporters' decision how to describe crimes such as filicide in search of some reason and predictability.³ To some extent, the reporter constructs specific realities by trying to ascribe a sense of order and meaning to this traumatic experience within collective society. The desire of narrators to ensure coherence can lead to the use of stock stories and anecdotal details, some of which are familiar to their intended audience.⁴ Sometimes, tragic events tend to be trivialized, and vital issues tend to be omitted, misrepresented or distorted by the press.⁵ At the same time, media reports clarify behavioral and normative social guidelines, contributing to the construction of cultural attitudes regarding the social and gender order. One of the results of this cultural construction is the formation of scripts and their protagonists, where good and bad actors and specific plots are created and judged.⁶

2. Focus and Limitations of This Research

This chapter explores how Israeli newspapers disseminate and reproduce cultural beliefs about the personalities of fathers and mothers who kill their children. Based on textual content analysis, it examines 66 articles from the three most popular Israeli daily newspapers that reported 18 notorious cases of filicide between 1991 and 2002. The coverage during the first few days, at the critical initial stages of the process of definition and designation of the events and the actors, receives more in-depth analysis.

Besides the small sample, the cases that appeared in media coverage are difficult to analyze for several other reasons as well:

1. Press language products require interdisciplinary efforts.⁷ This is aggravated when translating from Hebrew journalistic jargon into English, since some of the subtleties are lost.
2. The methodological distinction between unplanned or mercy killing and intentional murder is complex.⁸ The cases here were not chosen through a strict legal definition of the crime, but rather were characterized by press coverage of a violent act that directly caused the death of a minor, when the culpability of the parent was beyond doubt, at least on the basis of the parent's confession and/or overwhelming *prima facie* evidence. The corpus does not include cases where killing was caused by negligence or neglect (e.g., accidents, lack of appropriate

medical care, malnutrition), where the victim was not an infant or a minor, or cases of mercy killing motivated by altruism.

3. Media narrative cannot be separated from other forms of narrative or, to use Foucauldian vocabulary, this 'discourse' is part of a complicated interplay of forces between various 'micro-physics of power/knowledge' in society. The media and other systems of social control influence each other with regard to definition and classification. Though the media construct their own stories, they also function as a vehicle through which social actors within the medical, welfare and criminal justice system disseminate their statements.
4. The process becomes more complicated because these social actors may be influenced later by coverage. This spiral movement of cross-fertilization and mutual influence can be defined as a vicious circle which further influences the societal construction of images of parents who kill. In other words, the reporter's voice is not only his/her own. On the one hand, like an orchestra conductor, the reporter modulates and amplifies certain sounds and tones, while silencing others. On the other hand, the reporter also has to adjust to the pre-constructed musical composition.

3. The Sample

Of the six cases of mothers who killed, the differences are substantial. Two of the women were Israeli born, two were immigrants from the former Soviet Union, and two were Arabs. The ages of the mothers ranged from the late teens to the late thirties. The differences are also considerable concerning the various means of filicide: drowning, defenestration, throat-slitting, stabbing, strangulation and bludgeoning. The only apparent common denominator is that in comparison with fathers, mothers seem to use 'their own hands' more as an instrument of killing.

The twelve cases of father filicide also touched all sectors of Israeli society: their ages ranged from mid-twenties to late fifties. Six perpetrators were Israeli-born or long established Jewish citizens, three were new immigrants and three were Israeli Muslim Arabs. The family status also varied: six of the men were legally married, two were at different stages of divorce and four were unmarried (three with a common-law child from the live-in friend, and one without children of his own). Their method of killing covered the entire spectrum: three shootings, two deaths by strangulation or suffocation, two by drowning, two by arson, one stabbing, one defenestration and one electrocution. Unlike the mothers who kill, there was use of firearms among men (25% of cases). Furthermore, there are more

instances of male familicide (33% of the cases involving fathers, as opposed to no cases reported for mothers).

4. Content Analysis

Mothers:

Notwithstanding the variety and the small number of cases, several common denominators emerge from the textual analysis. In half of the cases, where the mother was Jewish and married, the press condoned or justified her acts as a consequence of mental impairment. In one other case of one unwed young Jewish mother more stress was put on her unbearable social and economic conditions. In the two cases of Arab unwed mothers, predominantly bad attributes were ascribed. I should be stressed that the press is more likely to ignore psychopathological explanations and assign more negative attributes to mothers who are economically marginalized, uneducated, young, unwed or belong to marginalized ethnic groups (Arabs or North African Jews). As other scholars have stressed, these groups are stereotypically perceived and discriminated against by Israeli culture as ‘deviants’ and ‘criminals.’⁹ This deviance of *terrible others* – from the norms of middle-class *good* motherhood, owing to their illicit, self-indulgent, promiscuous, ungovernable and negligent behavior – probably influences the typifying of their acts and the rejection of a pathological etiology.¹⁰

This discriminatory labeling process starts at the early stages of retrospective interpretation and with the *prima facie* statements of the culprit herself, relatives, neighbors and reporters. This retrospective reading generally provides the media with just such evidence to support the conclusion that ‘this is what was happening’ and account for the defense mechanisms (or a technique of neutralization) adopted by the culprit: ‘[m]y son became my victim [...] I didn’t know what I was doing. I was crazy, I didn’t plan to kill him.’

In most cases human facial expression becomes a topic of subjective interpretation by the informants and the press. A *poker face*, a cold look and detached behavior can be interpreted in various ways. In the case of Jewish mothers who kill, facial expression was interpreted by the media and informants as a sign of insanity and genuine pain. This is the case, for example of Marina Davidowich. On March 24, 1992, Marina, a 29-year-old new immigrant nurse from the Former Soviet Union, drowned her two daughters (3 and 7 years old) in the bathtub of her apartment. ‘She was experiencing temporary insanity,’ the front page of *Yediot Ahronot* declared immediately. Her facial expression prompted identification and sensitization among the readership: ‘Who knows what went through her mind during those crazy moments? But we know that she had had emotional problems for many years.’

Besides facial expression, the press creates sensitization and identification in the public, particularly when the women expresses pain and regret and confess to their act: ‘I killed my nice sweet baby;’ ‘It was not easy sitting in court and

listening to the defendant testifying. [...] She described the deep emotional vortex which drove her to commit the worst of human acts;’ ‘During the trial she cried a lot, and the public cried with her.’ In a few examples of mad and sad mothers, external appearance was also softened by feminine stereotypes. The culprit was defined as well dressed or as a nice woman. The press used images such as ‘quiet’, ‘gentle’ and ‘fragile’ women who ‘couldn’t kill a fly.’ In various articles the reporter stressed that the woman was the victim of her own act.

No punishment can compare to the self-inflicted punishment the culprit caused to herself. From the moment her child passed away until the last days of her life, his cry will echo in her mind and his tears will appear again and again in her mind’s eye.

This is a good example of adoption and dissemination of the popular assumption that mothers should not be punished, or should be punished leniently, because they have already suffered enough with the loss of their child.

In the press narrative of mothers who kill, the father of the victim was usually invisible. With the exception of one live-in boyfriend who took part in the crime (Waffa Tafal), the father was not part of the tragedy, and, more importantly, he was not a subject or a target of the mother’s retaliation. The acts of the mothers who kill may be more closely related to ‘a vertical tie,’ directed against the children.¹¹

Fathers:

In contrast to what was found in the six cases of mothers who kill, the media stance on fathers’ filicide can be related to a *horizontal tie*; i.e., an act perpetrated against the wife through the children.¹² With a few exceptions, the act of child killing seemed to be intended to punish the wife or live-in friend, as though the children were physical extensions of their mothers.¹³ The etiology developed by the press derived mostly from ongoing tension and financial disputes. Among these mostly unhappily married or divorced men, the killings were cast as acts of revenge, retaliation and jealousy. Attempts to control the sexuality of their female partner or rivalry involving male honor can be seen as among the significant causes of filicide.¹⁴

The press tended to depict fathers as murderers (and not as killers), who acted with premeditation, in cold blood and with rational intent. Mostly their acts were portrayed as deceit. ‘Like a machine,’ ‘with a clear voice,’ ‘calm,’ ‘devoid of emotion,’ ‘cold’ and ‘premeditated’ were a few of the terms used to define their behavior. A reporter stressed that ‘in one second, their love disappeared. Their emotions ceased...’ The interpretation of facial expression differs from what was found in cases of mothers who kill - which in the latter case prompted more identification and sensitization among the readership. ‘Indifference,’ ‘coldness,’ ‘lack of tears’ have been defined as proof of ‘the heart of stone’ of male evil. In a

few cases, the character of the perpetrators was depicted in derogatory terms from 'horrific,' 'terrible,' 'pervert,' 'bad,' 'evil,' and 'cunning' to 'inhuman,' 'monstrous,' and 'satanic.' In dealing with the 12 cases of fathers who kill the press usually opted not to use the descriptors reflecting purported madness or social distress ('sadness') as we found among female perpetrators. Fathers' filicide is usually portrayed as a premeditated, rational, criminal and evil act of murder, and the press was resistant to explanations of mental disorders as one of the causes of the crime.

5. Discussion

Similar to public views on the subject as found in quantitative empirical research,¹⁵ the press highlighted the gender construction of the narrative by differentiating between the character of fathers and mothers, which may lead to different medical, legal, welfare-related and political attitudes.¹⁶ A benevolent attitude toward mothers who kill was found in a recent survey among 150 Israeli college students. Mothers are perceived as influenced more than fathers by mental disorders and therefore deserving of cure and care rather than punishment.¹⁷

The media representation of filicide plays a significant role in the construction and reinforcement of the gender order, a system of power relations between males and females. For mothers, at least for those who represent the well-ordered, middle class Jewish family, it appears that there is less space for will, intention and volition. They are not subject or actors. They are not their own agents. Unlike their masculine counterparts, with a few exceptions, they have no place for rage and anger in this criminal script.

Probably one of the roots of this distinction comes from a different cultural perception of parenthood. Motherhood is taken for granted, is thought to be natural and biological; therefore, mothers who kill elicit cognitive dissonance as regards the popular definition of their natural attributes. As a husband of a mother who killed stated:

I just couldn't agree that this woman did what she did in a rational way. I just wanted to tell everybody that the mother of my children was crazy, and didn't know what she was doing. I testified in court, stressing the fact that she was insane.

One of the explanations for this attitude is the positivistic assumption that mothers who kill are *de facto* more unbalanced or deranged. In the scientific literature, female aggression has mostly been interpreted as expressive, deriving from emotionality and irrationality.¹⁸ The cultural assumption that mothers who kill must be insane is corroborated by centuries-old deterministic knowledge about women, sexuality and crime.¹⁹ As early as 1968, Rascovsky and Rascovsky stated that there is a 'universal resistance to acknowledging a mother's filicidal drives,

undoubtedly the most dreaded and uncanny truth for us to face.’²⁰ Considering mothers who kill as irrational, uncontrollable and insane is a natural corollary of this cultural assumption.²¹ Identification of women with the unconscious, and therefore the irrational, irresponsible and disturbed, is a common stereotype in scientific as well as popular literature, particularly when mothers deviate from moral standards of behavior of the middle class well ordered family.²² Both society and culture perceive mothers as nonviolent even under very oppressive conditions. Women are expected to absorb frustration, humiliation, unemployment, poverty and extreme loneliness without losing their ‘natural’ attribute of good motherhood.²³ Thus, when a mother kills her child, the act is perceived as inconsistent with the natural biological role of meeting the child’s needs, suggesting some psychological lack of parental fitness. As feminist scholars have stressed, the political implication of this process is that while both popular beliefs and professional knowledge tend to perceive mothers who kill as influenced by forces that are beyond their control, they are mostly controlled, confined and punished by the medical and social welfare apparatus outside the criminal justice system.²⁴

This attitude is not only apparent in cases of filicide by mothers, but also with regard to violent female behavior in general. For example, in Israel, violent women are sentenced by district courts to shorter terms (five months less) than men.²⁵ Moreover, while women arrested for killing other human beings begin their journey through the criminal justice system in the usual manner, with an initial charge of murder, as they move further into the system, almost two thirds of the charges are reduced to some form of manslaughter or a lesser charge, and fewer than half of these women receive prison sentences.²⁶ Mann concludes that women are indeed ‘getting away with murder.’²⁷ However, if they are, the price they pay is a loss of agency and the chance to argue in defense of their actions. By being confined and silenced by the medical and social welfare systems, to some extent they are ‘rendered harmless,’²⁸ because they cannot claim that they acted of their own volition and they are denied the opportunity to state that their acts were reasonable, justifiable and even necessary,²⁹ in particular when they acted as victims of male violence.

On the other hand, fatherhood is not taken for granted, but rather is perceived as acquired, learned or modeled.³⁰ The portrayal of men who kill usually adheres to traditional, stereotypical roles of masculinity. There is more space for will, intention, volition, premeditation and rationality. They are subjects and actors. They are their own agents. They have more space either for decision making or for rage and anger.³¹ Also for this reason, in Israel, men who kill their children are much more likely than women to receive custodial sentences, even in the relatively few cases where a psychiatric plea was entered.³² Men’s pleas of partially diminished agency are considered aberrant and antithetical to cultural conceptions of active and rational masculinity.³³

Notes

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The Mediation of Evil Post 9/11: Metaphors of Mutation and Monsters in the Media

Phil Fitzsimmons

Abstract

Utilizing the tools of ‘conceptual metaphor,’¹ this chapter discusses critical elements of language use in the media that encased 9/11, the London bombings, and the ensuing riots in Sydney Australia. The results of this study found that the language use of key stakeholders, and the media itself, in America, England, and Australia has been characterized by a series of nested ‘sociomotor metaphors’² that subtly framed Islam as being evil in nature. This has had the effect that by linguistically deforming elements of the corporeal Islamic body, there has been the attempted creation of a first world cultural capital, albeit within a vocal minority, that negates all Muslims as human as we know it and denies the Islamic cosmological viewpoint as being valid as we know it. While having an immediate effect of racism and vilification, this chapter argues that the naming of evil at a national world-view level, however subtle, only serves to create or perpetuate a similar or parallel expression of perceived evil within the dominant naming body.

Key Words: Conceptual metaphor, evil, language use, Islam.

1. Collective Knowing: An Introductory Framework

While many horrific events in human history have become entrenched in the collective consciousness at an international level, no other single catastrophe in human history has become as universally entombed in the global awareness or associated mythology as that morning now known through the numerical acronym as 9/11. Swept around the world in real time via CNN, and then through constant replays at the speed of sight via the web in tandem with print media, 9/11 became ‘a dividing line between good and evil’³ For both sides of this divide, 9/11 has become a powerful conceptual metaphor in its own right, a framework of perception that lies at the core of collective values, beliefs and understanding.

While initially an autoethnography seeking to make sense of 9/11, this process methodologically cascaded into using various media forms as a data source. The time frame in undertaking this reflective course took several years and crossed over into other scenes of similar carnage, terror, and perceived evil. Acknowledging the inherent subjectivity, this project was underpinned by three nested psycholinguistic frameworks of emergent analysis. These included:

A. Transtextual Framework

This framework is based on the notion that a large proportion of our language

and thought is grounded in ‘conceptual metaphors.’ These are not poetic devices, rather psycholinguistic frames that enable us to conceptualize, reason, and visualize the world around us. Sensorimotor in nature they provide insight into ‘how we make sense of our experience’⁴ and the schema or truth-values an individual or group may hold. We accept the validity or trustworthiness of a language in use framework only if it resonates with our individual within a collective framework. Conversely, in times of crisis, if any group or individual is labeled as not fitting the accepted framework of thinking, and they deny this charge, this denial reinforces their alterity.

B. National Storying Framework

These elements are inferential structures that subtly add meaning and schema to particular interpretative communities. Typically grounded in particular historical socio-cultural facets or national narratives, they are often so pervasive that members of a group are unaware of their existence or their metaphoric power. Acting as collective reservoirs of memory and identity, they often have their genesis in times of crisis and re-appear at times of collective uncertainty. While having an overarching embedded nationalistic character they may also serve several cultural groups. Often succinct and standalone lexical items, they act as a psycholinguistic tips of the iceberg revealing generic perceptions or collective points of identification. Language is therefore an ongoing carrier of the collective consciousness, ‘the reinforcer and establishing agent of social and cultural beliefs and attitudes.’⁵

C. Context of Situation Framework

These language frames are peculiar to certain cultural groups and tend to be historically located but lack the depth of the previous form. When encountered, these metaphoric forms produce either resonant visualization or trigger off a set of archetypal or stereotypical perceptions. In essence, these metaphoric elements are conceptual mappings or literary cartographies that create individual or collective schema. Understanding these metaphors and associated maps provides insight into how readers or viewers react to changes in places and people, as well as reveal perceptions of ‘the interior schematic landscapes they adjusted to what was really there and what took place there.’⁶

Thus, in order to understand what happened on that September morning and what continued afterwards, we need explore the intersection of the past with the very new; a mind map of intertextuality revealing where we have been and were we are now. This intersection is most clearly seen in the narratives we are told in the public arena of the media in all its forms. At the beginning of this new millennium there appeared a skewed narrative of trans-cultural evil that reached its ultimate telling when the twin towers collapsed.

2. Collective Seeing: Media, Metaphors, and Manipulation

Because of space limitations it is impossible to fully describe and discuss all of the media coverage that formed the base platform of analysis for this chapter. Neither is possible to show all of the coding and thematizing elements that were involved in the analysis. Hence, salient examples have been provided that reveal the means by which a worldwide schema of *otherness in the first world* was developed immediately after 9/11 and then sent on an ever increasing spiral of subtle definition.

A. The Underpinning Framework and the Pivotal Metaphors

Given the catastrophic events of 9/11 it could be expected that immediately after the event a language of division would also surface. However, as can be seen in the table below, beginning with the President Bush’s speeches, which were immediately posted on the web, underneath the surface reference to the attacks on the buildings, planes, there was a specific reference to evil and an underpinning allusion to its forms. This acted as a sliding signifier defining all those connected to the bombers by virtue of religion as evil.

Table 1. Statement by the President in His Address to the Nation 11/11/01

Speech	Metaphoric Framework
<p>The President: Good evening. Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. The victims were in airplanes, or in their offices; secretaries, businessmen and women, military and federal workers; moms and dads, friends and neighbors. Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror.</p> <p>The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge structures collapsing, have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger. These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed; our country is strong.</p>	<p>Containment as Moral Decay Metaphor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collective framing; form and chaos. - The victim narrative (God as Father, Edenic motif, Pearl Harbour (Gulf War second story). - Sense of above, the handing down of truth from above, the truth of Christianity. - Pearl Harbour motif - Readjustment of metaphor; the attackers are non human, moral impure. <p>Containment as Violation Metaphor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Penetration, immorality, social rape. - Being controlled by another is down. - Being in control is up, the divine is up. - The monstrous reflects the radical permeability, fragility, and artificiality of the physical boundaries.

The President’s speeches were the initial verbal rock cast into an already murky pool of mistrust. This enacted a ripple effect in all forms of media and print, a reoccurring pattern that at face value appeared to be a measured and appropriate response to the atrocity. However, this speech became an international subtext of

metaphoric projection through prototypical metaphors based on the notion of *containment*, reference to *the state as enclosure*, and *moral relationships*, the inference was created that this was a fight of *right versus moral decay*.

This focus on division into *us and them* was revisited more explicitly in a later presidential speech. Firstly, there were the *others* that helped, saved, and paid the ultimate sacrifice. 'We have seen it in the courage of passengers, who rushed terrorists to save others on the ground - passengers like an exceptional man named Todd Beamer.'⁷ In the same set of speeches the opposite end of the other scale was mentioned. 'This conflict was begun on the timing and terms of others; it will end in a way and at an hour of our choosing.'⁸

The 'evil others' were mentioned three times in this speech, reference to an unholy trinity that in a few short days was starkly contrasted with the national media focus on Christian prayer and spiritual introspection. 'We have a national identity but most of us also have a spiritual identity. It will be a time when we all will be searching for what are our deeper roots.'⁹

As well as the underpinning conceptual metaphors, George W. Bush's speeches immediately post 9/11 had numerous intertextual overtones. As Susan Willis has pointed out, a key facet of subtext that Bush provided in all of his speeches and media forms arose from past national narratives of the cowboy motif and the circling of the wagons as a safe guard from attack. While this may have originated from within his own cowboy Texan roots, it has also been touted as being a deliberate ploy in this instance. Whatever the origin, the collective mythology, dream image, and current cultural world view in all media forms were grounded in what Engelhardt and Willis have termed the 'history of the wild west.' Just as in the years surrounding the turn of the new millennium, at a time when the United States was a new nation in turmoil and as a result of the need for cultural cohesion and identity amongst ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity, a new national narrative was required. So too 9/11 required a similar discourse. Once again an old metaphor was resurrected, one that reflected the need for a cohesive national account and the naming of *otherness*. Characterized by a sense of rugged individualism, this national myth was also an underpinning embodiment of the earliest Australian and English colonial narratives as it encapsulated the ideal of taming the wild, destroying uncouth indigenous inhabitants, and the pacifying of the uncivilized landscape itself. Commenting on the language use in all forms of public discourse just prior to 9/11, Doty believes that the characteristics of this narrative 'had been continuing for generations and set up dichotomous boundaries that have had massive impacts upon attitudes towards history, the material world, the life of the mind, emotions and feelings, and spheres of mental construction such as science, philosophy, literature, and religion.'¹⁰ Similarly, Kilgour believes this over-arching narrative was being continually spelt out and reinforced prior to 9/11 in the myriad of popular culture genres in that movies and books continually deal with national challenges that are dealt with powerfully, swiftly, and

effectively. ‘The smell of gun smoke and the death of the immoral, sinister, scheming and shady abject’¹¹ had never really disappeared from the transcultural *first world* imagination. More importantly, the concept of what constitutes true morality had constantly been portrayed as being on the side of the Christian victor, retelling and reinforcing the need to marginalize and destroy the primitive evil enemy.

This notion of the evil and the non-Christian enemy in itself had even deeper transtextual roots than the facets discussed in the prior paragraphs. In his discussion on the power of the media in America in general and post 9/11 in particular Baghdikian believes that both the Arab speaking nations and Christian countries still harbor deep resentment over the Crusades. The historian Christopher Tyerman has cogently demonstrated that not only is this the case but that the blood spilt over Jerusalem a thousand years ago has resulted in the cultural tolerance of acceptable violence for both sides of this religious divided. ‘Violence, approved by society, and approved by religion, has proved commonplace in civilized communities.’¹²

This deep-seated metaphoric belief that the Christian world was on the side of *right* became focused when Ignatieff wrote that in this time of terror ‘preemptive war was the lesser evil.’¹³ However, the greater evil that needs to be destroyed is of course that Western invention of the dark skinned and dark haired malevolence, which is the ‘deepest and most reoccurring images of the ‘other.’’¹⁴ The destruction of 9/11 now once again reinforced the concept of an *acceptable other* and the need to define the abject: an entity that inhabits a place of meaningless, ambiguous and the border that has encroached upon everything. With the advent of 9/11, Islam once again became ‘the monstrous other, the opposite of the truth.’¹⁵

The naming of an enemy in conjunction with the repeated pattern of conceptual metaphor and the entrenched subconscious concept of the Middle East as being the seat of evil had a flow on effect of projection of similar characteristics onto all of Islamic believers. As Lakoff suggests, the use of one or two words became a metaphoric prototype of vilification and marginalization through another reference to immorality. On September 20th, *The San Diego Tribune* stated that Jersey City was ‘a hot bed of radical Islam.’¹⁶ In the same week, an article in *The Boston Tribune* told the story of a Muslim fearing for her life because of retribution. The same writer made mention of the parallels between 9/11 and Pearl Harbour, as well as the treatment of Japanese Americans in the days after the Hawaiian attacks. 9/11 had well and truly become a war of symbols. The national internal narrative had been reborn afresh in which only those living inside the bounds of accepted visual truth were evidence of cultural appropriateness and propriety. As Lakoff has remarked, ‘denial in the face of such overwhelming frames only serves to reinforce their guilt.’¹⁷

B. The Initial Frame Reworked: The Attack on the London Underground

Willis argues that the reinvention of the national American myth in particular and the transnational narrative in general reached a peak in the months and years post 9/11 when once the monsters that had perpetrated the attacks had been revealed. The *western hero* in all forms of popular culture and the media was further projected into all national iconic elements such as the flag, the postal service, police and fire brigades, and the army. All things in the American, and conjoined international story, became imbued with the *macho* image of fighting darkness and the idea that God is on our side.

However, with the War on Terror now reaching across several nations, the transnational myth of *light* became further entrenched with what Ubel has called 'the thousand years of vilification of Islam.'¹⁸ While there was an obvious threat from elements of radical Islam, innocent Muslims worldwide also became the target of attack with an 'ever increasing and unfounded prejudice in both England and the United States.'¹⁹ With the monster identified and named 13,013 times in the English-speaking press world wide in the five days after 9/11, perhaps signifying a type of branding, the round up both real and psychological was underway.

The same pattern of defining cultural otherness through the actions of a few occurred in the days and weeks after the London bombing of July 2005. In the London newspapers alone there over sixty articles and short pieces that were headed with the word 'evil' and followed by editorial comments such as '[t]oday's acts were designed to cause harm and spread fear - not just among Londoners, but among people in every city around the world.'²⁰ The global *evil* metaphor was being continually reinforced. The retraction that *The Times* were forced to publish on July 19th after falsely branded a young Muslim as a terrorist, publishing his photograph and purporting that he was one of the earlier bombers, did little to stem the tide.

While again the bombers were Muslim involved, in this instance they were *insider others*. However, the language of division again had a religious manifestation. On July 14th *The London Sun* had a banner line that read, '[t]he Beast,'²¹ a reference to the Mr. Big of Al Qaeda who had allegedly escaped and fled to Egypt. This was later denied but the 'Beast' reference was a clear Antichrist reference for both sides of this geo-political divide.

In the days immediately following the London attack, Muslims in England were attacked and killed. Similar to the attitudinal shift that had occurred in America, the characteristics of the other perpetrators had now been projected onto the Muslim world at large.

3. Implications

This chapter reflects not only the nature of the stories that lie just beneath our psyche and are easily activated via the media, but also the ease in which a cultural group can be labeled as evil. While this is a *common sense* process in times of

national and international crises, what sounds like communal substance or national pride can in fact be become *deformed discourse*. At times of crises it is then that politicians, and perhaps ordinary citizens look for the abject, those that appear to embody or ‘highlight the fragility of the law, and that exist on the other side of the border, which separates out the living subject from the that which threatens its extinction.’²² As we take our daily dose of the mass media we have to be careful there is no spillage effect, that is, where the acts of a few don’t provide an opportunity for a larger group to become caught up in the web of past narratives. It would appear that our language use is infiltrated with metaphors that can so easily and discursively infect us with a worldview that is distorted and out of kilter.

The ease in which metaphors can so easily slip across cultural divides was exemplified in more recently Australia when Ken Moroney, the New South Wales police commissioner, in commenting on the race riots in Sydney in 2006, stated on national television that ‘the beast ha[d] been unleashed.’²³ Although he tried to retract and recant, the journalists present realized the connection. Evil had found another home and in an adolescent schema, ‘consolidated under the leadership of John Winston Howard.’²⁴

Notes

¹ G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*, Basic Books, New York, 1999, p. 12.

² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³ M. Sönser Breen, ‘Heroes and Monsters: The Politics of Survival in *Spiderman* and *A Long Line of Vendidas*’, *Truth, Reconciliation, and Evil*, M. Sönser Breen (ed), Rodopi, New York, 2005, pp. 181-196.

⁴ Lakoff and Johnson, p. 12.

⁵ C. Feldman, ‘The Construction of Mind and Self in an Interpretative Community’, *Literacy, Narrative and Culture*, J. Brockmeier et al. (eds), Richmond, Surrey, Curzon, 2002, pp. 52-66.

⁶ R. van Noy, *Surveying the Interior: Literary Cartographers and the Sense of Place*, University of Nevada Press, Reno, NV, 2003, p. 4.

⁷ G.W. Bush, ‘Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People United States Capitol’, 11 September 2001, Viewed on 14 September 2001, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/>.

⁸ Bush 2001, ‘Statement by the President in His Address to the Nation’, ‘Address at the Episcopal National Cathedral, National Day of Prayer and Remembrance 14 September 2001’, 14 September 2001, Viewed on 18 September 2001, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/>.

⁹ T. Eckert, ‘Experts Say Jersey City is a Breeding Ground for Terrorist Cells’ *San Diego Union-Tribune*, A2, 20 September 2001, p. 6.

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- ¹⁰ W. Doty, *Mythography: The Study of Myth and Ritual*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 2000, p. 90.
- ¹¹ M. Kilgour, 'Dr Frankenstein meets Dr Freud', *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative*, R. Martin and E. Savoy (eds), University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, Iowa, 1995, pp. 40-57.
- ¹² C. Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades*, Belknap Press, Harvard, MA, 2006, p. xiii.
- ¹³ M. Ignatieff, *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics of Terror*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2004, p. 166.
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- ¹⁶ Eckert, op. cit., p. 6.
- ¹⁷ Lakoff and Johnson, op. cit., p. 112.
- ¹⁸ M. Ubel, 'Unthinking the Monster: Twentieth Century Response to Saracen Alterity', *Cohen Monster Theory*, J. Cohen (ed), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1996, p. 290.
- ¹⁹ T. Eckert, 'Experts Say Jersey City is a Breeding Ground for Terrorist Cells', *San Diego Union-Tribune*, A2, 20 September 2001, p. 6.
- ²⁰ S. Pyne, 'Making Enemies: Post-9-11 Crackdowns Spurring Prejudice', *The Village Voice*, 9 July 2003, p. 15.
- ²¹ 'No Panic as Capital Stays Cool: Londoners Stand Up to Evil', *The Sun*, 22 July 2005, p. 3.
- ²² Creed, op. cit., p. 4.
- ²³ M. MacCallum, 'As Ye Sow, So Shall Ye Reap: Political Corrections', *The Northern Rivers Echo*, 25 February 2007, p. 16.
- ²⁴ Ibid.

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The Commodification of Fear: A Blueprint for Evil

Fred Karns

*The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor
is the mind of the oppressed - Stephen Biko*

Abstract

There are no apparent limits to the construction of fear as a political commodity, certainly not if one looks at the current U.S. government's seemingly inexhaustible ability to produce whatever degree of fear it may require for achieving its ideological ends. The Bush administration has repeatedly manipulated commonly-cherished ideals, long-accepted definitions of principles and fundamental beliefs as a way of manufacturing a multiplicity of realities to serve their political objectives. This practice of manipulation raises a number of questions I would like to examine: by what methods has the U.S. government been able to take commonplace ideas and turn them into objects of fear and political commodities? What role do the media play in the process? What are some of the underlying reasons for manufacturing these fears? How were these objects of fear so convincingly constructed as to be unquestioningly accepted as a reality by so many people? I will look at how, since 9/11, purposefully-created multiple realities have been *bought and paid for* with acquiescence, with the willing surrender of fundamental freedoms, and with the surrender of the wills and the minds of the *consumers*, the transaction is complete.

Key Words: Construction of evil, 9/11, political discourse, terrorism.

1. Well, First of All

Everyone needs to tell stories. From the first utterances of spoken language there have been narratives, narratives that have been intended to influence people's behavior. The more persuasive the narrative, the more power is bestowed on the storyteller.

An early storyteller, eager to acquire a cave being used by others, needed to find a way to make them leave. He told them a story about how, even though this cave might *seem* comfortable and safe, evil monsters lurked in its dark recesses, waiting for just the right moment to spring out from the shadows and destroy them. The cave dwellers were frightened. They didn't know what to do. He told them that he could lead them to safety; all they needed to give him in exchange was their trust. They believed him and they followed him - out of the safety and familiarity they had thought would always be theirs.

The storyteller discovered that he could make his audience understand his narrative any way he wished by carefully framing and interpreting it for them. And in this way he was granted legitimacy, authority and, most important of all, he was given consent.

2. How it Works

Certain needs of an audience must be met before they will accept a storyteller's narrative construction of events. The listeners will consent to believing it only after they have been presented with an acceptable interpretation of the story. The more successfully the narrative engages their emotions, the less they will feel the need to use their intellects to evaluate what they have been told. The narrative must be accessible, avoid technical accounts and, above all, be presented in a psychological framework. The more the story engages their emotions, the more easily the audience can be led.

As examples of narrative statements aimed at emotions, take these declamations from President George W. Bush's 2002 State of the Union Speech regarding terrorists and the so-called war on terror: 'Thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning.' 'We have seen the depth of our enemies' hatred in videos, where they laugh about the loss of innocent life. [...] evil is real and must be opposed.' '[O]ur discoveries in Afghanistan confirmed our worst fears.' 'Our cause is just and it continues.'¹ How should we react to these kinds of statements? What do such statements really mean?

Because of conditioning, an audience will most likely feel a certain way in response to these kinds of statements before questioning them and figuring out what they mean. And if their emotional response can be made strong enough, they probably won't rationally evaluate the message at all. By simply accepting the statements, they can avoid probative thinking about them, which might lead to basic questions such as, 'How do we know that's true?' 'Have there been some arrests, and have people been charged with springing out from the shadows in foiled attacks against us?'

But if it seems reasonable to believe what they have heard, they might say, 'It must be true. Why would he say it, otherwise?', 'After all, this is the president, and these matters are far too important for him to be politicizing them... aren't they?'

A skillful narrator can code, weight, and create narratives any way he wishes to present a construct of reality that suits his purposes. By framing and shaping the way his audience responds to and accepts the realities he is describing and interpreting for them, they will come to know nothing other than what he wishes them to know.

And how do we come to know what we think we know in the modern world? Most of what we believe about the way the world is comes to us from others - what

they say *about* the things we think we know. Aside from firsthand experience, our beliefs are products of our reliance and trust in the authority of so-called experts as well as in the word of ordinary people whom we consider trustworthy. Often our worldviews are based only on our impressions, or what seems reasonable to accept as truth.

In fact, we cannot justify much of anything we claim to know. We haven't learned most of what we think we know through firsthand experience, and when it comes down to it, we can't actually prove much of it. We base our beliefs largely on trust and consent. This is the same way we reject information or beliefs if we decide our source is untrustworthy or lacking in authority. In either case, we must at least be willing to agree to believe what seems reasonable to believe.

Is it reasonable to believe that pure evil exists as something tangible? And if so, is there any way we can know, and give a concrete definition to, exactly what is an act of evil? Sociologist Jeffrey Alexander proposes that the very category of evil is an arbitrary construction - purely the product of cultural and sociological work. Thinking about evil in this way strengthens the *sacred* aspect of its opposite. It also reduces the idea of good and evil to two antagonistic forms, and eliminates any degree of shading that might exist between them.²

Most people believe that the attacks of 9/11 were anything other than acts of evil. But even while the World Trade Center was still smoldering, 9/11 came to represent much more than just a powerful metaphor for evil. Political leaders had been energized and inspired by the enormous symbolic power of the attack, and they recognized the need to frame what had happened as some *thing* - something tangible. They needed to give shape and texture to something that could be thought of as representative of pure evil and they needed to punish someone for having visited it upon them. But just who was it that visited this deed upon them, and how were they to be punished for having done so? What would the narrative of these events be? And how would they be able to make the American public accept their narrative? After all, millions of people had seen for themselves what happened, and they had seen it on live television. The politicians felt that they would have to *interpret* what people had witnessed - and they would have to do it quickly if they were not to lose the emotional momentum of the public's panic and fear.

The Bush administration immediately and then repeatedly represented what happened on 9/11 as an example of evil as a thing in and of itself. At the same time, they defined this evil as something contingent and relative that could be overcome. To defeat it, according to their narrative, all that was needed was perseverance, sacrifice, and unquestioning trust in their leadership. And they made it clear that anyone who might question the methods they chose to overcome this evil was supporting the terrorists.

It seems that what has happened in this case is similar to the post-WWII struggle to define the Holocaust, in that decisions about the ontological versus the contingent status of that evil constantly shifted in its representation. But then the

representation of whom or what is evil can always be shifted and changed as needed to support the policy imperatives of the moment.

In keeping with their coding of 9/11, and what Sadaam Hussein represented in the coding, the Bush administration claimed that both the 9/11 terrorists and Sadaam were the same evil. Over and over, they linked Sadaam with the frightening and evil events of 9/11. Once the connection was established, there was justification for any action they deemed suitable to fight that evil. It is hard to parse exactly what President Bush was aiming at because his focus shifted and continues to shift from evil - as a thing in and of itself - to individual representations of the *thing* in the form of the terrorists, the murderers, the thugs, Sadaam and, more and more rarely, Osama. In fact, Bin Laden hardly figures in the narrative at all anymore.

The weight that President Bush ascribed to this thing - *evil* - was enormous, in fact it was depicted as nothing short of the greatest threat to freedom-loving-good people in the history of the civilized world. Within such a framework, why would the President have used terms as commonplace as murderers, and thugs to describe what his narrative proclaimed was an *extraordinary* enemy? One reason might have been that by using such powerful emotional terms it made it easier to manipulate the reaction of the electorate - and especially his religious political base - to his policies. It also conveniently framed the war with Iraq in terms of *us-the-good* against a constructed evil that didn't actually exist except as a concept of something that was at odds with this administration's political goals.

The opposition between the sacred-*us* and the profane-*them* has been constructed by the Bush administration's narrative as a conflict between America's normativity and the terrorist's instrumentality, and it has defined what freedom-loving-good people care about - or at least what they have been repeatedly told they *should* care about. This narrative, to paraphrase Jeffrey Alexander, has also placed powerful and aggressive barriers against anything that has been construed as threatening the *good*. These profane forces, according to the narrative, are not only to be avoided but are also sources of horror and pollution that must be contained and destroyed.

The validity of the Bush administration's claim that their policy of response to this evil is the only one possible depends entirely on who is narrating the story and how it is framed.

[...] This is a matter of cultural power in the most mundane and materialist sense. [...] Who controls the means of symbolic production? Now, as it was in 1945, it is 'America's Imperial Republic' - the perspective of the triumphant, forward-looking, militantly and militarily democratic new-world warrior [...].³

I believe it is indeed ‘America’s Imperial Republic’ that has constructed and is directing the cultural and organizational response to the murders of 9/11. And it is only through the means of symbolic production that the events of 9/11 could be coded as *evil*, and only through those means that President Bush was able to tie in Iraq with 9/11.

A standard political narrative has always included the promise to make a better world - both for the present as well as the future. Politicians have traditionally derived a large part of their power and authority from this practice of offering such neat packages of optimism. But beginning in the late 1960’s, they haven’t been able to successfully deliver on very many of these kinds of promises. Since then, more and more people, Americans at least, have become a tougher audience, perhaps even a little cynical, and increasingly, have started questioning the standard ideological narratives of their politicians and, as a consequence, they have even started questioning the power and authority of those politicians.

But 9/11 helped some of these politicians figure out a new way to regain a large measure of their power and authority. They discovered that instead of offering the electorate neatly packaged optimism and dreams of a better world, as they had always done in the past, they examined the flip-side of their rhetoric of optimism, and could now promise to protect them from their fears - and they pointed out and defined for them what they should fear. They now promise to rescue us from dangers that, even though we can’t see them, they assure us, are very real. They offer to save us from a web of pure evil - a global web of terrorist masterminds with sleeper cells everywhere, waiting to attack from the shadows.

3. What’s This Going to Cost?

With this narrative fully constructed, the American people were told, often testily and with little in the way of explanation, what they must give in exchange. It was a long and seemingly open-ended list: their consent to the curtailment of their civil liberties, to absolute secrecy by the government, to unwarranted spying on private citizens, the unlimited detention of hazily categorized ‘suspects’ held on the basis of ‘secret’ evidence and without specific charges and, perhaps most frightening of all, they demanded consent to the torture of so-called ‘detainees’ - because the information they *may* have is vital in the war on terror. Who could legitimately object to such a sacred goal as taking a stand against pure evil? It is a narrative that, at least in America, has been overwhelmingly accepted until fairly recently.

By the end of the 1990’s, both American neoconservatives and radical Islamists found that they were no longer at the center of the world stage. But that changed in one fiery moment on the morning of September the eleventh, 2001. After the initial shock and the brief triumph of the attacks themselves, the militant Islamists in Afghanistan, within a few months and with the help of US troops, had been largely destroyed; and as a result of that destruction, the neocons found themselves once

again in a leading role in Washington. It was the role they had dreamed of and had long and carefully prepared for. They quickly realized that in order to remain in the spotlight, they needed, at least figuratively, the Islamist extremists. They were an absolutely necessary part of the play. The neocons needed an evil and enduring enemy on which to reflect the fear they were manufacturing. This group of religious fundamentalists, whose culture was understood by very few in the Christian world, and who were from a land faraway, was perfect for their purposes. This evil enemy had to of course be based, at least in part, on some version of reality which could then be mythologized into an enemy of monstrous proportion and appetite - a real-world version of Grendel. And as the capabilities and the aims of this carefully constructed enemy grew, though they never offered any realistic prescriptions for dealing with their enemy, the Bush neocons were nonetheless being granted ever increasing power. From one of them, Richard Perle, the Chairman of the Pentagon Defense Policy Board from 2001-2003, a statement that draws a parallel between the cold war with the Soviets and this new conflict:

The struggle against Soviet totalitarianism was a struggle between fundamental value questions. 'Good' and 'Evil' is about as effective a shorthand as I can imagine in this regard, and there's something similar going on in the war on terror. It isn't a war on terror; it's a war on terrorists who want to impose an intolerant tyranny on all mankind, an Islamic universe in which we are all compelled to accept their beliefs and live by their lights, and in that sense, this is a battle between good and evil.⁴

The neocons were granted their ever-increasing power because the so-called 'terror network' proved, at least according to their narrative, what they had been warning us about throughout the 1990's; that there was indeed a threat to America from a terrifying evil that could be anywhere.

4. Why would Anybody Lie about This?

But is this threat of evil really as ubiquitous as they tell us it is? In recent months, mainstream American media pundits have proposed that the executive branch of the US government may have, at least with regard to the Iraq war, been creating fear and using it to sustain or expand their power. Weighting terrorism as the single largest threat to civilization certainly provides almost unlimited possibilities for scripting the politics of fear, but it is not a new or original idea. It is, rather, a revised and updated script for an old and reliable practice. To look at an example of this practice one has only to recall Hitler's rhetoric about the alleged threat posed by the Jews. In post-WWII America, citizens were conditioned to fear communists and a Soviet nuclear attack; now there is the fear of illegal immigration, AIDS, outsourcing of jobs, and on and on. There seem to be no limits

to the use of fear as a commodity. Governments have the ability to manufacture as much fear as they need to achieve their ideological goals.

Evil is an amorphous concept but is an ideal tool in the creation of fear as a political commodity. Part of its value as such a tool is that there is no consensus about what evil is. Its definition is flexible and changeable and, like a prop in the theater, it is no more than a *representation* of something -illusory and symbolic.

Evil is sometimes defined as a lack or privation of good. But if evil is a lack of something, then what is it? Parmenides stated that *nothing cannot be*. If that is true, and evil is truly the absence of something, how then does it hold such power over us? Perhaps one reason is that it can so easily assume whatever shape it is assigned. Or perhaps because of its ability to play on our primal fear of the unknown: it is nothing and, at the same time, it is everything we fear.

Is there a small row of explosives strapped beneath the jacket of the freshly scrubbed, young Muslim man? Why is the person sitting next to you on the flight to Los Angeles fidgeting so much? What is in the tanker about to cross the bridge into the city? Who are they, and what do they look like, and why do they hate us? How will we know when they have come? What should we do? Tell us what to do. Let us consent to something that will protect us from our fears.

5. If It's in the News, It Must be True, Right?

Noam Chomsky, in *Manufacturing Consent*, focused primarily on the news media. But consent may also be manufactured through films, TV entertainment programs, advertising, and fictional narratives such as novels, comic books, and popular music - all of which may be considered powerful components in the process of emotional management of audiences.

Chomsky seems to believe that what matters most is how news is rationed in both print and broadcast news. But also worth considering, along with the way a particular story is presented, and how much attention is given to that story, is how the story is framed and interpreted for its audience *by* the media. I believe this is a critical step in the manufacture of consent. The audience cannot be allowed time to ruminate on a news story and arrive at its own interpretation. Instead, they are told exactly what to think by sources they have been given to believe are *legitimate*. And then, before they have had a chance to digest the story they just heard, instantly comes another story, with no time between the two for reflection. As a result, audiences have become complacent, and unused to conducting their own analysis. They are left with what media empires, and this must include governments, deem appropriate and necessary for discussion and analysis - which will nearly always be done *for* them. Open discussion and analysis in the mainstream American news media all but disappeared after 9/11. The Bush administration's bullying and accusations of treason effectively shamed and silenced any dissent or analysis that was attempted.

Along with how a story is presented and how much attention is given to that story is the way it is constructed as part of a greater framework. Commonly, there is an overarching story that is supported by less important ones. When these less important stories are viewed in terms of the larger message, they can be seen to have served a support function - like individual bricks in the construction of a whole building.

Chomsky's primary focus in *Manufacturing Consent* is on the consent of the elite, but I believe consent is also manufactured through the management of the emotions of the masses. This is where popular, non-news media - anything that's part of the 'dream factory' - come into play. Audiences are lulled by these popular media into an almost dream-like state, a state in which wishes are easily fulfilled and problems sorted out - all through the use of fantasies.

Another important element in the manufacture of consent is the diversion of negative feelings and perceptions away from the power structure. This is often accomplished by the creation of scapegoats for the fears, anger, and the frustrations of the citizenry. Once negativity has been deflected from the leaders, it is a relatively simple matter to manipulate us into acquiescence.

6. Conclusions

In order for us to consent to a joint or communal orientation, we must first be convinced that we belong to a common cause. This common identification and our loyalty to it are embodied in our acceptance of common narratives - the myths and symbols of our institutions. Observance of rituals reminds us that our safety and security depend upon membership in a group that holds these things sacred. Our unquestioning acceptance of the narratives of our leaders and our willingness to acquiesce to what amount to little more than carefully constructed demands for ever-expanding power give us, in exchange, the promise of their protection from all the fears they created in the first place.

Jeffrey Alexander has written that if people choose not to engage in reason, or if they can neither rationally process information nor tell the difference between what is true and what might not be true, then they may be easily manipulated by the very leaders to whom they have granted authority, legitimacy, and their consent. This has been demonstrated in America many times since 9/11.

Critically examining and questioning the narratives of those we have chosen to lead us is not only our right; if a democracy is to function as it was designed to function, we must *demand* reasonable explanations of narratives from our leaders. Until storytellers are held to account for their narratives, they will be able to continue to conjure evil and manufacture fear to serve their own ideological goals. If we agree to buy, with our consent, what they are trying to sell us, in so doing, we will also be compromising our fundamental freedoms. The price being asked for the commodities they are producing and peddling is simply too high to be considered a fair exchange.

Notes

¹ G.W. Bush, 'State of the Union Address', *The White House*, 29 January 2002, Viewed on 29 January 2002, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>.

² J.C. Alexander, *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2003, p. 32.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ A. Curtis, 'The Power of Nightmares Pt. 3: The Shadows in the Cave', *BBC 2*, Viewed on 3 November 2004.

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Part 3

Evil in Cultural Products

Sympathy for the Devil: The Hero is a Terrorist in *V for Vendetta*

Margarita Carretero-González

Abstract

Based on the comic book series published in the eighties, co-authored by Alan Moore and David Lloyd, *V for Vendetta* did not go unnoticed when it was released on spring 2006. Whether we take the view that the film constitutes an apology for terrorism or that it offers a warning about the shape of things to come, this political thriller cannot leave the post- 9/11, 3/11, 7/7 viewer indifferent, even if the central theme of the story revolves around the old tale of coldly served revenge. In this chapter I will be looking at the way *V for Vendetta* problematizes such a sensitive issue as terrorism in a dystopian setting that, however exaggerated, bears striking similarities with our world at the beginning of the 21st century, where fear of terror is impelling governments to take drastic measures to increase safety, while jeopardizing freedom and, on some occasions, even trespassing basic human rights. The story is not new: Zamyatin, Huxley, and Orwell are among those who warned us about the dangers of totalitarian regimes; their heroes, however, were only victims of the system, not terrorists who actively fought against it. V's intentions are honourable, directed to give the power back to the people, but he is moved by a personal vendetta that prevents us from agreeing with some of his methods, especially when they involve the deaths of people who, like him, are just victims of the system. The chapter will deal with the way the film's structure invites the characters - and the viewer - to establish a dialogical relationship with the other, while launching a series of questions that are left for the viewer to answer.

Key Words: *V for Vendetta*, terrorism, revenge, dystopian films, dialogism, intertextuality.

Whenever I am confronted with any type of story dealing with the drastic measures people have taken in desperate times, I cannot help but wonder what I would do should I ever have to live in similar circumstances. Being a politically concerned person in peace times, what would I do if a foreign army suddenly invaded my country? What would I have done if I had been a French citizen during the Nazi invasion? Would I have kept a low profile in order to save my life or would I have become a member of the *résistance*? What if the government of my country suddenly became a dictatorship? As a pacifist and a believer in the power of words and education if the world is ever really to be changed, I fail to see myself using violence to impose my view. And yet, sometimes, as in the world of *V for Vendetta* 'there is no middle ground.'¹ In the dystopian future presented in the film, there is no room for ambiguity.

V for Vendetta is based on Alan Moore and David Lloyd's graphic novel of the same title. However, there are notable differences between the two texts, since they are aimed at different audiences. The graphic novel was particularly addressed to readers concerned with issues affecting life in Britain under Thatcher's rule, whereas the film has a wider audience in mind. In both, a war has put an end to the supremacy of the USA as world power, transforming England into a prevailing nation where any challenge to political, heterosexual, and religious homogeneity is eradicated or kept under cover. A masked man who calls himself V poses a threat to this hegemony and tries to open the nation's eyes to the oppression they have chosen to live in with a series of acts of terrorism directed to blowing up key, symbolic buildings in London. I am not interested in this chapter in establishing a comparison between the graphic novel and the film. Instead, I will concentrate on an analysis of the way the movie deals with issues of terrorism - individual and state - and the breach of boundaries between the self and the other, in a dialogue that cannot leave the viewer indifferent.

The film's political content stirred a lot of controversy from many different voices, some of which directly labelled it as anti-Bush, anti-Christian and pro-terrorist. For Ted Baehr, chairman of the Christian Film and Television Commission, *V for Vendetta* is just 'a vile pro-terrorist piece of neo-Marxist, left-wing propaganda filled with radical sexual politics and nasty attacks on religion and Christianity.'² Moreover, the fact that at the centre of the film lies a story of homosexual love - V's *muse* is a lesbian actress who was a victim, like V, of a series of experiments carried out on ethnic, sexual, and political minorities - has earned the film strong attacks from other conservative Christian groups who condemn its sympathetic portrayal of homosexuality and Islam, in contrast to the negative depiction of some of the Christian leaders of the country: a power-driven dictator, a narcissistic, drug addict TV pundit, or a paedophilic bishop.

But criticism has also come from the ranks of anarchists. Alan Moore accused the Wachowski brothers' script of watering down the original anarchist ideology present in the graphic novel. The result, according to Moore, has transformed his original work, intended to place two political extremes against each other, namely anarchism and fascism, into a story of 'current American neo-conservatism vs. current American liberalism.'³

It is not difficult to see the film attacking current international politics and the war in Iraq in the references to 'America's war' reaching England. Not only does the movie include footage of demonstrations against the war but also more subtle commentaries can be found in Gordon Deitrich's cellar, where this closeted homosexual with a prominent job on television hides a collection of forbidden artworks. Among those, the viewer can catch a glimpse of a flag, made up of the Union Jack, the Stars and Stripes, and the Nazi swastika, with the motto 'THE COALITION OF THE WILLING TO POWER.' According to director James McTeigue, the flag 'speaks to the present and the regime in the film, in a fairly

blunt fashion,⁴ but the fact that the camera does not dwell on it for too long transforms it into a rather elegant treat for the keen-eyed.

And yet, to consider the film just as a direct commentary on our present times would be tremendously unfair. *V for Vendetta* is far more than an attack on the Bush administration; it is the story of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and of Frankenstein's creature turned political. Our current times offer just one of the many texts the film establishes a dialogical relationship with, in an attempt to reflect any period in which individual freedom has been completely abolished in the name of - allegedly - public good. Through a series of intertextual relationships with narratives of the Iraqi war, of Nazi Germany, of Stalin's Russia, with literary and plastic artworks, cinema, and music, the film tries to break the boundaries between the self and the other, challenging the authoritarian discourse of the one-party society with a polyphony of voices coming from many different grounds. By the end of the film, the three central characters - V, Evey, and Inspector Finch - have confronted their own identity and, enabled to step out from their limited selves, can see the world from the other's perspective. To reinforce this idea, the film plays with the recurrent motifs of the mask and the mirror, useful tropes to deal with issues of identity and duality, together with a series of parallel narratives that echo this dialogue.

Although V is the only character who wears a visible, tangible mask, everybody else in the film is wearing a metaphorical one. Behind the deep religiousness and moral concerns of the members of Norsefire - the political party ruling England - lies a tremendous terrorist attack which, although blamed on Islamist extremists, was carried out by the leaders of the Party, an attack which enabled them to win the elections by a landslide, while making them incredibly rich thanks to the inoculation against the virus they had created. As said above, a paedophilic bishop and a drug-addict TV pundit, preserver of morality in his daily tirades against homosexuals and ethnic minorities, are among the gems of the Party, some of the villains hidden beneath the mask that advocates for 'Strength through Unity, Unity through Faith.'

V's first attempt to break up this hegemony, to tear off the mask covering the government's hideous face, is to blow up the Old Bailey to the music of a concerto, dedicated, as he explains to Evey, 'to Madame Justice [...], in honor of the holiday she seems to have taken from these parts and in recognition of the imposter [*sic*] that stands in her stead.'⁵ The following day, knowing that the government will falsify the news, V takes the TV station and addresses the nation with an inflammatory discourse that forces spectators to confront themselves and see the part they have played in bringing about their own oppression:

The truth is there is something terribly wrong with this country
isn't there? Cruelty and injustice, intolerance and oppression.

And where once you had the freedom to object, to think and speak as you saw fit, you now have censors and systems of surveillance, coercing your conformity and soliciting your submission. How did this happen? Who is to blame? Certainly there are those who are more responsible than others and they will be held accountable, but again, truth be told, if you are looking for the guilty, you need only to look into a mirror.⁶

While V addresses the nation, the camera moves from the TV set to the attentive viewers, enthralled by V's speech which, rather than being a mere accusation, intends to awaken the citizens from their long passivity:

I know why you did it. I know you were afraid. Who wouldn't be? War. Terror. Disease. Food and water shortages. There were a myriad of problems which conspired to corrupt your reason and rob you of your common sense. Fear got the best of you and in your panic you turned to now High Chancellor Adam Sutler, with his gleaming boots and polished leather and his garrison of goons. He promised you order. He promised you peace. And all he demanded in return was your silent, obedient, consent. Last night, I sought to end the silence. Last night, I destroyed the Old Bailey to remind this country of what it has forgotten.⁷

The price to pay for peace and order has proved to be too high and V's wake-up call to remove the mask, look at the reflection in the mirror, and accept a certain share of responsibility in the shape the world has taken is offered as the only solution to change it.

Like the mask, the mirror is a recurrent motif all through the film, present almost from the very beginning, when a travelling of the camera connects V's mirror in his Shadow Gallery, with that of Evey in another part of London. At that time, both characters are getting ready to get out: V adjusting his wig and mask, Evey putting some make up on, the camera creating the illusion that there is only one wall separating them. Perhaps an indication that the distance between them is not that big?

Later on in the movie, just before V kills him, Lewis Prothero takes a shower surrounded by mirrors and a TV monitor which constantly projects his own image. The scene offers a kaleidoscopic reflection of the aggressive man known as 'The Voice of London,' as if revealing the many facets of his personality, those hidden beneath the mask of fierce religiousness and morality Prothero uses to address TV viewers every evening. A series of mirrors strategically placed allows us to look at an object or a person from very different perspectives. On other occasions, it can help us to look at what's behind us without the need to turn ourselves. One such

mirror is used in the scene where V accepts Evey's offer to help him in his crusade. While she is polishing the mirror in question, we hear V addressing her, but we cannot see him, until a wider shot allows both Evey - turned to the camera - and V to be within the mirror, which thus reflects Evey's back and V's face. As viewers, we share V's position. Is he also standing for us? Evey's offer to help V is just a trick to get away from her imprisonment but, at that moment, neither V nor the reader knows about that.

The mirror, however, is not an easy trope to read. While it helps to look at ourselves and at reality from different angles, eventually opening up our view, it is no less true that the vision a mirror offers is distorted. What we see is just a reflection but cleverly used - as Perseus could tell - that reflection can be tremendously useful. Two paintings in V's Shadow Gallery, Jan van Eyck's 'Arnolfini Marriage' and John William Waterhouse's 'Lady of Shalott' are used to reinforce these two contrasting ideas. Van Eyck's painting displays a mirror in its centre, between Arnolfini and his wife, allowing the viewer to see what they are seeing, including the beholder and the beheld in the painting, as happened with V and Evey in the aforementioned scene. In Waterhouse's painting, the mirror is absent but, as anyone familiar with Tennyson's poem knows, is central to the story of the Lady of Shalott, cursed to look at the world through a mirror. On this occasion (Waterhouse painted different versions of the same topic), the artist chose to paint the moment when the Lady faces her death, sitting in the boat which will eventually take her to Camelot, after having dared to turn her eyes away from the mirror the moment Lancelot entered her angle of vision, choosing instead to look straight at him. As in V's world, the price to pay for wanting to look directly at reality is death; the Lady dies, but not before having seen 'the water lily bloom, [...] the helmet and the plume,'⁸ preferable to the shadows offered by the mirror. Although dead, she eventually even reaches Camelot.

Yet, unveiling the mask and looking at the mirror is just part of the process. In order to reach the truth, it is important to establish a dialogue with the other. This is what Inspector Finch learns to do while he investigates V and tries to prevent the announced bombing of the Houses of Parliament. His investigations on the terrorist lead him to unveil a different type of terrorism, hidden beneath the mask worn precisely by those who ordered him to stop V. Like the Lady of Shalott, Finch has confronted reality and is not only afraid to pay the same price, but also to admit that he is part of the system that has allowed such an atrocity to happen. In the following scene, Finch does the unthinkable; he dares question the government's version of events.

Finch: I want to ask a question, Dominic. I don't care if you answer me or not. I just want to say this aloud but I need to know that this question will not leave this office. [...] The question I want to ask is about St. Mary's. And Three Waters. The question

that's kept me up for the last twenty-four hours, the question I have to ask is what if the worst, most horrifying biological attack in this country's history was not the work of religious extremists?

Dominic: What? I don't understand. We know it was. They were caught. They confessed.

Finch: And they were executed. I know and that may be what really happened but I see this chain of events, these coincidences, and I have to ask what if that isn't what happened. What if someone else unleashed that virus, what if someone else killed all those people, would you want to know who it was?

Dominic: Sure.

Finch: Even if it was someone working for this government? That's my question. If our own government was responsible for what happened at St. Mary's and Three Waters, if our own government was responsible for the death of 80,000 people, would you really want to know?

Dominic: Honestly? [...] I don't know.⁹

Dominic's last intervention in the above passage is taken from the script but was removed from the film, leaving Finch's question in the air, addressed not only to Dominic but also to the viewer. As long as an evil action is ascribed to another, differentiated from the self, knowledge is demanded, punishment sought. The self feels comfortable in its disassociation from the evil other. To know the truth becomes less palatable when the possibility exists that this differentiation is non-existent. Dominic expresses doubts about wanting to know the truth, but Finch's actions show that his own answer is affirmative. Investigating the evil other has led Finch to unmask the extended self he is a part of. The terrorist is, in fact, reacting to an act of state terrorism. Why should one be more legitimate than the other? After seeing the self as perceived by the other, an exchange of viewpoints is the only path to mutual, complete recognition and understanding. This need for dialogue is reinforced in the movie by a series of parallel narratives, both oral and visual.

In his *Shadow Gallery*, V collects pieces of art taken from an Orwellian Ministry of Objectional Material. Similarly, Gordon Deitrich keeps in his cellar an assortment of banned artworks, hidden from the public view, like his homosexuality. This is one of the many instances in which correspondences are

found between these two characters: they both offer shelter to Evey, cook the same breakfast for her, make similar comments about the political situation in their country and they are given a very similar conversation with the female protagonist. Thus, to Evey's 'God, if they ever find this place,' referring to the Shadow Gallery, V replies: 'I suspect that if they do find this place a few bits of art will be the least of my worries.'¹⁰ Later, to Evey's concern about causing Gordon any trouble by hiding in his house, he retorts: 'If the government ever searched my house, you would be the least of my problems.'¹¹ The mask they wear - factual in the case of V, metaphorical for Gordon - has somehow made both men forget about their real selves. Years before, Doctor Delia Surridge had written in her diary that, after the series of experiments carried out on V 'the subject said he could no longer remember who he was or where he was from.'¹² In a similar way, Gordon admits to Evey that 'after so many years you begin to lose more than just your appetite. You wear a mask for so long, you forget who you were beneath it.'¹³ Towards the end of the film, Evey attempts to take V's mask, as if seeing his face would give her a complete knowledge of the person who has freed her from constant fear. V gently stops her hands, adding that '[t]here is a face beneath this mask, but it is not me. I am no longer that face that I am the muscles beneath it or the bones beneath that.'¹⁴ After all, any mask reveals just another one, made of the skin, the bones, the muscles, all the fibres that give physicality to our intangible self.

Together with parallel characters and remarks, the movie also makes use of purely filmic techniques to insist on the need to establish constant dialogue between the self and the other. In a flashback to Evey's childhood, for instance, the film shows her mother closing the bedroom door behind her and urging her daughter to hide. From her position under the bed, a young Evey can see her mother fall to the ground, beaten and black-bagged by the secret police. Virtually the same scene takes place years later, at Gordon Deitrich's house. Like Evey's mother did, Gordon urges Evey to hide under the bed and she, in the same fashion, sees Gordon's beaten face and body fall to the ground before mercilessly being dragged out of the room.

From my point of view, however, the most interesting of these parallel narratives is offered by the sequence in which Evey's present and Valerie's past are placed in contact, with V as a mediator. The initial dialogue between the two women ends up being an exchange between three characters connected by the same letter: Evey, Valerie, and V.

Evey's incarceration and torture turns out to be a rite of passage perpetrated by V as a necessary suffering for her complete liberation. While in her cell, she accesses a letter hidden in a hole, apparently addressed to her. In that letter, both Evey and the film-viewer learn the story of Valerie, a beautiful lesbian actress, arrested by the Party and transformed into a guinea pig for their scientific experimentation. A series of flashbacks accompany Valerie's narrative, showing her head being shaved in the same way as we had previously seen Evey lose her

hair, hiding the letter in a toilet, the piece of paper which Evey recovers from the same source, or writing in the same position as Evey is reading, both wearing the same red clothing, staying in a similar cell. The letter becomes Evey's only source of comfort, and is the item which connects the three lives. The sequencing of the images creates the illusion that the action is taking place simultaneously, that Evey and Valerie take turns in the same cell and in writing and reading the letter. In fact, the two women are separated by many years; Valerie was in fact the prisoner staying in the cell next to V's and it was to him that the letter was originally addressed. V has used it on Evey so that it could have on her the same effect it once caused on him.

Following Evey's initial explosion of anger towards V once she learns that he had been her torturer, she truly experiments a rebirth. After an asthma attack, V takes her up to the terrace. It's raining but Evey, disregarding V's offer of his coat to protect her, steps out of the shelter and into the rain, which she welcomes as a blessing while raising her arms in a victorious V. The camera then transports the viewer again to V's past, holding his arms in a similar V position, while emerging from the flames. The two images quickly and repeatedly follow each other, joining the two characters together.

Three are the viewpoints that become interchanged at the end of the story: those of Evey, V, and Inspector Finch. Evey has truly stepped out of her self and is capable of looking at life from V's perspective. That at the beginning she is centred in herself is clear from the way she responds to V's favourite film, *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Despite its happy ending, Evey feels 'sorry for Mercedes [...] [b]ecause he cared more about revenge than [sic] he did about her.'¹⁵ Later, Evey's reconsideration of the film, voiced shortly before V's final act, reveals that she is now able to see the world from his perspective: 'You know,' she says to V, 'I found a copy of 'The Count of Monte Cristo.' I think of you every time I watch it. It's funny though, I never feel as sad for Mercedes as I do for the Count.'¹⁶

But, as said above, Evey is not the only character who has undertaken this successful journeying towards an understanding of the other. So has V, as it emerges from the reasons he gives to make Evey his heir:

This is my gift to you, Evey. Everything that I have, my home, my books, the gallery, this train I am leaving to you to do what you will. [...] The truth is that you made me understand that I was wrong. That the choice to pull this lever is not mine to make. [...] Because this world, the world I am a part of and that I helped shape will end tonight. Tomorrow a different world will begin, that different people will shape and this choice belongs to them.¹⁷

Like Evey, V has been capable of abandoning his own self and, once his personal vendetta is almost over, understands that it is only fair to leave to people - represented then and there by Evey - to make the choices about their future. As she explains to Finch, she chooses to pull the lever, because 'he was right [about] that this country needs more than a building right now. It needs hope.'¹⁸

At this point in the film, Finch, who has become an external observer, not emotionally involved with either V or Evey, also reaches the end of his journey towards an appreciation of the other, a journey which he started with the intention of preventing the terrorist to destroy the Houses of Parliament but which he ends lowering his gun and allowing Evey to pull the lever that activates the train which blows up the emblematic building. We, the film viewers, have made the same journey as Finch, possibly reaching the same conclusion. We find our rational mind questioning the protagonist's methods, but feel the urge to see him triumph and mentally encourage Evey to pull the lever. I completely disagree that the film condones terrorism. As I hope to have explained in this chapter, it invites to understand the reasons why, on some occasions, some people may resort to abhorrent violence before easily labelling them and making every effort to distance our selves from theirs. It is not a case of sympathising with the devil, but of carefully looking for where he really hides.

Notes

¹ J. McTeigue (dir), J. Silver, G. Hill, A. Wachowski and L. Wachowski (prods), *V for Vendetta*, Warner Bros, 2007.

² T. Baehr, 'Time Warner Promotes Terrorism and Anti-Christian Bigotry in New Leftist Movie *V for Vendetta*', *WorldNetDaily*, 17 March 2006, Viewed on 26 November 2006, http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=49317.

³ H. MacDonald, 'A for Alan, Pt. 1: The Alan Moore Interview', *Giant Magazine*, 15 March 2006, Viewed on 26 November 2006, http://www.comicon.com/thebeat/2006/03/a_for-alan_pt_1_the_alan_moore.html.

⁴ L. Wachowski, A. Wachowski and J. McTeigue, *V for Vendetta: From Script to Film*, Rizzoli, New York, 2006, p. 241.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-41.

⁸ Lord Tennyson, 'The Lady of Shalott', *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 7th Edition, Vol. 2, M.H. Abrams and S. Greenblatt (eds), W W Norton C and Company, New York and London, 2000, p. 1206.

⁹ Wachowski, Wachowski and McTeigue, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-101.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹³ Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 151-152.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 152.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 153-154.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 166.

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Murder Made Beautiful: Aestheticisation of Crime Scenes in Contemporary Media

Ann Danilevich

Abstract

While cop shows and films have long featured images of murder, the publication of image-driven coffee table books such as *Law & Order Crime Scenes* and *High Fashion Crime Scenes* marks a new interest in the crime scene as an important site of cultural production. These visually sumptuous books represent an aestheticization of the image of murder, an infinitely variable act that has achieved a new valence in contemporary media. Photographer Melanie Pullen, for example, recreates historical crime scenes, but adds a modern twist to the events she re-stages by dressing her victims in the latest *haute couture*. The photographs are sensationally staged and deeply disturbing: gorgeously dressed victims are submerged in pools or rivers; *femmes fatale* are found dead inside taxis. Through the process of aestheticization, the image of murder is made fantastic and even glamorous, and is therefore dissociated from the brutal reality of the act depicted. This chapter explores the aestheticisation of murder, focusing on the interpretation and reception of crime scene imagery. The argument centres on the photography of Melanie Pullen, but is supplemented with other examples from contemporary media texts, *Law & Order Crime Scenes* being one.

Key Words: Melanie Pullen, High Fashion Crime Scenes, aestheticisation, crime scene, CSI, media, photography.

Images of violence and death are ubiquitous in contemporary media. While cop shows and films have long featured images of murder, the publication of image-centred coffee table books such as *Law & Order Crime Scenes*¹ and *High Fashion Crime Scenes*² marks a new interest in the crime scene as an important site of cultural production. Due to advancements in the technology of special effects the portrayal of the dead/wounded body reached a new level of realism.³ These advancements are concomitant with a spread of rampant consumerism and media attention to fashion, luxury, and a jet-set life of glamour, which is offered as *the ultimate* consumer fantasy. In addition, a new emphasis on the representation of the *real* via Reality TV has been taking shape in both North America and Europe, true crime shows like *America's Most Wanted* and *Crimewatch* being some of the early examples. The desire for authentic representations of crime coupled with luxurious lifestyles is depicted in shows like *CSI* (Crime Scene Investigation), and to a degree *Law & Order*, *Crossing Jordan*, etc. Death, crime, and violence are not taboos in the entertainment industry, *au contraire* they are selling points. Murder,

an infinitely variable act that has achieved a new valence in contemporary media, is made fantastic and even glamorous through aestheticization. For many people (particularly in the West) encounters with violent death occur most often through mediation, and death is thus encountered as an image. What is of particular interest here is how the images of murder are shifting. By focusing primarily on the photography of Melanie Pullen, and supplementary examples from other contemporary media texts, this chapter explores the aestheticization of murder, and the interpretation and reception of crime scene imagery.

Many crime scene photographers, in the early years of crime scene documentation, had a background in fine art. As a result, the images they produced were often aesthetically well-composed, and the distinction between a sterile image of *evidence* and an artistic production, was not so clear-cut.⁴ Today, aesthetic images of the crime scene are predominantly found in media representations via films and television shows. Melanie Pullen's collection of photography, recently published under the title *High Fashion Crime Scenes*, was inspired by Luc Sante's book *Evidence*, a compilation of New York Police Department crime scene photographs produced between 1914 and 1919.⁵ In her work, Pullen recreates authentic crime scenes predominantly from the 40s and 50s, using visual documentation and written descriptions that she has gathered from the Los Angeles Police Department and Coroner's Office.⁶ The difference between the archival footage and Pullen's photographs resides in her dressing the 'victims' in *haute couture* and restaging the crime scenes in modern locations; the details of the death, however, are recreated to the detail.⁷ In order to get each shot just right Pullen employs set designers, make up artists, and has even used 'the stunt team who worked on *Kill Bill*, a prosthetics and special effects crew;⁸ top designers also send her clothes to use in her shoots.⁹ Her photographs are sensationally staged and deeply disturbing: beautiful women hang from real or imagined nooses; gorgeously dressed victims are submerged in rivers or pools; *femme fatales* are found dead inside taxis.¹⁰ Luke Crisell incisively notes that, '[w]hile representations of violence have long dominated all fields of visual culture, Pullen's compositions are unusual in that the statement being made is artistic rather than political.'¹¹

It is in the aestheticization of the crime scene in an attempt to make it more seductive and appealing rather than shocking or gruesome, that her work differs from that of artists like Cindy Sherman, who has pushed de-idealization of the aesthetic body - offered to the mass public through the media - to the point of desublimation.¹² Art Historian Hal Foster states that Sherman's work,

points to the gap between the imagined and actual body-images that yawns within each of us, the gap of (mis)recognition that we attempt to fill with fashion models and entertainment images every day and every night of our lives.¹³

In contrast to Sherman, Pullen's photographs depict the same idealized body that is so often represented in the media.¹⁴ In her use of the language of the media her work has similarities with Andy Warhol's disaster series (a connection that I will explore at a later date).¹⁵ In a short article in *High Fashion Crime Scenes*, Colin Westbeck writes that:

Pullen belongs to the late flowering of post-modernism now in progress. When this movement got going a generation ago, it targeted media culture with parodies or polemics that distanced themselves from their subject by being intentionally clumsy, crude imitations - work like Barbara Kruger's or Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*. The more attention the post-modernists have attracted, however, the closer their art moved to the media's own production values.¹⁶

The idealized female body, drawn from the repertoire of such imagery circulating in the media, is not subverted through the representation of its death in Pullen's work. Rather its appearance in *High Fashion Crime Scenes* seems to extenuate the interchangeable quality of that body. As several critics noted, her work 'walks a delicate line between glamorising violence and being critical of it.'¹⁷

In television shows like *Law & Order* or *CSI*, the crime scene is created as part of a storyline that unravels in the span of an episode. Speaking of the crime scene in *Law & Order*, the show's producer Dick Wolf states:

It [the crime scene] is a door to explore the cost and consequences of violence and the specific way that we as a society - on the concrete streets of our urban environment - wrestle with evil and try to put wrong, right.¹⁸

In addition to presenting the viewer with a crime scene, the show seeks to explore the human cost of murder. The crime scene itself is but a small portion of the program, though some would argue it is the most important one. Even the imagery in *Law & Order Crime Scenes*, which features over forty pages of staged crime scenes shot by photographer Jessica Burstein over a decade on the set of the program, contextualises the realistic images with commentary on how *Law & Order* originated, and what goes into the making of a crime scene for television. Pullen also insists that each of her images tells a story, 'a complete story with its beginning, middle, and end.'¹⁹ However, unlike in television and film, the story is by no means complete. The image of the murdered victim, the crime scene itself, is only the middle of that story - the beginning being what led up to the murder and the end the apprehension of the murderer. The photographs in *High Fashion Crime Scenes* are sumptuous visuals with beautiful female *corpses* acting as

interchangeable protagonists in each representation.²⁰ The viewer as voyeur is invited to look at the moment after someone's death, when the murderer has left the scene. The story that Pullen describes is therefore in the viewer's mind - it is a re-imagining or reconstruction of the act of murder, or more precisely its reconstruction based on familiar representations offered by mainstream media.

The media sensationalizes violent crime, and murder in particular, and although the public is generally educated about the inner workings of the media, they often come to believe what the media represents as truth.²¹ Mark Seltzer calls this a *half-belief*. The belief of *real* crime is displaced onto mediated accounts of crime, which are increasingly sensationalized.²² But this was not always so. In his influential essay 'The Pornography of Death,' Geoffrey Groer states that for two hundred years birth and copulation were unmentionable, while death and dying were a common topic of conversation and contemplation. In the 20th century, however, the situation became reversed. Whereas sex became widely discussed, the subject of death has 'become more and more 'unmentionable' as a natural process.'²³ As natural death was moved out of discussion in the public sphere, the subject and depiction of violent death was becoming more pronounced, and 'has played an ever-growing part in the fantasies offered to mass-audiences.'²⁴ Likewise, Vicki Goldberg has argued that the increase in imagery of violent death stems from our removal from *sight* of actual death.²⁵ Societal changes, including those in medicine and religion, made death and dying nearly invisible to the general public, particularly in large cities. According to Goldberg, 'when it came to matters of death, people who were no longer seeing quite so much of it up close learned to accept representations that looked real as a substitute for experience.'²⁶ Death was becoming a mediated visual spectacle. As the word 'spectacle' implies, sensational death was given representational precedent; this also has to do with its relative rarity - it is unlikely to occur and is therefore a *safe* fantasy.²⁷ Furthermore, the repeatability of death that its image offers masks the reality of dying.²⁸ Through the image we are confronted with death, but 'it is the death of another.'²⁹ According to Elisabeth Bronfen images of death can be pleasing because they are regarded as fantasy. Writing of aesthetic representations of death in particular, Bronfen states that 'the aesthetic representation of death lets us repress our knowledge of death precisely because here death occurs *at* someone else's body and *as* an image.'³⁰

But do we come to view images of violent crime scenes as aesthetic? I suggest that the crime scene image becomes aesthetic through internal or external aestheticizing elements. This theoretical binary may be useful in distinguishing the deliberate aestheticizations of a representation by its creator, and those that emerge from the way the representation is used. Internal aestheticizing elements are those found in the images themselves; these include decadent clothes, idealized bodies, scenic surroundings, lighting, and choice of film. External aestheticizing elements are found outside of the images; they are contextualizing conceptual or

environmental factors that serve as a mediating layer between the image and the viewer.

According to Pullen, the internal aestheticizing elements (though she does not use that phrase) found in her work are *deliberate* distractions from the crime scenes she depicts: 'the goal being that the last thing you notice is the crime itself.'³¹ For example, *Zanotti's Sunflare*, at first glance, appears as image of nature. Bright daylight sun slices through an opening in a line of evergreens highlighting the soft winter snow. The viewer's gaze is immediately drawn to the intense sunlight emanating from the top left corner, and then follows the diagonal flow of the light to the bottom right corner of the photograph where, upon close inspection a pair legs in black pointed-toe stiletto heels stick out from inside a wooden barrel. The legs, the heels, and the barrel, which is the same colour as the tree trunks that surround it, blend into the background seamlessly, as if they are as much a part of nature as the trees. In *Red Phone*, the intense red of a velvet-textured dress, worn by a lifeless female, and the telephone, the cord of which is caught under the weight of her fingers, visually fuse with the deep wound on the exposed flesh between her neck and chest. Three streams of blood ooze from the wound, echoing the decorative red filaments suspended from the ceiling. The representations of the crimes are, therefore, overshadowed by the scenic surroundings, high fashion heels, clothing, and other details in the images. Similarly, in a television show like *CSI*, of which there are three incarnations - Las Vegas, New York, Miami - the glamorous lifestyles, idealized bodies, and scenic locales serve an internal aestheticizing function. Internal aestheticizing elements thus make the representation of the murder or crime scene more pleasing to look at, more aesthetic.

Alternatively, external aestheticizing elements mediate the reception of a spectacular image. A conceptual framework or genre fit is one such element. Pullen's work is often equated with a suspense thriller film, a murder mystery novel, or a high fashion shoot, which creates a ready access point for many viewers. This is noted by Charlene Roth when she states that:

[t]he genre fit with mystery writing, high fashion photography and abject art is auspicious for Pullen's photographs because it provides a readymade conceptual foundation for the art that is also a point of entry for viewers.³²

The physical environment in which the images are received also serves an aestheticizing function.³³ Encountering crime scenes in an art exhibition, for example, immediately creates a buffer for the viewer - it's in a gallery; it is to be looked as an aesthetic product. Similarly, when looking at a crime scene in the context of a television show like *CSI*, the crime is automatically rendered fantastic, no matter how realistic the imagery. This is articulated by Kathy Smith who states

that, 'televsual images domesticize, contextualizing and juxtaposing spectacular images within the familiarity of the domestic space.'³⁴ Following that line of argument, we can attribute a similar domesticating function to the format of the coffee table book. Firstly, the images in the book are encountered either in a domestic or retail setting, both of which are familiar to the viewer/consumer. Likewise, spectacular imagery involving fashion and beautiful, sexualized women is a genre fit. In Pullen's work the internal and external aestheticization elements work together to neutralize the image of murder, so to speak; even the title of her collection of photography *High Fashion Crime Scenes* has an aestheticizing function - these are scenes of high fashion, not real crimes.

It is the sensationalization and glamorization of crime by the media that Pullen declares she sets out to expose in her photographs.³⁵ The vintage nature of the crime scenes on which her imagery is based,³⁶ her appropriation of the entertainment industry's fetishization of violence, and sexualized representation of the female body, however, make such a critique both questionable and difficult to spot. The reality is that we are living in a society of spectacle, which inevitably perpetuates a spectacle economy.³⁷ Pullen's work plays off this economy by offering the viewer both a spectacle and commodity - as artwork or book for sale. Furthermore, positive reviews of Pullen's *High Fashion Crime Scenes* have appeared in many art, culture, and fashion magazines and widely-read newspapers; they have also been featured in an episode of the Canadian program *Fashion Television*.³⁸ An interesting dynamic is created through this process. Pullen incorporates the imagery offered by contemporary media into her work to create critiques of the glamorization of violence, yet her images do not subvert dominant media representations, but seem to heighten and push them further. Her sensational images are then picked up again by the media. I would suggest that photographs like Pullen's come to influence subsequent media representations of crime scenes in programs such as *CSI*, in which fashion and lifestyle play as important a role as the crime scene investigation (though this needs to be explored further). As most people encounter death, particularly murder, through its representation as an image in the media, aesthetic depictions of murder in crime scenes may become the standard representation of murder in the years to come.

Notes

¹ D. Wolf and J. Burstein, *Law & Order Crime Scenes*, Sterling Publishing Co. Inc., New York, 2003.

² M. Pullen, *High Fashion Crime Scenes*, Nazraeli Press, Tucson, Arizona, 2005.

³ J. Nuttall, *Art and the Degradation of Awareness*, Calder Publications and Riverrun Press, London and New York, 2001.

⁴ ACE Gallery Beverly Hills Institute of Contemporary Art, Press Release, *Melanie Pullen: High Fashion Crime Scenes*, May 12 2005. <http://www.highfashioncrimescenes.com>.

⁵ L. Crisell, 'Foreword', *High Fashion Crime Scenes*, Nazraeli Press, Tucson, Arizona, 2005.

⁶ C. Roth, 'Melanie Pullen at Silver Lake Society for Authentic Arts', *ArtWeek*, September 2004; and R. Enright, 'Urge and Urgency: The Artful Photographs of Melanie Pullen', *High Fashion Crime Scenes*, Nazraeli Press, Tucson, Arizona, 2005 and ACE Gallery, op. cit.

⁷ N. Mcdonell Smith, 'Fashion Victims: Melanie Pullen Shoots Weegee-Like Pictures with Gucci-Like Style', *The New York Times*, 29 August 2004 and ACE Gallery, op. cit.

⁸ J. Hundley, 'Fashion Victims' Gallery Scene', *Los Angeles Times*, 17 June 2004, E14-15 and ACE Gallery, op. cit.

⁹ Mcdonell Smith, op. cit.

¹⁰ For images of Pullen's work see M. Pullen, *High Fashion Crime Scenes*, Viewed on 9 October 2005, <http://www.highfashioncrimescenes.com>.

¹¹ Crisell, op. cit.

¹² H. Foster, 'Obscene, Abject, Traumatic', *October*, Fall 1996, pp.107-124.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Enright states that 'Pullen works almost exclusively with women because 'they are more distracting and interesting to look at in photographs' and because they are what the advertising world uses to sell magazines'. This type of assessment, however, questions the critique of violence Pullen says she is attempting to address. I will explore this idea in depth in a longer version of this chapter.

¹⁵ In this series Warhol appropriated newspaper images of disasters (car crashes, suicides, deaths, etc.) and recreated them repeatedly in colourful silkscreen paintings.

¹⁶ C. Westerbeck, 'Drowning in Organdy', *High Fashion Crime Scenes*, Nazraeli Press, Tucson, Arizona, 2005.

¹⁷ Enright, op. cit.

¹⁸ D. Wolf, 'Introduction', op. cit.

¹⁹ Pullen, op. cit.

²⁰ I say 'interchangeable' because each woman conforms to today standards of beauty - she is thin, attractive, and fashionable. Substituting one woman for another would not change the substantial quality of the image.

²¹ M. Seltzer, 'The Crime System', *Critical Inquiry*, Spring 2004, pp. 557-583.

²² Ibid.

²³ G. Groer, 'The Pornography of Death', *Death, Grief, and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, G. Groer (ed), The Cresset Press, London, 1965.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ V. Goldberg, 'Death Takes a Holiday, Sort Of', *Why We Watch: The Attractions of Violent Entertainment*, J. Goldstein (ed), Oxford University Press, New York, 1998.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid. Goldberg asserts that fantasizing about violent death is safe because it is an uncommon occurrence, unlike death from cancer or Parkinson's.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ E. Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death Femininity and the Aesthetic*, Routledge, New York, 1992.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Pullen, op. cit.

³² Roth, op. cit.

³³ J.H. Goldstein, 'Why We Watch', *Why We Watch: The Attractions of Violent Entertainment*, J. Goldstein (ed), Oxford University Press, New York, 1998. Goldstein argues that the context of the images plays a role in their reception. If images depicting violence do not have enough clues within them to render them unreal, then the physical environment in which they are located does - an example of which is the movie theatre.

³⁴ K. Smith, 'Reframing Fantasy: September 11 and the Global Audience', *The Spectacle of the Real: From Hollywood to Reality TV and Beyond*, G. King (ed), Intellect Ltd, Bristol, UK, 2005.

³⁵ Pullen, op. cit.

³⁶ Roth, op. cit.

³⁷ S. Lütticken, 'An Arena in Which to Reenact', *Life, Once More: Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art*, Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, 2005. The term 'society of spectacle' is taken from Guy Debord's text of that title.

³⁸ Fashion Television, 'Fashion CSI', *Star*, Viewed on 4 October 2006.

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The Sound of Evil: Confronting Nazism in Two Movie Musicals

David E. Isaacs

Abstract

Evil as a thematic element has often been either ignored or watered down in musicals. This chapter contrasts two popular musicals' use of Nazism to further their plots. *The Sound of Music* fails to address evil in a meaningful way even while using the Nazi takeover of Austria as a backdrop. The Nazis are caricatured more as leering bureaucrats rather than those seeking the annihilation of others. By not more fully engaging the evils of that regime, the film implies it is better to run away from evil than to resist it. *Cabaret* shows the subtle rise of Nazism in pre-war Berlin. While Sally Bowles and her friends indulge their passions, their rights are subtly removed; thus, evil triumphs as long as the average person does nothing. *The Sound of Music* engaged audiences in a much more popular way than *Cabaret*, becoming one of the most popular films of all time. This chapter explores whether evil taken seriously could be an appropriate topic of study in making a successful American movie musical.¹

Key Words: Bob Fosse, *Cabaret*, evil, film, musical, Nazi, Robert Wise, *The Sound of Music*.

Once a cinema staple, movie musicals have declined in popularity even though films such as *The Sound of Music* and *Grease* once set box office records and still sell well on video. As Leo Stern states, '[t]he movie musical is escapism at its best,'² and most agree that the musical is primarily escapist fare. However, besides putting romantic comedies to music, the musical has also been at the forefront of social commentary, especially regarding race relations and bigotry - for example, *Show Boat* (1929), *Hallelujah* (1929), and *Whoopie* (1930) confronted racism before their time. Other films, especially those featuring the music of Oscar Hammerstein II such as *Carmen Jones* (1954), *The King and I* (1956), and *South Pacific* (1958), continued to address racism in particular. However, given other evils, such as the evils of Nazism, war, or gender inequality, musicals have often ignored the issues, watered them down so as to render any real conflict with evil meaningless, or not addressed the issue in any significant way. When musicals have attempted to grapple with other heavy issues, they have mostly been ignored at the box office - consider *Rent*, which addresses AIDS and homosexuality among other contemporary issues; the show had incredible success on stage yet failed as a film in 2005.

Two successful musical films - *The Sound of Music* and *Cabaret* - serve as cases in point. Both used the rise in Nazism to further their plots without fully

addressing the evil presented by Hitler's regime. Both succeeded financially,³ but *The Sound of Music* engaged audiences in a more popular way, becoming one of the most popular and enduring movies in the United States (with frequent revivals, yearly showings on television, and public sing-alongs) while *Cabaret*, generally more appreciated by critics, has not had the same staying power. One reason may be because the first film deals less with the Nazi motifs while the second makes it a crucial element, raising the question of whether evil could be an appropriate topic in the American movie musical and still enjoy wide popularity.

For Leo Stern, '*The Sound of Music*...is that rarity, a really good family picture'⁴ although it is also '[p]onderous and stickily sentimental at times.'⁵ Mordden states it is an 'uncomfortably sweet show,' and that while 'Rodgers and Hammerstein do family shows,' they 'also killed off *Carousel*'s hero at a time when widowhood was a highly sensitive state and hammered at racism in *South Pacific*.⁶ He goes on to note that other shows at the time were much more daring and contemporary. It is thus the family-friendly nature of the film that keeps it from fully exploring the nature of evil, represented to a large extent by the encroaching Nazi regime. While this is not necessarily a bad thing, the film becomes so 'stickily sentimental' (and thus received many negative reviews) in part because it emphasizes the von Trapp children so endearingly while treating the Anschluss superficially.

Our first real glimpse of the Nazi presence takes place about half way through the film at the engagement party of Captain Georg von Trapp (Christopher Plummer) and the Baroness (Eleanor Parker). Herr Zeller (Ben Wright) enters; he is stiff, precise, and glowering. The Captain keeps his eye on him, as if Herr Zeller needs to be watched closely. Herr Zeller, upset to find the Austrian flag hanging prominently from a balcony, seeks out a colleague to complain about the seemingly 'obvious display' meant to be insulting.

A short time later, one of the guests, complimenting Georg on the children's goodnight song ('So Long, Farewell'), says, 'Is there a more beautiful expression of what is good in this country of ours than the innocent voices of our children?' This leads to the following dialogue:

Herr Zeller: 'Oh, come now, Baron. Would you have us believe that Austria alone holds the monopoly on virtue?'

Georg: 'Um, Herr Zeller, some of us prefer Austrian voices raised in song to ugly German threats.'

Herr Zeller: 'The ostrich buries his head in the sand, and sometimes in the flag. Perhaps those who would warn you that the Anschluss is coming - and it is coming, Captain - perhaps they would get further with you by setting their words to music.'

Georg: 'If the Nazis take over Austria, I have no doubt, Herr Zeller, that you will be the entire trumpet section.'

Herr Zeller: 'You flatter me, Captain.'

Georg: 'Oh, how clumsy of me - I meant to accuse you.'

This exchange typifies the way the Captain confronts his opponents - with wordplay and subtle vocal inflections (Plummer raises an eyebrow or two as he delivers his lines).

Later, a similar confrontation arises as the family tries to sneak out of their home only to find Herr Zeller and his men waiting in the shadows. Herr Zeller is smugly menacing as he reminds the Captain of his new duties. 'You will accept your commission,' he affirms, although he will also allow the family to sing at the Festival: 'You will sing - you will all sing, but only because that is the way I want it to be. It would demonstrate that nothing in Austria has changed.' The Captain is no longer in control of his fate; instead, Georg attempts to outsmart Zeller and eventually succeeds, leading to the dramatic escape over the mountains.

The family, it could be argued, symbolizes the country as a whole - if they work (and sing) together, they can resist the coming changes - but such symbolism is weak at best; this is, at heart, a love story. The great weakness is trying to blend a real-life love story with a dark time in history by using the musical formula, so we get a lot of sweetness, beautiful scenery, and pleasant songs but little sense of the looming horror which was also very real. Georg and Herr Zeller banter about 'the real Austria,' yet the menace cannot be fully realized within the confines of the formula. Even the chase at the end, an opportunity for real tension, is turned comic when the nuns who have sabotaged the Nazis' cars ask the Reverend Mother for forgiveness of their sins (is it a sin to hamper the Nazis?).

The film also misses the opportunity to explore fully why some supported the Nazis while others fought or fled them. Max (Richard Haydn), the lovable free-loader who acts as the children's manager, serves as the foil to Georg. After Maria's (Julie Andrews) wedding, we get 'The Anschluss' scene, with swastikas flying and soldiers marching in formation through Salzburg. Herr Zeller seeks out Max to relay a message to Georg. When Max does not give the Nazi salute, Zeller insists he does although Max then rubs his nose with the hand he had saluted with.

When one of the children wonders why everyone is so tense, and suggests, '[m]aybe the flag with the black spider on it makes people nervous,' Max replies with, '[t]he thing to do these days is to get along with everybody.' After the newlyweds' return, Max, always non-confrontational, argues, '[t]he Anschluss happened peacefully - let us at least be grateful for that.' After the Captain storms out, Max tells Maria that Georg 'has got to at least pretend to work with these

people.' Max then weakly repeats Zeller's argument that the children singing at the festival would be seen as for 'the good of Austria.'

By pitting Max's apathy, even opportunism, against Georg's patriotism, we see glimmers of important questions being raised about how to deal with the encroaching evil. However, the arguments get repetitive and stay superficial, and the plot requires the story to move ahead. Max never changes his views, and once his usefulness to the plot wears out, he is left behind. Thus, opportunities to explore the truly horrific effects when people do not resist the evils posed by oppressive regimes become the superficial means to set the family on their famous journey.

Granted, the film is already long, and it is difficult to make a film about singing children overly dramatic, but the superficial confrontations with evil only relegates them to thin plot points. While Mordden argues 'the Nazis have real menace,' which keeps the film from being too 'sicky-sweet,'⁷ in effect the menace is only that - Herr Zeller's grimaces and salutes make him more of a sneering bureaucrat than a real threat (he is never seen wearing Nazi insignia), leading Mordden to ponder the story as 'strange, suddenly neither light nor accommodating. Should this story even *be* a musical?'⁸

The Nazis, by becoming caricatures rather than fully-realized characters, only exist to further the plot and provide minimal character development, and so fail to give little real reason why the Anschluss was worth fleeing. Unless one has a familiarity with these things (a safe assumption, especially in 1964), one only gets a flimsy understanding of the evil the von Trapps were escaping. The worst evil seems to be that the Captain will be forced back into a career just as he is getting to know his family again. As Mordden laments, the sugary feel of *The Sound of Music* makes us forget the earlier bite that Rodgers and Hammerstein had after dealing with such heavy issues as spousal abuse, adultery, racism, and interracial sexuality; here, the 'Nazis aren't real by the time the 'bright copper kettles' effect sets in.'⁹

The Sound of Music thus fails to address evil in any significant way; instead, the way to confront evil is to run rather than fight against it directly. Consider that Maria, who has solved all problems up to the end, is unable to offer much help to her new family except to take them to the convent to hide; the Reverend Mother's only advice is for them to flee over the mountains. By showing some conflict between the von Trapps and the Nazis, writers Lindsay and Crouse (Rodgers and Hammerstein only provided the music) were able to create some tension and embellish the story's romance; however, by not fully engaging the evils of that regime, they may have shown viewers that it is better to run away from evil than to resist it. Perhaps it is asking too much of a family musical, but then, that could lead to the conclusion that the musical has inherent difficulty in addressing such complex issues in anything but a superficial way.

Like Robert Wise's film, in *Cabaret* Bob Fosse shows the subtle rise of Nazism albeit in pre-war Berlin; we see how sexual license and decadence led to a gradual acceptance of the Third Reich's ideals. Unlike Wise's film, though, the lack of engagement is the point, and the failure to confront evil is, in a sense, seen as a form of evil itself and gives the film a stronger dramatic punch. By applying a more Brechtian approach to the musical genre, Fosse breaks out of the traditional formulas, and his use of Nazi iconography provides real tension and menace.

In *Cabaret*, we see 'unsettled men and women in a spiritually bankrupt society' in which the 'central idea reflects one of the traditional problems of moral philosophy, *carpe diem*, living for the day in a world too complicated to be truly enduring.'¹⁰ While Sally Bowles (Liza Minnelli) and her friends indulge their passions, their world changes almost without notice. Fosse shows the subtleties of the shift by the main characters' ignorance and self-absorption; in this way, we see that evil truly does triumph as long as the average person ignores it.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of the country's changes comes in the only song performed outside the Kit Kat Klub. We see the shift from an ordinary, pre-Hitler beer garden to the infusive presence of the Third Reich. A young man starts to sing the uplifting 'Tomorrow Belongs to Me.' At first, it seems a pleasant song: 'The sun on the meadow is summery warm/ The stag in the forest runs free/ But gathered together to greet the storm/ Tomorrow belongs to me.' However, as the singer performs, the camera pans down so we can see his Hitler Youth uniform, and the words take on a chilling irony, especially when the young man is joined by most of the audience members singing, 'Now Fatherland, Fatherland, show us the sign/ Your children have waited to see/ The morning will come/ When the world is mine/ Tomorrow belongs to me/ Tomorrow belongs to me,' and they all stand in a Nazi salute.

Like the characters, we as an audience have initially failed to see the truth of this young man, as John Kobal describes:

In a beautiful landscape, a beautiful young boy sings a beautiful song. And then we realize *what* he is singing, as all the other people in the beer garden, with the exception of one old man, join in the song and finish with the fist-clenched Nazi salute. It is not at all usual in American musicals [...] to find that what you are seeing and what you are hearing is [*sic*] beautiful but in which the meaning is awful. It sounds good; it looks good, but the meaning is terrible. That is new. That is powerful. That is the artist, through his art, pulling the blinkers off our eyes. Usually in musicals, the ugly people (from a moral point of view) are cast to look ugly [...] and they sing ugly, downbeat songs.¹¹

Brian (Michael York) and Max, hearing this song, feel unwelcome; they have been involved sexually, something the Nazis will not tolerate, so they leave the restaurant as Brian asks, '[d]o you still think you can control them?' to which Max merely shrugs, and they return to their daily lives. Thus, when confronted directly and dramatically with the 'group think' occurring around them, they choose to ignore rather than confront it.

As in *The Sound of Music*, *Cabaret* also uses the concept of family symbolically. However, this is a metaphorical 'family' without commitment, depth, or loyalty. Sally and Brian may sleep together, and with others (especially for money and gifts), but when Brian proposes marriage, the thought of being tied down drives a wedge between them. Sally's pregnancy and ensuing abortion symbolizes the futility of her relationships and her dreams. Like many around her, she would rather pretend nothing has changed. We see her at the end, as we saw her at the beginning, on stage - she is putting on an act to keep from confronting the evil around, and even within, her: 'To her the point is to laugh and sing and live forever in the moment; to refuse to take things seriously - even Nazism. . . . She is capable of warmth and emotion, but a lot of it is theatrical.'¹² The musical numbers underscore this:

The introductory song and the final number welcome the audience [...] to the transitory entertainments of a grotesquely unreal world. The presentation offers its own moral justification that life must be regarded as a cabaret (that is, an opportunity for entertainment). Since these numbers enclose the series of Sally's adventures [...] the film projects a cynical, virtually bitter view of the world.¹³

To survive evil, one must accommodate it - after all, 'Life's just a cabaret, old chum.' However, Sally will be left with nothing. As Roger Ebert notes, the final song 'Cabaret' 'isn't a song of happiness, but of desperation.'¹⁴ By not confronting the evil before it spreads, or by not resisting it either overtly or covertly, the characters let it propagate. The final image, of the Master of Ceremonies looking out at an audience wearing Nazi insignia, is haunting but also a warning:

The old innocent decadence has given way to a far more insidious evil, though one that retains the Master of Ceremonies within the symbolic framework of the old style. His cynicism may prove a mode of survival, but the value of survival in such an era is itself doubtful.¹⁵

Is the old decadence really innocent, though? Is it not one of the reasons that Nazism spread? Fosse seems to suggest this, and the warning is clear: if we wish to

prevent similar evils, we must be more vigilant in keeping them in check. Unlike *The Sound of Music*, *Cabaret* becomes a dark morality tale. Perhaps this is why it has not resonated with audiences in the same way - it is too stark and disturbing, not enjoyable enough for a yearly visit, yet at the same time it succeeds in using the Nazi motifs effectively. 'Part of its success,' Ebert asserts, 'comes because it doesn't fall for the old cliché that musicals have to make you happy,' and setting the film in 'the context of Germany on the eve of the Nazi ascent to power makes the entire musical into an unforgettable cry of despair.'¹⁶

Both films deserve their accolades and success but also point out the difficulty of using the musical genre to address themes dealing with social evils. The successful film version of *Fiddler on the Roof*, in 1971, rooted much of its discussion of evil in the racism and bigotry of the Hammerstein musicals, so little new territory was explored. More recent musical films have had even more trouble resonating with audiences. One which specifically deals with Nazis, *The Producers*, is based on one of the most successful plays ever, yet the movie version did not do well. Other films worth similar consideration would be *Swing Kids* and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. The film *Rent* also failed, likely in part because, like *Cabaret*, it addresses dark social themes. *Moulin Rouge* likewise had difficulty resonating with audiences although it did eventually achieve some success. It seems, then, that audiences do not mind stage shows which address social evils but do not wish to see them on the big screen. It could be that these later works do not offer the family-friendly stories, and do not have the memorable songs of Rogers and Hammerstein or Kander and Ebb, but it could also be because they violate the genre's formulae. A happy ending, even a marriage, is expected as is a showstopping finale,¹⁷ yet it seems difficult to pull this off convincingly if characters sing and dance about the darker social and historical realities without traipsing into parody (as in *Chicago*, which uses dark themes such as murder and adultery but mocks society in the process).

Cabaret shows it is possible to do this successfully, but only if the right talents and the public will come together at the right time. Perhaps it is enough for the musical form to do what it does best, and to stick within the confines of musical comedy. Granted, the musical's popularity may simply be over, relegated to music videos and television specials, with only the occasional hit shining through, as with 2006's *Dreamgirls*. Even so, one always hopes another Fossesque talent will be able to explore successfully the dark side of human nature in a satisfying, and tuneful, way. It would certainly be *willkommen*.

Notes

¹ My thanks to David Marley for invaluable help in formatting this chapter.

² L.E. Stern, *The Movie Musical*, Pyramid, New York, 1974, p. 12.

³ While both musicals are based on other sources (stage plays, short stories, etc.), I will focus on the movie versions which had much wider audiences.

⁴ Stern, op. cit., p. 138.

⁵ Ibid., p. 141.

⁶ E. Mordden, *Rodgers & Hammerstein*, Harry N Abrams, New York, 1992, p. 204.

⁷ E. Mordden, *The Hollywood Musical*, St Martin's, New York, 1981, p. 203.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Mordden, *Rodgers & Hammerstein*, p. 213.

¹⁰ S.J. Solomon, *Beyond Formula: American Film Genres*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, San Diego, 1976, p. 106.

¹¹ J. Kopal, *Gotta Sing Gotta Dance: A History of Movie Musicals*, Spring Books, London, 1988, pp. 282-283; see also Stern, op. cit., p. 141.

¹² R. Ebert, 'Review of *Cabaret*', *Sun Times*, 2007, Viewed on 20 February 2007, <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19720101/REVIEWS/2010103...>

¹³ Solomon, op. cit., p. 107.

¹⁴ Ebert, op. cit.

¹⁵ Solomon, op. cit., p. 110.

¹⁶ Ebert, op. cit.

¹⁷ See J. Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 2nd Edition, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1993, pp. 81-82.

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‘It’s Been Edifying, Don’t You Say?’ The Dialectic of Evil in Lars von Trier’s *Dogville*

Anders Johansson

Abstract

This chapter is an attempt to show that Lars von Trier’s film *Dogville* (2003) may be understood as an effort to break down the pact of goodness between the viewer and the film. Every work of art, the author argues, implies a silent contract between the subject (the viewer, reader, etc.) and the object (the film, book, etc.), saying that no matter how horrible the story depicted is, the aesthetic experience is ethically edifying to the subject. Drawing on the French philosopher Alain Badiou, the author contends that this implicit ethics is reactive and nihilist: the goodness of art depends on a more fundamental idea of evil. The discussion circulates primarily around a crucial moment in the end of the film, when the whole setting is turned around, and the merciful victim becomes a cold blooded executioner. One way to understand this moment is to say that von Trier rips the ethical contract, with a very confusing result. What von Trier tells us is, in a way, that we’re all stuck in a rudimentary fiction of goodness, which is kept up by contrasting narratives of evil.

Key Words: Lars von Trier, Alain Badiou, evil, nihilism, idealism, materialism, fiction.

1. The Silent Contract of *Dogville*

There is a moment in Lars von Trier’s film *Dogville* when everything is turned upside down. Not only the plot and the destiny of the central characters, but something more fundamental, something involving the assumptions of the spectator. What I’m aiming at has to do, I believe, with the concepts *good* and *evil*.

Dogville is everything but a mainstream movie. In a very non-realist, theatrical way, using a lot of *Verfremdung*-effects, it tells the story of Grace, a mysterious fugitive who arrives to the small American village Dogville. There she meets Tom, a young idealist who introduces her to the other inhabitants and convinces them to let Grace hide in the village. After a while she wins the hearts of the skeptical locals, but later on the hospitality is gradually replaced by hostility. Little by little Grace is pushed out, mistreated, made a prisoner and finally abused in all possible ways.

What interests me in von Trier’s film is not so much the possible interpretations (theological interpretations, political interpretations, feminist interpretations, etc.) of the story. What I’d like to highlight is rather the ethical implications of the breakdown of the conventions or assumptions in the last scene. Fredric Jameson once pointed out that genres in the end are social contracts between the author and

the public. The function of this contract is to show how a certain artifact - a novel, a poem, a film - is to be understood, or used, in order to avoid that it succumbs to a variety of contingent uses.¹ Jameson's comment strikes me as pertinent when it comes to explaining what is at stake in *Dogville*: what is turned upside down, or broken, in the last scenes is the contract Jameson is talking about. All of a sudden it becomes obvious that we have seen the movie in a naïve way. And not only that; it may even be that we have seen *every* movie in a naïve way. *Dogville* makes us aware of the ethical aspects of the silent contract between director and spectator in general.

So, what's happening more precisely in the last scene (or 'chapter' as it is called in the movie) then? Well, Grace's father, a mighty gangster boss, arrives with all his sidekicks and guns. They find Grace locked inside a shed, chained to the bed. Grace's father surprises the inhabitants by showing a friendly attitude towards Grace - who was running away from him in the first place - and tries to convince her to come with him and become his partner. At first Grace, who so far has appeared almost like a saint, shows no interest at all in his offer, but then she starts to reconsider her situation. Or as the narrator puts it: 'Dogville underwent another one of those little changes of light. It was as if the light, previously so merciful and faint, finally refused to cover up for the town any longer.'² Suddenly it stands clear to Grace that the people of Dogville *had not* acted good enough, as the narrator expresses it. This is a painful insight to her: 'It was as if her sorrow and pain finally assumed their rightful place.'³

After some more thinking and discussion with her father she not only agrees to come with him, but also asks him to kill all the people of Dogville and burn down the village. She even adds that they should see to that the children of a certain family are killed in front of their mother who should be forced to watch. 'I owe her that,' she explains.⁴ In the end there's only Tom left, a young man who arranged Grace's stay in the village, and to whom Grace has declared her love earlier in the film. Tom asks for forgiveness, in his own stupid way, but Grace shoots him down herself without hesitation. Then the film ends, to the dry, slightly ironic words of the narrator, who has been commenting the entire film:

Whether Grace left Dogville, or on the contrary Dogville had left her and the world in general, is a question of a more artful nature, that few would benefit from by asking, and even fewer by providing an answer. And nor indeed will it be answered here.⁵

Von Trier was once asked if he understands *Dogville* as a morality. He answered a bit vaguely:

[...] perhaps. The thing is that I often manage to create a certain mess in my stories, so fortunately the final message becomes a bit

unclear. But morality? I'm not quite sure about that. All in all most films deal with man at heart being an animal unable to control himself and his existence.⁶

His hesitation in front of the question is understandable: *Dogville* certainly has something of the exaggerated clarity of an old morality. There seems to be an obvious moral of the story, an almost explicit message. Grace's father steps in on the scene almost like a God, making justice in the most simple way. This aspect is also underlined by the voice of the narrator, which gives the whole movie a touch of a Dickens novel.

But at the same time as that description - Dogville as a morality - seems rather appropriate, it is outright inappropriate.

2. Nihilism and Catharsis

'[I]n a certain way,' the French philosopher Alain Badiou writes in his essay *Ethics*, 'every definition of Man based on happiness is nihilist.'⁷ Badiou's point is that 'Ethics' (he's aiming at the ethics of the so called ethical turn, the ethics of the rights of Man, etc. - that is, an ideology that has been growing very strong during the last decades) in reality is founded on its presumed opposite: *evil*. Trying to illustrate this hypothesis he turns to the war in former Yugoslavia, or rather the intellectual western European responses to the war:

it is pointed out - with a kind of subjective excitement, an ornamental pathos - that these atrocities are taking place 'only two hours by plane from Paris.' The authors of these texts invoke, naturally, all the 'rights of man,' ethics, humanitarian intervention, the fact that Evil (thought to have been exorcized by the collapse of 'totalitarianisms') is making a terrible comeback. But then these observations seem ludicrous: if it is a matter of ethical principles, of the victimary essence of Man, of the fact that 'rights are universal and imprescriptible,' why should we care about the length of the flight?⁸

To Badiou this is an illustration of how this Ethics is dependent upon a rudimentary but more fundamental idea - or one might say *construction* - of Evil. This is why the relatively short distance from Paris to Yugoslavia matters: 'Ethics feeds too much on Evil and the Other not to take silent pleasure in seeing them close up (in a silence that is the abject underside of its prattle).'⁹ It is from this observation that he draws the conclusion: the ethics of the rights of Man is nihilist.

The point with Badiou's idea is the way in which he turns our notion of ethics and evil upside down. In that sense there is a Nietzschean touch to his idea: just like the Christian belief in a transcendental salvation implies a devaluation of

immanence (that is, life here and now), the tendency to treat the Rights of Man as a transcendental idea, involves a prior devaluation on an immanent level.¹⁰ I believe this point is highly relevant for our understanding of *Dogville*. In short, his critique affects not only the overtly *ethical* interpretations of film or literature that have become so popular during the last decade, but the ethics implied in our mundane ways of watching (or producing) movies in general.

Before being killed by Grace, her former ally Tom tries to defend his cowardly behavior when Grace was abused:

Although using people is not very charming, I think you have to agree that this specific illustration has surpassed all expectations. It says so much about being human. It's been painful, but I think you also have to agree it's been edifying, don't you say?¹¹

His comment may be read as an argument for the film itself: it has been painful, but also edifying. It says so much about being human, doesn't it? This is the traditional bourgeois defense of art, which can be traced back to Aristotle: no matter how painful or evil the dramatized story is, it may be edifying to take part of it as a spectator. Accordingly, we could say that Tom is speaking for all of us, *Dogville's* spectators in general, everyone who, like myself, went to the cinema, paid for the ticket, enjoyed or endured the 'painful illustration', in the belief of somehow being educated.

This edifying quality presupposes a certain *distance*: the illustration may have been edifying to Tom, but it is hardly the right way to describe it to Grace, the abused victim. By the same token, the condition for our appreciation of the movie as spectators - our feeling educated, purified, entertained, affected etc - is of course that we at the same time stay *unaffected* (unharmd) by the action on the stage or screen or page. In that sense there is a similarity between the intellectuals in Paris that Badiou was discussing, and the cinema audience. There has to be a *distance* to the war that keeps us safe; a *frame* that stops the evil of the illustration from reaching us, so to speak. If we return to Jameson we could call it a *contract*, a contract that says, among other things, that 'this is fiction, you're neither responsible nor really affected; and if the story contains atrocities, it is only in order to educate and purify you. Don't worry!'

In *Dogville* this frame or contract is underlined by the narrator, whose reassuring voice guides us through the film. But even without the narrator, the frame would be there, as an integral part of the genre itself: no matter how painful, film is always edifying; there is always a metaphysics or ideology of the goodness of art that keeps us safe.

But the concealed point with approaching *evil* is that it helps sustain our own goodness. In that sense, our presumed distance from or independence of the object is illusory: in fact our unspoken ethics is parasitically dependent on our assumption

of evil. That is why, when we come too close, it becomes frightening: not because evil suddenly is 'for real,' but because the difference between good (ourselves) and evil (the object) isn't that clear anymore. The distinct frame that we took for granted can't really protect us.

3. The Dialectic of Evil

If we take a step back for a moment, and try to generalize, we could distinguish between two fundamental views on the relation between art (including film) and evil. From one perspective evil is the radically *other*, that which the artwork defeats through its mere existence. Art is consequently good by definition.¹² From another perspective evil is on the contrary a premise of art, perhaps even the core around which all narrating and every creation circulate. Without evil, no poetry, no novels, no film, no art. Accordingly, it is not possible to separate art from evil - art is just as *good* and just as *evil* as everything else.

The difference between these two views could be boiled down to two concepts: autonomy and heteronomy (or idealism and materialism). That is: either art works through its separateness from society, economy and all relativizing circumstances; or: art is fundamentally permeated by time, life, reality, capital, politics, religion, ethics, etc.

The point, in any case, is that, at a closer look, it is impossible to keep these two positions separate from each other. If art is autonomous from everything else, it is indirectly dependent upon what it distances itself from. And if art coincides with everything else, including *evil*, it must still differ in some sense if the concept of art is to have any substance at all.

So, on the one hand it is impossible not to comprise the idealist notion of art as a possibility of constructing something better than what exists independently of art. It is simply not possible to create an evil movie or write evil literature, since the artwork one tries to create isn't only an individual creation, but also inevitably a product of a two thousand year long tradition. On the other hand, the hope that art is less evil than everything else, is just as false as the hope that one could fully liberate oneself from that idealism. Through the very ambition of creating something better out of something not so good, art is deemed to reproduce something of the violence and evil it sought to leave behind. A one sided stand would inevitably fall back into the opposite it wants to avoid; the relation between art and evil may only be dialectic.

To return to *Dogville*, what is interesting about it is the very sophisticated way of not only illustrating, but also handling this dilemma. *Dogville* fools the spectator into the traditional contract. Even though the setting is odd, we have seen the story of the beautiful female martyr a thousand times before - in that sense *Dogville* is nothing but another repetition of the standard Hollywood drama. But when everything seems to be wrapped up and we are ready to leave the *illustration* as better human beings, the martyr becomes the executioner and we are forced to

make a choice: supporting the eye-for-an-eye-ideology and the excessive violence of the revenge, or dismissing the film as both ethically and aesthetically deficient.

Or is there another possibility? There may be, if we take into account the Chinese box phenomenon which becomes visible in the end of the film. The thing is that there are at least three levels of fiction, three dramas, in *Dogville*. Firstly there is Tom's *illustration*, as he calls it; his way of arranging Grace's stay in the village as some kind of lesson to the inhabitants. The conflict here is obviously between Grace and the residents. Secondly there is the story told by the narrator. The conflict on this level is between the reality of Dogville and the world outside (the gangsters, the police, the law, things in the past), to which Grace steps over in the last scene. Thirdly there is of course the movie that reaches the audience. The responsible here is von Trier himself, and the ethical conflict could be said to be between the film and reality. (This is underlined by the after texts: a series of documentary photos of poverty, misery, ugliness etc, accompanied by David Bowie's 'Young Americans').

The point is that every one of these levels implies a transcending, which brings an uncovering of the failure on the prior level. (In a way already Tom's *illustration* does this: exposes the prejudices of the people of Dogville.) The narrator exposes the naivety of Tom in forgetting the outside world. And then, on yet another level, von Trier tells us that this is only film; there is also a reality outside of the movie theatre.

But then of course another question arises: isn't there yet another level, one that reveals the failure of von Trier? Without doubt there is such a level, but what it unveils is more doubtful. The conflict, on this fourth level, is, I believe, between what's edifying and what's destructive, *good* and *evil*.

In other words, in the end *Dogville* could be understood as a meta-drama about the ethics of film, an attempt to dismantle the implicit idealism that every film is stuck in from the outset. *Dogville* dramatizes the contracts, the frames; it ignites a becoming in which all frames, all contracts, all certainty about good and evil becomes unstable. There may always be yet another level.

Notes

¹ F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Symbolic Act*, Methuen, London, 1981, p. 106.

² L. von Trier, *Dogville*, Zentropa, Denmark, 2003.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ S. Björkman, *Trier om von Trier: Samtal med Stig Björkman*, Alfabet, Stockholm, 2005, p. 338 (my translation).

⁷ A. Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, Verso, London & New York, 2001, p. 37.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

¹⁰ Cf J. Rancière, 'Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 103, No. 2, 2004, pp. 297-310.

¹¹ L. von Trier, *loc. cit.*

¹² With Wittgenstein, that which we can't talk about, that which lies beyond our conceptualizing abilities.

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Reel Rwanda vs. Real Rwanda: (De)Mythologizing the Genocide

Ann-Marie Cook

Abstract

100 Days (Nick Hughes, 2001), *Hotel Rwanda* (Terry George, 2004), *Shooting Dogs* (Michael Caton-Jones, 2005), and *Sometimes in April* (Raoul Peck, 2005) have been widely applauded for bringing the story of the Rwandan genocide to a worldwide audience that had previously been given minimal access to information about the causes and consequences of this humanitarian catastrophe when it was taking place during the spring of 1994. However, as I shall demonstrate, the four films draw upon a core body of iconography to construct an ideologically driven and deeply mythologized depiction of the Rwandan genocide. This chapter endeavours to de-mythologize these representations by identifying how the repetition of images across each of the films constitutes an iconography of genocide that contributes to the construction of reductionist, Manichean narratives that demonize Hutus, sanctify Tutsis and the Tutsi-led rebel army, and condemn the UN and western governments for failing to intervene to stop the genocide. It is my contention that, by refusing to acknowledge the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)'s participation in acts of genocide, the US government's behind-the-scenes involvement in the conflict and the role of political, economic, and historical factors in facilitating the violence, the films do a disservice to audiences by cloaking what is little more than mythologized propaganda in the guise of historical fact.

Key Words: Rwandan genocide, *100 Days*, *Hotel Rwanda*, *Shooting Dogs*, *Sometimes in April*, Hutu, Tutsi, historical film.

The docudramas *100 Days* (Nick Hughes, 2001), *Hotel Rwanda* (Terry George, 2004), *Shooting Dogs* (Michael Caton-Jones, 2005), and *Sometimes in April* (Raoul Peck, 2005) received wide acclaim for revealing the untold story of the victims and survivors of the Rwandan genocide.¹ Trading on the promotional taglines 'based on actual events' and 'based on the true story,' the films positioned themselves as educational texts that recounted the story of a particularly brutal genocide perpetrated by Hutu extremists intent on wiping out the population of ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus who opposed the ideology of Hutu Power. While the Hutu government, the Rwandan Army and the Interhamwe militias are positioned as the primary villains in the conflict, the films also expose the complicity of the United Nations, the United States, other western governments, and, in some cases, the Catholic Church as agents who failed to use their institutional authority to prevent the killings. By contrast, the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front is portrayed as a

heroic liberation force that rescued survivors, overthrew the oppressive government, and brought an end to the butchery. Although there is no question that ethnically-motivated acts of genocide took place on a massive scale, I contend that these films present a reductionist vision of the past that mythologizes the genocide by relying on an exclusively ethnic frame of reference to account for events that were also product of a complex matrix of historical, political, and economic factors. In this chapter, I seek to demythologize these representations by examining the visual and narrative conventions that operate to demonize Hutus, sanctify Tutsis, and condemn western institutions for their non-interventionist policies. I shall then trace out some of the historical details that have been excluded from these narratives, and assess the ideological implications of those omissions.

1. Constructing a Mythology of Genocide

In their work on historiography and narrative, Robert Rosenstone and Hayden White draw attention to the role stories play in constructing the terms by which we understand the past. The distillation of history through a narrative model entails selecting certain moments and individuals for inclusion, inscribing them with particular meaning, framing figures as protagonists and antagonists, suggesting causality among events, and presenting all of this information through a familiar story arc organized in terms of exposition, climax, and denouement. But as Rosenstone reminds us, ‘neither people nor nations live historical ‘stories;’ narratives, that is, coherent stories with beginnings, middles, and endings, are constructed by historians as part of their attempts to make sense of the past.’² For White, the ‘notion that sequences of real events possess the formal attributes of the stories we tell about imaginary events could only have its origin in wishes, day-dreams, reveries.’³ By pointing to the constructed nature of historical narratives, both scholars direct us to consider the ideological implications of stories. In particular, it is crucial to examine how stories mobilize the annals of history selectively in order to moralize events and project an idealized vision that says more about how society *wishes* to perceive the past than it says about the past itself.

This sort of critical approach is especially valuable for interrogating films about the Rwandan genocide, where narrative discourses provide a vehicle for confronting the emotions of loss, guilt and hope evoked by the tragedy. Despite variations at the level of visual style, plot, and character development, *100 Days*, *Hotel Rwanda*, *Shooting Dogs*, and *Sometimes in April* construct what I regard as an iconography of genocide through the repetition of images of the machete, the radio, identity cards, and the gruesome spectacle of bodies. Moreover, the films mobilize these images in ways that imply a particular causal relationship between them: radio broadcasts, especially those by the station Radio des Mille Collines (RTLM), incited ethnic hatred and directed the Hutu *Interhamwe* militias (whose name literally means those who work together) to ‘go to work’ killing Tutsi

inyenzi, the Rwandan term for cockroaches.⁴ Identity cards, which had been introduced by the country's Belgian colonisers, arbitrarily designated individuals as either Hutu or Tutsi, and determined who would be targeted during home inspections and roadblocks that had been set up to prevent Tutsis from escaping to neighbouring countries.⁵ Machetes, which doubled as both weapon and farm tool, were widely distributed to the Hutu population by the government,⁶ thus enabling ordinary Rwandans to participate in mass slaughter whose scale is rendered visually through images of a sea of human bodies. Whilst these images operate to trigger a palpable emotional response on the part of the viewer, they also function at an iconographic level to frame the conflict in purely ethnic terms.

This ethnic framing is advanced further through plots and narrative structures that return consistently to the same core group of events to generate a grand narrative that reduces complex historical figures to the status of clear-cut heroes and villains. While all four films are guilty of such reductionism, *Sometimes in April* gestures toward a critique of audience expectations for simplified treatments of complex political events by including a press conference sequence featuring Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Prudence Bushnell (Debra Winger) and members of the press. As Bushnell attempts to explain the situation in Rwanda to baffled journalists whose sole concern is with the safety of Americans, she fields a question from an aging journalist whose query articulates a perspective undoubtedly shared by many audiences members.

Journalist: These rebel forces, are they Tutus or Hutsis?

Bushnell: Hutu and Tutsi.

Journalist: Which ones are the good guys?

Equally simplistic are the historical prologues and character dialogue designed to explain and contextualize the genocide as the result of decades of Tutsi oppression at the hands of their compatriots. *Shooting Dogs* opens with an historical overview that exemplifies the way in which all four films oversimplify Rwanda's violent past and the causes of the 1994 genocide:

Rwanda 1994. For thirty years the majority Hutu government has persecuted the minority Tutsi people. Under pressure from the west, the Hutu president has reluctantly agreed a deal to share power with the Tutsis. The UN has deployed a small force around Kigali, the capital, to monitor the fragile peace.

Framing the historical background in this way enables the films to situate the Tutsis as the *good guys* ennobled by their suffering and oppression and the Hutus as the evil architects of genocide. Additionally, each of the films feature sequences that reveal what characters' lives were like before the killing ensued, thereby

enabling audiences to identify with the Tutsi and moderate Hutu protagonists whose struggles to survive comprise the balance of the film narratives. Sequences that showcase the ominous calm before the storm are generally presented as the preparation phase of the genocide, during which time the Hutu government built its arsenal, trained Interhamwe militias, and compiled lists of names of Tutsi targets. The assassination of President Juvenal Habyarimana, which figures in the films as the trigger event for the mass violence, is attributed to Hutu extremists who opposed the government's agreement to share power with the RPF. The inclusion of extended sequences in which people are raped, shot, tortured, burned alive, and hacked to death reveal the particularly brutal nature of the violence in Rwanda, but what is significant is that the violence is always portrayed as something that is perpetrated by Hutus in the name of establishing their own ethnic superiority. Thus, the spectacle of violence on offer in these films leaves no doubt as to who the bad guys really are.

The narratives also condemn the complicity of western institutions, though they reserve particular criticism for the United Nations and the United States for failing to intervene to stop the killing. Common to all four films is the iconic image of the mass exodus of refugees seeking the protection by UN peacekeeping forces, which exposes the absurdity of the United Nations mandate that permitted the use of force only in cases of self-defence and placed soldiers in a position of having to literally stand by as Interhamwe militias slaughtered scores of civilians. Equally, the films appeal to a sense of moral outrage that the United States and other western governments evacuated their own citizens but refused to allow any Rwandans in the rescue convoys, even when there was room to convey refugees to safety. To further illustrate the American government's abrogation of its moral duty, the films feature actual footage from a press conference in which State Department spokeswoman Christine Shelley struggles to answer journalists' questions about the genocide. In *Hotel Rwanda*, the radio provides a link between the besieged hotel and the outside world, enabling the main characters to listen in disgust and disbelief as Shelley equivocates over the legitimacy of classifying the first wave of ethnic cleaning in Rwanda as 'genocide.' In response to Shelley's insistence on using the phrase 'acts of genocide' a journalist challenges her to explain 'how many 'acts of genocide' it takes to make 'genocide'?' When she concedes, 'that's just not a question that I'm in a position to answer,' the journalist presses her further: 'Is it true that you have specific guidance not to use the word 'genocide' in isolation, but always to preface it with the words 'acts of'?' Clearly uncomfortable, Shelley stutters a response in a halting manner:

I have guidance which I try to use as best as I can. I don't have an absolute categorical prescription against something, but I have the definitions. I have phraseology which has been carefully examined and arrived at as best as we can.

There is no evidence that this press conference was actually heard on Rwandan radio, so the inclusion of a scene that juxtaposes the press conference with the refugees' reactions to Shelley's refusal to acknowledge the seriousness of their plight, seems to be motivated by a desire on the part of the filmmakers to portray the American government as a dithering, bureaucratic entity that wilfully ignored the situation in Rwanda.

By contrast, the RPF emerges as a heroic liberating force that came to the rescue of survivors, defended the refugees, and drove out the Hutu oppressors when the rest of the world turned its back. The final sequence of *100 Days*, for example, situates the RPF as the saviours of Rwanda by depicting a young soldier's rescue of an abandoned baby whose mother was raped by a Hutu priest. As the product of a legacy of conflict between Hutu and Tutsi, evoked by blood red water cascading down an otherwise scenic mountain waterfall, the baby can be seen to represent Rwanda itself. Thus, the rescue of the child symbolizes the rebel army's role as the new generation of leaders who will rescue Rwanda by becoming the surrogate parents, and indeed, the benign protectors, of a new nation in which ethnic violence has no place. While this is clearly the most poetic treatment of the RPF, each of the films offer decidedly optimistic endings that soften the horror of the atrocities by allowing individual protagonists to either survive against the odds (as in *100 Days*, *Hotel Rwanda*, and *Sometimes in April*) or achieve a greater goal by sacrificing themselves (*Shooting Dogs*), and by imposing a reassuring sense of finality upon a conflict that, in actuality, remains unresolved to this day.

2. A Narrative of Gaps: Assessing the Missing Pieces of the Story

Despite the filmmakers' stated intention to reveal the true story about the Rwandan genocide, the educational value of the four films is undermined by the fact that they promote a skewed perception of what took place. The most glaring flaw in these accounts is that they refuse to acknowledge both Hutus and Tutsis were historically involved in the killing and that ethnicity was one of *several* factors behind the violence. The hagiographic treatment of the RPF is problematized by the research of Keith Harmon Snow, who has found evidence that the rebel army 'slaughtered, bombed, massacred, assassinated, [and] tortured hundreds of thousands of people - including Hutu and Tutsi soldiers, politicians and government officials and innocent civilians.'⁷ The moral legitimacy that the films ascribe to the RPF is further undermined by the testimony of RPF operatives who have implicated rebel army leader, Paul Kagame, as the mastermind behind the Presidential assassination.⁸ The portrayal of the violence as a *final solution* perpetrated by Hutus intent on wiping out the Tutsi population purely because they were Tutsi ignores evidence that the government maintained strong, mutually-beneficial relationships with Tutsi businessmen who were actively supportive of the regime, and that Tutsis belonged to, and occupied leadership roles in the *Interhamwe* militias. Indeed, the research of Christian Davenport and Allan Stam

challenges the interpretation of genocide advanced in the films by demonstrating that:

Many of the victims, possibly even a majority, were Hutus - there weren't enough Tutsis in Rwanda at the time to account for all the reported deaths...When you add it all up it looks a lot more like politically motivated mass killing than genocide. A wide diversity of individuals, both Hutu and Tutsi, systematically used the mass killing to settle political, economic and personal scores.⁹

Howard French, the former East Africa Bureau Chief for the *New York Times*, concurs, noting that invasions by RPF insurgents and presidential assassination are key pieces of evidence that 'lead one in the direction of civil war, as a descriptor, as opposed to the one-sided tale that we have been given.'¹⁰ Further investigation and discussion is clearly needed to assess the veracity of these claims, but to the extent that they offer compelling evidence that violence did not always fall along ethnic lines and that the killing was situated within a context of civil war, I think there are good reasons to question the agenda behind the rather one-sided accounts on offer in the films.

Perhaps the greatest irony is that, by implying that the extent of America's involvement was its refusal to acknowledge the genocide and its failure to actively intervene, either diplomatically or through force, to stop the killings, the films obfuscate the role America played in actively facilitating the violence. In his testimony before a Congressional forum on Africa, Wayne Madsen argues that there was a clear economic incentive for America to maintain a foothold in the central African Great Lakes region because politically unstable countries like Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Angola, Eritrea, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo offered ripe business opportunities for Private Military Contractors (such as the infamous Haliburton) with close links to the US government.¹¹ While Rwanda may have lacked resources in its own right, its geographic proximity to other resource-rich nations invested it with strategic importance in the context of US-African relations. According to Madsen, along with Robin Philpot, Keith Harmon Snow, and Michel Chossudovsky, the Rwandan conflict was actually 'an undeclared war between France and America' in which the US trained Paul Kagame and other members of the RPF and provided them with weapons and intelligence support in what Chossudovsky describes as an attempt to 'displace France, discredit the French government (which had supported the Habyarimana regime), and install an Anglo-American protectorate in Rwanda under [...] Kagame.'¹² Due to the RPF's concern that intervention by UN forces would deny them a full victory over the Hutu government, and thereby hamper the rebels' ability to assume control of the country, Chossudovsky asserts that 'Washington

deliberately did nothing to prevent the ethnic massacres.¹³ Robin Philpot takes the argument even further, contending that the US government actively used its power on the UN Security Council to thwart efforts by France and others to resolve the crisis.¹⁴ Thus, the greatest outrage is not that the United States *failed* to intervene, but rather, that the US government's *did* intervene and that this intervention pursued economic and geopolitical interests at the expense of human life.

3. Conclusion

Citing Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow's scholarship on the conventions, metaphors, and images that inform western representations of African culture, Robin Philpot has observed that:

Unlike the tales about bloody wars in Europe, nobody in the literature on Africa finds, or attempts to find, social, economic, political, international or institutional reasons for the wars. Based on the literature, people just seem to like killing each other in Africa.¹⁵

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, films about the Rwandan genocide have participated in this literary tradition by using a simplistic, ethnic framework to explain the killings that had their origins in historical, political, and economic factors. A courageous film would acknowledge that the complexities of Rwanda's historical and political situation defy easy judgments about heroes and villains, and it would lay bare the greed and geopolitical wrangling that underpinned the massacres. But by sanctifying the RPF, ignoring the persecution of Hutus, and concealing the extent of America's involvement in Rwanda, the four docudramas mythologize the genocide and endorse an ideological tradition that persistently erases the hand of the west in creating and perpetuating the conditions of instability, violence and exploitation in African nations. There is no inherent reason why cinema cannot make substantial contributions to the ongoing debate over the causes and effects of the Rwandan conflict. But if this medium is to undertake a job of such vital importance, it must concede the degree to which the Rwanda's history is still being contested by abandoning the practice of manufacturing mythologized versions of the genocide and passing them off as the *true story*.

Notes

¹ I use the term docudrama to distinguish these films from non-fiction films because, although they claim to be based on historical events, they are primarily dramatic narratives characterized by varying degrees of creative license.

² R. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. 35.

³ H. White, *The Content of the Form*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1987, p. 24.

⁴ See C.L. Kellow and H.L. Steeves, 'The Role of Radio in the Rwandan Genocide', *Journal of Communication Studies*, Vol. 48, Summer 1998, pp. 107-128.

⁵ L. Malvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, Verso, London and New York, 2004, pp. 196-197.

⁶ See L. Malvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, Zed Books, London, 2000, pp. 64-5. Government records show that in addition to amassing a stockpile of machine guns, grenades, and landmines, half a million machetes and other agricultural tools that could be used as weapons were purchased and distributed to the Hutu population.

⁷ K.H. Snow, 'Hotel Rwanda: Hollywood and the Holocaust in Central Africa', *Global Research*, 16 October 2005, Viewed on 3 March 2007, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=%20SN20051016&articleId=1096>.

⁸ See M. Chossudovsky, 'The Geopolitics behind the Rwandan Genocide: Paul Kagame Accused of War Crimes', *Global Research*, 23 November 2006, Viewed on 4 March 2007, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=20061123&articleId=3958>. Paul Mugabe, a former member of the RPF High Command Unit, testified in a French enquiry into the assassination that Paul Kagame ordered the President's plane to be shot down.

⁹ C. Davenport and A. Stam, qtd. in Snow, op. cit.

¹⁰ H. French qtd. in Snow, op. cit.

¹¹ W. Madsen, 'What a Difference an Election Makes: Or Does It?', *From the Wilderness Publications: Blood Money Out of Africa*, 6 April 2001, Viewed on 4 March 2007, http://www.fromthewilderness.com/free/politics/blood_sparkle.html.

¹² Ibid. See also M. Chossudovsky, 'Rwanda: Installing a US Protectorate in Central Africa', *Global Research*, 23 November 2006, Viewed on 4 March 2007, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=20061123&articleId=3958>; and R. Philpot, 'Rwanda 1994: Colonialism Dies Hard', *The Taylor Report*, 2004, Viewed on 4 March 2007, http://www.taylor-report.com/Rwanda_1994/.

¹³ Chossudovsky, 'The Geopolitics behind the Rwandan Genocide'.

¹⁴ Philpot, 'Rwanda 1994: Colonialism Dies Hard'.

¹⁵ Ibid.

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Representations of War in Canadian Fiction: Atwood, Michaels, Ondaatje and Urquhart

Mercedes Díaz Dueñas

Abstract

In this chapter I will examine the ways in which several of the most successful and well-known Canadian writers have dealt during the last decade of the twentieth century with the wars in Europe. I will explore how Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride*, Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces*, Michael Ondaatje' *The English Patient* and Jane Urquhart's *The Underpainter* tell stories of characters whose lives are deeply affected by war. The analysis will show that these works establish a direct connection between war and Europe, considering Europe as the source and site of evil and destruction. I will argue that the insistence on this extremely negative image of Europe is a way of picturing Europe as the Other, of establishing a distance between Canada and Europe. Hence, these novels perform what can be interpreted as a postcolonial rewriting of these events by exposing the fact that Canada's connection to the British Empire is the cause for the country's involvement in the war and, consequently, for the suffering of its consequences. Moreover, I will conclude that this type of writing has allowed Canadian artists to detach themselves from Europe and the British Empire, and in a way to perform a distinctive Canadian identity.

Key Words: Contemporary Canadian fiction, war, Atwood, Michaels, Ondaatje, Urquhart.

War is what happens when language fails.¹ The evils of war have often been represented in the arts. Amongst them, literature frequently portrays warfare, and Canadian literature is no exception. However, it is striking that the topic of war, especially as regards its physical and emotional consequences, features very predominantly in contemporary Canadian fiction.² Dagmar Novak notes that Canada's perception of war, studied through the novels published from 1915 to 1955, can be described as the shift from 'glory to dubious glory.'³ Contemporary writers have definitely abandoned any heroic idea of war and concentrate on its harmful effects.

In this chapter I will examine the ways in which several of the most successful and well-known Canadian writers have dealt during the last decade of the twentieth century with the wars in Europe, focusing on the ways in which the war is present in the plots of various novels, and in the life of its characters. I will explore how Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride*, Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces*, Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and Jane Urquhart's *The Underpainter* deal with this topic. I will also show what I consider to be the implications of this presence of war.

The selection of these four novels has been made attending to several reasons. First of all, they were awarded important literary prizes. *The English Patient* won the Booker Prize, Governor General's Award and the Trillium Award; *The Robber Bride* was awarded the Trillium Award in 1993, *Fugitive Pieces* won the Trillium Award in 1996, and *The Underpainter* was awarded the Governor General's Award in 1997. Secondly, they attained great selling success. In addition, they have been translated into many different languages, and in some cases even turned into successful movies. In my opinion, these facts indicate both that these works have attained critical acclaim and that they have reached a large audience. This, in turn, means that they have had an influence on the general opinion, which contributes to building a certain image of Europe.

Although the subject matter of these fictional works is quite diverse, they share some common aspects related to the topic of war. The first feature that these four novels share in their approach to war is that they focus on the negative consequences of the European wars on Canada and its people. Secondly, they consider war as the destruction of culture, tradition and civilization (in a positive sense). Finally, they blame the British Empire and Europe for the harm caused to Canada, because this country is involved in the European wars due to its colonial status.

The English Patient, probably the best-known of these stories because of the film directed by Anthony Minghella, actually takes place during the war. World War II serves as the backdrop against which the story of four characters (the so-called English patient, Hana, Caravaggio and Kip) is narrated. The novel explores their state of mind and the relationships they establish with each other, which are all deeply affected by the experience of war.

The character that appears in the title of the novel has lost his nationality and his identity. This loss is physically visible in the disfiguration of his face. The narrator's words are very powerful in this sense:

A man with no face. An ebony pool all identification consumed in a fire. Parts of his burned body and face had been sprayed with tannic acid, that hardened into a protective shell over his raw skin. The area around his eyes was coated with a thick layer of gentian violet. There was nothing to recognize in him.⁴

Similarly, Hana and Caravaggio suffer the amputation of a part of themselves. For Caravaggio, like for the English patient, the damage is not only mental, but also physical, since his thumbs are cut off.⁵ Hana loses her father, her lover, and an unborn child in this war, which destroys her completely. She explains herself how she felt: 'After that I stepped so far back no one could get near me.'⁶

The *English Patient* could also be interpreted metaphorically in terms Europe's disintegration and of the participation of Canada in the war. Europe, like the English patient, is devastated by the war; and the colonies, represented by the Canadians Hana

and Caravaggio and by the Indian Kip, have to help out in the war effort. Canada is involved in the war just because it is part of the British Empire. In this sense, Hana and Caravaggio, just like Canada, are victims of a war that has been declared by others.

The opinions of the English patient, Hana, Caravaggio and Kip are very telling in this respect. The English patient attacks the obsolescence of nations and blames the death of his friend on this European construction: 'I came to hate nations we are deformed by nation-states. Madox died because of nations.'⁷ Hana totally identifies Europe with the war when she tells her friend, 'I was sick of Europe,'⁸ and later repeats in a letter to her father's wife '*I am sick of Europe, Clara.*'⁹ Caravaggio thinks they are all being used and should not be taking part in that war.¹⁰ Finally, when the first atomic bombs are dropped, Kip hints at Europe's capacity for creating something that can destroy western civilization: '[a] new war. The death of a civilization.'¹¹ The parallelism that these characters establish between Europe and the destruction of war is obvious.

The novel *Fugitive Pieces* may not be as famous as *The English Patient*, but perhaps this will change, since a film based on it is about to be released.¹² It is no overstatement to describe *Fugitive Pieces* as a novel about the consequences for its main characters of the war and the Nazi genocide. The two narrators, Jacob in the first part of the novel, and Ben in the second, explicitly think about the effects those historical events had on them and explain how they have become the persons they are due to those events. The indelible mark of war is expressed right from the beginning. The quotation that opens *Fugitive Pieces* reads as follows: 'A man's experience of war,' he once wrote, 'never ends with the war. A man's work, like his life, is never completed.'¹³

In the narrations this chapter deals with, Europe often appears as the origin of civilization and history. However, war subverts these values. For instance, Ben, the narrator of the second part of *Fugitive Pieces*, feels bereaved of his history by the war; instead only absence is available to him:

Most discover absence for themselves; trees are ripped out and sorrow floods the clearing. Then we know what we loved. But I was born into absence. History had left a space already fetid with undergrowth, worms chewing soil abandoned by roots. Rains had made the lowest parts swampy, the green melancholia of bog with its swaying carpet of pollen.¹⁴

This description bears some similarities in the use of nature to describe the disheartening feelings caused by the war in Europe with another excerpt from *The Robber Bride* quoted below.

As opposed to the two previous novels analysed here, *The Underpainter* does not deal specifically with war. However, the two Canadian characters who participate in

the war in Europe suffer irreparable harm: after taking part in the war George and Augusta spend some time in a mental institution and they end up committing suicide when their lives had apparently returned to normality.

The story is narrated from the point of view of a painter from the USA, who spends some time in Canada. One of the issues that strike him most is how Canada gets involved in a war that in the eyes of an American has nothing to do with this country. He explains it as follows:

From Dominion Day onwards, the ceiling of Davenport's dance pavilion was tented with flags - the Union Jack, the Red Ensign - and the talk before, during, and between dances was always of war. A forty-mile excursion across a shared Great Lake had brought me so close to Europe and its conflicts that, at times, even during my hours of withdrawal, it was difficult to remember that particular continent and its adjacent imperial island were still thousands of miles away.¹⁵

In this passage the references to the Empire ('Dominion Day,' 'the Union Jack,' 'imperial island') are very significant for a postcolonial reading of this novel. Just as in Ondaatje's novel, although through other literary devices, the reader finds here a denunciation of Canada's colonial subjection to Britain: in this case the detachment of the US narrator makes it possible to call the reader's attention to this situation.

Moreover, Urquhart also makes reference to the destruction of culture through war. George talks to the narrator about the war establishing a contrast between the destruction of the battlefields and the culture and beauty, represented by the chinaware that he admires so much. His general perception of the war, as can be derived from the following quotation, is that it implies the destruction of Western culture:

I couldn't dispel the idea that we were all in it together, that we were just vandals, really, bent on destroying western culture. Finally it seemed to me that Europe was one vast museum whose treasures were being smashed by hired thugs. We weren't making history, we were destroying it.¹⁶

Again, the positive connotations evoked by Europe, such as art and history, are turned into destruction. In fact, the concentration of vocabulary from the semantic field of destruction in this excerpt is astonishing: 'vandals,' 'destroying' (repeated two times), 'smashed,' and 'thugs.'

Finally, in Margaret Atwood's novel the consequences of the war are equally significant, although the characters of *The Robber Bride* are not involved in the war themselves; they are descendants of those who participated in the war. This novel is a new version of the traditional tale by the Grimm brothers 'Der Räuberbräutigam'

(‘The Robber Bridegroom’), but with a female protagonist. The story revolves around Zenia, a charismatic and manipulative woman who gets involved in the lives of Tony, Roz and Charis, at different moments of these women’s lives. She causes havoc, especially regarding their respective partners.

It is remarkable how the destructive main character, Zenia, is connected to Europe from the very beginning of the novel:

The story of Zenia ought to begin when Zenia began. It must have been someplace long ago and distant in space, thinks Tony; someplace bruised, and very tangled. A European print, hand-tinted, ochre-coloured, with dusty sunlight and a lot of bushes in it - bushes with thick leaves and ancient twisted roots, behind which, out of sight in the undergrowth and hinted at only by a boot protruding, or a slack band, something ordinary but horrifying is taking place.¹⁷

The qualities that are attached to Zenia’s origins (and also to Europe) are ancientness and a convoluted origin where destruction lurks.

The damage caused by war takes different shapes in the lives of Tony, Roz, Charis and Zenia. Tony becomes a historian devoted to the study of wars. Her parents had met during the war and her father commits suicide after a lifetime of reproaches from his wife for having missed the harshest part of the war in Britain.¹⁸ Charis was treated as a war orphan because her father apparently had died in the war and her mother was deeply upset by his disappearance.¹⁹ Finally, Roz grows up waiting for her father to return from the war and when he finally comes back,²⁰ she has to face the fact that her father will never be just like the fathers of her friends, because she is told at school that he is a Dps. Later she finds out what that acronym means: ‘Dps meant Displaced Persons. They came from the east, across the ocean; what had displaced them was the war.’²¹ Even Zenia reflects on the lasting effects of war: ‘People couldn’t get used to being normal again, afterwards.’²²

Thus, all the characters mentioned are deeply influenced by the destruction caused by the war. However, it has to be noted that it is not an abstract war; it is unmistakably identified with Europe. Tony’s reflections offer a good example:

How unfair life is! Where was God when all of this was happening, in sordid Europe - the injustice, the merciless brutality, the suffering? In a meeting, is where. Not answering the phone.²³

This passage derives its intensity both from the sarcastic tone of these thoughts, as well as from the enumeration of negative concepts (‘the injustice, the merciless brutality, the suffering’), reinforced by the description of Europe as ‘sordid’.

As opposed to the first Canadian novels about the Great War, in which war tended to be regarded only from its glorious side, as if it were as Novak puts it ‘a romantic

adventure, a holy crusade for God, King, and Country,'²⁴ there is no trace of any heroic feeling about Canada's participation in the war as part of the country's obligation towards 'the mother country' in the novels of the 1990s. Instead they portray the destruction and harm that the war has caused and the British Empire and Europe are made responsible for it.

First and foremost the evil consequences of war are shown through the impact that it has had on the characters that appear in many stories as I have commented above. Additionally, the opposition between history, art and culture, and the destruction of war often works very powerfully. There are examples of this contrast in almost all of the novels addressed here. For instance, *The Underpainter* constantly establishes a contrast between the delicacy of chinaware and the destructive power of war. It is particularly striking that George, one of the main characters, takes the opportunity while he is taking part in the war in France to visit the porcelain museum in Sèvres.²⁵ In fact, that is one of his main interests for participating in the war.

In *The English Patient* the book that the protagonist carries with him, *The Histories* by Herodotus, saved even from the fire that burns his own body, seems to indicate that only classical culture can survive.²⁶ Furthermore, there is a contrast between the magnificent past of the villa where Hana nurses the patient and its present military use. The patient seems to be more connected to a past that Hana cannot grasp: '[i]t was a hospital, she said quietly. Before that, long before that a nunnery. Then armies took it over.' But the patient insists: 'I think this was the Villa Bruscoli. Poliziano - the great protégé of Lorenzo. I'm talking about 1483.'²⁷ *Fugitive Pieces* is in itself a contrast between the negative consequences of war and the redemptive power of art, especially of poetry. Again, as in *The English Patient*, classical culture is portrayed as something that will remain and endure the atrocities of war: 'war can turn even an ordinary man into a poet. I'll tell you what I thought the day they abused the city with their swastikas: At sunrise the Parthenon is flesh. In moonlight it is bones.'²⁸

Therefore, I conclude that the deep impression caused by the two World Wars in Canada has had a lasting effect. As a result, on the one hand, many writers still feel compelled to include references to these historical events in their fiction. On the other hand, the perception Europe and the British Empire has changed. What used to be considered the origin of culture and tradition is now regarded very often as the site of wars, genocide and displacement. The four instances of novels analyzed here are only a representative sample of a trend existing in contemporary Canadian fiction.²⁹

This chapter has shown that the novels analysed establish a direct connection between war and Europe, considering Europe as the source and site of evil and destruction. The insistence on this extremely negative image of Europe is a way of picturing Europe as the Other, and, as a result, of establishing a distance between Canada and Europe. Hence, these novels perform what can be interpreted as a postcolonial rewriting of these events by exposing the fact that Canada's connection to the British Empire is the cause of the country's involvement in the war and, consequently, of the suffering it causes. In conclusion, it is my contention that this

type of writing has allowed Canadian artists to detach themselves from Europe and the British Empire, and in a way to perform a distinctive Canadian identity.

Notes

- ¹ M. Atwood, *The Robber Bride*, Virago, London, 1994, p. 39.
- ² M. Díaz Dueñas, *Europa en el discurso canadiense. La imagen de Europa en la narrativa canadiense en lengua inglesa de finales del siglo XX*, Editorial Universidad de Granada, Granada, 2005, p. 246.
- ³ D. Novak, *Dubious Glory: The Two World Wars and the Canadian Novel*, Peter Lang, New York, 2000, p. 5.
- ⁴ M. Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, Vintage, New York, (1992) 1993, p. 48.
- ⁵ Ondaatje, p. 55.
- ⁶ Ibid., p. 85.
- ⁷ Ibid., p. 138.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 85.
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 296.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 121.
- ¹¹ Ibid., p. 286.
- ¹² The film is also called *Fugitive Pieces* (2006) and has been directed by Jeremy Podeswa.
- ¹³ A. Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces*, McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, 1996.
- ¹⁴ Michaels, p. 233.
- ¹⁵ J. Urquhart, *The Underpainter*, McClelland & Stewart, Canada, 1997, p. 71.
- ¹⁶ Urquhart, p. 153.
- ¹⁷ Atwood, p. 3.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 158.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 234.
- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 321.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 324.
- ²² Ibid., p. 163.
- ²³ Ibid., p. 362.
- ²⁴ Novak, p. 34.
- ²⁵ Urquhart, p. 108.
- ²⁶ Ondaatje, p. 16.
- ²⁷ Ibid., p. 57.
- ²⁸ Michaels, p. 68.
- ²⁹ Cf. *A Good House* by B. Burnard, *The Jade Peony* by W. Choy, *Elizabeth and After* by M. Cohen, *The Wars* by T. Findley, *The Love of a Good Woman and Friend of My Youth* by A. Munro, *The Stone Diaries* by C. Shields, *The Stone Carvers* by J. Urquhart, and *Clara Callan* by R.B. Wright. These are just some instances of the many works that address war in similar terms.

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Deconstructed Masculine Evil in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber Stories*

Aytül Özüm

Abstract

Fairy-tales are thought to form the major segment of the literature of consolation, but what if these stories resist re-presenting the consoling demarcation of the fairy-tale and fabricate a subverted form of the monstrous and the evil? In some of the stories of *The Bloody Chamber*, Angela Carter is concerned not only with the shortcomings of conventional representations of gender, but also with different models of deconstructed masculine evil which take various shapes in evil and wicked female format. In the stories, the image of the female which is mostly associated with the good, the decent, the innocent and naive in most of the traditional fairy-tales is rendered either to have inclinations towards pervert sexual practices or to be violently harmful for the opposite sex. In re-telling such well-known fairy-tales as 'Bluebeard,' 'Puss in Boots,' 'Snow White' and 'Sleeping Beauty' respectively in the stories entitled 'Bloody Chamber,' 'Puss in Boots,' 'Snow Child' and 'The Lady of the House of Love,' Carter claims, in an interview, to have used 'the latent context of those traditional stories,' and 'that latent context is violently sexual.'¹ It is impossible to evaluate these stories in *The Bloody Chamber* independently from Carter's *The Sadeian Woman*, which was published in the same year, 1979. The latter work received antithetical criticism from feminist critics of pornography; Susanne Kappeler accuses Carter of valuing the pornographic - in the name of equal rights and opportunities - by employing the literary. However, what Carter depicts in *The Sadeian Woman* is not the mere objectification of the female to the pervert male world, but she reinforces the idea of separation of women's sexuality from their reproductive function. She also asserts that Sade 'put pornography in the service of women, or, perhaps, allowed it to be invaded by an ideology not inimical to women [...].'² In the stories selected from *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter not only deconstructs but also discloses the fixity of the frame that encloses the motif of the masculine evil to one single referent by playing with the slippery ground where content and form of the fairy tales are fabricated. Hence, the representation of the female evil in the reappropriation of the fairy tales saves the woman subject from being victimized in the traditionally acknowledged frameworks.

Key Words: Angela Carter, Marquis de Sade, *The Bloody Chamber*, *The Sadeian Woman*, fairy-tales, female evil, masculine evil, sexuality, deconstruction.

Angela Carter reappropriates the consolatory mechanisms of the traditional fairy tales in *The Bloody Chamber* stories and reconstructs the conventions governing a certain social behavior for women. Carter's tales fabricate new cultural and literary realities in which sexuality and free will in women replace the patriarchal traits of innocence and morality in traditional fairy tales. In some of the stories of *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter is concerned not only with the shortcomings of conventional representations of gender, but also with different models of deconstructed masculine evil which take various shapes in wicked female format. The image of the young female which is mostly associated with the good, decent, innocent and naive is rendered either to have inclinations towards perverted sexual practices or to be violently harmful for the opposite sex. In the stories entitled 'The Bloody Chamber,' 'Puss-in-Boots,' 'The Snow Child' and 'The Lady of the House of Love,' Carter claims to have used 'the latent context of those traditional stories,' and 'that latent context is violently sexual.'³ The aim of this chapter is to show that the stories, in effect, deconstruct and demystify evil which is closely linked with masculinity and patriarchal values and norms, and that the stories intentionally display a potential harshness of the female evil simultaneously existing with the masculine evil. This attachment of the evil to feminine attributions in fact foregrounds the female body and voice which can at times be as lustful, self-conscious, vulgar, reckless, harsh, and independent as the body and voice of a male.

It is not possible to separate Carter's *The Sadeian Woman* (1979), which is in fact her own reading of Marquis de Sade, from *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), in reading and interpreting the stories. The way Carter re-presents female sexuality, the arousal of which is triggered by cunning, evil, sly and sometimes pervert revelations, plays with the earlier misogynistic versions of the fairy-tale genre. In *The Sadeian Woman*, what Carter depicts is not the mere objectification of the female to the pervert male world, but she reinforces the idea of separation of women's sexuality from their reproductive function. In the selected stories, the evil females are allowed to take as much pleasure from sex as the evil males who have always already been accepted as such. The link which combines the subverted version of the fairy-tales and *The Sadeian Woman* is embedded in the way Carter reimagines the young heroines as active in their own sexual development and experience. In *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter reads Sade in such a way that she believes he claimed the 'rights of free sexuality for women' and created 'women as beings of power in his imaginary worlds.'⁴ She also acknowledges Marquis de Sade's belief that 'it would only be through the medium of sexual violence that women might heal themselves of their socially inflicted scars, in a praxis of destruction and sacrilege.'⁵ Carter concludes the 'Polemical Preface' of *The Sadeian Woman* by asserting that Sade 'put pornography in the service of women, or, perhaps, allowed it to be invaded by an ideology not inimical to women.'⁶ Thus, as a parallel to this ideology, Carter's texts not only deconstruct but also

loosen the fixed frame that encloses the motif of the evil to one single referent by problematizing the slippery ground which lets the reappropriation of the fairy tales save the woman subject from being victimized in the traditionally acknowledged frameworks.

The Bloody Chamber is the retelling of the ‘Bluebeard’ story and is filled with quite a lot of hints making the reader question whether the young maiden bride is really purely naive or not. In the original story, the Charles Perrault version, Bluebeard is a wealthy aristocrat who has married several times, but no one knows exactly what has happened to his wives. None of the families in the neighborhood consents to marry their daughters to Bluebeard except for one family. After the marriage he takes his young bride to his château and when he is away for a while, she discovers the secret of his ex-wives. When she is about to pay the cost of this discovery, she is saved by her brothers who kill the wicked husband, and finally she inherits Bluebeard’s wealth. Carter does not hesitate to play with the gaps in the original fairy-tale to subvert the balance between the Marquis and the bride in terms of gender, intention and free will. The first person narrator does not deny that she accepted marriage for a well-off future and a comfortable life. When her mother asks, ‘[a]re you sure you love him?’ she replies, ‘I’m sure I want to marry him.’ What is emphasized boldly by the narrator is also the hope of bearing an heir to ‘that legendary habitation.’ More emphatic than this is the hope that this will be, as she clarifies, ‘my destiny.’⁷ From the very beginning of the story, the narrator does not portray herself as an intimidated, shy and ignorant maiden. Within her voice, one can feel that an alternative evil is offered to compete with the latent evil of Marquis: ‘His wedding gift, clasped round my throat. A choker of rubies, two inches wide, like an extraordinary precious slit throat.’⁸ She catches the sight of herself in the mirror and sees:

the way the muscles in my neck stuck out like thin wire. I saw how much that cruel necklace became me. And, for the first time in my innocent and confined life, I sensed in myself a potentiality for corruption that took my breath away.⁹

The language Carter employs does exclude the use of vocabulary which is convenient for traditionally accepted and naturally developing norms of a heterosexual relationship. Instead, she paves the way with an appropriate wording of sensuality and violence for the maiden’s psychological involvement in the pornographic and pervert world of the Marquis. The reader continues to doubt about her innocence and ignorance: ‘He is in his London tailoring; she, bore as a lamp chop. Most pornographic of all confrontations [...] I was aghast to feel myself stirring.’¹⁰ Later, she discovers the pornographic books belonging to the Marquis’s collection and before the pictures she admits that ‘I knew enough for what I saw in that book to make me gasp.’¹¹ The problematized issue in the story is

not focused on the young woman's sexual arousal, but it is on the fact that women can be as inclined for evil as men. Carter's means to affiliate this woman with sexuality or pornography is through the creation of potential for evil and corruption. However, in *The Sadeian Woman*, her pretext for the presence of women in pornography is rather social than sexual. She explains it as: 'A moral pornographer [...] would not be the enemy of women, perhaps he might begin to penetrate to the heart of the contempt for women that distorts our culture.'¹² So pornography in fact deconstructs the plight of woman for Carter and when this attitude is accompanied with the creation of female characters with evil and cunning intentions, it becomes quite possible to observe a potential female evil.

Susanne Kappeler, a critic of pornography, accuses Carter of valuing the pornographic in the name of equal rights and opportunities by employing it within the literary. Carter's concern is rather metaphoric in her stories. In fact, Kappeler acknowledges this intention of Carter, while teasingly stating that '[s]ince it all happens in the realm of the literary, it cannot possibly be 'inimical' to women in the real world.'¹³ Carter however does not 'lapse into the fallacy of equal opportunities [...] to cause suffering, 'just as men do.'¹⁴ She employs literary devices to impose the idea that evil and wickedness cannot be attributed to the male solely, and she deconstructs the solid link between evil and masculinity in most of the fairy-tales.

Another hint Carter creates and poses in the story about the problematic innocence of the female in fairy-tales lays bare once again the female potentiality for being bad. In fact, this innocence is the gap that Carter makes use of. The young woman confesses that:

I was not afraid of him, but of myself. I seemed reborn in his unreflective eyes, reborn in unfamiliar shapes. I hardly recognised myself from his descriptions of me and yet [...] I blushed again, unnoticed, to think he might have chosen me because, in my innocence, he sensed a rare talent for corruption.¹⁵

When the keys of the chambers are given to her by the Marquis, a 'dark newborn curiosity'¹⁶ leads her to the forbidden room where she sees the tortured dead bodies of the Marquis's ex-wives. To the reader's surprise, the young chatelaine becomes the blind piano-tuner's beloved immediately after realizing what will happen to her when the Marquis arrives. In the end she is saved by her mother who enters the castle through the door left open by the piano-tuner. In the Perrault version, those who save her are her brothers. The ending of Carter's story is quite suggestive. The Marquis leaves a mark on her forehead with the key of the bloody chamber. She is glad that her lover 'cannot see it [...] - not for fear of his revulsion, since I know he sees me clearly with his heart - but, because it spares my

shame.’¹⁷ What is the thing that she is ashamed of? Adultery, curiosity or tendency for corruption?

‘Puss-in-Boots’ is the other story where the imprisoned young married woman and the lecherous bachelor who is the master of the cat find a common evil ground to perform their intentions. Just after they see each other, the master falls in love with the woman and, with the help of the cat, goes into the woman’s house and sleeps with her. The next step is to put the real plan into practice, which is to kill the woman’s old husband. Carter, while using Perrault’s story, makes quite a number of thematic and stylistic changes. The cat narrating the story employs a highly sarcastic tone with abundant obscenity. He is as clever, wicked, and tricky as the one in Perrault’s story but the foregrounded evil is not the cat’s but the master’s. Along with many references to Perrault, as ‘[t]hen faithful Puss curls up on his chest to keep him warm at nights,’ Carter does not avoid making half erotic and half pornographic depictions about these two males:

I’ve sat inscrutably by and washed my face and sparkling dicky with my clever paw while he made the beast with two backs with every harlot in the city, besides a number of good wives [...] But never the word ‘love’ has fallen from his lips, nor in nor out of any of these transports, until my master saw the wife of Signor Panteleone [...].¹⁸

The cat does believe that if he persuades her into having an affair, she will be his, however the way he expresses himself is quite vulgar: ‘All good women have a missionary streak, sir; convince her her orifice will be your salvation and she’s yours.’¹⁹ The puss-in-boots and his master make a plan to go into the house. The master poses as a rat-catcher and the narrator guesses that ‘[...] though milady exhibits a most praiseworthy and collected presence of mind, being, [...] a young woman of no small grasp, perhaps, she has a sniff of the plot already.’²⁰ So the plan goes successfully and the male evil sleeps with the female evil. When the governess asks her why the bedclothes are so disordered, the young woman answers, ‘Puss had a mighty battle with the biggest beast you ever saw upon this very bed; can’t you see the bloodstains on the sheets?’²¹ But this satisfaction does not satisfy the master who has much in common with the puss for ‘he’s proud as the devil, touchy as tin-tacks, lecherous as liquorice [...].’²² Since this lechery is hand in hand with greed, the last plan is based on murdering the rich old man whose wealth is ‘[e]nough to keep two loving couples.’²³ The old man, early in the morning, places ‘his foot upon the subfusc yet volatile fur of a shadow-camouflaged young tabby cat.’²⁴ Thus, he breaks his neck. The young woman pretends to be sorry while ‘dutifully’ and ‘correctly’ drying her eyes. In the end of the story, the so-far silent young wife suddenly becomes a patronizing woman while talking to the old hag: ‘Now, no more of your nonsense [...] I am a rich

widow and here [...] is the young man who'll be my second husband.'²⁵ Carter, in 'Puss-in-Boots' combines evil with lechery and proposes the idea that women have this potential and it is not less strong than the evil in men.

For Sally Keenan, although Carter reimagines the heroines in the fairy-tales as having equal share in their own sexual experience, '[...] the route she takes towards that revision constitutes what could be called a scandalous liaison with the book on Sade.'²⁶ However, Carter puts forward an elucidation of equality through attaching evil qualities to women and believes that the archetypes of both the pornographic and fairy-tale worlds confuse the 'historical fact of economic dependence of women upon men.'²⁷ Through symbolic means in her reappropriation and problematization of the tales, Carter demonstrates that women, in putting their free will into practice in this way or the other, can attain autonomy.

The third story is the 'Snow Child,' a rewriting of Grimms's 'Snow White.' Angela Carter introduces rather abruptly the Count riding on a grey mare and the Countess on a black one. Carter describes the physical appearance of the Countess in greater detail than the Count's. The color black is dominant in this depiction: '[...] she wrapped in the glittering pelts of black foxes; and she wore high, black, shining [...].'²⁸ She does not do the needle work while staring outside her window like the queen does in Grimm's story. She is more active and wicked. In Carter's version the Count is the one who wants a girl as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as raven's feathers. He mentions neither her skin, nor her lips and hair. His is not a fatherly wish. After she appears all of a sudden before them, the Countess hates her, because she feels that she was the child of the Count's desire. He lifts her up and sits her in front of him on his saddle. The evil which has already been attributed to the Countess is aroused in her. She searches for the ways of getting rid of her and orders the girl to bring her diamond brooch back from the ice of a frozen pond. The Count prevents the girl from diving into the pond. But when she orders her to pick a rose for her, the girl's finger bleeds and she dies. He gets off his horse and rapes the dead girl while his wife watches him, so Carter creates a female aristocratic voyeur. In the end, she refuses the rose her husband offers her, saying that 'it bites.' In this story the evil Countess acknowledges the Count's authority. However, she participates in the evil action and evil will. The child who is created to be consumed is a means through which the potential evil in the Countess becomes overt. Furthermore, Elaine Jordan suggests that the death of the virgin girl is the symbol of 'killing of masculine representations,' not 'a killing of women.'²⁹ The presence of the female evil in the story is not offered as a challenge against the male evil, they are not involved in a power struggle. They are hand in hand to destroy the innocence through the pervert practice of necrophilia.

The last story to be dealt with is 'The Lady of the House of Love,' which is a rather loose adaptation of Perrault's 'Sleeping Beauty.' The story can also be seen as the ironic parody of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. As in the early three stories, Carter challenges representation altogether. None of the ladies including the one in this

story is proper. The lady vampire suffers from immortality which feeds on humanity. When she is transformed into a mortal woman, she becomes a dying human subject. The representation of unworldly female evil in the story explores the sphere of an absent fantastic male hero. Carter eventually adds a male sadist into the narration. So, the lady vampire is not the only evil. Her counterpart, though his existence does not pervade the whole story, is a masculine figure. The soldier's colonel who appears only in his memory, not in the actual action of the story, is called 'an old goat with jaded appetites.'³⁰ He gives the soldier the visiting card of a brothel where 'the customer [takes] his necrophiliac pleasure of a pretended corpse.'³¹ Good-natured virgin soldier refuses this by thinking that this would be 'taking criminal advantage of the disordered girl.'³² The lady leads the soldier to her bedroom to conduct her fatal ceremony. To take off her dress, she has to take off her glasses first. They slip from her fingers and are broken into pieces. The noise of the broken glass breaks the 'wicked spell' in the room. She cuts her thumb; he kisses the wound and causes her death. This is her doom, which takes place at the edge of an unconsummated sexual experience. Most of the rewritten female characters of Carter cannot be good. For Carter, '[t]he end of exile is the end of being.'³³ Once they become good, loyal and submissive, they are threatened to disappear.

Throughout the stories chosen from the collection, Carter's poststructural reading in the reappropriation of the fairy tales is quite evident. As she herself pointed out, she believed that all fiction was about other fiction. And accordingly, the 'Ur-book' is the real world.³⁴ In this paradoxical paradigm, she attributes unusual and perverse sexuality to the female and poses this situation as a possibility for female awakening. Hence, the juxtaposition of the female and male evil, within the framework of violent sexuality, lays bare the female body and voice and becomes the symbol of Carter's weird but down-to-earth feminism.

Notes

¹ R.A. Sheets, 'Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*', *Critical Essays on Angela Carter*, G K Hall & Co, New York, 1998, pp. 96-118.

² A. Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: And the Ideology of Pornography*, Penguin, New York, 2001, p.37.

³ R.A. Sheets, op. cit.

⁴ A. Carter, op. cit., p. 36.

⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

⁶ Ibid., p. 37.

⁷ A. Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, Penguin, London, 1981, p.8.

⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 15.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 17.

¹² A. Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: And the Ideology of Pornography*, p. 20.

¹³ S. Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1986, p. 135.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁵ A. Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, p. 20.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 71-72.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 74.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 77.

²¹ Ibid., p. 79.

²² Ibid., p. 70.

²³ Ibid., p. 81.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 81.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 83.

²⁶ S. Keenan, 'Angela Carter's *The Sadeian Woman*: Feminism as Treason', A. Easton (ed), *New Casebooks: Angela Carter*, St Martin, New York, 2000, p. 41.

²⁷ A. Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: And the Ideology of Pornography*, pp. 6-7.

²⁸ A. Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, p. 91.

²⁹ E. Jordan, 'The Dangers of Angela Carter', *Critical Essays on Angela Carter*, G K Hall & Co, New York, 1998, p. 41.

³⁰ A. Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, p. 105.

³¹ Ibid., p. 105.

³² Ibid., p. 105.

³³ Ibid., p. 106.

³⁴ A. Day, *Angela Carter: The Rational Glass*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998, pp. 11-12.

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Victorian Evils and Gothic Revival: Narratives and Aesthetic of Human Wickedness

Sonia Ouaras

Abstract

This chapter engages with Evil in Art as conceptualized in Victorian literature. Focusing particularly on English *fin-de-siècle*, it draws a hermeneutic path towards the acceptance of beauty as both a moral and an immoral device. The literary works of the time demonstrate Art's potential, not to elevate the human soul, but to corrupt it. This literary Gothic revival finds sustenance in human corruptibility and coincides with the movement of Decadence of the time, itself symptomatic of the contemporary sense of ending. Where ordinarily monstrosity is evil and beauty virtuous, these contemporary values are upturned in such a way that we realize the human soul is but clay is awaiting the sculpting of a creative mind. Confronted with moral choices, aesthetic beauty, contrary to classical metaphysics, cannot necessarily be regarded as the summit of human moral aspiration. This choice is made difficult by the art of fiction that presents decadence and Evil as a potentially tangible and legitimate moral standard.

Key Words: Evil, *fin-de-siècle*, gothic, decadence, art, aesthetics, supernatural, *das Unheimliche*, consciousness.

For the imagination of man is evil from his youth.¹
Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art.²

1. Introduction

During my research, I easily noticed that in books dealing with evil and literature, regardless of the period, an expression came back as a relentless leitmotiv: that of the 'problem' of evil. It is probably a 'problem' because of the perpetual fluctuations of moral standards that, in spite of religious codes for instance - that are supposed to be set once and for all - each period adapts its mentality to the contemporary events and state of mind. I found interesting to focus on the 1890s because, as far as my experience in literature is concerned, this is the ultimate period that could synthesize the complexities of 'the problem of evil,' the period that presented it in the most imperceptible way. I am currently working on a novel entitled *The Lost Stradivarius* (1895), by John Meade Falkner, that tackles the question of Art and its evil potential. To sum up the plot quickly, *The Lost Stradivarius* is a short novel in which the main narrator, Sophia Maltravers, writes about the downfall of her brother John Matravers. The latter's decadence is due to his discovery of a long lost roll of music and a Stradivarius in his student's room at

St John's College, Oxford. This very discovery will engender the apparition of the ghost of Adrian Temple, a decadent English nobleman who died in mysterious conditions in Italy in 1752, a century before the events that Sir John underwent. In this novel, Art and its correlation with evil is the heart of the plot, with this quasi-Faustian quest for ecstasy via the senses, like many of the novels written and published at that time, such as George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), the now emblematic *Picture of Dorian Gray* of Oscar Wilde (1891), Thomas Hardy's *The Fiddler of the Reels* (1893), William Sharp's *The Lute Player* (1893), and many more. And while working on this subject for my dissertation and realizing the dominance of this topic in *fin-de-siècle* fiction, I wondered why the 'problem' of Evil was correlated to Art, tinged with a Gothic heritage and revival at the turn of the Victorian century.

While I tried to find an explanation, I came across quite naturally to the notion of decadence. In the cultural sphere of the time, it is a latent concept - and even lifestyle for some - haunted by a general sense of regression and downfall at the end the 19th century. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, implying a possible regression in humanity at some point of the chain, certainly had an impact on the mentality of the Victorians, more particularly at the turn of the century that announced slowly the end of Queen Victoria's reign and thus of a powerful civilization. This growing sense of doubt in the future expressed itself in a fascination in the past; and the return of the Gothic genre, with its uncanny 'aura' if I may say, managed to crystallize this whole philosophical reflection. It is not purely a return of the Gothic, but an updated version, renewed according to the period's mentality, as Emma McEvoy writes: 'none of these works is wholly Gothic but each contains Gothic material - and the Gothic material in each of these works is inflected in a challenging manner.'³

The Gothic genre is a perfect medium to introduce this interstitial dimension of evil and art, for today's question cannot be answered in a Manichean way. The Gothic, evil, and decadent thoughts of the time have in common their ability to cross boundaries and to offer an alternative mode of thinking to the Victorian inflexible and Philistine codes, as transgression is a perfect concept for the decadents who found exaltation in provocation and controversy. My argument is that the whole decadent thought was not made to be purely the expression of Evil but was a complex philosophical mode of individual and cultural re-questioning in a period of doubts; Arthur Symons, a Late Victorian critic wrote in 1893:

Decadent literature was neither simple, nor sane, nor perfectly proportioned; it was rather the expression of 'an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, and an over-subtilizing refinement, a spiritual and moral perversity.'⁴

Decadence uses particular forms of arts to be even more controversial and provocative, knowing the '[...] widespread hostility among the Victorians to 'mystery,' to the 'daemonic,' to the irrational - however how we choose to name it.'⁵ At the time, the mainstream and 'politically correct' acceptance of the irrational could only be religious.

The re-questioning of art and its role intrigues innumerable writers who use fiction as essays on the problem of, if not of evil *per se*, of art and its moral role: indeed, 'What are the aesthetic powers of sin? And which is the stronger, art or morality? [...] Can life be made into art? At what moral cost?'⁶

2. Time and Nostalgia: A Dreadful Monomania for the Past

The literary tradition confusingly designated as 'Gothic' is a distinct modern development in which the characteristic theme is the stranglehold of the past upon the present, or the encroachment of the 'dark' ages of oppression upon the 'enlightened' modern era.⁷

As mentioned earlier, there is a latent sense, if not of a downfall, maybe of an ending, for the end of Queen Victoria's reign is imminent, announcing inexorably the end of the pinnacle of a powerful civilization. This thought appears as a disruption of a comfortable lifestyle, and a latent sense of nostalgia came about, and was expressed in fiction as a dreadful monomania for the past. And with the Gothic tradition, authors create chaos and disorder through the discontinuity of Time and this constant ebb and flow between past and present, as a sign of the Victorian consciousness of Time. Temporality is questioned for instance in *Wonderland* (1865), and even 'personified' in haunting forces in *A Christmas Carol* (1843). The study of Victorian literature shows that the more we progress towards the end of the century, the more Time becomes a disturbing obsession. Falkner's writings and *The Lost Stradivarius* in particular often subvert the idea of Time with one of the most typically Gothic features: the use of a ghost that epitomizes this reflection on the past and the obsessive attraction it has in the present. The temporality of progressive history is challenged in such a way that one may wonder if it is done as a mere means to subvert contemporary codes or if, on the contrary, this strange fascination for the past is not a reactionary step of the decadents.

The Decadent Movement was highly conservative, if not outright reactionary. [...] Weary of his own time, the decadent longed for a former age, for tradition and traditional values. If the romantics turned from time to time to the past for some of their subjects,

they did so as spectators of history, not with the desire to recapture the past for their own time.⁸

This attraction for regression is not so much subversive for there is no claim to any revolutionary ideas, but is rather nostalgic of a former age. The past is canonically described in the absolute through the concept of history, and more precisely historical facts. Hence one may expect from the reference to past events a form of truth. In fiction, the past emerges to be subverted by the uncanny, and brings about a distortion of truth instead of a clarification of facts through the gothic feature of haunting intangible forces that act inexorably upon the lives of the characters we follow.

The Gothic legacy on this reflection on Time launches a sense of entrapment; the ghostly atmosphere and presence in these texts create 'a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space',⁹ which means that the correlation between past and present is an enclosed dynamism where one cannot run away from the consequences of past events and/or decisions. This idea is all the more frustrating in *The Lost Stradivarius* because John Maltravers is not the one who acts with evil deeds; he is the victim of the ghost of Adrian Temple. John Meade Falkner was a fervent Roman Catholic and his novel presents the decadents as evil people who behave and think insensibly, and whose acts can have dreadful repercussions on more moral characters. The downfall and death of John Maltravers is not clearly presented as having resulted from deliberate evil acts; John is the victim of Adrian Temple, a decadent of the 18th century who can pervert even after death. And this structure puts forward the evil side of the decadents who, for Falkner, have a contagious influence, as he presents them in the novel punctuating crescendo his descriptions with epithets like 'wicked' and 'evil.' Hence Falkner takes the notion of Time as indeed attractive but takes into consideration its perverting potential. This is even more obvious in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, as the eponymous character seeks immortality through art and its devilish bounds. Art, and painting in particular, seems to have a supernatural ability to subvert the concept of Time in a negative way for it goes against natural laws of progress and continuity. Indeed in Wilde's novel, art becomes the medium between humanity and evil - even devilish - forces, as one can read in the climactic scene where the young and still innocent Dorian makes a pact with the devil so that his portrait will bear all signs of perversion while his face will keep its beautiful, young and innocent appearance, and progressively dives into perversion with the ultimate influence of literature (when Dorian discovers the yellow book).

Generally speaking, fiction views Art as an introspective mode, and in those examples, its spiritual dimension is highly pessimistic: literature, music and painting have links with evil forces from the past that haunt the present. Thanks to the instability of Time, evil forces can use this weakness to pervert those who feel lost in this discontinuity.

3. *Ennui* and Metaphysical Pessimism

Since Time is unreliable, a sense of loss grows among those who are seduced by Evil, and boredom is the first step towards this downfall, for religion is no longer ‘entertaining’ if I may say. ‘God is dead’ as Nietzsche wrote in *Zarathustra*, and as a reaction we have statements like Baudelaire in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, who explains how evil derives from boredom - see for instance the poem ‘Au lecteur’ (‘To the Reader’), which prefaces *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Even John Meade Falkner with *The Lost Stradivarius* expresses some sort of doubt about the presence and powers of God for not matter how hard Sophia’s religious fervour is (she punctuates her narrative with the word ‘God’ constantly), and in spite of John’s final attempt for redemption by going to Church on his return to England, all these efforts are vain and God is of no help for He allows John’s downfall and his death. Sophia even supports her brother trying to give him hope in God:

We must trust, dear John, in God. I am sure that so long as we are not living in conscious sin, we shall never be given over to any evil power; and I know my brother too well to think that he is doing anything he knows to be evil.¹⁰

This is all the more frustrating because to some extent John has committed ‘unconscious sins’ under the influence of the Stradivarius and the ghost of Adrian Temple (or of madness, depending on which interpretation the reader chooses); and still religious belief is of no great help, which is particularly surprising on the part of Falkner who, strangely enough, complies with the contemporary trend of metaphysical pessimism in his fictional work.

This latent pessimism, as crystallized by the Gothic and its revival, can be an expression of a post-Romantic disappointment. The Romantics in England of the late 18th - early 19th century, witnessing at a distance the French revolution, were hoping and waiting for an overthrowing of their value system and institutions. Maybe after a century, the Victorians took stoke on the outcome of this revolutionary desire, seeing that nothing really happened and that the verve the Romantics had and wanted the following generation to aspire to did not come into effect. The supernatural and the uncanny of evil forces is somewhat a way to perform these revolutionary deeds, in order to fulfil this Romantic verve. This spiritual tension and doubt results once more in trying to find a solution in the past; and paganism as the Gothic has often presented it, is an option to find some metaphysical relief. But the Judeo-Christian background of the time is entirely in contrast with any pagan spirituality, the latter being too close to evil. Indeed, it is a way to go against the burden of *ennui* and to find excitement in the subversion of spirituality.

This boredom that engenders evil and a perverted spirituality is to be found in *The Lost Stradivarius*, and John’s final self-seclusion in Italy, the Villa de Angelis

at Posilipo, where his life then consisted of doing nothing except living in a 'lethargic stupor' as Sophia puts it, playing the violin, and his only companion is a young Italian boy, Raffaele Carotenuto, with whom he might have a homoerotic relationship. This Italian setting takes up the exotic criteria of the Gothic, where England is supposedly safer than any other place in the world, and that more exotic places may inspire a good English man to be seduced by a pagan culture. The fact that John is the victim of a Stradivarius and of the Gagliarda, two foreign expressions of Art, illustrates the Gothic feature of the dangerous aura of the Other and the Outside. *The Lost Stradivarius* evokes in that the gothic tradition - Italy is depicted as depraved, that inherited the cultural patrimony of a licentious 18th century, emphasized by the description of the Villa De Angelis and the portrait of Adrian Temple. The aesthetics of the Gothic genre is used to transcribe a sense of wickedness on the part any artistic expression.

4. Is Art the Devil? Aesthetics as an Incarnation of Wickedness

But is really Art itself evil? According to a classic metaphysic, 'virtue coincides with beauty of soul and vice with ugliness of soul. Call this the aesthetic theory of virtue.'¹¹ Decadence, as I have hinted earlier, could be related to an unfulfilled Romantic ideology, but with a cynical and *blasé* attitude in its relation to artistic beauty, for decadence is no longer a quest amidst the natural world, certainly due to the cultural impact of all the scientific and technological breakthroughs of the 19th century. Beauty is subverted in such a way that its classic moral representation and symbolism is no longer reliable. *Fin-de-siècle* fiction often presents the feeling of horror or extreme awe/fright/abjection as coinciding with the sublime, as much as extreme beauty does. In the type of fiction we are dealing with, very often extreme beauty creates a mixed feeling, 'a combined reverence and revulsion.'¹² Very often the question of beauty as a pleasurable experience is put forward: 'Beauty is never purely delight of the senses.'¹³ Then one may wonder what it is then. It is a question that Nathaniel Hawthorne already put in his short story 'The Artist of the Beautiful' (1844). The story revolves around Owen Warland, a watchmaker, who turns his passion for his job into an aesthetic obsession, for he dreams to *spiritualize machinery* by creating an extremely beautiful mechanic butterfly. But beauty in this story is a destructive quest, for Owen is ostracized and lives in secrecy, and going through a slow process of physical decay. He doesn't reveal anything about his project until the epilogue, and this secret and confined atmosphere lets the other characters and the readers think he may be preparing evil deeds by being so close to the borders of Nature. The omniscient narrator even lets us understand that Owen's project of creating the Beautiful is a dangerous and lethal pursuit for '[s]o long as we love life for itself, we seldom dread the losing it. When we desire life for the attainment of an object, we recognize the frailty of its texture.'¹⁴

5. Art and the Double: Evil Reveals the Multiplicity of the Human Mind

In this late example, I mention the word ‘seclusion,’ which in *fin-de-siècle* literature seems to appear as a leitmotiv. And indeed, the more I work on this period the more I realize how egotistic this period has been. It seems that both the Gothic and decadence enable some sort of exploration of consciousness and of the self, and this definitely coincides with all the contemporary Freudian discoveries. The young Dorian Gray ponders over the conceptualization of the Ego, and here is his reflection:

[Dorian] used to wonder at the shallow psychology of those who conceive the Ego in man as a thing simple, permanent, reliable, and of one essence. To him, man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead.¹⁵

This statement sounds logical at first but Dorian’s rhetoric presents the multiplicity of the human ‘soul’ as negative, as Other (‘strange’), as a disease, as if he were revealing our evil potential, in all humans. This duplicity in aesthetic and beauty could reflect yet another question: that of the self and its constant mutations and (re)discovery throughout the 19th century. Many *fin-de-siècle* novels use the metaphor of the mirror to express this multiplicity; the mirror in the literature we are dealing with are artistic in that they are to be found in portraits, the ultimate egotistic artistic form. It is interesting for instance to see how ‘[Dorian Gray] can gaze in secret upon the terrible face of his soul’ at will and witness the evolution of his own downfall into evil.¹⁶ In general the reader realizes how strangely art can reflect one’s personality, and the confrontation is always shocking, repulsive, unbelievable, epiphanic. The motif of the portrait is perfectly uncanny - i.e. *das Unheimliche* as defined by Freud - in that it is the (re)emergence of a hidden truth, and we are materially confronted to someone’s inner self, staring at you, in some sort of atemporal bravado.

6. Conclusion:

Le Mal et le fantastique ont ceci en commun qu’ils identifient une hantise que la conscience et la subjectivité humaine s’efforcent de comprendre et d’exprimer.¹⁷

Indeed, via Art and its uncanny potential, the artist tries to *express* how one can conceptualize Evil, hence using the latter concept as a creative force. Drawing from my experience of English *fin-de-siècle* fiction, Art can be both creative and destructive, in a very Nietzschean confrontation for a will of power, a battle

epitomized in *The Lost Stradivarius* through John Maltravers who does not create art but is submitted to it; so does Dorian Gray, whose confrontation with painting has engendered a slow process of destruction of others (being empowered) and self-destruction (being finally weakened). In both cases, the outcome in this uncanny confrontation with Art and its evil side is an inevitable death (physical and spiritual). The 1890s is a period of conceptual conflicts between the creative and destructive powers of imagination. It seems that with the uncanny, the author can explore the boundary between the two. The Gothic imagination favours the dark side of imagination, in particular in its Late Victorian revival, where the contemporary battle between metaphysical doubts against spiritual beatitude finds its epitome in the question of creation (or rather Creation-ism) that shows as a watershed the impact of Darwin's theories.

In this battle, it seems that destruction is an artistic creative feature, and *fin-de-siècle* decadence is the epitome of the uncanny magnetism of evil; as the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé put it: '[...] étrangeté et singulièrement j'ai aimé tout ce qui se résumait en ce mot: chute.'¹⁸ And the fact that the Gothic genre was revived at this very period is not just fortuitous but symptomatic of contemporary conceptualizations of the self as potentially evil and destructive, in particular through the whole Gothic rhetoric of decay, degeneration, and duplicity.

Notes

¹ Genesis, 8: 21.

² O. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Penguin Classics, London, (1891) 1994, p. 5.

³ E. McEvoy, 'Really, though Secretly, a Papist: G.K. Chesterton and John Meade Falkner's Rewriting of the Gothic', *Literature and Theology*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2004, p. 51.

⁴ A. Symons, 'The Decadent Movement in Literature', *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, LXXXVII, November, 1893, p. 859.

⁵ W.A. Madden, 'Victorian Morality: Ethics Not Mysterious', *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 4, October, 1961, p. 460.

⁶ C. McGinn, *Ethics, Evil and Fiction*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997, p. 123.

⁷ J. Kekes, *The Roots of Evil*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 2005, p. 2.

⁸ C. De L Ryals, 'Toward a Definition of Decadent as Applied to British Literature of the Nineteenth Century', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Sep, 1958, p. 90.

⁹ C. Baldick, *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993, p. xix.

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- ¹⁰ J.M. Falkner, *The Lost Stradivarius*, FrontList Books, Gullane, (1895) 2004, p. 61.
- ¹¹ McGinn, op. cit., p. 93.
- ¹² Sophia's first reaction to the portrait of Adrian Temple. Falkner, op. cit., p. 25.
- ¹³ H. Ramsay, *Beyond Virtue: Integrity and Morality*, Macmillan, London, 1997, p. 132.
- ¹⁴ N. Hawthorne, 'The Artist of the Beautiful', *Hawthorne's Short Stories*, Vintage Books, New York, (1844) 1946, p. 282.
- ¹⁵ Wilde, op. cit., p. 164.
- ¹⁶ McGinn, op. cit., p. 124.
- ¹⁷ 'Evil and the Fantastic have in common an identification of an obsessive fear that human consciousness and subjectivity try to understand and express.' [My translation] A. Toumayan, *La Littérature et la Hantise du Mal. Lectures de Barbey d'Aureville, Huysmans et Baudelaire*, French Forum Publishers, Lexington, Kentucky, 1987, p. 9.
- ¹⁸ '[...] I have loved strangely and singularly everything which was summed up in this word: fall.' S. Mallarmé, 'Plainte d'Automne', *Poèmes en Prose*, Penguin Books, London, (1897) 1965, p. 119.

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Evil Writers: The Obsessive Effect of Gothic Writing

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Abstract

Writing, as any other form of creation, can be an addictive practice that leads to obsession and madness. Gothic fiction involves particularly high levels of ambivalence, which are sometimes translated by a curious similarity between hero and villain, and by a fatal attraction between victim and criminal. A possible identification between the writer and his villain is an important aspect of the ambiguity and transgressive power of gothic narratives. The intention to give gothic fiction a high degree of reality, in order to produce strong emotions, has always been a central motive for many gothic writers. Gothic terrors can subvert and transgress social and moral values as well as any kind of aesthetic limits, but they are also paradoxically used to reaffirm those limits underlying their value. Horror fiction can become a warning against the dangers of transgression, presenting them in their darkest and most threatening form. However, many of the bestselling gothic novels can only produce a high level of alienation, extracting only a very superficial aesthetical pleasure from destruction. As Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* reminds us, the threat may not be a supernatural creature, but a text.

Key Words: Evil, writer, obsession, gothic, transgression, danger.

To consider writing as an addictive practice, which leads to obsession and madness, is a point of view from which some gothic writers depart to reflect on the dangerous effects of the creative process, when it becomes a Faustian enterprise that exceeds all its reasonable limits. Gothic fiction involves high levels of ambivalence, which are sometimes translated by a curious similarity between hero and villain, and by a fatal attraction between victim and criminal. The villain is allowed some human features and may often be the victim of sinister forces beyond his control. Consequently, a possible identification between the writer and his villain is an important aspect of the ambiguity and transgressive power of gothic narratives. Author and villain can be different versions of the same figure: the outsider in a hostile and incomprehensible world, the self-portrait of the Romantic artist.

The intention to give gothic fiction a high degree of reality, in order to produce a strong aesthetic pleasure, has always been the central motive of many gothic writers. In John Carpenter's famous film, *In the Mouth of Madness*, we can find an expert in fantastic literature, Sutter Can, who is able to affect the mental state of his readers by the power of his writing, a special gift that any other author, such as

Lovecraft and Stephen King, can possess. Their novels can be an inspiration to create this evil writer. Jack Torrance in *The Shining*, Ben Mears in *Salem's Lot*, Thaddeus Beaumont in *The Dark Half* and Paul Sheldon in *Misery* can be good examples to illustrate the obsessions and existential crisis provoked by gothic writing. The language crisis from which they suffer makes them authors of two kinds of novels: the good ones and the *bestsellers*. The first type produces a fiction whose authenticity and cathartic power try to exorcize the anxieties and obsessions connected to literary and artistic creation. Writing can be dangerous, but can also be a confrontation with other dangers involved in the creation of a world which is far from being a safe place. In these novels the writer can be an author of evil, but he has a cathartic function, which Stephen King was able to clarify:

I and my fellow writers are absorbing and defusing all your fears and anxieties and insecurities and taking them upon ourselves. We're sitting in the darkness beyond the flickering warmth of your fire, cackling into our caldrons and spinning out our spider webs of words, all the time sucking the sickness from your minds and spewing it out into the night.¹

Gothic terrors can subvert and transgress social and moral values as well as any kind of aesthetic limits, but they are also paradoxically used to reaffirm those limits underlying their value. Gothic fiction can become a warning against the dangers of transgression, presenting them in their darkest and most threatening form. However, some of the bestselling gothic novels can only produce a high level of alienation, extracting only a very superficial aesthetical pleasure from destruction. In this sense, gothic writers can become real villains without any ethical responsibility or aesthetical honesty. As Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* reminds us, the threat may not be a supernatural creature, but a text. To denounce this danger implies an intellectual challenge, which contemporary gothic criticism should never refuse. In *Wickedness*, Mary Midgley alerts for this sense of responsibility, stating that:

From the earliest myths to the most recent novel, all writing (including comic writing) that is not fundamentally cheap and frivolous is meant to throw light on the difficulties of the human situation, and if, in tribute to arbitrary theories of aesthetics, we refuse to use that light, we sign up for death and darkness. Where the refusal extends to teaching students not to use it, the responsibility is particularly grave.²

According to David Punter, the essential features of gothic fiction are psychological: derangement, obsession, nightmare, and the eruption of the

irrational. The ambiguous meanings of gothic fiction intervene to create a certain duplicity of its effects. Not only its authors are able to confront and exorcize the sources of terror by the cathartic effect of their narratives, but they can also be responsible for the desire for terror in their readers minds, inducing them to practice evil actions by following the same obsessive impulses they saw portrayed in some evil characters so realistically created by writers, who, perhaps, only wanted to objectify in their villains some of their own creative obsessions. This dangerous proximity between writer and his villains happens because the same identity crisis or obsession that takes a criminal to kill or to develop perverse behaviours is often originated from the same existential emptiness and anxiety that lead the author to write, experiencing sometimes the frustrations and the impossibility to fulfil his personal desires of power and fame by being unable to reach meaning through language. This feeling of dissatisfaction and impotence in face of the blank page is what leads the writer to try, so obsessively, to achieve perfection in his art, as the criminal also repeats his crimes to show high levels of competence in his performances.

The anxiety and terror felt by the writer, in his moment of writing, can turn into evil and extreme attitudes, as Stephen King concluded in his famous novel *The Shining*. The playwright Jack Torrance is possessed by an uncontrollable impulse to murder all his family, due to an enormous feeling of boredom and emptiness lived in the loneliness of the Overlook Hotel, from which he wants to escape writing a play and teaching his son how to write. King's interest in individuals who become victims of terror, by living deep existential crises provoked by the use of language, is the reason he so often uses in his novels characters who are themselves writers. Representing King's self-reflection on his role as a writer, these characters try to exorcize the anxieties connected to the literary and artistic production, being a way for the author to reveal the act of writing in all its authenticity. He wants to warn us that writing can be dangerous by giving origin to a certain perverse impulse, inherent to the nature of speech. In *The Gothic Sublime*, Vijay Mishra clarifies this process:

Any idea that is in excess of language signifies the death of its own medium of representation, that is, of language itself. For speech is marked by a compulsion towards its own self-dissolution, its own nirvana, that narrative attempts to circumvent by prolonging through writing.³

In *The Dark Half*, George Stark is the personification of that impulse. Being a pseudonym of the writer Thad Beaumont, he acquires a life of his own and starts committing all the crimes described in his novels. The writer is thus threatened by a character born from his own literary creativity. His capacity for using language may be lost in a fight against a self-destructive force created inside language. So

terrified as Dr. Jekyll, after discovering the perversity of his own creation, Thad becomes conscious of all the dangers inherent to writing. If the irruption of George Stark showed him that 'pen names can come to life and murder people,'⁴ he could also run the risk that his activity as a writer could turn against himself, being to him very harmful for provoking obsessions, fragmentation of personality, and a deep alienation in relation to others and to himself. As Stark represents Thad's projection of this fear towards writing, he refers to him as a double - 'I will call it my William Wilson complex'⁵ - who will have to be confronted in order to reach consciousness and authenticity, similarly to what happens in Poe's short-story.

Relating the desire of writing to the terrible repressions produced by the act of writing itself, King creates his monsters as the result of repressed desires and fears that are equivalent to the desire for the unrepresentable, so common in the gothic sublime, which sometimes leads the imagination to a crisis. This creative paradox of gothic fiction has a positive effect, because it uses the confrontation with the fear of language or with the terror of writing, so that an author could surpass them and obtain a deeper consciousness of his human condition and of his role as a writer. As Thad Beaumont well knows about his 'dark side,' George Stark, 'words on paper made him, and words on paper are the only things that will get rid of him.'⁶ Consequently, Gothic transforms the aesthetics of sublime into an existential and psychological process, which is able to bring to consciousness the dark side of human psyche, so that it could be recognized as an integral part of its identity. Its essential cathartic function is once more described by Stephen King as a kind of exorcism. In *Danse Macabre*, he refers to gothic writing as a necessity of 'lifting a trapdoor in the civilised forebrain and throwing a basket of raw meat to the hungry alligators swimming around in that subterranean river beneath.'⁷

This cathartic effect is usually not only felt by the readers, but also by the author, who exorcizes his most terrible demons through gothic writing. The most perverse characters have very often the power to dramatize their author's creative crisis, whenever they become obsessive characters involved into some maniac purpose, but who also possess some criminal impulses that, apparently, keep them at a distance from the identity of their creator. Through this process, the gothic writer finds an indirect and metaphorical way to reflect on his own act of writing, transforming some of his stories into meta-fictions that develop efficient processes of self-reference.

Both in literature and in cinema, we can find several examples of these evil writers, showing that Stephen King is not alone in this reflection on the darkest side of creativity. The famous *Basic Instinct*, starring Sharon Stone, can be associated with many other psychological thrillers, such as *Secret Window*, with Johnny Depp, adapted from King's novel *Secret Window, Secret Garden*. Burdened with a craft that is essentially uncinematic, writers in the movies are perennially blocked, broke, and insane, simultaneously romanticized and ridiculed for their excesses, which allow a process of self-regarding and self-reflexivity, both

from the reader's perspective, as in *Misery*, and from the writer's, as in *Dark Half* by George Romero.

All these stories have the common purpose of discussing the question of the writer's double personality to which his creative activity seems to condemn him, giving evidence of the fact that his power to create and to imagine evil gives him more probabilities to yield to those destructive instincts that he so obsessively wants to create with the highest level of authenticity, proving he has a deep knowledge of the darkest side of human mind. This explains the relation of empathy between the writer and his villains, an identification that leads them to imitate one another, as Val McDermid's novel, *Killing the Shadows*, so well exemplifies. The plot centres on a serial killer whose actions seem to blur the line between fact and fiction, because his victims are thriller writers he imitates, whenever he kills them in the way they killed the victims in their books. Through this novel, McDermid expresses her awareness of the responsibility writers should have for whom they write, leading them to reflect on the effects of violent writing on people's minds. Consequently, we can conclude that neither readers nor writers are completely protected against these dangers, because there is no such thing as safe art. This is so especially if these artistic products are part of a culture which is so driven by obsession with celebrity that it makes celebrities out of serial killers. In *Haunted*, Chuck Palahniuk created a story about a group of people who accept to participate in a secret writer's retreat, because they want to become famous writers, and this obsessive purpose will lead them to do anything to get fame and fortune. An homage to horror stories, that reminds Lord Byron's *Villa Diodati* and *Frankenstein's* genesis, this is a fiction about the process of writing gothic fiction and also a satire of reality TV, where perverse behaviours associated with creative motives are totally exposed, showing the dark-side and all the horror of narcissism. Deeply believable and horrifyingly real, these 17 stories also contain Palahniuk's irony and provocative tone, which allow to reflect upon gothic writers' obsessive desire to represent terror with high degrees of authenticity and reality. The cover itself has a dark image that changes while the book is read. When the book is closed in darkness, the effect is that a scaring face appears before the reader. This so real effect, which every good horror story should create, was especially obtained by 'Guts,' one of the best known of these stories, because it was read by the author to his audiences in several promotion tours, and over 35 people fainted while listening to the readings.

As direct consequences of transforming fictional terrors into real terrors, these and other effects force us to reflect on the consequences of the special power which gothic writers have to transcend the frontiers between fact and fiction. The creative obsession from which the author departs, feeling simultaneously great joy and terrible torment, is transmitted to the readers who are stimulated to reproduce, in the reality, all the terrors they lived in the world of fiction, to experience, with the same degree of intensity, the real risks the writer created. Sometimes they desire to

imitate his creative power to gratify their own perverse needs for terror and violence, as Annie Wilkes, the obsessive reader in *Misery*, so well illustrates. This danger can be created by the process of writing itself, because writers can be often exposed to the excess. Defending that Gothic is the paradigm of all fiction and all textuality, David Punter states in *Gothic Pathologies*:

Gothic is, on the whole, proliferative, it is not intrigued by the minimal: in its trajectory away from right reason and from the rule of law it does not choose to purify itself but rather to express itself with maximum - perhaps magnum - force, even if on many occasions this also involves considerable ineptitude. It tells stories, it tells stories within stories, it repeats itself, it forgets where it left off, it goes on and on; it 'loses the place'. Endlessly it seeks for excess after excess, and does not draw a textual line under this.⁸

This close connection to the excess and the persistence in its representation implies a risk of losing the aesthetic distance to certain terrifying experiences and to the real sources of terror, especially in gothic fiction, because both writer and the reader have the same intention of extracting strong aesthetic emotions from every terrible event. Commenting on some readers' desires for fear and their anxieties of experiencing real risks in *Delights of Terror*, Terry Heller concludes:

Modern readers come to such works expecting some sort of a challenge; adult readers, I believe, though they may enjoy 'The Man in the Bell,' prefer 'The Tell-Tale Heart,' in part because it produces some measure of real risk. The pleasure of enduring and overcoming this anxiety of real risks, however small they may be, is greater than that of simply entering into the sufferings of the victim at second hand.⁹

The fact is that neither writers nor readers are free from their desires to satisfy negative pleasures, some irrational impulses that Freud explained in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where he concluded that 'the aim of all life is death', because he suspected that instincts other than those of self-preservation operate in the ego, leading man to be impelled by unconscious desires of self-destruction, completely opposite to his life instincts.¹⁰ In 'The Imp of Perverse,' Edgar Allan Poe reflected on these paradoxical tendencies to practice evil without motive. No other writer gave better expression to the consciousness of his own obsessions and the urgency to objectify them in his characters, forever victims of their own recurrent and persistent thoughts that caused them so much anxiety and distress.

Like Poe, every gothic writer knows he can't be free from these paradoxical

tendencies of the human behaviour. One of the main themes of gothic fiction is precisely this ambiguity, being the double one of its most interesting type of characters, in the tradition of Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. This duplicity can be transmitted to gothic writing itself, whenever the writer's intention to transcend himself, through the experience of the terrible, can induce him and their readers to self-destruction, which shows the paradox of the gothic sublime. Nothing is merely aesthetic or fictional, because there is always a mutual contamination between art and life. Reflecting on the high level of alienation that some aesthetic experiences could produce whenever they extract pleasure from violence or destruction, Walter Benjamin, in his *Illuminations*, concludes:

Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order.¹¹

Notes

- ¹ S. King, 'The Playboy Interview', *The Stephen King Companion*, G. Beahm (ed), Futura, London, 1991, p. 69.
- ² M. Midgley, *Wickedness*, Routledge, London, 2001, p. 200.
- ³ V. Mishra, *The Gothic Sublime*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1993, p. 23.
- ⁴ S. King, *The Dark Half*, New English Library, London, 1990, p. 135.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 135.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 430.
- ⁷ S. King, *Danse Macabre*, Berkley Books, New York, 1981, p. 205.
- ⁸ D. Punter, *Gothic Pathologies: The Text, the Body and the Law*, Macmillan, London, 1998, p. 9.
- ⁹ T. Heller, *The Delights of Terror*, University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1983, p. 42.
- ¹⁰ S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Norton, New York, 1989, p. 46.
- ¹¹ W. Benjamin, *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*, Schocken, New York, 1968, p. 242.

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