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Fictional Realities of Eternal Peace

JOHANNES D. KAMINSKI (ed.)

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Fictional realities of eternal peace

JOHANNES D. KAMINSKI

Warfare runs against the values promoted by liberal democracies. There are situations when peace falls into the same category, such as when authorities impose the "peace of Ulysses's comrades", who languished in the cave of the Cyclops, waiting their turn to be devoured. In Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Du contrat social* (*Social Contract*, 1762), this Homeric reference emblemizes the undignified peace that results from submission to power (8; https://gallica.bnf.fr). This is why literary authors, despite their often pacifist convictions, have also provided the most drastic accounts of power constellations when "peace" reveals itself as "pacification".

The contributions of this issue address the wicked situation when visions of peace are, willingly or unwittingly, paired with undercurrents of violence and injustice. In speculative fiction and thought, the quest for long-term, even eternal peace represents a key concern of reflection. What would a just, war-free society look like? And what challenges must a society overcome to reach such state? While sweeping visions of world peace fit well in a novel's closing chapter, high-flown visions of sociopolitical harmony tend to become problematic if they serve as a story's point of departure. There is little resemblance between Berta von Suttner's ambitions for global disarmament and the sort of world peace imagined in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), whose citizens are drugged into a state of perpetual acceptance. Irritatingly, world literature features greater examples of dystopian architectures than of happy places. Is this possibly an indication of a deeply human feature, a certain inability – or even unwillingness – to imagine a perfect world? While authoritarian leaders and ideological zealots unremittingly offer their remedies, the dystopian imagination reminds us of an important truth: even if things are not great at the moment, that does not mean they cannot get worse.

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"All we have is means": Ursula K. Le Guin's utopianism as ongoingness

ALEXIS SHOTWELL

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"All we have is means": Ursula K. Le Guin's utopianism as ongoingness

Utopianism. Abolitionism. Anarchism. Ongoingness. Social movements.

This article argues that we can affirm the impulse to change our current course and start over, while rejecting the idea that new beginnings take us out of our social and historical embeddedness. Instead, I propose using Ursula K. Le Guin's science fiction and anarchist attention to process and "ongoingness" as a political good. Bringing her novels *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971) and *The Dispossessed* (1974) into conversation with contemporary movements for prison abolition, this essay asks how her imperfect utopianism contributes to understandings of political prefiguration, process, and the idea that social transformation must be an ongoing project.

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We are in the middle of a process that will end, if we don't change course, with the intense immiseration and the destruction of much of the life on Earth. How might we start a new course, begin anew? In this article, I argue that we can affirm the impulse to start over while rejecting the idea that new beginnings take us out of our social and historical embeddedness. Instead, I look to an understanding of process and "ongoingness" as a political good. This approach can help us think about engaging in collective political work on complex problems that do not admit of easy solutions, and which no individual can solve alone. I am thinking here of problems such as the cascading climate catastrophe, mass extinctions, capitalism, colonialism, mass imprisonment, and the global trend towards authoritarianism. We are in the middle of all of these, and more. It won't work to try to start again as though all of the history that has constituted the mess we are currently in had never happened. Part of that mess comes from legacies of oppression and violence, and part of it comes from the beautiful work of ordinary people working for collective liberation.

One way to help build practices of ongoingness is through the imperfect utopianism of Ursula K. Le Guin, placing her science fiction in conversation with contemporary movements for liberation. Le Guin is perhaps best known for her fantasy series "Earthsea", which begins in *The Wizard of Earthsea* (1968) with a boy who goes to a school for wizards and goes on to become a powerful mage, but which goes on to become a meditation on death, living in balance with ecology, and the meaning of freedom. Indeed, freedom and bondage are abiding concerns across her fictional and critical work, which includes young adult fantasy novels, science fiction, and essays. For example, her ecological novel *The Word for World is Forest* (1972) is an extended polemic against resource extraction, imperialism and human exceptionalism; this novel discusses collective Indigenous self-determination and was written in part in response to the US's involvement in the Vietnam War. In a very different mode, *The Annals of the Western Shore* trilogy, written later in Le Guin's life, investigates modes of "power-over" subjection, from feudalism to authoritarian theocracy to chattel enslavement; each of the books in this series explore ways of building resistance through the power of collective story-making. Many of the books in her "Hainish" cycle, which includes one book I focus on here, *The Dispossessed* (1974), are set at planetary and society-wide sites of political transformation, and concern reckoning with legacies of enslavement, living after revolution, and building the possibility for directly democratic collective social worlds. Her monumental and strange ethnography of the future, *Always Coming Home* (1985), is perhaps her most political work, depicting a conflict between an authoritarian resource-hoarding military society and a loose configuration of self-organized polities. While we can read Le Guin's books as light (while always enjoyable) speculative fiction, we can also read them as offering complex political ideals for our consideration.[1] In this piece, I focus on one aspect of her own complex anarchist thought through her novels *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971) and *The Dispossessed*. Her attention to the significance of prefiguration, process, and non-instrumentality in her work can help those of us interested in contemporary social movements think about our own practices.

ABOLITIONISM AND THE HORIZON

Take movements against mass imprisonment, police violence, and the rise of the surveillance state, for example. Today, abolitionist movements in North America call for defunding the police and refunding social goods such as schools, affordable housing, and health care. They are part of the broader movement for Black lives, which is also connected to movements for migrant and refugee rights and against the existence and enforcement of borders. Abolitionism aims for those possibilities beyond militarism, state governance of the movement of people, and mass imprisonment. As Mariame Kaba and others have framed it, "abolition is the horizon" (2021, 96). This is in part to say that it is what abolitionists aim for, but also that it is continually moving out ahead of those of us who take up these politics – a horizon is what we move toward, but never reach. And yet, we move. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore writes, abolition is "the context and content of struggle, the site where culture recouples with the political; but it is not struggle's *form*. To *have form* we have to organize" (2022, 42).

Current abolitionist movements flared up in the wake of increased attention to police murders of Black people in North America in 2020, but they were connected to the constellation of thinking and activism from groups such as Critical Resistance, formed in 1997. The abolitionist movements of the late 1990s were in turn rooted in the work against prisons by imprisoned people in the 1960s, which called back to much older global struggles for the abolition of prisons and enslavement. Each iteration of these struggles builds on the work of people who came before, and inherits the complex limitations and legacies of their movements. Oppression works similarly. Enslavers in North America responded to the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade by intensifying their extraction of people's lives for profit; when chattel slavery was abolished, new laws criminalizing not having a place to live – vagrancy – applied to formerly enslaved people who left plantations with no place to go or way to live. When they were arrested and imprisoned, further laws allowing forced labor meant that imprisoned people were mandated to work without pay. Imprisoned people and people institutionalized in disability "sheltered workplaces" remain people to whom laws about minimum wage and work choice do not apply. Pursuing a world without prisons involves not just doing away with the buildings that currently contain people; it involves creating a world in which social problems are solved by other methods than shutting people away. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore said, "Abolition is about presence, not absence. It is about building life-affirming institutions" (quoted in Davis et al. 2022, 51). It is, I believe, central to this sense of abolitionism that the work is ongoing. Gilmore writes elsewhere:

> If unfinished liberation is the still-to-be-achieved work of abolition, then at bottom what is to be abolished isn't the past or its present ghost, but rather the process of hierarchy, dispossession, and exclusion that congeal in and as group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death. (2022, 475)

Both oppression and liberation are processes and practices; they are unfinished and therefore we can begin again towards horizons unpredicted by our current path.

Beginnings imply endpoints from which we might look back on where we started, but also the purpose or reason that we do something, and the result of something we aim for. Beginnings and ends are stitched together by the process of getting from one to another; it is the duration of activity in the middle that creates a start and a conclusion. This bit in the middle is "process", the part of what we're doing that is a "how", a method. We are perpetually in the middle: what we're doing is our means of activity and why we are doing it, or the outcome we are aiming for, is our end. This article will focus on two aspects of attending to means: the idea that what we do and how we do it matters very much, and the idea that there is no point at which the work of social transformation ends. We can have many beginnings, and many more processes and "hows", and, indeed, many ends toward which we aim – but any end will be simply a new beginning in an ongoing process. I'm particularly interested in the implications of thinking about process for contemporary collective social movements. Literature is a generative space for thinking about social transformation. As I will show, science fiction is an especially fertile site for exploring the idea that process is important for collective social movements.

PREFIGURATION AND THE REFUSAL OF INSTRUMENTALITY

The phrase "the ends justify the means" signals, even as it points to an end point, many senses of beginnings – a projected destination that can be achieved, a reason for the activity to come, and a good that the doer intends to accomplish. The significance of thinking about means and ends is canonized in ethical theory in Immanuel Kant's injunction to never treat others as mere means, but always as ends in themselves (2006, 38). That is to say, we oughtn't to use others for our own purposes or make their goals and life subsidiary to our own. Instead, we ought to relate with others as full and autonomous beings.

Le Guin is a theorist of means and ends, or process and ongoingness, of continuing without fixed essences. I read her work in its anarchist register, but I think this attention to process comes primarily perhaps from her life-long study of Taoism. *The Lathe of Heaven* may be her most Taoist novel, featuring a character (George Orr) whose dreams change reality, a manipulative therapist (Dr. Haber), and (eventually) pretty neat aliens. The therapist becomes convinced he can make a better world through shaping the things that George dreams. Dreams, of course, are difficult to manage. As things get more and more involuted with each successive shift in reality, George reflects on the ways Dr. Haber is using him, and the ways they together are shaping the world without its consent. He thinks: "The end justifies the means. But what if there never is an end? All we have is means" (83). If beginnings are only determined from some way down the road, how do we decide that something is an end? And who has standing to determine the direction of the world? We could here think of Jean-Paul Sartre's argument that when we choose as individuals we are choosing for everyone, and that part of the burden we feel when we confront our own freedom is precisely this understanding (2007, 24). In Dr. Haber's case, this is literally true – he is choosing for the world. George objects to this, but also to being personally used. He explains of Dr. Haber: "He's not … not an evil man. He means well. What I object to is

his using me as an instrument, as a means – even if his ends are good" (45). A key lesson in this claim that *all we have is means* is this idea that we ought not use others as instruments for our ends, whether they are good or bad.

In activist work, this approach involves being against instrumentalist organizing, and for what is sometimes thought of as "prefigurative politics". As Chris Dixon defines it, the term "prefigurative politics" names

> activist efforts to manifest and build, to the greatest extent possible, the world we would like to see though our means of fighting in this one. Examples of such efforts include using directly democratic methods of making decisions and building institutions through which people can self-organize to meet popular needs. (2014, 83)

Paul Raekstad and Sofa Saio Gradin define the concept as "*the deliberate experimental implementation of desired future social relations in the here-and-now*" (2020, 10; emphasis in original). A prefigurative approach often implies the idea that we should never treat others as means to another end, or use means that are at odds with the ends we aim for. So, for example, if we aim to create a world not organized around sexist divisions of labor, we would actively work to not have all of the cleaning, notetaking, and emotional care work in a group done by women – even if they are currently better at these tasks than men in the group.

Dixon's theorization of the idea begins from the *how* question, but expands it significantly. He writes, "The core idea here is that *how* we get ourselves to a transformed society (the means) is importantly related to *what* that transformed society will be (the ends). The means *prefigure* the ends" (2014, 84–85). His expansion of this concept, based on extensive interviews with long-term anti-authoritarian organizers alongside a deep engagement with anarchist theory, is important: prefiguration is not just how people treat one another, or whether we live countercultural lifestyles, but also whether we are building counter-institutions that have the capacity to meet people's needs such that those institutions replace the role the state currently plays. Further, we can attend to whether we are organizing, which is to say "bringing people together in ways that build their collective power – with a horizontal orientation" (85). These four characteristics of prefiguration, as manifested in anarchist-inflected social movement spaces, inform how I understand the idea of means as Le Guin is using it.

Zoe Baker's history of anarchist theories and practice in Europe and the US encapsulates another factor in this approach, that in working to change the world, we also transform our own subjectivities. Baker writes:

> the reasons anarchists gave for supporting or opposing particular strategies were grounded in a theoretical framework – the theory of practice – which maintained that, as people engage in activity, they simultaneously change the world and themselves. This theoretical framework was the foundation for the anarchist commitment to the unity of means and ends: the means that revolutionaries proposed to achieve social change had to be constituted by format of activity that would develop people into the kinds of individuals who were capable of, and were driven to, (a) overthrow capitalism and the state, and (b) construct and reproduce the end goal of an anarchist society. (2023, 10–11)

This tendency frames the unity of means and ends as carrying a politics and a practice. It invites us to change the world – but also to change ourselves so that we become the kinds of beings who can live in the world we collectively make. Or, as Dean Spade puts it, "By participating in groups in new ways and practicing new ways of being together, we are both building the world we want and becoming the kind of people who could live in such a world together" (2020, 17). We become both the means and the ends of that world.

Veteran organizer Myles Horton, who co-founded the Highlander Folk School, a training ground of civil rights activism, reflected in his autobiography:

> I think it's important to understand that the quality of the process you use to get to a place determines the ends, so when you want to build a democratic society, you have to act democratically in every way. If you want love and brotherhood, you got to incorporate them as you go along, because you can't just expect them to occur in the future without experiencing them before you get there. (1998, 227)

There is a key experiential quality to centering the question of how we do things – it is through experiencing the possibility of, for example, genuinely democratic decision-making that we might develop confidence that such a thing is possible at all.

This also works at the level of organizations. As Jura Federation's critique of the First International famously put it in the Sonvilier Circular,

> How can we expect an egalitarian and free society to emerge from an authoritarian organization? Impossible. The International, as the embryo of the human society of the future, is required in the here and now to faithfully mirror our principles of freedom and federation and shun any principle leaning towards authority and dictatorship. (1871)

The generative paradox here is that while we cannot expect an egalitarian and free society to emerge from a hierarchical and frequently authoritarian one, this world is the only one we have from which to work for freedom. Even though our beginning is fraught, we still might aim to create a free world in which free people can live. Indeed, this is the only way that liberation has ever been pursued.

One solution to the problem of bringing something into being that doesn't exist yet is to nourish the seeds of that world to come. This might be amplifying the small-scale ways we can treat one another with care and dignity, or it might be the idea of starting with a small group of competent people who agree on a way forward and chart the path for others to follow. Prefigurative approaches often critique the idea that in order to transform the world we should have a core organizing committee or vanguard who set a political line or plan and relate with the masses of people necessary to social transformation as fungible, fuel for the revolution. Stereotypically (but also to some extent historically), this vanguardist approach is connected with Vladimir Lenin's analogy for how we would set go about building something like a brick wall: Many of us have the skills and capacities to haul brick, to pile things on top of one another. But only some people understand how to correctly set a line to make a structurally sound wall, how to mix mortar and apply it, how to set bricks. Similarly, the analogy goes, in social struggle there is often a small group of people who have trained themselves in political analysis, who have the time and skills to assess how we should proceed to make collective change (1963, 178). Of course,

even the most ardent Leninist understands themselves to be doing advance work for the benefit of the people who do not yet clearly understand the political situation; no actual vanguardist I've known has expressed that they think they're smarter or better than an ordinary worker, though they may say that they have a better political education or more time to work on the publication that helps lay out a political program for the masses. The transitional program even of vanguardist groups aims, ultimately, at full governance by the proletariat. And of course conversely even non-vanguardist activist groups that aim to express a prefigurative praxis and not use people instrumentally do themselves end up burning people out, replicating the very patterns they aim to transform, and using means they abjure to try to get to ends they desire. Working for collective transformation is perhaps the most frustrating, near-impossible task we can take up, and there is never a way to do it without messing up.

Like the character George Orr, or Immanuel Kant, we can find many examples of activists being committed to the idea of not treating others as mere means to use on the way to an end I set. Abolitionist organizing offers one good example. As Davis et al. put it,

> an abolitionist lens teaches us that our work is not simply about "winning" specific campaigns but reframing the terrain upon which struggle for freedom happens. Indeed, one of the fundamental precepts of abolition is that winning a campaign is not the only measure of success: *how* we struggle, how our work enables future struggles, and how we stay clear about what we are fighting for matters. (2022, 33–34)

Later, they write: "How struggle unfolds matters" (66). If "freedom is a constant struggle" (111) and how the struggle unfolds matters, it's fruitful to attend to the question of this "how."

I do not think the ends justify the means, or that we will come to a good conclusion on the basis of consistently sacrificing people, ecologies, or our sense of what it right and good to do. Most people don't set off to ruthlessly exploit others for their own benefit. Most employers wouldn't aim to become the kind of people who would fire someone because their mother's surgery went badly and they have to take time off work to care for her. The reasons for their actions are before or beyond them – the whole system of capitalism militates against being able to express care to an employee.

In *The Lathe of Heaven,* Dr. Haber explicitly sets out to be a force for good. Justifying his use of George Orr's power to dream new worlds into being, Dr. Haber reflects: "A person is defined solely by the extent of his influence over other people, by the sphere of his interrelationships; and morality is an utterly meaningless term unless defined as the good one does to others, the fulfilling of one's function in the sociopolitical whole" (53). This framing comes eerily close to a formulation Le Guin explores in *The Dispossessed*: the idea that the purpose of a society is to allow each individual in it to most fully and beautifully manifest what they personally can and love to do best. In that work, this is framed as their "cellular function", and Dr. Haber's conception retains an attention to the importance of interrelationships and the question of how we each have a role in a sociopolitical whole.[2] But a key difference is the idea that what defines us is our *influence over* other people. Dr. Haber's practice

enacts this understanding: he genuinely thinks that the way to make a better world is through his individual force of will. He eradicates racism-as-colorism by having George dream everyone into having always been an identical shade of gray; his instruction to bring peace to Earth takes the form of all the governments of the planet uniting to oppose an alien invasion. This stands in sharp contrast to the idea that what defines us is our *relationships with* others and the world.

Over the course of the novel, George repeatedly tries to convince Dr. Haber that he is making changes that make things worse for everyone, saying: "We're in the world, not against it. It doesn't work to try to stand outside things and run them that way. It just doesn't work, it goes against life. There is a way but you have to follow it. The world *is*, no matter how we think it ought to be. You have to be with it" (140). Dr. Haber's hubris and conviction that he's making a better world only grow. A key point here is that the critique of instrumentality is not just about the ways it is wrong for Dr. Haber to use George as the means towards his personal ends. Rather, Le Guin is naming the idea that we ought not use the world as a means towards our ends. We cannot stand outside of life and try to run it, because we're part of the world.

The alien invasion George dreamed into being turns out to hold the key in the novel. The aliens too have people whose dreams can change the world, and so they are concerned for George, because he is dreaming alone. One approaches him and explains that they have a term for what he does – *Iahklu'* – and that there is a way to practice this dreaming in a good way. That approach, called *Er' perrhnne*, recognizes that *Iahklu'* is "too much for one person to handle alone" (168). People need a little help from their friends. *Er' perrhnne* names a kind of collective dreaming, finding a way to change the world that is with life and the world, not against it, because it recognizes the dreaming, potent self as always a part of a whole. The solution to instrumental dreaming is to dream with others.

Because we're in the middle of an ongoing stream of life, history, inheritance, we're also called to recognize ourselves as in the middle of other people's needs, interests, and ideas. In political work for collective liberation, those of us who benefit from existing systems of oppression can easily fail to perceive how our lives are connected to others. One antidote to this is to take leadership from those most affected by a decision, or to foreground the interests of those historically oppressed by the systems one aims to dismantle. From this stance, if we're working on issues of imprisonment, we should listen to prisoners. In this approach, there can be an impulse to find the "most oppressed" member of a group and take leadership from them, according epistemic privilege to the people most affected by a political situation. But since everyone experiences multiple vectors of oppression and benefit, and since no one person should bear the burden of dictating the direction of a whole movement, individual epistemic privilege is limited.

Le Guin's approach in *The Lathe of Heaven* offers a different approach, consonant with collective social movements. Dreaming with others, working with them in horizontal relationships of practice, puts us in the middle of difficult decisions and complex histories; only from there can we make good collective decisions. So, people will have different access needs – one person may need to stim (make repetitive move-

ments) or chew gum to comfortably be in a space, another may have misophonia or be very easily distracted by movement around them. Similarly, people have different insights into the political stakes of activist decisions, informed by their histories and the social relations they inhabit – one group's call to build a new jail so their imprisoned family members have access to air conditioning can come up against another group's campaign to not build any new jails but instead to release imprisoned people. It is only through working together in groups, toward shared goals, that we find ways to argue both for the conditions for dignified lives inside prisons and simultaneously an end to prisons, or that we set up rooms or have noise-modifying headphones on hand so that someone stimming or chewing does not prevent someone else from participating in decision making. This is a form of practicing collective epistemic privilege in making political decisions. Collectivity, with all the messy implications involved in being with others, comes along with means being all we have. This approach offers one example of Le Guin's solution to the problems of individual heroism and small-group vanguardism in her work generally. Decision making from the middle of history and in the muddle of complex problems can only be meaningfully done with others, not alone. *Er' perrhnne.*

I read Le Guin's formulation that *all we have is means* is as expressing also that it matters *how* we do things. In a collective or revolutionary mode, that *how* includes not only how individuals and groups treat people or the world, but also whether we build the conditions for collective, horizontal decision making. In order to have such decision-making, we'll need to become people who can participate in making the decisions that shape our lives. And in order to make those decisions carry any weight at all, we'll need to create institutions and infrastructure that can bear the weight of collective care, everything from water treatment plants to growing food to educating one another to tending people who are sick or dying. The unity of means and ends, in prefigurative mode, involves our interpersonal connections, but also physical and hermeneutic infrastructures for justice.

THERE WAS PROCESS: PROCESS WAS ALL

Le Guin's novel *The Dispossessed* is set on a moon, Anarres, where a colony of anarchists has modeled their lives and built a society in part on the writings of a revolutionary called Laia Asiao Odo. Their anarchism is Odonianism, a variation of what on Earth we would call anarchist communism. Le Guin renders ongoingness, process, and the idea that the "means are the end" a core part of the Odonian conception of a good society. The subtitle of *The Dispossessed* is "An Ambiguous Utopia", naming the ways that the anarchist society it depicts is imperfect. Readers encounter anarchism on Anarres nearly two hundred years after the revolution; that far away from the idealistic inauguration of a collective project, what calcifications, diffusions, and corruptions creep in? Le Guin models remarkably plausible failure modes of syndicalist anarchist societies, from the ways people highjack consensus process to how informal hierarchical fixity can become difficult to disrupt, precisely because people claim that there are no hierarchies. The novel focuses on a theoretical physicist of temporality, Shevek, and his journey to and

from the propertarian planet Anarres orbits. His journey allows Le Guin to stage a series of conversations about anarchism, mutual aid, and the questions of means and ends. Ultimately Shevek and his friends start a new syndicate called the Syndicate of Initiative, which catalyzes the main events of the novel. Thus, beginnings are central to this book, but process and the means by which we pursue our ends turn out to be equally important.

Le Guin writes about one of the key characters, Takver, that "she too was an Odonian, and the separation of means and ends was, to her too, false. For her, as for [Shevek], there was no end. There was process: process was all. You could go in a promising direction or you could go wrong, but you did not set out with the expectation of ever stopping anywhere" (1974, 334). Notice here some key aspects of this formulation of process: There is a unity of means and ends, which I've framed above as a prefigurative approach to social transformation. As well, there is the sense in which you can *go in a promising direction*, which requires a criteria and capacity to say what is promising, and why. Finally, there is this sense in which when you set out, you don't expect to stop – there will not be a point, in a living and collective world, at which the work of building that world together ever stops. Le Guin understands this as the imperative for society to be a permanent revolution. Our work has goals, but it will never be done.

I first began thinking about the idea that our work is never done while doing interviews with people who were AIDS activists in the Canadian context in the 1980s and early '90s. I often think of the Emergency Drug Release Program (EDRP), a four-year campaign from 1990 to 1994 to provide access to experimental drugs, especially when they had been approved for use through studies in other countries. Immediately upon winning this fight, members of the activist group AIDS ACTION NOW! (AAN!) turned their attention to working on getting practical access to the drugs, since many of the newly-available medications were prohibitively expensive. In the province where I live, Ontario, the program they won in 1995 (The Trillium Drug Program) is still one of the main ways people get access to drugs they need, thanks to the work that AIDS activists did. But that work in turn was grounded in an understanding that there were significant barriers to people accessing social services that would shape their experience of living with HIV and AIDS. The work that AAN! took up to fight for funding for drugs was possible largely because they had always seen the question of pharmaceutical access to be inseparable from the questions of affordable housing, clean needle supply for injection drug users, access to harm reduction supplies of all kinds in prisons, and more. As I learned more about the histories of AIDS activism, there were so many examples of cases like the EDRP and the pivot to create the Trillium program for access to drugs in times of financial need. These are situations where activist work won a major victory, and where those same activists immediately took up the next fight, which they had opened through that win. In that case, they won again. But it was just as often the case that they lost, and had to regroup and try for something else.

After learning this lesson from AIDS and other activists, historical and current, I began to perceive it as a pattern in my own activist work. Myles Horton closes his autobiography with a reflection on setting goals that illuminates this point:

> Goals are unattainable in the sense that they always grow. My goal for the tree I planted in front of my house is for it to get big enough to shade the house, but that tree is not going to stop growing once it shades my house. It's going to keep growing bigger regardless of whether I want it to or not. The nature of my visions are to keep on growing beyond my conception. That is why I say it is never completed. I think there always needs to be a struggle. In any situation there will always be something that's worse, and there will always be something that's better, so you continually strive to make it better. That will always be so, and that's good, because there ought to be growth. You die when you stop growing. […] [E]ven if we had a revolution, the quality of that revolution wouldn't necessarily be satisfactory, so I'd have to try to make it better. (1998, 228)

Just as the tree continues growing past the goal it was planted to fulfill – shading the house – social movements should continue growing and changing past the goals they were created to achieve. They will be passed down to and among others, and change as they take shape with their lives.

It is a good thing that we cannot conceive of what will happen to a vision or goal we set up, because this means that we are neither constraining it to what is currently conceivable nor artificially stunting the possible growth and change we seed. Just as they resist the giant agrochemical corporation Monsanto creating seeds that require proprietary chemicals to germinate, preventing farmers from saving seed from year to year, activists can resist any impulse to fully master the future. Instead, we can remain open to impossible things becoming possible. The idea Le Guin offers, that *process is all*, doesn't mean that there is never any winning or losing. It means that whether we win or lose, we carry on. As long as we're part of a living whole, things will be in movement. If we make things better, we'll still need to tend them, or reach for what could come after that. If we fail in a goal, or lose a fight, that too is the beginning of the next attempt. Every win or loss is a new beginning for the next struggle, and we have no intention of stopping.

A couple of things follow from a process-based approach. The first comes back to a non-instrumental approach to organizing. The second is an appreciation of continual and ongoing change as the basis of a good society, which I'll discuss below. From an approach where the ends justify the means, if we treat people badly or burn them out during a certain campaign, and we win our goal, that is worth it. We may have used up the energy, good will, and sense of connection of some number of activists, but we have won! From an approach where means is all we have, and where we're assuming that even wins are just steps on a path with no final destination, there is profound concern about any organizing based on people burning themselves out. Instead, we ask: How is everyone at the end of each campaign? Are they nourished and more connected to one another, or exhausted and angry, sometimes more at their fellow activists than at the things they oppose? As Davis et al. (2022) invite us to consider, we can ask whether our work *enables future struggles*, and attend to *how we stay clear about what we are fighting for*. An approach based in process and a sense

of continual beginning implies that even losses can leave a group stronger and more energized through the work. Often, though, this doesn't happen. Orienting toward the work we're doing as part of a continual messy beginning, perpetually something to begin again, corrects any tendency to use people instrumentally, to despair if we don't win soon or easily, or to rest on our laurels when we accomplish things.

SOCIETY AS AN ONGOING REVOLUTION

Including awareness of process in any thinking about social transformation also invites us to understand the ways it matters that we're always stepping into something that precedes us. In turn, anything we create must continue to change. In *The Dispossessed*, the spark that moves the narrative is that a group of anarchists have created a new syndicate, the Syndicate of Initiative, which initiates the first direct contact between the anarchists of Anarres and people on Urras, the propertarian planet they fled two hundred years earlier. This is the site for significant conflict on Anarres, and discussions about personal freedom and collective wellbeing – is it selfish and egoizing for the new syndicate to act as they have? When Shevek ultimately leaves Anarres to visit Urras, is he betraying the anarchist cause?

The seed of the Syndicate of Initiative was in conversations between Shevek and his friend and sometimes lover Bedap; he is profoundly critical of how things are run on Anarres in ways that shock Shevek, but also compel him. Bedap says, passionately, "Change is freedom, change is life – is anything more basic to Odonian thought than that?" (Le Guin 1974, 166). This is almost a truism when we think about our personal life: Anyone who is alive is continually and necessarily constantly changing. We are in a dense and continual relationship of mutual transformation with our world in basic biological ways, with every breath we take or bite of food we take. Here Odonian thought asks how we might apply that basic orientation to a collective situation. Just as individuals must continually change or die, so societies must be in a continual process of change. Le Guin writes, "Bedap had forced [Shevek] to realize that he was, in fact, a revolutionary; but he felt profoundly that he was such *by virtue of* his upbringing and education as an Odonian and an Anarresti. He could not rebel against his society, because his society, properly conceived, was a revolution, a permanent one, an ongoing process" (176). Holding to process requires a practice of society as a permanent, ongoing revolution.

For readers familiar with Marxism this reference to "permanent revolution" may call to mind Leon Trotsky's formulation of the "Permanent Revolution" as a way to account for the possibility of a revolution that did not progress through the stages Marx and Engels suggested would follow one another. As Michael Löwy carefully outlines, while we see this theory of revolutionary stages in Marx and Engels, they also speak of the need for a "uninterrupted revolution" and sometimes "permanent revolution" ([1981] 2010, 8–29). Mao Zedong departed from and transformed Trotsky's concept into the idea of "continuous revolution," arguably one of the leaping-off points for what became the Cultural Revolution; this theory cannot be discussed apart from the ongoing aftermaths of that political program. Thinking about the idea of revolutionary ongoingness thus both references and calls for a reckoning with how a key

phrase or concept like "continuous revolution" is implicated in the immiseration and deaths of millions of people. Le Guin would likely have encountered these framings as part of participating in political life when she was writing *The Dispossessed*, but I would argue that the meaning and rendering of Shevek's reflections on the society of Anarres being a permanent revolution departs from both Trotsky's and Mao's uses of these concepts (which are, again, very different from one another). Indeed, although I have no direct evidence that Le Guin formulated her process-based anarchism in direct opposition to Lenin, Mao, and Stalin, she certainly articulated her anarchism as in opposition to the state, explicitly naming authoritarian state socialism. Her novel *The Telling* is both a meditation on the power of collective memory and explicitly a critique of Mao's Cultural Revolution, especially with attention to its suppression of Taoism. Various anarchist thinkers have also articulated the idea that there would not be an end point to any social transformation we might call revolution, and Le Guin may have been reading some of them. She positioned herself explicitly in the lineage of Paul Goodman, Emma Goldman, and Peter Kropotkin, but I see her work here as also resonating with others.

Anarchist Gustav Landauer, for example, theorizes the process of change as an ongoing shift from a what he called a *topia* to a *utopia*. As he wrote: "not only the state, the estates of the realm, the religious institutions, economic life, intellectual life, schools, arts, or education, but the combination of all of those; a combination that, for a certain period of time, rests in a relative state of authoritative stability. We call this combination – the current state of communality – topia" (2010, 113). For Landauer, the way that any communality changes is through "individual life", which he frames as "a combination of ambitions that will never reach their goals" (113). The attempt towards something beyond the *topia* constitutes a revolutionary break, which is resolved into a new *topia*. Landauer says, "If we call the topias A, B, C (etc), and the utopias a, b, c (etc), then the history of a community goes from A to a to B to b to C to c to D, and so forth" (114). But, he jokes, this makes it seem as though history starts from the beginning of the alphabet, so perhaps we should instead go with the middle of the alphabet, M, m, and so on. But even then, we would need to decide if history begins with society or the revolutionary idea. Indeed, because Landauer sees history as necessarily having no end point, there is no beginning; process is all.

CONCLUSION

In their book on prefigurative politics, Paul Raekstad and Sofa Gradin formulate what they call a "process"-based view of revolution. They distinguish three main ways in which anti-capitalists think about revolution: 1) "the one big event view", a singular event in which people seize state power; 2) "the flash-flash-bang view" – with reference to autonomous Marxists and especially John Holloway's formulation of transformation – as "a series of cracks or ruptures within capitalism and/or the state", and 3) the "process" view. They define this approach thus:

> Here revolution is conceptualised as a process of creating and developing ongoing mass organisations and movements which fight for reforms in the present and aim to replace

> capitalism and the state with free, equal, and democratic socialist institutions. As such organisations grow, develop, and struggle, they change the powers, drives, and consciousness of their members individually and collectively. Their growth and development and winning of reforms increases their powers and the powers of their members, developing and altering members' drives and consciousness, making it possible for them to replace capitalism and the state. (2020, 58)

Raekstad and Gradin articulate this process-oriented conception of fundamental societal transformation as in some real way requiring a prefigurative politics. If we think about prefiguration in the expanded way Dixon outlined above, which is to say as including both transformations to how we live and to the social and material infrastructures of our lives, we can perceive some of the usefulness of linking the unity of means and ends with a conception of ongoing societal transformation.

Being always in a process of change places us as part of multiple ongoing processes, where the means are all we have and we don't expect to ever stop. Arguing with one of the propertarians on Urras, Shevek says:

> We don't want purity, but complexity, the relationship of cause and effect, means and ends. Our model of the cosmos must be as inexhaustible as the cosmos. A complexity that includes not only duration but creation, not only being but becoming, not only geometry but ethics. It's not the answer we are after, but only how to ask questions… (Le Guin 1974, 226)

Shevek is of course here a fictional character talking about his passion, physics. In his love for complexity and attention to means and ends, though, I find resources for how we might attune to starting again, and again after that. The horizon of transformation – abolishing certain social relations, building others – may forever recede before us, but a commitment to ongoingness makes that a delight and a promise rather than a burden and a disappointment.

NOTES

[1] I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting I mention the broader context of Le Guin's work in this regard. There has been, of course, quite a lot of writing about the politics of Le Guin's literary offerings. I am in this essay thinking specifically with Lewis Call (2007), Laurence Davis and Peter Stillman (2005), Shiobhan Leddy (2019), John Plotz and Elisabeth Ferry (2024), Ursula K. Le Guin and Margaret Killjoy (2010), and Richard D. Erlich (2010).

[2] There is much to say about how Le Guin's formulation contrasts with many strands of theorizations of the relationship between the individual and society in political philosophy, from Rawls to Rousseau to Aristotle or Hobbes, but space does not allow me to unpack these connections.

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Messy utopianism and the question of war: What does "staying with the trouble" mean in relation to war?

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Messy utopianism and the question of war: What does "staying with the trouble" mean in relation to war?

Donna Haraway. P. M. Utopianism. Speculative utopia. Dualism. Anarchism. War.

Donna Haraway's formula "staying with the trouble" frequently appears in discourses concerned with ecological catastrophe. Despite their ostentatious rejection of utopian thinking, Haraway and like-minded thinkers tend to consider messiness, tension or even conflict as antithetical to their ideal state of (no longer only human) society. A cultivation of a specific life-promoting and enabling messiness and ambiguity, however, is essential for nourishing new forms of a minoritarian, "messy" utopianism. This article reflects on contemporary utopianism's relation to war: do contemporary utopias address war explicitly or implicitly? In this context, *bolo'bolo* (1983), written by sci-fi author and anarchist P. M. (a pseudonym of Hans Widmer), can serve as a helpful reference. This speculative utopia sketches out a different relation to conflict and its underlying presumptions of stately order, property, control and subjective self-determination. It proposes to conceive of violence as something *not* akin to war and thus offers a welcome alternative to simplistic notions of a "natural state", in which humans are determined either by a bellicose or a peaceful inclination. This approach fills important gaps in the discussion of no-longer-modern utopianisms.

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"Gemein ist es, wenn diese Gewaltlust als
Keim des Krieges verschrien wird."[1]
P. M.: *bolo'bolo* (2015, 205)

Donna Haraway's seminal monograph *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) ends with the fictional chapter "The Camille Stories: Children of Compost" (134–168), outlining a no-longer-modern utopianism that breaks with contemporary readers' commonsensical associations regarding the utopian imagination. Whereas most modern concepts of utopia, from Thomas More to Immanuel Kant through to Le Corbusier, see the world as dominated by rectangular order, transparency, liberal self-determination and peace, things are not so clear with the formula "staying with the trouble", from which the book also takes its title. Proposing a "messy utopianism" (Jörg and Weber 2023) that builds on inspirations from micro-biology, quantum physics and chaos theory, Haraway and like-minded thinkers are much closer to an idea of utopia that does not see mess, tension or even conflict as antithetical to an ideal state of a society that extends beyond the exclusively human realm. As interconnectedness and entanglement have become the focus of attention for ecologically-minded thinkers, the ideal of clear-cut separations and of orderliness at large appear no longer as desirable, but rather as part of a mindset that caused the ecologically precarious situation we find ourselves in. The cultivation of a specific vitally nourishing and enabling messiness inspires new forms of – as yet minoritarian – utopianism. One of Haraway's central points is her rejection of dualisms, arguing that this type of world-making has "finally become unavailable to think with, [it is] truly no longer thinkable" (2016, 5). Significantly, Haraway rejects dualisms not on moral or political, but on ontological grounds.

In this article, I reflect on this messy utopianism's relation to war. Does a messy utopia cling to an idea of Eternal Peace that is reminiscent of modern visions such as Kant's? Do contemporary utopias address war explicitly or implicitly? Since Haraway's own sources, such as the "The Camille Stories" or the work of Ursula K. Le Guin, contain rather little on the subject, I will draw from the 1983 anarchist utopia *bolo'bolo*, written by sci-fi author and anarchist P. M. (the pseudonym of Hans Widmer). As I will show, this speculative utopia is congenial to Haraway by offering a "posthumanism" avant la lettre and has the advantage of sketching out a different relation to conflict and its underlying presumptions of stately order, property, control and subjective self-determination. *bolo'bolo* proposes to conceive of violence as something *not* akin to war and thus offers a welcome alternative to simplistic notions of a "natural state", in which humans are determined either by a bellicose or a peaceful inclination. This approach helps to address the blind spots of many no-longer-modern utopianisms. Inspired by P. M.'s genre mix between underground novel and political treatise, the current article critically questions the modern dualism of war and peace as well as its regulative ideal of Eternal Peace. The central question is if the dichotomy between Eternal Peace and war-like normality reproduces a modern dualism that is analogous to dichotomies such as *mind/body* or *male/female*, which were already subjected to critical evaluation in the past. In contemporary progressive

discourses such as posthumanism, new materialism, and speculative ecosophy, as well as queer and postcolonial discourses, it is common currency to reject dualisms such as *nature/culture*, *body/mind* and *woman/man*. Does this also apply to the hierarchical dualism of *peace* and *war*? Would we feel equally comfortable with dethroning *peace* as opposed to *war*, as we are with dethroning the prevalence of *culture* over *nature*, the *mind* over the *body*, the *male* over the *female*? To connect this question to Haraway's formula, this article wants to ask: what does "staying with the trouble" mean in relation to war?

THE SEDUCTIVE IDOL OF ETERNAL PEACE

Peace has always been a central part of modern utopianism. In the European context, this ideal was canonized by humanist Enlightenment philosophers prior to the French Revolution, then popularized by Kant's famous essay *Zum ewigen Frieden: Ein philosophischer Entwurf* (1795; Eng. trans. "Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch", 2006). As Bernd Hüppauf points out, this concept is rooted in the unflinching analysis of Thomas Hobbes's "war of all against all" as a natural state that needs to be reined in by larger stately entities, the legitimate, "civilized" agents of war (2013, 115.). Eternal Peace is the logical conclusion of a very modern desire for stately order that can only be attained by the prevalence of *culture* and *reason*. This modern pacifism is closely linked to the dualism of *nature/culture*, as war is associated with the base, lowly and "natural" elements of humanity, and considered as driven by brutal and primitive desires that can only be put in check by the development of culture and civilization (120–122). According to this modern mindset, "the ideal state would, of course, be a community of humans who have subjected their instincts to the dictatorship of reason" as in Sigmund Freud's condensed description of utopian pacifism in his 1932 letter to Albert Einstein, "Why War?" (Einstein and Freud 2005, 43).[2] Freud further specifies that "everything that promotes the development of culture is also working against war" (47).[3] *Culture* needs to prevail over *nature*, *reason* over the instincts and drives of lower human desire to give way to Eternal Peace – this is the central argument of modern utopian pacifism.

Arguably, this type of pacifism also has a dark side to it. While Eternal Peace represents an ideal that every sane, civilized and cultured person aspires to, it is premised on a dualism that can only see peace as a process of *culture* as opposed to *nature*. Consequently, we must first bring the values of *culture* (read: *our culture*) to lesser developed political entities that are perceived as threatening our civilized political order. There is a quite violent imperial logic woven into modern utopian pacifism that is hardly ever explicitly stated, but which periodically resurfaces when war efforts are legitimized by "maintaining the balance of power" and keeping "terrorist states", "dictatorships" or the "axis of evil" in check, to just name a few of the pejorative terms that are mobilized in this modern framework. Indeed, Freud's analysis of the psychological drives of war acknowledges this aspect by stating that "as paradoxical as it sounds, one has to admit that war might be an apt means to produce the longed for 'eternal' peace, because war is capable to bring forth those large entities within which a strong central power can make further wars impossible" (33).[4] Ac-

cording to this paradigmatic defense of modern utopian pacifism, "the sound prevention of wars is only possible if humans agree on the installment of a central power, to which the judgement in all conflicts of interest is transferred"[5] (33). Following this logic, a plurality of cultures, peoples and types of government must submit to the rule of law by a strong central power or *Zentralgewalt*.[6] This is in order to tame and check the Hobbesian "war of all against all", which Freud also identifies as the natural state of humanity, moreover stating that not all human cultures are equally fit to advance such Eternal Peace. He embraces a tellingly Eurocentric perspective by stating that "the Mongols and Turks have only wrought disaster" by installing centralized power structures (33).[7] Meanwhile, Roman and French imperialism are considered paragons of a humanist venture for Eternal Peace. The fact that both have created war machines that outmatch their Eastern equivalents does not seem to worry Freud. This is reminiscent of how today's US-American imperialism draws much less scrutiny than Russia's or China's, especially in Western media outlets or in supranational institutions such as the UN or the EU.

Thus, the core concept of modern utopian pacifism – Eternal Peace – is not only premised on difficult ontological presumptions such as the *nature/culture*-dualism, but it is a problematic idol in itself. Its vision of total global peace entails the kind of homogenization that subjects the planet to one common law and norm. As history has shown time and time again (for example in British, American, German, or Japanese imperialism), to insist on one true principle leads to a proliferation of war rather than Eternal Peace. Every culture champions this ideal, but every culture also wants to be the central agent that enacts said peace, thereby representing the peak of so called "civilized" humanity. As a consequence, the elusive ideal leads to ever more conflicts between blocks of states that see themselves as chosen civilizations to bring Eternal Peace to the world. I thus argue that the idol of Eternal Peace is intrinsically *seductive*: it lures us with an idea that is almost impossible to reject. For who would seriously claim that Eternal Peace is the wrong aim to pursue? Yet its modern ontological footings and presuppositions entail the proliferation of war and armed conflict. It is not far-fetched to claim that Kant's secular concept of Eternal Peace shares many traits of Christianity's transcendent heaven, in which the supreme power of God assures Eternal Peace. Countless wars have been fought in the name of both ideas.

"STAYING WITH THE TROUBLE" – WITH PEACEFUL INTENT

The concept of Eternal Peace comes with political as well as ontological significance. Haraway's rejection of dualisms is inspired by multi-disciplinary sources, ranging from Lynn Margulis's "microbial turn" (1999) to Karen Barad's philosophical analysis of Bohrian quantum physics (2007) through to Isabelle Stengers's reformulation (1995; 1996; 2004) of what can be called a "new materialist" philosophy of science in a Whiteheadian tradition. Moreover, her skepticism also tunes in with Bruno Latour's description of scientific and technological research (Latour 2002; 2004). They all share an awareness of the lacking adaptability of modern dualisms to current scientific world views. These dualisms are not wrong in the strict sense,

but simply cannot address the true complexity of the material and social world in the 21st century. According to Alfred North Whitehead, whose early pragmatist ventures matter deeply for the abovementioned authors, dualisms are simplifying abstractions: "In one sense the abstraction has been a happy one, in that it has allowed the simplest things to be considered first, for about ten generations" (2010, 154). But in what has been sometimes called the "Anthropocene", these abstractions lack the exactitude and detail required for a truly planetary and more than human society.

This pragmatist view of modern dualisms is helpful in dispensing with the excessively simplistic mode of moralistic condemnation ("you are wrong – in the moral sense – to use dualisms") to a more nuanced and affirmative position of complexity as in: "I understand why you use these dualisms but I think you are not helping yourself in sticking with them and their abstractions to really attain the goal you profess to want to attain (e.g. understanding, clarity, ...)". To this end, Haraway found a very useful slogan to encourage thinking actively and engaged in times of catastrophe: "staying with the trouble". To neatly separate the world into one sphere of *nature* and one of *culture*, into *mind* and *body*, *male* and *female* etc. not only has a certain allure (due to its conceptual clarity), but can also advance understanding to a certain degree. However, for a deeper and more ecological understanding of how thinking and acting emerges out of specific environmental situations, it becomes an obstacle that can do more harm than good.

My reading and critiquing of modern utopian pacifism should be understood in this vein: by highlighting the imperialist and exclusivist innuendo of Eternal Peace, I do not want to condemn anybody who would cling to its ideal of pacifism. Much rather, the idea is to point out that – as much as I understand and share the desire it is motivated by – the tools and ontological presuppositions of modern utopian pacifism are simply not refined and well-tailored enough to achieve a more peaceful, friendlier, and more open world (or worlds). Indeed, to go one step further, I propose that an ethics of "staying with the trouble" can shape a pacifism to come that is less burdened by the modern tradition – most significantly, its tendency to enforce a Zentralgewalt to quell any trouble for all time – and thereby prolonging a Eurocentric logic of dualistic rationalism, suppression and block-building.

BOLO'BOLO – DARING TO SPECULATE ABOUT A PLANETARY UTOPIA WHILE REMAINING MESSY

In order to develop this positively "troublesome" politics of war, P. M.'s *bolo'bolo* can serve as an apt example to sketch utopian worlds that are freed from this fatal logic of modern utopian pacifism and its necessity for a Zentralgewalt. This pick may seem somewhat eclectic, as there exists a vast array of ecologically-minded utopias, starting with Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975) to today's sinister variants, for example Michelle O'Brian and Eman Abdelhadi's *Everything for Everyone: An Oral History of the New York Commune 2052–2072* (2022) or Peter Gelderloos's *The Solutions Are Already There* (2022). These all address the question of war in one way or the other. However, *bolo'bolo*'s weird hybrid style of political tractatus and sci-fi

utopia envisions a radically mutualist anarchist utopia that is particularly useful for the purpose of this article.

In the "messy utopia" of *bolo'bolo*, the planet is dotted with a myriad of little islands of autonomy that can develop according to their desires and needs. In this sketch of joyful life under conditions of a "messy utopia", central powers or larger political blocks have disappeared. Instead, so-called *bolos*, small scale social units, are home to 100 to 500 individuals, who the text refers to as *ibus*, another one of P. M.'s many neologisms.[8] Since "bolo' bolo is not a uniform system, but a patchwork of small worlds" (P. M. 2015, 66),[9] each *bolo*'s degree of individualism or collectivity is determined by its inhabitants and limited only by the need for self-sufficiency and hospitality: "Every ibu can find the bolo that suits them, transform it or start a new one" (79).[10] In this world of *bolo'bolo*, a community of car enthusiasts can coexist alongside organic farmers or yogis – every *bolo* can live and develop their own idea of a good culture or civilization without having to fear intervention from above, simply because there is no "above". All larger associations are voluntary, such as the organization of train lines, health care, the trade for specific local goods, committees for global understanding and communication, or solidarity aid in times of catastrophes. The main goal is

> the expression of typical productive passions of a *bolo*. Productive passions are in turn directly linked to a *bolo*'s cultural identity. There might be painter-*bolos*, shoemaker-*bolos*, guitar-*bo-los*, clothing-*bolos*, leather-*bolos*, electronics-*bolos*, dance-*bolos*, woodcutting-*bolos*, mechanics *bolos*, aeroplane-*bolos*, book-*bolos*, photography-*bolos*, etc. Certain *bolos* won't specialize and will do many different things, others would reduce the production and use of many things to a minimum (Tao-*bolo*). (2011, 96)

bolo'bolo reads like a planet Earth in which the community of biohackers mentioned in Haraway's "The Camille Stories" aside from millions of other bolos find their joyful and mutualistic co-existence without interference from others. This global frame of P. M.'s messy utopian sketch is helpful for a political philosophy of war because the "outside", the origin of warlike aggression, tends to be neglected in messy utopian stories. For example, "The Camille Stories" take place in a small, limited space of autonomy that is surrounded by a vague, presumably hostile or indifferent environment.[11] Although there is little mention of the state of the world at large, one might imagine this little biohacker bubble as embedded in a world comparable to the one in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), in which clans fight over the last resources and fertile lands of the planet.

In contrast to Haraway, *bolo' bolo* is a utopia that professes to work only when realized on a global scale: "Planetary substruction from the beginning is a precondition for the success of the strategy that leads to bolo'bolo. If bolo'bolo remains just the spleen of a single country or region, it's lost; it will become just another impulse for 'development'" (2011, 67). Since the current modern capitalist order "has a planetary character, a successful bolo'bolo strategy must also be planetary from the outset. Purely local, regional or even national [strategies] will never be sufficient to paralyze [it] as a whole" (65). However, since the world of *bolo' bolo* is a messy utopia nevertheless, it cannot provide a coherent master plan reminiscent of Leninist planning;

instead, the book consciously avoids specific information on how a worldwide community of *bolos* can be achieved: "Bolo'bolo is an attempt to formulate a planetary project in a few basic outlines. […] It is a snapshot of our (my?) current desires and today's assessment of the 'technical/biological' limits. In many respects the limits will be too narrow, in others the wishes too extravagant" (2015, 55).[12]

This is why *bolo'bolo* is written in a hybrid form of speculation and political treatise. Its daring move to speculate about the whole planet under the condition of a messy, unimposing utopia comes at the price of concrete information on how such a state can be achieved. But this ambiguity contrasts positively with Haraway's "Camillie Stories" by moving beyond the confined space of utopian islands to formulate a vision of complex peace in no-longer-modern terms. This utopia is thus true to its etymology of being a "non-place": it can be read as a "regulative idea" for political thinking today that can inspire philosophical reformulations of what the political means. According to, such politics will also help the global peace movement "simply because they're not primarily interested in 'peace', but because they've got a common, positive project" (2011, 69) of different world-building and -inhabiting.

YAKA & IBU – LETTING THE TROUBLE FLOW FREE FROM NECESSITY

Evidently, the world of *bolo'bolo* is neither trouble-free nor void of conflict. There is even a joking reference about a hypothetical bolo in which psychopaths come together to build an atomic bomb to annihilate the world (199). In a world without central power or justice apparatus, nobody would be able to stop them. Yet there is the argument that the development of such a highly complex technological object – alongside nuclear plants, massive damns etc. – is unlikely in such a joyfully fragmented world. After all, only the centralized power of the state can enforce the necessary concentration of work, capital, focus and resources for such large-scale infrastructural projects.

This special kind of "laissez faire"-attitude is characteristic of *bolo'bolo* and its underlying ontology of a sympoetic planet that is not hostile and warlike, but brings forth a myriad of colorful life-worlds. Hereby, P. M.'s vision offers an original "posthumanist" critique of the "state of nature" avant la lettre and reframes the question of war in a more nuanced way. Contrary to mutualist anarchist predecessors, such as Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin (1976), this vision takes a planetary perspective while refusing to subscribe to the simplistic idea that humans are peaceful and harmonious "by nature". In *bolo'bolo*, there is plenty of room for conflict, for example when armed battles result in an activity that could indeed be called "war". P. M. devotes an entire chapter to so-called *yaka* (2015, 173), in which he offers a critique of humanism in a true posthumanist fashion. He criticizes the central modern notion of "the human" in such a fundamental way that its overcoming is presented as one of the necessary preconditions for the prevention of full-scale war. P. M. replaces the fraught term "the human" by addressing the individual as *ibus*:

> Since the ibu has emerged, we've gotten rid of "the human", and, luckily, gotten rid at the same time of all those questions like: is "the human" violent or non-violent, is he

> "good" or "bad" by "nature" (we've gotten rid of "nature" too). All these definitions of that strange being called "the human" – particularly the humanist, positive ones – have always had catastrophic consequences. Someone always didn't fit into these well-intentioned definitions and had to be collected in camps for the purpose of re-education, correction, and so on. (2015, 197)[13]

P. M. rejects the notion of a natural state of both the world and humans, identifying it as a source of conflict, exploitation, eradication, normalization and large scale wars. Like many contemporary posthumanists (Cavazza 2014; Debaise 2017; Morton 2009; Latour 2004; Stengers 1995), he rejects *nature* – or Nature with a capital N – to liberate our political thinking from the preconception that the desire for violence and destruction ("Gewaltlust") is the source of war that requires suppression by reason, culture state and a central power. To the contrary, Widmer affirms that this violent desire exists in every *ibu*:

> It is unfair when this lust for violence is decried as the seed of war. War is much more likely to arise from mass suppression of violence. As a bureaucratic, faceless nuclear disinfection (neutron bomb), war has absolutely nothing to do with violence and hatred. Feelings would only hinder the technicians and officials of modern war in their work. War does not result from a logic of violence, but from the logic of the state and the economy. (P. M. 2015, 197–198)[14]

This passage is central, for it moves our reasoning on war to a completely different plane: in contrast to modern utopian pacifism, according to which the state is the necessary precondition to tame the dormant violence of human animals, *bolo'bolo* considers the state's taming of violence as the cause of war. In short, violence is integral to the human, its suppression leads to war. In this anthropology, the human animal is violent, though "perhaps not by 'nature', but simply because it likes it. It can find pleasure in personal, painful, direct contact" (197–198).[15] There is no clean utopian state that is free of violence, neither in primordial nature nor in a political order. Violence and conflict can and will occur – *trouble will remain*.

P. M. considers the state and the capitalist lifestyle as the main cause that, after subjecting individuals to alienation, frustration, anger and conflict, can lead to catastrophic war. But in doing away with this toxic lifestyle in a utopian framework, *bolo'bolo* doesn't go as far to take the easy and trouble-free way of avoiding or eradicating the question of violence and war altogether. In the utopia of *bolo'bolo*, negative feelings will remain. But they will not escalate into catastrophic war because *yaka* provides socially framed and controlled outlets for the desire for violence that will prevent the alienation endemic to excessively rigid structures. By affirming violence and trouble as something that can happen, war will become less and less a necessary outlet for repressed drives and can escape the catastrophic logic of modern utopian pacifism.

CONCLUSION

A political position that applies the principle of "staying with the trouble" to war theory must abandon monocausal attributions of war to isolated factors, such as the state, patriarchy, violence, evil desires or instincts. Widmer somewhat provocatively writes: "if war is understood as a collective, direct act of violence, then yaka

only makes it possible again. Possible because it is unnecessary and therefore cannot become catastrophic"[16] (198). Since the trouble that leads to war cannot be eradicated, my approach understands war as a political result that does not primary emerge from any so called "natural" desires (which have always been a mere speculation and projection of the current state of affairs onto an imagined past). Rather, the connotation of "war" as a catastrophic evil is rooted in the logics of state-thinking, turning necessary conflicts into cold and deadly wars. In *bolo'bolo*, the Zentralgewalt, the ultimate panacea of modern utopian pacifism, is named as the main cause of conflicts turning into catastrophic full-scale wars. By centralizing and monopolizing violence, the Zentralgewalt requires the suppression of all other violent competitive desires in *ibus*, animals and humans, thereby inhibiting their free expression in forms that in fact contribute to colorful life-worlds and the flourishing of human culture and creativity. The neo-pacifist stance of "staying with the trouble" could thus be described as being based on a recognition of the existence of trouble and conflict in any state of affairs (natural, utopian, self-governed, stately, national, confederal) which tries to cultivate creative ways to transform troublesome desires into liberating outputs that prevent full-scale war.

In my view, the negation of monocausal necessity can pave the way to a new pacifism for our troublesome times. Simply by arguing for an abstract state of Eternal Peace will not help because it reproduces propositions that are part of a suppression of trouble that make the outburst of trouble catastrophically necessary. No matter how suppressed by central powers, trouble will always find ways to resurface. A philosophy of "staying with the trouble" in times of war affirms the courage not to reject conflict and violence universally, but places the focus on small scale solutions to political situations that escape overly broad and abstract concepts. If we understand war as an outlet for the more troublesome aspects of life, perhaps it will never end. This said, to dispense with simplistic positions is the precondition of reining in the Zentralgewalt that launches catastrophic wars – rather than encouraging *yaka*'s liberating force.

NOTES

[1] "It is nasty to decry violent desires as the root cause behind war." Unless otherwise stated, all translations by K. J.

[2] "Der ideale Zustand wäre natürlich eine Gemeinschaft von Menschen, die ihr Triebleben der Diktatur der Vernunft unterworfen haben."

[3] "Alles, was die Kulturentwicklung fördert, arbeitet auch gegen den Krieg."

[4] "so paradox es klingt, man muss doch zugestehen, der Krieg wäre kein ungeeignetes Mittel zur Herstellung des ersehnten 'ewigen' Friedens, weil er im Stande ist, jene großen Einheiten zu schaffen, innerhalb deren eine starke Zentralgewalt weitere Kriege unmöglich macht."

[5] "eine sichere Verhütung der Kriege ist nur möglich, wenn sich die Menschen zur Einsetzung einer Zentralgewalt einigen, welcher der Richterspruch in allen Interessenskonflikten übertragen wird."

[6] I am using the German original term here to emphasize the homonym "Gewalt", which signifies authority *and* violence.

[7] "Mongolen und Türken haben nur Unheil gebracht."

[8] Alongside "bolo" and "ibu", other neologisms include "yaka", "taku", "kana", "nima", "kodu" and "sibi". P. M. argues that in the world of *bolo'bolo*, the homogenization of languages, customs and life-forms will give way to a "pluralistic Totalitarianism" (2015, 184), allowing languages to branch off into uncountable dialects and sub-idioms. The basic names/concepts are considered the product of a basic linguistic set that can aid global understanding even in times of radical semantic and lingual pluralization.

[9] "Bolo'bolo ist also kein einheitliches System, sondern ein Flickenteppich kleiner Welten". Please note that I am quoting from two different versions of *bolo'bolo*: from the original German text (using the 2015 edition), which I translate into English, and from the 2011 English translation. When the latter does not convey the original tone adequately, I offer my own original translation.

[10] "Der Grad von Individualismus oder Kollektivität wird in jedem bolo von seinen Bewohnern selbst bestimmt und ist nur durch die Notwendigkeit der Selbstversorgung und die Gastfreundschaft beschränkt. […] Jedes ibu kann das für es passende bolo finden, umwandeln oder neu gründen".

[11] This aspect leads Alf Hornborg (2017) to critique the complete absence of the material conditions of the bio-technological community in "The Camille Stories", a telling example for the lack of reflection on the role of capitalist techno-industry for this little utopian island. Accordingly, Haraway's vision features a dangerous myopia for global structures of exploitation and inequality. See also Jörg 2023.

[12] "Es ist eine Momentaufnahme unserer (meiner?) augenblicklichen Wünsche und der heutigen Einschätzung der 'technisch/biologischen' Grenzen. in vielen Punkten werden die Grenzen zu eng gesteckt sein, in anderen die Wünsche zu extravagant. Bolo'bolo ist der Versuch, ein planetares Projekt in einigen Grundzügen zu formulieren.")

[13] "Seit dem Auftauchen des ibu sind wir zum Glück auch den ‚Menschen' los und die Frage, ob dieser nun gut (= friedfertig) oder böse (= gewalttätig) von «Natur» (die ist auch nicht vorgesehen) aus ist. Die Definitionen des Menschen – vor allem die humanistischen – hatten nämlich bisher immer höchst katastrophale Folgen. Irgend jemand passte immer nicht in diese so gut gemeinten Definitionen und musste dann zwecks Umerziehung, Besserung usw. in Lagern gesammelt werden."

[14] "Gemein ist es, wenn diese Gewaltlust als Keim des Krieges verschrien wird. Krieg entsteht viel eher aus massenhafter Gewaltunterdrückung. Er hat als bürokratische, gesichtslose nukleare Desinfektion (Neutronenbombe) mit Gewalt und Hass rein gar nichts mehr zu tun. Gefühle würden die Techniker und Beamten des modernen Krieges bei ihrer Arbeit nur behindern. Krieg ergibt sich nicht aus einer Gewaltlogik, sondern aus der Staats- und Wirtschaftslogik."

[15] "vielleicht nicht von 'Natur' aus, aber einfach, weil es ihm gefällt. Es kann Lust an persönlicher, schmerzlicher, direkter Berührung finden."

[16] "Wenn aber Kriege als eine kollektive, direkte Gewaltaktion verstanden wird, dann macht ihn yaka erst wieder möglich macht. Möglich, weil er unnötig ist und daher nicht katastrophal werden kann."

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World-wide conflicts, insular solutions: Universalizing government, language and race in H. G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* and Kang Youwei's *The Great Unity*

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World-wide conflicts, insular solutions: Universalizing government, language and race in H. G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* and Kang Youwei's *The Great Unity*

Political theory. Utopianism. Ethnocentrism. Racism. Centralization.

In H. G. Wells's and Kang Youwei's early 20th century utopias, World Governments take center stage by proposing global political orders to prevent large-scale wars. Both texts propose not only the centralization of military and juridical power, but also the homogenization of culture and language as well as race. Despite both texts' ostentatious cosmopolitanism, however, their visions are compromised by their (Anglo- and Sinocentric) ethnocentrism and racism. In light of the complex narrative forms of both texts, this article proposes an alternative to judging them by today's liberal values. Their sprawling form requires a consideration of their full heterogeneity, including Wells's use of narrative irony and Kang's intergalactic vision of cosmic citizenship.

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Since the turn of the millennium the concept of World Government (WG) has been enjoying a renaissance. Faced with the multiple crises of a globalized world, in which the economic, political and ecological dilemmas can no longer be addressed in only localized terms, the current internationalist system appears like an outmoded or, at best, inefficient geopolitical framework. As a measure to manage and prevent financial, geopolitical and health crises, WG would entail the "full integration of all political units into a cohesive global institutional framework" (Cabrera 2018, 514) to ensure long-term peace on both regional and global scales. In contrast to the United Nations in its current shape, this includes supreme military and juridical power over member states, effectually meaning that civil liberties can be overwritten in favor of the security needs identified by a political elite. It is difficult to refute Hannah Arendt's condemnation of the idea that a WG with supreme juridical and executive authority would abolish political agency itself and install an anonymous and unaccountable tyranny (Arendt 1993, 14). Desperate times, however, call for desperate measures and rouse interest in utopian ideas "beyond what existing political institutions and even imaginations seem to be capable of" (Ingram 2016, xi). In today's academic realm, support for a unified world – and the sacrifices it may entail – shows in Zhao Tingyang's reappraisal of *tianxia*, an ancient Chinese concept, as the blueprint for a new world order (2021), through to academics who, in the face of unmitigated climate heating, call for the formation of a WG to enforce eco-friendly policies (Tännsjö 2021).

The present study takes the cue from contemporary discussions of WG to reexplore two modern utopian texts whose central concern foreshadowed the two historical events that most reshaped the globe, the First and Second World Wars. The central theme of *A Modern Utopia* (1904) by H. G. Wells and *Da Tong Shu* (1913; Eng. trans. *The Great Unity*, 1935) by Kang Youwei is how to prevent armed conflicts from breaking out in the first place, even if this means radically reshaping the makeup of human societies. Understandably, the interwar and the postwar period saw a rise in WG enthusiasm, loosely drawing from the utopian imagination of the previous generation. Both Wells's and Kang's texts advance a type of political-philosophical reflection that combines the intellectual rigor of social-contract treatises with the creative verve of speculative fiction, a combination that defines the great works of modern utopianism, such as Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (1888) and William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890).

While Kang's and Wells's treatises are conceived as positive visions of possible futures, they contain the seeds of dystopia – not simply because the grand narratives of progress have become porous today but owing to the concrete proposals that nurture their imagination. As this article will demonstrate, their visions of world peace are afforded by elements that stand at odds with commonplace notions of a just society. While research has already addressed such aspects with regard to Wells, scholarship has nothing but praise for Kang's text, probably because of its precarious cultural status as a Chinese utopia. This also applies to the one existing comparative study of both utopian texts, Dmitry E. Martynov and Yulia A. Martynova's article from 2015. According to their argument, Kang's commitment to freedom contrasts

positively with Wells' puritanism (Martynov and Martynova 2015), a view that does not account for the complicated cultural undercurrents that show in both texts, not only in the British writer's. The binary *Western/non-Western* is inconsequential for the present discussion. After a historical sketch of the WG imaginary, the article traces how Wells's texts conceives of centralized leadership and how it addresses two problematic themes, the choice of a universal language and racial politics. Then the same focus will be placed on Kang's book. These findings are then considered in light of the texts' confusing vacillation between normative description and playful speculation. Finally, the conclusion asks what their uneasy mix of utopian ambitions and dystopian innuendos says about contemporary WG enthusiasm.

GENESIS OF WORLD GOVERNMENT

In principle, one can argue that historical empires, such as the early dynasties in China, Ancient Mesopotamia and Rome, already claimed to rule the "world", at least as they understood it (Münkler 2007, 11). From today's perspective, however, such views document the limitation of the geographical data available at the time and a chauvinist attitude toward cultures beyond the known world. Inevitably, this also applies to the earliest speculative vision of WG, Dante Alighieri's "De Monarchia" ("On Monarchy", 1316), written at a time when parts of Europe had been threatened by the largest contiguous land empire in world history, the Mongol empire (1206–1335). In his text, Dante envisions a world ruled by the Romans, claiming that "the noblest people deserve to be put above all others" (Alighieri 1957, 27). While such ethnocentric claims ring hollow today, the treatise's provocative trajectory lies in its secular outline. The Holy See, which at the time strived to install a theocratic monarchy beyond Rome, promptly placed "On Monarchy" on the index of banned works (Bellamy 2019, 30).

The lingering appeal of Dante's idea shows most visibly in the most influential discussion of WG in political theory, Immanuel Kant's treatise *Zum ewigen Frieden: Ein philosophischer Entwurf* (1795; Eng. trans. "Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch", 2006). While it argues in favor of actively shaping the global order of things – after all, "the state of peace must be established" (Kant 2006, 73) against the barbaric state of nature – the treatise articulates reservations against forging a "state of peoples" from existing states. Identifying popular with state sovereignty, Kant considers it unlawful for one state to acquire another one, no matter if through peaceful negotiation or as the result of territorial aggression. The only realistic approach to gradually establish perpetual peace, argues Kant, is to establish a "republicanism of all states", that is, a cosmopolitical order that respects territorial borders as contact points between the jurisdictions of discrete national legal systems. Whereas those borders ensure the rule of law, their disappearance within large political unities would entail a backlash into barbarism: "This is so because laws increasingly lose their force as the borders of a government are extended, and a soulless despotism, after having eliminated the seeds of good, ultimately declines into anarchy" (91).

Ignoring Kant's warning against a global tyranny, the early socialist Claude-Henri Saint-Simon envisioned a WG for the post-revolutionary world, "Lettres d'un habi-

tant de Genève à ses contemporains" ("Letters from an inhabitant of Geneva to his contemporaries", 1803). This pamphlet proposes the end of inherited privilege and endorses the rule of philosophers, as envisioned in Plato's *Republic* (375 BCE). Saint-Simon's elite is comprised by the "Council of Newton", a group of scientists, scholars, authors and artists who will be elected by the citizens. The Council will be "working for the progress of your enlightenment; you [i.e., the citizens] will be endowing these leaders with great prestige and you will be placing considerable financial resources at their disposal" (Saint-Simon 1976, 65). Arguably, the patronizing undercurrent of this form of rule, which leaves no room for checks and balances, represents the birth of avant-garde politics, the central concept behind the Leninist and Stalinist "revolution from above". Building on such early forays, socialist internationalism also challenged national boundaries, which it considered a byproduct of bourgeois politics and which Friedrich Engels imagined to simply "die out" (1983, III: 147) at some point.[1]

Kang's and Wells's utopian visions actively draw from this WG matrix. Their argument is that the existing world order needs a structural shakeup and that its benefits would go beyond the mere prevention of war: they promise the world's spiritual rebirth from the limitations inherited from the 19th century.

TOWARD A POST-EMPIRE EMPIRE (H. G. WELLS I)

Wells's novel *A Modern Utopia* represents the author's first foray into how a central authority could reshape human life on the planet, and it was followed by *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933), a fictional work of history that documents how a WG emerges from a century of global war, and *The New World Order* (1940), a non-fiction book that proposes the establishment of a socialist and scientific WG. In comparison, *A Modern Utopia* is more unrestrained in its ideas. While the largest part of the narrative is comprised by discursive exposition, the storyline follows an Englishmen, the story's narrator, and his fellow traveler, the ignorant botanist, on their unexpected sojourn on an Earth-like planet. Despite being populated by the same human population, social relationships are designed in such a way that the whole place forms "an imaginary whole and happy world" (Wells 2005, 11). Central to its realization is the advent of a "World-State authority", a central administration that oversees monetary and economic policy, engineers social mores, and implements eugenic long-term planning.

For obvious reasons, critics consider *A Modern Utopia* a highly problematic text. Readers who take its vision of a perfected world at face value cannot help noting the unmistakable imprint of Wells's English cultural background and his value preferences, for example when the text endows the World State with suspicious similarities to the British colonial administration (Shadursky 2020). In the same vein, it was considered "unflatteringly" prescient regarding contemporary Europe's supranational mobility control, as Wells's utopia affords borderlessness by nightmarish levels of surveillance (Foster 2020). According to Sarah Cole's overall judgement, Wells's works merit to be considered along their mixed legacy, as the author's progressive radicalism and his chauvinism form a complex unity. They "showcase the enmesh-

ment of incompatible positions and impulses within a mind of exceptional activity, whose limitations and biases can be visible in the most troubling way" (2020, 56). This also applies to *A Modern Utopia*'s ideas of global unification as well as its linguistic and racial policies.

Akin to Saint-Simon's "Council of Newton", the World State is ruled by an elite. But rather than being comprised of an elected group of scientists and artists, the elite in Wells's text comprises an order of gifted men and women, the "samurai". Their ascetic code not only prohibits them from consuming meat, drink, tobacco and narcotic drugs, they are also denied the possession of material goods, a policy that supposedly makes them immune to corruption and self-interest. Originally a militant organization, the samurai successfully campaigned against all political entities that stood in the way of unification. Now they hold all the power: "Practically all political power vests in the samurai. Not only are they the only administrators, lawyers, practicing doctors, and public officials of almost all kinds, but they are the only voters" (Wells 2005, 207). In short, the samurai hold an unchecked monopoly over the fiscal and executive power of the World State.

In contrast to such centralization, the World State's language policy seems comparatively *laissez faire*. Once the narrator sets foot on utopian soil – in fact in Lucerne – he realizes that if he is to give a precise account of this place, he must have perfect command of the local language. Vacillating between the descriptive and normative speech, the narrator explains: "The whole world will surely have a common language, that is quite elementary Utopian, and […] we may suppose that language to be sufficiently our own to understand. Indeed, should we be in Utopia at all, if we could not talk to everyone?" (18) This statement proposes a variant of English as the common language, one that the narrator can "sufficiently" understand. Yet the universal tongue is also described as a coalesced language, such as modern English, itself a mix of Anglo-Saxon, Norman French and scholarly Latin. The universalized tongue draws from additional sources, including vocabulary from a dozen once separate tongues that forge "a living tongue, an animated system of imperfections, which every individual man will infinitesimally modify" (21). The make-up of this coalesced language, here described as an open system, stands at odds with a central feature of the utopian World State. Overall, cultural and economic bridge-building is conceded to an administrative elite whose normative power overwrites localisms, and one would imagine linguistic aspects to be included. Critics argued that Wells's universal language rests on the idea that the languages of the world will eventually yield to a variant of Basic English (Cole 2020, 312). Since the language must be "sufficiently" understood by the narrator, his knowledge of foreign languages may expand the portfolio. Given his portrait as a man of some erudition, he may also understand French and traces of other European languages. It is inconceivable to imagine the book's universal language including elements taken from Slavic, Sino-Tibetan, Atlantic–Congo, or from any other major language families of the world. Glad to find himself a speaker of the universal language, the narrator interrupts his exposition soon enough: "This talk of languages, however, is a digression" (Wells 2005, 22).

Since the novel is also written in English, one can take the text's programmatic disinterest in further discussion as a clear signal: whatever interferences existed between the dozens of tongues before they coalesced into the universal language, there is nothing left that cannot be represented adequately in modern English. This indicates a radical departure from utopian language politics of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when the creators of artificial tongues such as Volapük and Esperanto hoped to overcome communication barriers through a new, accessible lingua franca. Wells's commitment to natural languages puts faith in a non-intentional, transhistorical process to reverse the Biblical *confusio linguarum*, causing linguistic heterogeneity to become redundant, even in the absence of a centralized, intentional design. Such narrative choices deserve to be taken seriously and give away the same Anglocentric focus that also shows in most cultural aspects of World State. Indeed, this utopia's open design is considerably compromised by the narrator's declaration "that Westminster shall still be a seat of world Empire, one of several seats, if you will – where the ruling council of the world assembles" (164).

UTOPIAN POLITICS OF RACE (H. G. WELLS II)

In terms of racial politics, Wells's utopia offers a more cosmopolitan outlook than Dante's insular claim that the Romans deserve to be put above all others. The anti-racism of *A Modern Utopia* is summed up in the following statement: "What the average Chinaman or Englishman may be, is of no importance whatever to our plan of a World State. It is not averages that exist, but individuals" (221). In the narrative, the botanist acts as a spokesman for the prejudices and race theories that were common currency during Wells's time, which posited that the struggle between the races was the major driving force of world history (Berg and Wendt 2011, 2). As the botanist expresses his dismay at the potential union between a Chinese man and a white British woman, the narrator retorts:

> "Yes", I said, "you've got to swallow that, anyhow; you shall swallow that." He finds the idea too revolting for comment. I try and make the thing seem easier for him. "Do try", I said, "to grasp a Modern Utopian's conditions. The Chinaman will speak the same language as his wife – whatever her race may be – he will wear costume of the common fashion, he will have much the same education as his European rival, read the same literature, bow to the same traditions." (Wells 2005, 227)

Indeed, Utopia's universal culture is modelled after Anglo-European templates that set the example for dress codes, gender relations and religious beliefs. The greatest homogeneity is achieved by the samurai class, whose modest dress, strict sense of duty and abstract theology are indebted to Protestant norms. This cultural code is available for all global citizens, hereby complicating the relationship between race and culture, two categories that the pseudo-scientific racism of the late 19th century considers mutually determined (Geulen 2011, 66). This said, the utopia's anti-racism largely remains "putative" (Bell 2020, 184). The travelers encounter practically no non-white Utopians between Lucerne and London, the exception being a "white-tunicked [Chinese] clerk" and "a prosperous-looking, self-respecting young negro, in a trimly-cut coat of purple-blue and silver" (Wells 2005, 211).

The narrator encounters various samurais, but none of them are described as non-white.

This is all the more worrying given *A Modern Utopia*'s bio-politics. The world population is categorized into four types: the Poietic, the Kinetic, the Dull and the Base. Based on every individual's mental and physical unique set of abilities (or lack thereof), the four categories determine every citizen's prospect for success in the World State's society. Accordingly, the Poietic and the Kinetic represent the mentally, morally and physically desirable population, who take up roles as artists, thinkers, top managers and administrators. Only the Poietic and the Kinetic are allowed to create offspring (without incurring financial punishment) and to become part of the samurai class. Meanwhile, the Dull, "the people who never seems to learn thoroughly, or hear distinctly, or think clearly", and the Base, people with "a narrower and more persistent egoistic reference than the common run of humanity" (181), are limited to hold basic income jobs and hindered from procreating. Within this type of eugenics, it is only fitting that the carriers of transmissible diseases as well as "drunkards, drug takers, and the like" will be isolated on remote islands. Such measures will help "the maximum elimination of its feeble and spiritless folk in every generation with the minimum of suffering and public disorder" (99). In the end, Wells's utopia merely reinvents racial eugenics as another type of eugenics that focusses on ability.

Within this Eurocentric utopia, such emphasis on ability is difficult to untangle from questions of race. Regardless of the proposition that education should be uniform for all citizens until the age when differences become apparent, there are two aspects that reflect badly on this seemingly open design. First, there is the text's general cultural bias, a factor that makes it more probable for non-white races to fall into the category of the Dull. After all, the lingering traces of non-universal cultural codes may hinder their ability to "think clearly" – that is, to reproduce the codes that administrators classify as "clear thought". As recent work on "racial color-blindness" has shown, it is next to impossible to erase educational inequality as long as racial gaps are not addressed aggressively from an early stage (Martin et al. 2017; Orfield 2024). Admittedly, such second thoughts on universal education, very much a 21st-century concern, are alien to the turn-of-the-century paradigms that form the background of Wells's text. And yet they bring to light the layers of injustice that hide behind the façade of the utopian society. Tellingly, the narrator admits that the population's division into the Poietic, the Kinetic, the Dull and the Base does not stand the test of reality, as too many inconsistencies arise from this classification:

> Obviously, this is the rudest of classifications, and no Utopian has ever supposed it to be a classification for individual application, a classification so precise that one can say, this man is "poietic", and that man is "base". In actual experience these qualities mingle and vary in every possible way. It is not a classification for Truth, but a classification to an end. (Wells 2005, 182)

It turns out that the utopia's eugenic grand scheme is merely an instrument for the sake of classification.

The discussed biases and idiosyncrasies go against the narrator's initial claim that he sets "all the customs and traditions of the earth" (135) aside. Instead, he draws

on the European humanist tradition to extrapolate a de-facto ethnocentric World State, hereby reiterating a feature of the earliest WG vision, Dante's Roman world empire. In Wells's *A Modern Utopia*, the elites do not have to *be* Roman, but they must excel at *acting* Roman: there is no place for non-European cultures but only for their human resources. Taking all this into account, there is some truth in the claim that 1920s dystopian literature also emerged as a direct reaction to the supposedly positive utopia of Wells (Flaherty 2020). Before the discussion moves to the pertinent question of the status of such speculations, the article now turns to a utopia that emerged in the Chinese context and shows striking parallels.

FROM THE EMPIRE TO GREAT UNITY (KANG YOUWEI I)

Paradoxically, Kang's vision of supranational unity in *The Great Unity* emerged in a period in Chinese history, when the multi-ethnic Qing empire was in the process of a wholescale transformation from empire to nation-state. This process had started in reaction to the Opium Wars during the 1860s and gained traction when charismatic figures like Sun Yat-sen argued that a sense of nationhood, centering around Han identity, was essential to encourage collective solidarity against colonial aggression (Sun 2020, 25–49). In contrast, *The Great Unity* rejects the Westphalian system's focus on the nation-state, arguing that it hinders the true teleology of humanity's evolution: "The progression from dispersion to union among men, and the principle whereby the world is gradually proceeding from being partitioned off to being opened up, is a working of the Way of Heaven and human affairs" (K'ang 1958, 79). The manuscript's textual genesis spans several decades, as Kang's initial work on the manuscript covers the period between the 1880s and 1902. After fragments were printed in 1913, the full form was published posthumously in 1935. The book exerted a considerable global influence, not only because Kang's disciples included influential Chinese reformers such as Liang Qichao, but also because the manuscript's readers included US President Woodrow Wilson, who was conceiving the League of Nations at the time (Manela 2006, 1342). In contrast to Wells's book, the existing scholarship on *The Great Unity* considers it a "model of absolute freedom" that features an "open society free from any social, intellectual, ethnic and gender barriers" (Martynov and Martynova 2015, 1), "where the earth's human inhabitants are living together as free equals without cultural, national, racial divides" (Yan 2017, 254). In more concrete terms, the book is characterized as a testament to Confucian universalism. But while this judgement implies that Kang's work envisions "a moral and quasi-religious framework anchored in a unitary, all-encompassing order" (Wang 2017, 50) and that it offers a "potentially *universal* model of civilization" (Brusadelli 2020, 9, emphasis in the original), it remains unclear to what extent this vision bears relevance for the non-Confucian rest of the world.

In contrast to the prehistory of the WG idea in the West, its Chinese counterpart does not emerge from the Enlightenment and the socialist movement but from the kind of late 19th-century scholarship that embraced Western learning without throwing the Confucian heritage overboard. Kang indeed formed part of the scholarly elite that administrated the Qing Empire, but he often found himself at odds

with its ossified structure. Kang was the author of a string of moratoria addressed to the Emperor, but his attempts at reform and modernization were never successful (Thompson 1958, 11–25). Given the Hobbesian undertones of *The Great Unity* and its commitment to egalitarianism, critics such as Zhang Longxi have it as "very much influenced by his understanding of Western ideas and Western social and political systems" (2005, 195–196). To consider the book's ideas as mere concessions to occidental values, however, means to dismiss the great lengths that *The Great Unity* goes to root its vision in ancient Chinese philosophy. Kang invokes the *Zhou yi* (*Book of Changes*) to make a case for humanity's need to be governed by ever larger states: "Since, in the time of the rude beginnings, there were many states standing together, there were then strong and weak coexistent. The large and small states fought with each other, daily going to war and grinding down the people. This was most unpeaceful!" (K'ang 1958, 79). Emerging from such chaotic beginnings, humanity progressed from "animality" (qinshou) to "barbarism" (yeman) through to "civilisation" (wenming) (64). Hereby, Kang offers a deeply Confucian outlook on human history. Significantly, the Confucian tradition posits that one can only overcome "barbarism" by submitting to the rule of a Sage King, through integration into social hierarchies and by adopting civilized standards (Poo 2005, 66–67). Another significant source of Kang's interpretation of human history is Confucius's *Li ji* (*The Book of Rites*), a text that he treats to an unorthodox reinterpretation. Indeed, the concept of *datong*, the "Great Unity", derives from a passage in which Confucius references the time when such unity will be (or, according to orthodox readings, was) realized.[2] To Kang, Confucius's notion of the three ages points toward future perfection, as history moves from the present "Age of Disorder" to an "Age of One World":

> If we look at all the ways of saving the world through the ages, to discard the Way of One World and yet to hope to save men from suffering and to gain their greatest happiness, is next to impossible. The Way of One World is utmost peace-and-equality, utmost justice, utmost *jen*, and the most perfect government. (K'ang 1958, 72)

According to Kang, this unifying tendency is complemented by democratization. In contrast to Kant's conviction that "laws increasingly lose their force as the borders of a government are extended", the Chinese thinker argues that the formation of the United States and the unification of the German Empire had a democratizing effect, notably by bringing about the countries' constitutions. While one could argue that there exists plenty of evidence of the reverse process, such as the Russian Empire's growth alongside repression, this observation allows Kang to extrapolate the genesis of a "world parliament", an elected, extraterritorial institution that would hold supreme authority over its global citizens. Based on simple majorities, this parliament would regulate the relationship between the states and their complete disarmament. Once full unification will be achieved, the parliament's functions would be conceded to a premier, the head of the World State and supreme commander of its military troops.

It is important to note that Kang's "world parliament" is surprisingly passive, as it acts as a mere instrument of historical progress. Despite its concessions to the principle of majority rule, which was first institutionalized in England during the Res-

toration period, it ignores its most consequential epiphenomenon, party politics (Bulman 2021, 180–205). Instead, the majority principle is accompanied by the re-emergence of consensus politics, as there is no indication that their vote can interfere with the large scheme of things. Parliamentary decisions reflect the path-dependency of progress, which shows in irreversible developments, including gradual demilitarization, the abolition of monarchies across the world, the division of the world into ten continents, the installation of a global coordinate system dividing the planet into 10,000 grid squares, et cetera. Strikingly, Kang also demands women's equality and the complete dismantling of the traditional family structure, an unheard-of proposal from a Confucian scholar. Exciting as such proposals are, they clash with the world parliament's agency. As world society moves toward the Great Unity, participatory politics can only hasten but not correct, let alone roll back, the historical trajectory. Interestingly, Kang's vision also sees the president's power increase over time, a nod to Confucius's idea of the Sage King.

While the proposed reset of the global calendar to Year 1 upon unification suggests that the Great Unity starts from scratch, features such as the Sage King highlight Kang's commitment to the Chinese cultural heritage. This is also shown in his ideas on the universal language: "If the Chinese language were to be adopted, with the addition of an alphabet, to form the new world language, the energy expended would be slight, and much would be gained" (K'ang 1958, 101). According to Kang, two aspects speak in favor of choosing this language: not only does Classical Chinese facilitate faster letter composition than any Western or Indian language, it is also the most ancient among all living languages. While the higher speed of letter-writing indeed holds true, as more information can be transmitted in less space, Kang forgets to mention a significant side-effect; after all, mastery in this language entails a long period of education that only the elite class can afford. This is why many of Kang's contemporaries, who aimed to combat the endemic illiteracy of the Chinese population, pursued the exact opposite approach: their idea was to replace the classical idiom with a vernacular variant (Zhou 2011, 104–117). The consequence of Kang's proposition is drastic, as it entails the continuation of a historical feature of Chinese civilization: the formation of an aristocracy of the educated who rule over a largely illiterate population. Moreover, Kang's reference to the venerable age of the Chinese language undermines the notion of a true Year 1, a move into the opposite direction of the artificial language movement. There is no doubt that the Anglocentric outline of Wells's vision is matched by Kang's Sinocentrism.

FORGING A NEW RACE (KANG YOUWEI II)

Another aspect that the Great Unity seeks to universalize relates to the planet's races. Kang cautions that the abolishment of political and economic barriers would amount to nothing if races continued to exist: "At present there are in the world the white race, the yellow race, the brown race, and the black race. Their surface colours are completely different, and their spiritual constitutions are very dissimilar. How can they be smelted?" (K'ang 1958, 141). His emphasis on the differences between their spiritual constitution, including intellectual abilities, gives away the hier-

archy that informs Kang's views on race. In regard to the mixing of the "white", which he considers the "strongest", and the "yellow" race, which he considers the "wisest", he sees no obstacles for their complete blending, at least after a given period of interbreeding and after observing similar dietary regimes. With respect to the "brown" and the "black" races, however, Kang is pessimistic about their ability to survive in the long term. On the one hand, their numbers are in decline already, an observation he applies to the indigenous populations of both China and the Americas (whom he both classifies as "brown") as well as to the "black" population of Africa. On the other hand, he finds that their physiological "weakness" has a debilitating effect on their progeny, arguing that the mixing with the "white" and the "yellow" races produce predominately non-brown and non-black offspring.

Since Kang's speculations depart considerably from scientific racism of the European type, scholars have downplayed his ideas on race as "just another aspect of the global progression towards *Datong*" (Brusadelli 2020, 109). But as in Wells's case, an open attitude toward race mixing comes paired with a eugenic long-term plan to neutralize the "weak". This includes moving "brown" and "black" people into the north, where the "strongest" among them would develop "white" and "yellow" features. Over the next two or three centuries, the "brown" and "black" races will gradually disappear:

> Throughout the whole world there will only be the yellow and white peoples. Taking it that there are numberless persons of the good yellow and white races; if they contract mixed marriages with one or two persons of the bad brown and black races, then the one or two of the inferior races are few, and forthwith there are the numberless persons of the good races to rectify and redress this. (K'ang 1958, 147)

Quite in contrast to Kang's many borrowings from Confucius, racial attributes such as "weakness" and "inferiority" unmistakably depart from ancient universalism, which builds on the conviction that human differences are cultural attributes. Similar to Wells's notion, the Confucian tradition posits that every ethnic group can assimilate and adopt those attributes, thus changing their status from "barbarian" to "civilized". Kang's ethnic reinterpretation departs from this norm by dividing the world's population into two desirable and two undesirable races. Despite the rise of the Japanese Empire as the most powerful actor in South-East Asia during the late 19th century, Kang leaves no doubt to who he concedes primacy among the "yellow" race: to the Chinese people. Indeed, Kang's influence on Chinese notions of race cannot be underestimated, as his views were further amplified by his own students, among them Liang Qichao, who would make the case for a hierarchy of the human races, in which the "yellow" and the "white" races dominate the world, while the others hold an inferior position (Dikötter 2015, 37–60). Contrary to its universalist claims, Kang's Great Unity pursues an idiosyncratic agenda that concedes primacy to Sinic values, such as his preference for Classical Chinese as a universal language. *The Great Unity* also takes an ethnocentric perspective toward the world's racial future, and while he generously extends the torch of civilization to Europeans and North Americans, there is no long-term future for "brown" and "black" people. While of no direct influence, Dante's Roman Empire appears congenial to the ethnocentric ar-

rogance of Kang's Great Unity. Likewise, the world parliament's blind implementation of a given set of reforms is reminiscent of Saint-Simon's Council of Newton, an avant-garde that installs a revolution from above without further consulting its citizens. Whereas the Council's members are "working for the progress of your enlightenment", the commoners in this world of peace become passive objects of history: while one part is smelted into a Sinophone super-race, the other is left to die out.

NORMATIVE VS. SPECULATIVE UTOPIANISM

In sum, Kang's vision of the Great Unity reiterates many features of Wells's *A Modern Utopia*. When considered in the light of today's liberal values, those features certainly represent defects, as they tinge their uplifting visions of a better world with the hallmarks of dystopia. This starts with Kang's questionable commitment to democratic participation, resulting in a world parliament whose policies are already set and, once unification is achieved, the installation of an all-mighty president. As in Wells's case, whose samurai represent an unelected and unaccountable elite, this technocratic ideal is emblematic for two 19th-century gentleman scholars, one British and one Chinese, who cannot quite bring themselves to give electoral power to the uneducated, a characteristic that applies to wretched commoners and hereditary aristocrats alike. In addition, there are two features that further compromise both utopias: their culturalist notions regarding which tongue should be chosen for a universal language (a variant of Basic English for Wells, Classical Chinese for Kang) as well as their racist accounts of who should populate the world of tomorrow (Europeans and assimilated non-Europeans for Wells, "whites" and "yellow" people for Kang).

But do Wells and Kang actually propose the ideas that their texts advance? How serious are their recommendations? Both texts vacillate between the realm of fiction and non-fiction, and the former part deserves to be taken just seriously as their factual collision with general ideas of a just world. Indeed, both texts are replete with signals that veer off into a realm that is disconnected from the type of discursive speech found in sociopolitical pamphlets. In Wells's case, this starts with the author's introduction of the "Voice", the narrator, whose monologue meanders between imaginary journey and political-philosophical reflection. In the preface, the author points out that this narrator is not identical with himself but should be imagined as a "whitish plump man, a little under the middle size and age, with such blue eyes as many Irishmen have, and agile in his movements and with a slight tonsorial baldness […]. And his Voice (which is our medium henceforth) is an unattractive tenor that becomes at times aggressive" (2005, 7). While one should not entirely rule out the possibility of this being a candid self-portrait, the author characterizes the narrator in unflattering terms, for example by highlighting his defective looks and the "unattractive" sound of his voice. So is the peculiar Europeanness and Anglo-centeredness of the imagined World State merely a result of the intellectual narrowness of the person who imagines it? Is Wells offering a critical portrait of the kind of utopia that is produced by the idiosyncrasies of birth, education and class? In the book's conclusion, the author points out that "this so-called Modern

Utopia is a mere story of personal adventures among Utopian philosophies" (247), further eroding the idea that the text's ideas about world politics, culture and race represent normative rather than personal narrative speech. It would follow that *A Modern Utopia* tells of a blue-eyed, occasionally aggressive man's idea of a perfect world, thereby cunningly inverting the political-philosophical and the psychological spheres. Fascinating as this prospect seems, the text offers a much simpler solution to the problem of perspective; after all, there are several occasions when the narrator's personal idiosyncrasies enter in conflict with utopian practice. This includes a passage when he fervently praises Burgundy and ales (50–51), a preference that conflicts with the utopia's prohibitionist tendencies: here, alcoholics are dispatched to remote islands and samurai must abstain from drink or any other form of intoxication. Although this discrepancy creates a sense that the narrator is not quite suited for this supposedly perfect world of tomorrow, this episode casts a different light on utopian standards. Their rules and habits appear less like an incontestable ideal but more like the strange habits observed in an exotic country. Although the samurai's world appears superior in many respects, the last word has not been spoken yet, which is why the narrator closes his account with a statement that indicates a new perspective: "There will be many Utopias. Each generation will have its new version of Utopia, a little more certain and complete and real, with its problems lying closer and closer to the problems of the Thing in Being" (245). The narrator, the "whitish plump man", has begun to question his own idiosyncratic positions as well as the grand scheme of Wells's utopia. The future remains open.

The case of Kang Youwei's novel *The Great Unity* cannot be resolved by reference to authorial alter-egos, as the text unmistakably affirms Kang Youwei as its narrator; after all, the book commences with an autobiographical account of Kang's educational journey and his realization that only world peace can bring an end to human suffering. Given the many injustices described in the book, it appears that *The Great Unity* is compromised by its unabashed Sinocentrism. Kang's work, however, is more complex than that. On the one hand, there is reason to consider *The Great Unity* along the same line of tentative speculation that also applies to *A Modern Utopia*. While there is no narrator who puts everything into perspective, the text can be aptly related to the utopian form, which Fredric Jameson considered crucial in challenging the status quo (2005, 232). Since the genesis of the book spans both the late feudal and the early republican period of China, Kang's project is directed against two ideological antagonists: first, against the Qing administration, where he tried to fight for reform and modernization; and second, against China's gradual reinvention as a nation state, placing the author in direct opposition to Sun Yat-sen (Platt 2007, 95). To read Kang's WG in Jamesonian terms means to emphasize its antagonistic outline while, at the same time, treating its bio-politics and ethnocentrism with some leniency.

It also merits consideration that *The Great Unity*, like *A Modern Utopia*, is not a political pamphlet but that its political-philosophical content represents just one of many other foci. Next to its autobiographical section, the book dwells on cosmological and soteriological thought. Regarding cosmology, Kang's text takes a specu-

lative turn early on when he mentions the "living creatures on Mars, Saturn, Jupiter, Uranus, Neptune" (1958, 67) and all the states, peoples, and cultures that are dispersed across the galaxy. And while he acknowledges that the Great Unity can only apply to the Earth and its inhabitants, he holds out the prospect that "the uniting of states will never be completed. Since there is no limit to the possible size of a state, then there is also no limit to the feasibility of uniting coexistent states. At the extremes of this amalgamation, it would extend to the star-clusters and nebulae, and still would be unlimited" (80). In opening up this cosmic perspective, the proposals of the Great Unity are dwarfed by such cosmic scales, as the earthly variant of the Great Unity is bound to be corrected by the norms set by cosmic civilization. Strikingly, Kang's reference to other worlds does not focus on technological progress alone; rather, the seemingly unsurmountable distances between the different cosmic civilizations, argues Kang, will be transcended by humanity's achievement of immortality and Buddhahood. Therefore, Kang closes *The Great Unity* with a superimposed perspective that considers unification as merely a political means to a spiritual end: "For One World is the ultimate Law of this world; but the study of immortality, of life without death, is even an extension of the ultimate Law of this world. […] After the studies of immortality and buddhahood will come the study of roaming through the heavens" (275–276). Kang's Sinocentric, racist variant of the Great Unity is bound to be corrected by other norms that will be set by cosmic citizenship. In this light, it becomes apparent that *The Great Unity* is merely a prelude to Kang's most outlandish and neglected work, *Zhu tian shu* (The book of heavens, 1927), where Martian and other civilizations are discussed in great detail (Andolfatto 2024).

CONCLUSION

If the aim is to judge the concrete proposals featured in *A Modern Utopia* and *The Great Unity* by today's standards, there is little reason to consider them worthy of analysis. Their visions of a positive future are replete with alarming levels of authoritarianism, culturalism and racism. The WG matrix that started with Dante's ethnocentrism and Saint-Simon's unaccountable avant-garde seamlessly continues into the early 20th century, when thinkers devised new forms of government to prevent the outbreak of global wars. And while the Westphalian system turned out incapable of preventing the horrors of two world wars, Wells's and Kang's utopias feature enough horrors themselves. They act as reminders of Kant's reservations against pursuing a "state of peoples" and Arendt's warning against the anonymous and unaccountable tyranny of WG. Today, however, such skepticism against grand schemes of salvation is slowly eroding. Contemporary critics have started to challenge Kant's preference for a weak federation of sovereign nations (Lutz-Bachmann 1996, 38; Gloy 2008, 349); meanwhile, political philosophers such as Zhao Tingyang lament the "failure to create a world entity" (2009, 6), commending a WG vision that complements the People's Republic of China's authoritarian politics. And Torbjörn Tännsjö, fearful of humanity's self-destruction, freely speculates about the UN Security Council's transformation into the organ of an "enlightened despotism" of the future.

There are a couple of lessons to learn from Wells's and Kang's texts that should make us wary of such proposals and may contribute to combatting their one-sidedness. At the same time, this awareness can also create more awareness of the utopian form:

1. It is difficult, perhaps impossible to speak *for* the world as long as one only belongs to a certain part of it. The normative power of the British Empire compromised Wells's utopian imagination just as classical Chinese erudition limited Kang's imagination. Despite the proposition of Wells's narrator "that we are on another planet, and that all the customs and traditions of the earth are set aside" (2005, 135) and despite Kang's insistence that all sociopolitical norms require thorough reform, both concede primacy to the basic templates of their native cultures. Only selected elements of their visions are excluded from this general rule, for example Kang's radical egalitarianism among the genders and the boundless mobility of Wells's workforce. Any vision of WG that fails to reflect on its cultural limitations inevitably produces more ills than it can possibly solve.

2. There is a tendency that visions of WG do not address the "world" after all – that is the totality of the sociopolitical structures on our planet. Instead, they enter into an intracultural dialogue with the archives of their native cultures. Strikingly, *A Modern Utopia* advances the kind of rule that is closest to the ideal that Plato lays out in *The Republic*, a state ruled by philosophers, one that also features prominently in the writings of Saint-Simon. Meanwhile, Kang's WG culminates in the rule of a Sage King, reiterating a quintessentially Confucian trope. Such visions of tomorrow offer a glorified return to mythical ideas that are never tested in reality but continue to inspire the quest for a better tomorrow. Such historical borrowings are fascinating objects for the study of the human past but are not relevant beyond the realm of scholarship.

3. Visions of WG tap into the possibilities that emerge from the interplays between fiction and non-fiction, between normative and speculative thought and between real-world analysis and the flight of fancy. Such interplays do not conform to the rules established by political common sense or genre designations; instead, they deviate into uncharted territory. This is why Wells's utopia requires an unreliable narrator, the "whitish plump man", who indulges in his own vision rather than presenting an omniscient account thereof. For the same reason, Kang sees no point in limiting his Great Unity to the realm of humans but jumps at the opportunity to move beyond earthly limitations, pursuing a cosmic citizenship that extends to the star-clusters and nebulae. Such flights of fancy are integral to WG visions; after all, the reproduction of common sense would only affirm an author's inability to think beyond existing structures.

4. Underneath the projected vision of long-term peace, WGs hold the seeds of devolution. If utopia's universal language, as imagined by Wells, indeed shows a tendency to "infinitesimally modify", it will not be long before the tongue will undergo fragmentation and give rise to new localized cultures. Furthermore, this World State also allows the seeds of unrest to gather on remote islands, probably under the assumption that the Dull and the Base lack incentive and ability to coop-

erate against their samurai overlords. But since the ascribed "qualities mingle and vary in every possible way", such ghettos will host scores of quasi-Poietic and quasi-Kinetic. With indignation they will take note of their treatment, prompting them to organize bloody rebellions. Similar caveats feature in Kang's vision: the scholarly elite of the educated, practically new mandarins, will infallibly create resentment among the masses. Why shouldn't they mobilize against the centralized authority? Indeed, Chinese history abounds with such instances, the last time being 1949 when Mao Zedong proclaimed the People's Republic. Once a Sage King is installed, other familiar patterns of history will reappear, including regicide, wars of succession and civil war.

5. It is imperative to keep in mind Wells's narrator who reminds his readers that "[e]ach generation will have its new version of Utopia". This truism has two implications: one is encouraged to overcome the political cliché that "there is no alternative" through imaginary practices. On a more pessimistic note, this also indicates that certain utopias emerge at certain times. In the past, the WG imaginary flourished prior to the outbreak of two global wars.

NOTES

[1] Since the classics of socialism provided no clear doctrine regarding how the post-national world should be steered – or if it needed any steering at all – Vladimir Lenin and Josef Stalin rejected such internationalist visions as pipe dreams (Van Ree 1998).

[2] Commonly referenced as an appraisal of a peaceful age long ago, Kang takes the liberty of placing the civilizational stage of *datong* in the future rather than in the past. This is an interpretation which Kang already pursued in one of his earliest publications "Li Yun zhu" (Annotations on Li Yun, 1835), a commentary on a section of Confucius's *Book of Rites* (Li ji). Since Confucius's original is written in Classical Chinese, the passage lacks clear temporal markers. Meanwhile, James Legge's classic translation into English endows Confucius's speech with an unmistakably nostalgic tone, rendering all verbs in the past tense: "I never saw the practice of the Grand course, and the eminent men of the three dynasties. […] This was (the period of) what we call the Grand Union" (1967, I: 364–365).

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Mind and peace: The "democratic" info-technological determinism of Gu Junzheng's "The Dream of Peace"

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Mind and peace: The "democratic" info-technological determinism of Gu Junzheng's "The Dream of Peace"

Gu Junzheng. "The Dream of Peace". Chinese science fiction. Democracy. Information technology. Peace.

Gu Junzheng (1902–1980) published "The Dream of Peace" in 1939, adapted from Edmond Hamilton's short story "The Conqueror's Voice". Junzheng's tale is highly scientific and includes many technical terms and ideas. It corresponds to the May-Fourth legacy of emphasizing scientific precision for strengthening the nation, but trickily excludes China in the information warfare between the US and "Eastern-most Nation". Taking "The Dream of Peace" as a both national and personal allegory that reflects the ideas of democracy, *minzhu*, and communism in relation to represented info-technological determinism, one can discover that Gu's acceptance of techno-hierarchy, anti-concession, obscurantism, patriotic exclusionism, and absolute public control originated in his specific wish for peace rather than in democratic thought.

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Over two centuries ago, Immanuel Kant's *Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf* (1795; Eng. trans. *To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, 2003) considered that China and Japan, to avoid potential invasion, "wisely restricted contact with" the Europeans (2003, 16–17). He could not foresee that a wave of modernization, caused by both countries' enforced opening to the West, would finally result in the outbreak of two Sino-Japanese Wars (1894–1895 and 1937–1945) and subsequent ideological warfare. On the one hand, modernization urged global adoption of democracy that might contribute to peacemaking. In a post-Cold War American context, Francis Fukuyama (1992) declared that "liberal democracy" could end history, an idea applauded by Bruce Russet (1993) who optimistically regarded democratizing conflict-resolving mechanisms as a crucial way to guarantee international peace; after all, democratic countries rarely wage a war against each other. However, Fukuyama (2016) modified his stance when the rise of "populist nationalism" started to turn "vetocracy" to the extreme in the United States, causing riots. On the other hand, according to scholars who are worried about the abuse of public control techniques, especially in relation to Donald Trump (expounded by Herbert, McCrisken, and Wroe 2019; Hassan 2020; O'Brien 2020), one can assert that modernization is diversifying the ways how internal and external wars are fought. Supported by theoretical and technical evolution, this development raises the possibilities of biological, electromagnetic, psychological, chemical and radiological wars – all in addition to conventional warfare.

In an age when wars, in the broadest sense, are omnipresent, it is pertinent to study an overlooked Chinese science fiction short story entitled "Heping de meng" ("The Dream of Peace"), (re)written by Gu Junzheng (1902–1980) in 1939. Contrary to Rudolf Wagner's belief, the story was not conceived as a Chinese original work (1981, 30), but represents a free adaptation from Edmond Hamilton's "The Conqueror's Voice" (1939), as Uehara Kaori discovered (2015).[1] Consequently, "The Dream of Peace" transplants a Western vision of absolute public control to a Chinese setting to deliver a firm rejection of superficial notions of how world peace can be achieved. The short story's emphasis on the ownership of information technology is prophetic and facilitates a reflection on the personal-national use of information in the post-truth era. In the following, this narrative, revolving around an American spy's triumph over the power of "Easternmost Nation" (Jidong guo), a fictional country, will be analyzed in light of the ideas of science, democracy, info-technological determinism, and communism.

THE SCI-REALISTIC "CO-AUTHORSHIP" OF TWO PEACEMAKERS: "MR SCIENCE AND MR DEMOCRACY"?

Right before the May Fourth Movement took off in 1919, Chen Duxiu's "Ben zhi zui'an zhi dabian shu" (In defense of our journal against accusations) established two prominent figures: Mr Democracy and Mr Science, whom he recognized as the only saviors of China against "all political, moral, academic, and philosophical darkness" (Chen 1919, 10–11).[2] After the Treaty of Versailles transferred the German concessions in Shandong to Japan instead of returning them to China, many Chinese intel-

lectuals embraced, practiced, and further developed the two personalized and undefined ideas for strengthening their endangered motherland. A mix of scientific and democratic progress then appeared as the ultimate way to achieve a kind of peace that is determined by the individual self instead of military superpowers.

In the literary arena, writers, editors, and educators responded to Tao Xingzhi's "marrying science with the public" movement (kexue xiajia yundong), initiated in 1931, with a mission that built on Chen Duxiu's "Defense". Regarded as "the starting point of modern science education" (Wang, Wang, and Ye 2020, 127), this movement was followed by Lao She's serialization of the satirical science fiction novel *Mao cheng ji* (Cat country, 1932–1933) in the literary journal *Xiandai* (Modern age), which inspired Gu Junzheng to "turn to popularizing science" (Li 2023, 115). Previously, Gu had already started to work as an editor for the scientific section of Commercial Press in 1923 and to translate Western popular scientific classics, such as Peter Christen Asbjørnsen's *Three Princesses* (1863) in 1929.[3] In addition, Gu published short pieces of scientific knowledge. Concerning science fiction, he completed his first work "Wu kongqi guo" (The airless nation, 1926)[4] and became most productive during the Second Sino-Japanese War. In 1939, he founded the magazine *Kexue quwei* (Scientific taste, 1939–1942) with Liu Zhenhan, Li Zunquan, and Yu Zaixue, and, from 1939 to 1940, published four science fiction short stories (out of five in total): "Heping de meng", "Lundun qiyi" (The strange plague in London, 1939), "Zai beiji dixia" (Under the North Pole, 1939), and "Xingbian" (Sex changes, 1940). Although Uehara Kaori discovered that the former three works, published in a collection in 1940, were largely translated and adapted from American sources, unattributed by Gu (Edmond Moore Hamilton's "The Conqueror's Voice" [March 1939], Frederic Arnold Kummer's "The Invisible Invasion" [April 1939], and Ed Earl Repp's "Under the North Pole" [April–May 1939], respectively; Uehara 2015, 38–39),[5] one shall note that the process of plagiarizing and rewriting still facilitates the inclusion of Gu's unique perspective. This corresponds to Lorenzo Andolfatto's reading of earlier Chinese science fiction translation as a trope that could address the issues of "political reform through technological modernization", "epistemological readjustment via the implementation of foreign modalities of thinking", and "the reform and use of literature for nurturing society" (2019, 48). At the point of his writing "The Dream of Peace", the Sino-Japanese War had just entered a protracted stage prior to the outbreak of the Pacific War (1941), which united the Chinese antagonists for the time being. The question is whether Gu Junzheng's text merely instrumentalizes science based on pragmatic concerns, or if it can also serve as a vehicle for democratic thoughts. From a simplistic perspective, Gu cannot be considered a representative democratic science fiction writer because most of his commercial publications appear apolitical and non-allegorical, largely unrelated to current affairs. For instance, in *Women de kangdi yingxiong* (Our resistance heroes, 1936), a collection of science fiction short stories, Gu included a six-page text entitled "Boli zhi" (Cellophane), where he explicitly discusses mere technicalities related to the material. Gu's texts contrasts with Gao Shiqi's eponymous short story "Women de dikang yingxiong" (Our resistance heroes), in which leukocytes could emblemize Chinese soldiers who

responded to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931. Moreover, Gu's "Shiguan zhong de xin bingqi" (The new weapon in test tubes) barely mentions Japan military aggression in the most general terms: "Japanese air raids on Chinese cities would result in the same outcome as the rebels' bombing of Madrid. They killed many innocent people with bombs and caused countless tragedies, but they will not make Chinese people 'kneel down' and beg for peace from them" (Gu 2000, 131).[6] Here, Gu's support for Chinese people's dignity is not connected to any technological notions of self-strengthening. Besides, the following paragraphs sharply jumps to interpreting the value of aircrafts in the Spanish war without mentioning China anymore.

ADOPTING/ADAPTING A CHINESE-LESS STORY OF TECHNOLOGY

"The Dream of Peace" starts with the return of Xiaen Malin (Shane Marlin), an American agent, to his home country. Baffled by the public's support for friendship with Easternmost Nation, he realizes that Li Guer (Ligor), a scientist of the aggressive enemy, hypnotizes the public via radio waves. After tracking down Ligor through positioning techniques, Shane obtains control of the waves for propagating a military action against the enemy. To a certain extent, the manipulation, anti-manipulation, and counter-manipulation advance a kind of information warfare that suits its broad definition by Martin C. Libicki. Accordingly, modern warfare branches out into multiple directions, including intelligence-based, hacker-driven and cyber warfare (1995, 9–84).[7]


THE CONQUEROR'S VOICE by ROBERT CASTLE

What hellish device were the Eurasians using to make loyal Americans surrender? Shane finds the future welfare of his country entirely in his hands! But how can any man hope to defeat a weapon that cannot be seen?

"America must not surrender to Eurasia. America must fight on."

34

Figure 1: The first page of Robert Castle's (the pen name of Edmond Hamilton) "The Conqueror's Voice" (1939, 34). Courtesy of Gabriel F. Y. Tsang.

Drawing on Hamilton's "The Conqueror's Voice" (Uehara 2015, 41), written before the United States' entry into World War II, Gu's version is largely a duplicate with most of the paragraphs directly translated from the original text. The main difference is that it supplements and elaborates technological and psychological ideas, such as "psychological suggestion" of the French Nancy School, shell shock, and the loop antenna (Gu 1939a, 82–85; 1939b, 107–112), and some are accompanied with graphs. For instance, Gu closes in on Figure 2 to explain that "the so-called loop antenna is just a large coil of wire around a wooden frame" (109).[8] Figure 3 illustrates that "when radio waves are emitted in all directions, electrostatic force lines function first. They are perpendicular to the ground, spreading outwards in bundles. Together with the generation of electrostatic force lines, magnetic force lines are produced in parallel to the ground" (109–110).[9] Such elaborations are typical for Gu's emphasis on "realist" representation for truly popularizing science (Wang 1996, 34).[10] However, all scientific speculation is embedded in a story that relates the conflict between the United States and Easternmost Nation, nominally excluding China. What is more, Gu did not adapt the nationalities of Hamilton's story to tell a localized story. This shows in Gu's reiteration of Ligor's message that "You, the American civilians, must keep a peaceful relationship with Easternmost Nation" (Gu 1939a, 81)[11] alongside the protagonist's reverse message that "the United States must never surrender to Easternmost Nation. The United States must keep resisting and fighting" (1939b, 119–120).[12] Shane Marlin, the American protagonist once mistaken by a Western scholar as a "Chinese hero" (Wagner 1981, 30),[13] stays at the central position of the narrative.

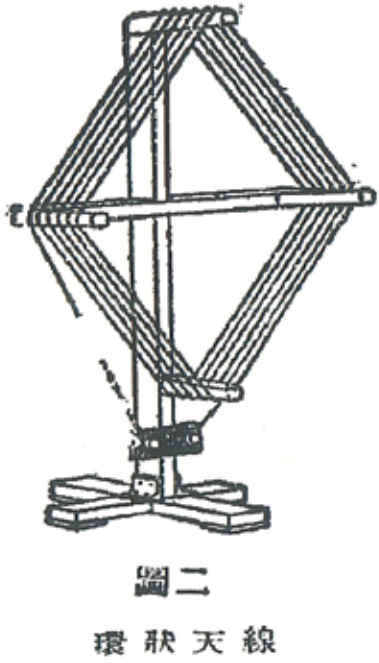

Figure 2: The graph of the loop antenna in "The Dream of Peace" (Gu 1939a, 77).
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The absence of Chinese characters in the story seems to imply Gu's conviction that countries with stronger military forces and individualistic traditions are more likely to change the current international dynamics; conversely, China, the country under attack, is reduced to passiveness and political insignificance. Apparently, at the very moment of withstanding invasion, democracy (a sense of prioritizing Chinese individuals) appeared ill-suited to serve the mission of empowering China. In contrast, Gu embraced technology as an imagined panacea.

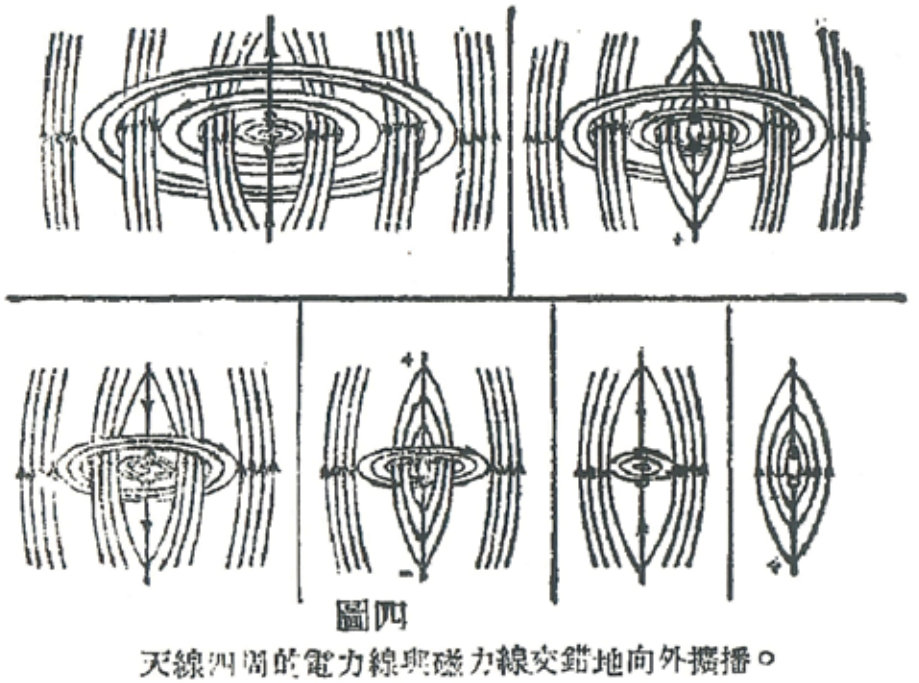

Figure 3: The graph illustrating electrostatic force and magnetic force lines in "The Dream of Peace" (Gu 1939a, 77). Reproduced with the kind permission of The Chinese University of Hong Kong Library.

INFO-TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM FOR REALIZING *MINZHU*

"The Dream of Peace" serves as an allegory of democracy with Chinese characteristics, an interpretation that takes the cue from Gu's subtle political praxis. The text was written in a complex historical situation, when the Japanese invasion had temporarily halted the antagonism between the US-supported Kuomintang and the Soviet Union-supported Chinese Communist Party. As leftist, simplistic, nationalist, and patriotic literature dominated (against purely scientific, romanticist, and consumerist writing), such writing responded to Liang Qichao's famous notion: "Improving the governance of a collective must start from a revolution in the fictional arena" (1902, 1).[14] In reaction to this idea, the 1920s witnessed a revolution in fiction. Regardless of the moral issue, what motivated Gu Junzheng to claim a foreign story to be his own was probably an obscure idealistic sense that speculative fiction could unite the Chinese public in Shanghai during the "isolated island" period (gudao

shiqi, 1937–1941).[15] Like his contemporaries Ba Jin, who completed the "Kangzhan sanbuqu" (Trilogy of the anti-Japanese war, 1940–1945) and Lu Xun who advocated for a popular literature of national revolutionary war, Gu supported the concept of "war for peace" instead of "concession for peace". Hereby, Gu's project contrasts strongly with Wang Jingwei's supposed "peace movement" (heping yundong) with its focus on negotiation and compromise.[16] Five months after Wang supported the Third Konoe Declaration, which allowed Fumimaro Konoe to unify China, Manchuria, and Japan through promises of friendship, anti-Communism, and economic subsidization,[17] Gu turned to Hamilton's "The Conqueror's Voice" for reverse unification. His adaptation was published in the journal *Zhongxue shenghuo* (Middle school life) under the sarcastic title "The Dream of Peace" and with suggestive national names. In his story, Easternmost Nation, modified from Hamilton's "Eurasians", probably refers to the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, the imagined community proposed by Fumimaro Konoe in 1940, rather than the Japanese Empire itself, as identified by some readers (such as Yang 2010, 51).[18] Conversely, its antagonist, the "United States", indicates the Western allied powers in general, whereas South America, marginalized in the story, may represent the anti-war sector of China. In the dialogue between Shane Marlin and his hypnotized supervisor, the American protagonist says regretfully: "Of course you know, the people of Easternmost Nation were the ones who first initiated this war, and the reason was that we did not agree to their demands of occupying South America" (Gu 1939a, 81).[19] Here, South America serves as a symbol of powerlessness, foreshadowing the fate of East Asia after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Alongside other countries of the Global South, China is not fortified and self-strengthened enough to confront aggressive superpowers.[20]

Behind the call to fight and resist, the final message of "The Dream of Peace", Gu nurtures his wish for tactical evolution that can achieve the best outcome for his nation. Placing his trust in a techno-hierarchy that authorizes only those at the top level to act, his story manifests a conflict between patriotic militarization and optimistic trust in diplomatic harmony. From the perspective of the protagonist, the former option is preferable, and only through reversive manipulation of hypnotic technology can he entirely shift the public mindset towards his ideal. Beyond the level of propaganda and bribery, which Shane presumes to be the true reason for his supervisor's sudden change of mind (Gu 1939a, 78), Ligor's electronic-psychological weapon can entirely determine the thoughts of other individuals. In other words, the personal will of the weapon owner can ultimately overwrite the voices of the majority. Ethically, this setting apparently has 3R problems (risks, rights, and responsibilities) that Mariarosaria Taddeo raised in her study "Information Warfare: A Philosophical Perspective". First, the final urge to wage a war definitely bears the risks of "potential increase in the number of conflicts and causalities" (2011, 107), as reflected in the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; second, civil rights, individual liberty and privacy are "under sharp, devaluating pressure" (107) because the common people are deprived of autonomous thinking; third, although "the actions performed by complex, hybrid, man-machine systems on the battlefield" (107) are clearly portrayed in "The Dream of Peace", the effects of the omnipotent use of the hypnotic technology

are not. However, it is paradoxical that this kind of discourse was somehow ethically accepted in the Chinese context – for the sake of victory over the Japanese aggressors. Arguably, such acceptance is not rooted in the idea that "democracy comes after peace" (Welzel 2013) but in the way how Chinese intellectuals interpret the term "democracy" borrowed from the West.

There exist many contemporary studies on the differences between *minzhu*, the established Chinese translation of "democracy" (literally meaning "people-oriented"), and its Western equivalent (Helgesen and Xing 1996; Guang 1996; Hu 2018; Xie 2023). Significantly, democracy "has become the standard translation" of the term "people's power" (minquan) of Sun Yatsen's *Three Principles of the People* (Angle 1999, 64). Speaking as a contemporary of Gu, Chen Duxiu's treatise "Women yao zenyang de minzhu zhengzhi?" (What kind of democracy do we want?, 1932) can serve as a helpful reference. The treatise relates the idea of establishing a people-oriented government through universal suffrage as well as enabling freedom of speech, of religion, of publication, of assembly, and of association. Ironically, Gu's fiction delivers a much narrower sense of democracy and departs considerably from John Dewey's classical emphasis on the complexity of governance.[21] To challenge Wang Jingwei's prioritization of peace, Gu proposes a form of rule that is unflinchingly autocratic: only two characters are empowered by information technology, and one of them, Shane, acts as a spokesman for the author's judgment. Trickily enough, this autocratic form is an elitist and top-down variant of "democracy" mixed with the kind of self-strengthening determinism that Gu supported prior to entering the China Association for Promoting Democracy in 1951. As Chen Yishen illuminates, the Soviet Union consistently confused the understanding of democracy by turning its core from "by the people" to "for the people" (1994, 12), hereby embracing a dictatorial one-party rule and political tutelage (Fung 2010, 225). Gu might have nationalistically regarded "for the people" (a more teleological than constitutional approach) as a localized way of Chinese democracy even before becoming a member of the Communist regime. For instance, since information technology can mold the mindset of a collective, Shane single-handedly uses the hypnotic radio waves to advance his agenda. He neither shares access to this technology with anyone nor involves other people in the decision-making process regarding the disseminated information, even after the crisis. He just follows a nationalist default setting that prioritizes the dignity and wellbeing of his fellow citizens, rather than trusting in the value of collective intelligence and free will. Overall, although the "for the people" and "people-oriented" plots are not Gu Junzheng's original design, his duplication of an oversimplified approach to top-down rule addresses ideas and values that he regards as true, correct, and important to his readers and compatriots.

THE DREAM/NIGHTMARE OF PEACE TOWARDS NATIONALLY AUTONOMOUS COMMUNISM

Within Chinese science fiction history, "The Dream of Peace" is significant for several reasons. 1) The short story revived the late-Qing tradition of satirizing the status quo through science fiction, a genre that was disrupted by the rapid growth of short scientific prose in the Republican period (Isaacson 2017).[22] 2) It further elab-

orated the topic of hypnotic science, a topic first introduced by late-Qing writers (Jia 2019), to address non-martial weapons and relevant espionage. 3) Gu's fiction formed a sample of hard science fiction, which achieves credibility through the insertion of accurate, logical, and credible knowledge, such as expounding the brainwashing mechanism. This approach differs from Lao She's *Cat Country*, for example, where the functioning of the opium-like "mysterious leaves" (mi ye) remains elusive to the reader. 4) "The Dream of Peace" advanced a sense of scientific determinism, hereby contrasting with utopian socialism's lack of a positivist and empirical foundation. 5) The text advances a futuristic, elitist concept of peace that stands in opposition to more established ideological positions, including anti-war romanticism, class struggle-driven proletarianism, and Trotskyist eternal revolution. Concerning the fifth point, which is particularly relevant to the core idea of this article, "The Dream of Peace" is an equivocal title. It represents the illusion deployed by the enemies of Chinese nationalists (Japan and pro-Japan politicians) and also a goal to be achieved through scientific advancement. This is further addressed in Gu's modification of Hamilton's ending:

> Shane Marlin grinned wearily to himself as he turned the receiver off. America had awakened from a dream, indeed!
> It would only learn how dangerous and devil-inspired a dream that had been, when Shane took his prisoner back to Washington. But before he did that –
> He looked to Ligor's bonds. And then he stretched on a couch with a sign of contentment. In three minutes his snores shook the room. (Hamilton 1939, 45)

In Gu's version, the second paragraph above was deleted, which now reads:

> Shane Marlin turned the receiver off and grinned wearily to himself. America had awakened from a nightmare of peace!
> He looked to Ligor's bonds. And then he stretched on a couch with a sign of contentment. In three minutes, his snores shook the room. (1939b, 120)[23]

While leaving other passages unredacted, Gu found it important to emphasize that "America had awakened from a nightmare [not "dream"] of peace". This awakening not simply corresponds to the trajectory of idealistic search for a hero blooming in late-Qing fiction (Yeh 2015; in this sense, the male protagonist may be allegorically interpreted as a wanted "Chinese hero"), but also represents Gu's switch of the idea of peace. By eliminating moral judgment on individuals ("devil-inspired"), the author shifted the narrative focus to a collective's will (determined by one's will) about either being attacked by invaders or being saved through struggle. His identification of the American dream as "a nightmare of peace" implies that "a dream of peace" does exist and only exists after struggling through innovative approaches, instead of merely avoiding wars.

Since maintaining internal peace was also the priority of the People's Republic of China, established in 1949, Gu's dream tallies with the communists' dream. Although "The Conqueror's Voice" was written by an American author, its sense of patriotism (such as its repetitive use of the words "traitor" and "patriotic"), propaganda, ideological control, and centralized management of information, directly adopted by Gu, corresponds with Leninism, which deeply influenced the formation of Maoist

practices (Li 2010). Gu's heroic story sets an authoritarian tone to support unifying the will of war-advocates and peace-keepers towards that of the decision maker, rather than allowing for a bottom-up led society, in which individual thoughts and people's intellectual contributions matter. It proposes a polar world order, in which superficially autonomous national subjects, especially the collectivists, express hatred for traitors and sneer at the opposite side's "fanatic quality of patriotism" (Hamilton 1939, 43; Gu 1939b, 116). To the enemies, inhuman treatment, even corporeal torture (Hamilton 1939, 44; Gu 1939b, 118–119) is permitted. Moreover, Gu's addition of scientific knowledge to the speculative fiction matches the Chinese leftists' introduction of the idea "scientific literature" from the Soviet Union, where Mikhail Il'in had emerged as the most prolific science communicator in the mid-1930s (Zhan 2014, 64). According to orthodox Chinese Marxism, advancement of productivity is a prerequisite of social development, as capitalism progresses into first socialism, then communism (Dirlik 1988). Therefore, Gu's import of Western scientific knowledge and its insertion into propaganda-like fiction with imagined manipulation of information techniques to unify internal and external wills for a productive outcome could be perceived to assist in the development of a democratic communism. Indeed, under Mao's reign, Gu acted as a leader in the China Association for Promoting Democracy (once acting as the member of its Central Standing Committee) as well as the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. To a certain extent, Gu's story equipped him with an insight into how information asymmetry sustains internal security through technical control and deprives the public of its right to know, an insight that also allowed him to survive in the People's Republic. Despite his inability to save others, he managed to dodge the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), a dream pursued by communist zealots which inflicted great suffering on Ba Jin and uncountable Chinese intellectuals. If we further consider Gu's "nightmare of peace" as a futuristic idea, when info-technological management over individuals becomes a global issue, the question is whether there will come a democratic Shane Marlin to awaken us from this "dream".

NOTES

[1] Originally, Hamilton published the short story under the pseudonym Robert Castle.

[2] "政治上道德上學術上思想上一切的黑暗。" Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Chinese are my own.

[3] Other translated works include Jean Henri Fabre's *The Wonder Book of Chemistry* (1922), Otto Willi Gail's *Romping through Physics* (1933), and Bruno H. Burdel's *The Strange Stories of Dr. Ulebuhle* (1922).

[4] As Ren Dongmei (2023), a scholar of Chinese science fiction, discovered, Gu Junzheng completed at least five science-fiction short stories. She found that "The Airless Nation", previously overlooked, was published in the first issue of the *Xuesheng zazhi* (Students' magazine) in 1926.

[5] These works were all transformed by Gu Junzheng within two months after their publication. In the preface of Gu's *Under the North Pole* (1940), which is the collection of the three works later reprinted and retitled as "The Dream of Peace", Gu Junzheng barely mentioned the original names of five Western science-fiction magazines in English: *Amazing Stories, Thrilling Wonder Stories, Marvels-Science Stories, Science Fiction, and Dynamic Science Stories* (1946, ii). Without citing the sources of his

writing, he ambiguously stated, "The three fictional works I chose for this collection are the outcome of my trial" (iv). Thus, many scholars (such as Zhang and Shan 2017; Chen 2014) still deemed "The Dream of Peace" his original work.

[6] "日本的空襲中國城市，與叛軍的轟炸馬德里得到同樣的結果。他們炸死許多的平民，造成了無數的慘劇，但是他們不會使中國人'屈膝'，向他們乞求和平。"

[7] Libicki later narrows down his definition of information warfare to "the use of information to attack information" (2007, 20)..

[8] "所謂環狀天線，實在只是一隻大線圈，係用導線圍繞在一個木架上而成。"

[9] "當無線電波向四周發射時，最初是發生電力線(Electrostatic force line)其方向與地面相垂直，一束一束地向外擴播，隨著電力線的產生，同時又生成了磁力線，其方向與地面相平行" (Gu 1939a, 109–110).

[10] In a short memoir published on *Minzhu* (Democracy monthly), Wang Shizheng states that "at the beginning of the anti-Japanese war, Gu noticed that some of the foreign science-fiction works were based on fantasy rather than science. They discorded with the claim of popularizing science." Therefore, he "wrote 'The Dream of Peace', 'The Strange Plague in London', and 'Under the North Pole' upon scientific facts" (1996, 34).

[11] "你們，美國的人民。必須同極東國和平親善。"

[12] "美國決不能向極東國屈服。美國必須繼續抗戰。"

[13] Starting from a misrecognition of Shane Marlin as a Chinese hero, Rudolf Wagner interprets the core idea of "The Dream of Peace" as "not merely the fantasy of a writer from a poor and undeveloping [the exact word used by Wagner] country, but a message encoded with a distinct tone of cultural superiority: the Americans may have more machinery, but the average Chinese has more morality, wit and common sense" (1981, 30).

[14] "欲新一國之民，不可不先新一國之小說。" This statement was translated into English by Gek Nai Cheng as "If one intends to renovate the people of a nation, one must first renovate its fiction" (Liang 1996, 74).

[15] It was a period when Shanghai had not been invaded by the Japanese force due to the protection of the Western powers.

[16] Evidently, such political aims stand at odds with Gu's tongue-in-cheek remark that by writing popular science before 1949 he did not think of "saving the nation through science" but of "sustaining his family through royalties" (Gu Quan 2000, 293).

[17] After Gao Zongwu explained the necessity of holding peace talks with Japan to Wang Jingwei and Jiang Jieshi on 31 July 1937, Wang Jingwei had increasingly counteracted against Jiang, the leader of the pro-war party (Li 2011, 117), and spread his thoughts of concessions through presses, such as writing "Heyi de keneng xing" (The possibility of peace talks, 1939) later included in the publication of *Xu he zhan wenti zhi taolun – Nanhua Ribao pinglun ji* (Continuing the discussion of the war-peace issues: The collection of the commentaries of South China Daily) in April 1939.

[18] It shall be noted that, by quoting Sokichi Tsuda's insight, Taichiro Mitani remarks on the importance of the Japanese side's conscious effort paid to impacting Chinese intellectuals' understanding of nations (2018, 68). This probably includes the possibility of establishing the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere directed by Japan.

[19] "你當然知道，極東人首先挑起了這次的戰爭，而戰爭的起因，無非為了我們沒有答應他們佔據南美的要求。"

[20] Both Hamilton's and Gu's texts use the word "South America" instead of "Southern America" or "Southern United States".

[21] As Dewey wrote, "Democracy is a word of many meanings. Some of them are of such a broad social and moral import as to be irrelevant to our immediate theme. But one of the meanings is distinctly political, for it denotes a mode of government, a specified practice in selecting officials and regulating their conduct as officials" (2012, 85).

[22] Subsequent satirical science fiction includes Si Yin's "Huoxing youji" (Travel notes of Mars, 1940), Zhou Lengjia's "Yueqiu luxing ji" (A journey to the Moon, 1941), Xu Deshan's "Tieyu di sai" (The gill of iron fish, 1941), and Xiongji's "Qiannian hou" (A thousand year later, 1943) (Wu 2022).

[23] "夏恩把收音機關閉，暗自覺得好笑。美國確已從和平的惡夢中醒過來了！ 他望了望李谷爾的束縛，然後橫倒在一隻長沙發裡，滿足地舒了一口氣。不上三分鐘，他的熟睡的鼾聲，就已響徹全室。"

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The Chinese Nobel complex and peacebuilding: Gao Xingjian and Mo Yan as case studies

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The Chinese Nobel complex and peacebuilding: Gao Xingjian and Mo Yan as case studies

The Nobel Prize. Gao Xingjian. Mo Yan. Chinese literature.

This article offers a reappraisal of the Nobel Prize in Literature as a facilitator of global mutual understanding, using the polarizing receptions of Nobel laureates Gao Xingjian and Mo Yan as case studies. Instead of describing the relationship between Chinese literary circles and the Prize as an irrational "Nobel complex", I contend that readers and writers of Chinese literature have identified various uses in the Prize's Eurocentric outline, particularly its emphasis on national allegory, or what the Swedish Academy refers to as "witness literature". I further argue that Gao and Mo Yan strategically comply with Western demands for national allegories, in order to preserve the forgotten voices from the Chinese Cultural Revolution beyond national and cultural borders.

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In 1893, Alfred Nobel confided to his close friend and the future Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Bertha von Suttner, that he planned to allocate a portion of his wealth for prizes in physics, chemistry, medicine or physiology, literature, and peace. These prizes were to be awarded every five years, for six times spanning a period of 30 years. He believed that if significant progress towards peace in Europe was not achieved within that period, society would regress to barbarism. The prizes were therefore intended for those who made the most significant contributions towards "the pacification of Europe" (quoted in Aspel 2015, 169). With the pursuit of (European) perpetual peace in mind, Nobel sought to recognize "the most outstanding work in an idealist direction". Moreover, he declared: "It is my express wish that when awarding the prizes, no consideration be given to nationality" (Nobel 1895).

This article probes deeper into Alfred Nobel's vaguely-worded principles of peacebuilding by revisiting the notion of the "Nobel complex" in Chinese literary circles. The Nobel Prize in Literature has long faced criticism for its reproduction of Western cultural values in the name of "universal validity" (Shih 2004; Lovell 2006; Fisk 2018), but it continues to command respect amongst readers and writers of Chinese literature. Instead of describing their engagement with the Prize as irrational or symptomatic of a psychological "Nobel complex", I argue that Chinese literary circles find strategic value in its prestige, especially regarding its Eurocentric demands for national allegory – or what the Swedish Academy refers to as "witness literature" (Engdahl 2002). While many readers fetishize Gao Xingjian's and Mo Yan's Nobel Prize wins as political symbols of "Sinophone" culture and "Chineseness", Gao and Mo Yan themselves consider the Prize's controversial prestige as a means to amplify the silenced voices of individuals on the global stage.

With reference to oft-debated excerpts from Gao Xingjian's novel *Yi ge ren de shengjing* (1999; *One Man's Bible*, 2002) and Mo Yan's novel *Shengsi pilao* (2006; *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, 2008), the following analysis illustrates how their works both adhere to and disrupt the Swedish Academy's expectations of witness literature. I contend that Gao and Mo Yan employ analogous narrative devices to blur the categorical boundaries of "victim" and "perpetrator" in Chinese Cultural Revolution memories: Gao through his use of interchanging pronouns in *One Man's Bible*, and Mo Yan through his use of the Samsaric cycle of reincarnation in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*. In doing so, both authors preserve the forgotten voices from the Cultural Revolution. While such imaginative sympathy with silenced individuals cannot directly establish eternal peace amongst Chinese-language societies, it does make the struggle for such an ideal possible.

WITNESS LITERATURE, PEACEBUILDING, AND MULTIDIRECTIONAL MEMORY

Since the 2001 Nobel Symposium, the Swedish Academy has introduced the criterion of "witness literature" as a "new policy" for the selection process of the Nobel Prize in Literature (Espmark 2020, 13). A longstanding member of the Swedish Academy, Kjell Espmark, identifies V. S. Naipaul (2001), Imre Kertész (2002), Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio (2008), Herta Müller (2009), Tomas Tranströmer (2011), Mo Yan

(2012), and Svetlana Alexievich (2015) as examples for the Academy's esteem for authors who not only bear witness to historical trauma but who also transform personal and collective experiences into complex literary narratives (2020, 13–20). However, Horace Engdahl, the permanent secretary of the Academy, reminds us that witness literature is not to be confused with historical or legal documentation, as the essence of a witness's testimony is more complex:

> Testimony is more than merely a true story; that it has a direct connection with the event and with the victim; and that it is a sequel of an evil deed, like revenge. One does not become a witness only by observing an event with one's own eyes. A witness is a person who speaks out and says, "I was there, I saw it, I can tell people!" As an act of speech, testimony is inseparable from this kind of self-reference and from the accompanying claim to immediate credence. Pronounced by a different person in a different situation, the same series of words could be a fable. Language lacks a special marker for truth. Testimony is an utterance that presupposes a certain kind of speaker, perhaps even a special way of speaking. (2002, 2)

Although testimony requires truthfulness about reality, a testimony (of an evil act) is inevitably followed by a desire for retribution on behalf of the victim. A testimony is never merely a "true" account, but one that aims to cause a reaction in the listener through the manipulation of language. A witness's testimony would therefore not meet the standards of reliability and logic required by the historical sciences or at court. Yet, paradoxically, it remains a fundamental source of truth in society (3). Such contradictions allow for testimony and literature to converge: Literature is the license to talk about reality as it is not, and hence cannot be accused of lying or fabrication. Consequently, the purpose of witness literature is to illuminate the unreliability and incompleteness of testimony, and to inadvertently "giv[e] voice to the silenced, and [preserve] the victims' names" which have experienced "systematic erasure of memory in totalitarian societies" (4).

The overlapping of fictional expression and testimony in witness literature aligns with key concepts in peacebuilding and conflict transformation studies. Johan Galtung (1969) defines peace in two ways: "Negative peace" refers to the immediate prevention or the discontinuation of wars and conflicts, but this form of peace is often short-lived because it does not address structural violence and deep-rooted causes of conflict such as trauma. In order to prevent wars and conflict sustainably in the long term, the fundamental problem of violence must be addressed first – that is, through building what Galtung refers to as "positive peace". Yet this process often relies on a top-down, elitist approach that risks reinforcing cultural hegemony (Goetze and de Guevara 2014). In contrast, the concept of "everyday peace" (Mac Ginty 2014; Richmond 2022) seeks to address this elitism by focusing on mass engagement with a culture of peace that is rooted in daily life.

The arts are increasingly recognized as potential vehicles in meeting the growing demand for grassroots and bottom-up approaches towards peacebuilding (Premaratna and Bleiker 2016; Kerr 2022; Hawksley and Mitchell 2020). The arts are deemed to be useful for peacebuilding because of their complexity and creativity, which allow them to attend to the emotional aspects of conflict, such as grief and anger – in short,

what John Lederarch (2005) considers as "the moral imagination". This discursive space for creative imagination and for the conditions of reconciliation strives to give voice to the silenced and to preserve the names of victims. However, Rachel Kerr also notes the dilemma of the role of the arts in peacebuilding. As peacebuilding is not only psychological and social, but also a political process, "it would be naïve to think that alone, [the arts] can foster social repair. What [the arts] can do is to provide discursive space and the tools to nourish the creative imagination necessary for reconciliation" (2022, 22).

Memory, as an important aspect of peacebuilding, is the "presence of the past", and is linked with the shaping of identity and ideology (Terdiman 1993, 247). At the level of the social, memory is reproduced and recollected through literary and cultural artefacts, hence is also referred to as "cultural memory". Since it is not possible for a society to remember its past in a comprehensive fashion, the study of cultural memory concerns how different forms of cultural expression, including literature, selectively imagine collective narratives of the past, present, and future, and influence the identity of society through stories and languages (Rigney 2018). Owing to its relevance for social identity, cultural memory is conventionally considered to be inseparable from the concept of the nation. However, as Astrid Erll remarks, cultural memory cannot be pinned down by ideological categories and national borders. Instead, cultural memory must "travel" to gain relevance in individual minds and social formations (2011, 12).

The sociocultural reification of memory is famously described by Michael Rothberg as operating in a competitive manner, like "real estate development". Accordingly, different strands of traumatic memory enter into a struggle with each other:

> Fundamental to the conception of competitive memory is a notion of the public sphere as a pregiven, limited space in which already-established groups engage in a life-and-death struggle. In contrast, pursuing memory's multidirectionality encourages us to think of the public sphere as a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions but actually come into being through their dialogical interactions with others; both the subjects and spaces of the public are open to continual reconstruction. (2009, 5)

Rothberg notes the arbitrariness of such memory competitions, and argues that memory, in general, works in multidirectional ways, including negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing. As such, if memory is allowed to travel freely, there is always only more memory, never less memory. As Rothberg argues that collective memory is subject to open-ended interpretations in the public sphere it appears that all memories circulate on a global level in equal conditions. Yet Birgit Neumann (2020), for example, observes the impact of European market forces on the circulation of memory and fictional worlds, notably through immensely influential awards such as the Nobel Prize in Literature.

The Nobel Prize in Literature's honoring of the sacred standards of literary aesthetics ("the most outstanding work") is associated with – and perhaps even subjected to – the profane forces of (Western-centered) politics, profits, and power ("an idealistic direction"). Such an overlap between the sacred and the profane serves

as the breeding ground of the Prize's cultural life and of its unique power to inspire cultural, social, and political activities based on its prestige as an arbiter of global literary excellence. Indeed, the Swedish Academy's notion of witness literature appears to suggest a strong relationship between national identity, literature and memories of forgotten individuals, as evident in the chosen examples of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's literary investigation of the Soviet Gulag and Imre Kertész's fiction about the Nazi Holocaust (Engdahl 2002, 5–7). Any analysis of the Academy's recognition of literary works as witness literature, therefore, must also consider how the prestige of the Nobel Prize in Literature interacts with the specific sociocultural and political contexts in which these works are produced and received. It is with this awareness that I now turn to the Nobel complex in Chinese literature.

THE (CHINESE) NOBEL COMPLEX

Alfred Nobel explicitly requested that "no consideration be given to nationality, but that the prize be awarded to the worthiest person, whether or not they are Scandinavian" (Nobel 1895). This said, the postcolonial, gender, and political biases of the Nobel Prize in Literature selections are difficult to refute: As of 2024, amongst 121 laureates, 57 of them are from five Western nations – that is, almost half of them – and 18 of the selected writers have been female (15%). Literary giants like Emile Zola and Henrik Ibsen were also reportedly rejected for being politically unacceptable (Espmark 1991, 18). In this light, critics and the general public often argue that the Prize does not contribute to the goals of peacebuilding, especially because its selections only incite more conflict and perpetuate literary injustice globally (Shih 2004; Lovell 2006; Fisk 2018).

Reservations about the Nobel Prize in Literature's legitimacy have regularly been expressed by Chinese state officials, intellectuals and writers throughout the 20th century, including Lu Xun, Qian Zhongshu, Liu Xiaobo, and Liu Zaifu (Lovell 2006, 83; Larson and Kraus 1989, 152). Most recently, Mai Jia, the vice chairman of the Chinese Writers Association, advised readers and writers of Chinese literature: "We should not care too much about the Nobel Prize in Literature. Very few Chinese authors get the Nobel Prize in Literature, […] but every prize comes with emotional, even political coloring, and the Nobel Prize in Literature is awarded on the basis of Western values" (Mai 2023).[1] Nonetheless, readers and writers of Chinese literature have never ceased to consider the prize as a key to international recognition and its rare bestowal on Chinese nationals as a source of national humiliation.

According to Julia Lovell (2006), the Nobel complex in Mainland China can be traced back to a mixture of inferiority and superiority complex at both the national and individual levels. Since the collapse of the traditional imperial dynasty and the birth of Republican China, literati sought to utilize cultural means to strengthen and modernize their nation after the Century of Humiliation (1839–1945) and military defeat by Western countries. This vision of saving the nation through culture is also described by the Sinologist C. T. Hsia as an "obsession with China" (1971). After enduring multiple decades of state purging under the Maoist-Communist regime, Chinese intellectuals, insecure about their social status in the post-Mao era, also

strived to re-establish the prestigious status of the literati. Upon identifying the Nobel as the symbol of global recognition and literary universality, Chinese intellectuals focused on salvaging China's position as the world's "Middle Kingdom" and on restoring their own social relevance.

Following Pascale Casanova's framework of the "world republic of letters" (2004), recent scholarship on the Nobel Prize in Literature often refers to it as part of the global literary economy that consists of writers and readers as well as translators, publishers, agents, reviewers, lawyers, benefactors, and prize judges, an economy that is dominated by Western market forces (Shih 2004; Lovell 2006; Fisk 2018). In turn, non-Western literatures gain access to the Western-dominated center by reproducing Euro-American literary techniques and accumulating prestige and honor, or what Pierre Bourdieu (1986) describes as symbolic and cultural capital. In this sense, the Nobel complex amongst readers and writers of Chinese literature is the result of their interactions with Eurocentric logics of cultural capitalism. Consider, for instance, the way that the question of who should be considered the first Nobel laureate of literature of Chinese cultural origins, Gao Xingjian or Mo Yan, is a hotly debated topic inside and outside of China. This debate alone reveals the immense cultural capital deriving from the exchanges between Chinese literary circles and the Nobel Prize in Literature.

GAO XINGJIAN, MO YAN, AND THE TECHNOLOGIES OF RECOGNITION

When Gao Xingjian won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2000 "for an œuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity, which has opened new paths for the Chinese novel and drama" (Nobel Prize Website 2024), he was hailed as a national icon amongst the cultural spheres of Taiwan and France. This was evident by the widespread media attention and governmental honors he received soon after he became the first Chinese-language writer to receive the Prize. Ironically, his win was met with indifference and negative responses in Mainland China, Gao's birthplace and home to the most Chinese-language readers in the world. After all, Gao is a banned writer, as a result of his public critique of the Chinese state after his emigration to France in 1987.[2] Two days after the Prize announcement, the leading state newspaper *People's Daily* (Renmin ribao) voiced the state's official stance: "It seems the Nobel Committee has used a political criterion for giving the prize for literature, instead of doing so from the perspective of literary value […]. This shows that the Nobel Prize for Literature has essentially been used for political purposes and thus has lost its authority" (quoted in Lovell 2006, 171). Echoing China's official narrative which suggested politics had overridden aesthetic merits in the selection of Gao as a Nobel laureate, critics from the Chinese mainland lambasted Gao for his mediocre language that has "been washed and simplified by French", and for his novels which explicitly link contemporary China with "images of the Cultural Revolution, struggle sessions, and Tian'anmen" (quoted in Lovell 2006, 174–176). A media blackout on the 2000 Nobel Prize ceremony followed.

In contrast, when the news arrived that Mo Yan, who is a Chinese citizen and one of the most popular and respected writers in China, was the recipient of the 2012 Nobel Prize in Literature, the state-affiliated Xinhua News Agency quickly published a congratulatory letter from the Standing Committee of the Central Politburo: "Mo Yan's Nobel Literature Prize win not only demonstrates the thriving of Chinese literature, but also a reflection of our nation's ever-increasing national strength and international influence" (Xinhua Agency 2012). With the approval from the state, the Chinese public celebrated Mo Yan's win with much frenzy. In addition to widespread media reportage and rapid increase in book sales, officials of Mo Yan's birthplace, Gaomi county, even sought to invest RMB 670 million into building a Mo Yan theme park (Hille 2012).

Meanwhile, Mo Yan's Nobel Literature Prize win was met with strong criticism from liberal-leaning intellectual and critics, especially in Europe and America. It was alleged that Mo Yan, as a vice-chairman of the Chinese Writers Association, supported literary censorship by association with the Chinese state. As such, the German novelist and 2009 Nobel literature laureate Herta Müller condemned Mo Yan's Nobel Prize win as a "catastrophe", and "a slap in the face for all those working for democracy and human rights" (quoted in Flood 2012). Perry Link (2012), a Sinologist based in America, attributes what he perceives as the "poor quality" of Mo Yan's language and storytelling to the author's status as an "inside-the-system" writer, whose writings must concede to the demands of the state. Link cites Mo Yan's signature use of dark humor in portraying historical episodes like the Cultural Revolution as the "safety valve" that placates Chinese society from making any meaningful critique of the state's accountability for China's traumatic past.

The controversies surrounding Gao Xingjian's and Mo Yan's respective Nobel Prize in Literature wins have served as common case studies of the political realities of the circulation of Chinese literature across national and cultural borders. In response to the Swedish Academy's citation of Gao Xingjian's "universal validity", Shih Shu-mei (2004) observes that the allusion to universality paves the way for a mystification, which reproduces Western cultural hegemony through the recognition of the "exceptional particular". The Swedish Academy did not recognize Gao for his "universal validity", but for his exceptional ability to translate the particular experience of Maoist and post-Mao China for a Eurocentric audience (25). Gao's title as "the first Chinese-language Nobel laureate" therefore does not imply the so-called "universal" significance of his works, but rather "the exceptional, singular case of one particular with universal resonance" (26). With reference to how debates about Mo Yan's literary expression are mired by his political background as the vice-chairman of the Chinese Writers Association, Gloria Fisk critiques the negative reaction to Mo Yan's Nobel Prize win as an example of non-Western writers being unfairly evaluated according to European Enlightenment's legacy of participatory democracy. If non-Western writers like Mo Yan fail to engage in the "act of representation – by rendering visible people and places that might otherwise go unseen", for example by emphasizing the Chinese state accountability for past human disasters, Western readers consider them unfit for the Prize's recognition of literary universality (2018, 148).

A SCANDAL-DRIVEN APPROACH TO MULTIDIRECTIONAL MEMORY

At the core of Shih Shu-mei's and Gloria Fisk's observations about the Nobel complex in Chinese literary circles is that the Nobel Prize in Literature transforms the writings of Gao and Mo Yan into national allegories of China, resulting in the aforementioned debates: Gao and Mo Yan are considered to be "scandalous" representatives of global Chinese literature because their literary interpretations of key events in modern Chinese history, such as the Cultural Revolution, challenge established national narratives; after all, their representations by Chinese liberals, foreign cultural figures, and official state representatives vary considerably. While pro-Chinese state voices complain that Gao has intently focused on writing about the Cultural Revolution to comply with Western demands for literature of "Chinese pain" (Lovell 2006, 179), pro-Western voices are displeased at how Mo Yan's affiliation with the Chinese state effectively marks him as a mouthpiece for authoritarianism.

Of course, by considering the Nobel Prize in Literature as a token of Chinese literary universality, such debates are already based on Western values. As Rebecca Braun (2013) observes, the Prize's prestige is rooted in a "mid-European, non-market-driven model for valuing high-end cultural achievement" (320), where the public is eager to celebrate Prize-winning authors for their achievements while, at the same time, reinforcing self-affirming standards of recognition. Braun describes this European model of literary fame, in Marxist terms, as "intellectual fetishization", which masks the underlying process of cultural commodification. Interestingly, as noted earlier, the Eurocentrism of the Nobel Prize has long been acknowledged by Chinese literary circles.

Extending what James English refers to as "scandalous currency" (2005, 187), I contend that it is more accurate to describe the Chinese Nobel complex as a strategic means of accumulating cultural capital through critiques of the Prize. The public perceives the duty of cultural prizes in recognizing the excellence of "pure" artists, but the Nobel Prize in Literature is in fact an "instrument for negotiating transactions between cultural and economic, cultural and social, or cultural and political capital" (10). When the Prize's reputation of recognizing disinterested artistic merits such as "the most outstanding work in an idealistic direction" is punctured by "the threat of scandal" (36), the controversies that arise from such scandals inadvertently reveal its importance as a prestigious source of cultural capital. Its prestige is therefore not merely defined by a Eurocentric reproduction of the Swedish Academy's evaluation of universal literary merits, but also informed by how readers and writers compete for cultural capital through debating the Prize's legitimacy.

As agents in the global literary field, Gao Xingjian and Mo Yan also compete for cultural capital through the strategic appropriation of the rules of the global literary economy (Casanova 2005, 89). In Gao's Nobel lecture (2000), he remarks that the Nobel Prize aims to circulate "a frail individual's weak voice" in the public sphere, which would not be heard under normal circumstances. Likewise, Mo Yan's Nobel lecture connects his work to the pursuit of justice: "Telling stories earned me the Nobel Prize in Literature. Many interesting things have happened to me in the wake of winning

the prize, and they have convinced me that truth and justice are alive and well" (Mo Yan 2012). In addition to emphasizing the "idealistic direction" of the Prize, the remarks from both writers demonstrate their awareness of how the rules of the global literary economy can also be useful in realizing their own idealistic aspirations, namely giving voice to the silenced, and the pursuit of truth and justice.

As mentioned earlier, the debates about Gao Xingjian and Mo Yan's Nobel Prizes cannot be separated from discussions on Chinese cultural memory and post-Mao Chinese identity. With regards to Maoist-era conflicts, the Chinese state did not comprehensively address deep-rooted issues of conflict, such as the matters of leadership, victimhood, accountability, and truth about the Chinese Cultural Revolution. As Letty Chen observes: "The specter of the Cultural Revolution continues to haunt the Chinese society. One possible reason is the imbalanced attention on victims and perpetrators, and as a result, in-depth discussions of *chanhui* (confession, remorse) are not made possible" (2020, 103). The post-Mao regime therefore had only initiated the process of rehabilitation (*pingfan*), but never the process of reconciliation (*hejie*). Such a clear construction of "victim" and "perpetrator" in turn results in the arbitrary competition of memory in the Chinese-language public sphere, not unlike what Michael Rothberg observes concerning the tensions between the collective memories of German Nazi Holocaust, slavery, colonialization, and decolonization. The remainder of this article will illustrate how Gao Xingjian and Mo Yan utilize narrative devices that blur the boundaries of Cultural Revolution victims and perpetrators, thereby advancing fluid and multidirectional accounts of memory.

INTERCHANGING PRONOUNS AND CULTURAL REVOLUTION MEMORIES IN GAO XINGJIAN'S *ONE MAN'S BIBLE*

The Swedish Academy's focus on "witness literature" and specific literary testimonies is shaped by Eurocentric values, which appears "scandalous" for a literary prize that claims aesthetic neutrality. However, the controversial prestige of the Nobel Prize in Literature remains a powerful means of circulating silenced voices and memories, especially those which are systematically erased in totalitarian societies. A closer inspection of Gao Xingjian's fiction *One Man's Bible* suggests that its central narrative device – the interchanging of pronouns – transform the global literary market's demands for national allegories, such as the Chinese Cultural Revolution memories, into a site for the silenced voice of an individual who prioritizes introspection above identification as victim or perpetrator. In the following, I shall first offer an overview of Gao's artistic vision of being "without isms" (meiyou zhuyi), and then examine an excerpt from *One Man's Bible* which is often cited in the debates about Gao's validity as a Nobel Prize-winning representative of global Chinese literature.

In the essays "Meiyou zhuyi" (1993; "Without Isms" [1995] 2005) and "Meiyou zhuyi – zixu" (1993; "Authors' Preface to Without Isms", 2005), it is evident that Gao Xingjian's priority in his creative work is first and foremost one of introspection. With the claim of being "without isms" as a point of departure, Gao reflects on how the ideological systems of the self, the nation, the literary experimentations, language,

and politics do not match with his personal belief that speech is a basic human need that requires no verification nor outcome:

> Without isms, but not without choices. One can do something, or one can do nothing. If there is something to be done, then do it. But if nothing can be done, it does not mean everything is trashed. If something is to be done, do as much as one can. But do not be killed or commit suicide for a cause. Therefore, without isms is not nihilism nor eclecticism, nor is it egotism or solipsism. It opposes totalitarian dictatorship but also opposes the inflation of the self to the status of God or Superman. It also hates other people being trampled upon like dog shit. (1996a, 4)[3]

In a theologically negative manner, Gao offers his own opinion about how existing ideologies (e.g. nihilism, eclecticism, egotism, solipsism) do not match with his personal belief. And yet, by mentioning such isms, he is also demonstrating awareness of their influence on him. In other words, Gao's being "without isms" does not suggest his writings are completely void of isms, but rather seeking to address the restrictions and boundaries of isms in a way that helps him realize his introspective approach to literature.

In Gao Xingjian's prose work, introspection is carried out via his experimentation with interchanging pronouns. By utilizing different narrative points of view, the perception of the narrator-protagonist changes "while maintaining the same subject" (1996b, 194). This results in a more complete portrayal of the narrator's subjectivity. The protagonists of *One Man's Bible* are the second person (addressed as "you" by the narrator) and the third person (addressed as "he"), which suggests that the omitted first-person "I", who can arguably be identified with the author who serves as an interlocutor regarding the narrations about the Cultural Revolution and other memories. As such, the pronouns of "you" or "he" should be understood to be part of the narrator's introspection.

Chapter 5 of *One Man's Bible* contains a highly contested passage that shaped debates on Gao Xingjian's Nobel Literature Prize win, where the third person suggests that his idea of personal freedom is equivalent to the discharge of (infertile) semen from the male reproductive tract:

> When he closed his eyes his mind began to roam, and only with his eyes closed did he not feel others watching and observing him. With his eyes closed, there was freedom and he could wander within the female cavern, a wonderful place. He once visited a perfectly preserved limestone cave in the Massif Central of France. The tourists entered one after the other, holding onto the iron rail of their individual cable cars. The huge cavern, illuminated by orange light, had layers of walls with twisting folds and numerous wet, dripping stalactites and stalagmites. This deep fathomless cavity created by nature was like a huge womb. In this dark natural cavern he was minute, like a single sperm, moreover an infertile sperm, roaming about happy and contented; this was a freedom that exists after release from lust. (2002, 34)

Critics have expressed an array of opinions about Gao's Nobel Prize win based on the above excerpt, ranging from a critique of Gao being a "pseudo individualist" (Cao 2002), to varied interpretations about the "infertile sperm" metaphor of freedom as "phallic" (Rojas 2002), the conditions of the "exile writer" (Li 2014), and

a failed attempt of releasing from "the haunting of [Cultural Revolution-related] memory" (Chen 2006). In contrast, I argue that the excerpt, and the novel at large, fundamentally engages in an ongoing process of introspection.

Through the lens of the interchanging pronouns, the third-person narrator's self-conception as an infertile sperm in a cave represents the introspective process of how forgotten events of the past are born and reborn. Memories of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the Holocaust, intimate encounters with the second person, and the German-Jewish woman Margarethe's experience of rape, confront each other during a sex-filled fling in Hong Kong, a city anxious about its future amidst the Handover from British colonial rule to the People's Republic of China. Such memories are initially repressed by the second person and Margarethe, but subsequently evoked during their numerous sexual intercourses. However, this dialogical process of remembering is also full of contradictions:

> "Fascism wasn't only in Germany, you never really lived in China. Fascism was no worse than the Cultural Revolution", you say coldly. "But it wasn't the same. Fascism was genocide, it was simply because one had Jewish blood in one's body. It was different from ideologies and political beliefs, it didn't need theories." She raises her voice to argue.
> "Your theories are dog shit! You don't understand China at all and you haven't experienced the Red Terror. It was an infectious disease that made people go mad!" You suddenly lose your temper.
> She says nothing, and, wearing a loose gown and holding the bra she has taken off, she emerges from the bathroom, shrugs her shoulders at you, and sits on the bed, head bowed. With eye makeup and lipstick removed, her face is pale but it has a more feminine softness.
> "Sorry, sexual repression", you explain with a bitter smile. "You go to sleep." You light a cigarette.
> She stands up, walks over to you, presses you against her soft breasts, fondles your head, and says quietly, "You can sleep next to me but I don't have any lust, I just want to talk with you." (Gao 2002, 66–67)

It is largely contested whether the horrors of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the German Holocaust can be compared in a meaningful way: the former was a disaster (haojie) involving a war of Chinese against Chinese; the latter was a deliberate and systematic genocide of Jews by Nazi Germans (Schwarcz 1998, 110–113). Margarethe's challenge offers a much-needed corrective for the emotional and Sinocentric remembering of the Cultural Revolution by the second person. In lieu of another round of sexual intercourse, Margarethe establishes her constructive role in the "negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing" of multidirectional memory. As Margarethe's offer to listen to the second person is not passive but active, it follows that such recollections of Cultural Revolution memories are open-ended.

Considering that the second and third person form part of the same subjectivity, the third person's metaphorical comparison between the infertile sperm and personal freedom directly relates to the dialogical remembering between the second person and his fling, Margarethe. Although the narrator initially seeks to obtain freedom from his past through casual sex, Margarethe's presence offers him both the intimacy and space for introspection. And if one further considers the possibility that Marga-

rethe is part of the narrator's imagination, then his shallow and misogynistic pursuit of freedom is in fact subjected to the introspection of the interchanging pronouns. The entirety of *One Man's Bible*, including the memories of the Cultural Revolution, and the problematic equivalence between promiscuous sexual activities with various (Western) women and personal freedom are an expression of the voice of an introspective individual. As the novel's title implies, Gao Xingjian's focus is a personal, reflective, and even spiritual escape from the (global market) demands of historically accurate yet static portrayals of the Cultural Revolution.

SAMSARIC CYCLE OF REINCARNATION AND CULTURAL REVOLUTION MEMORIES IN MO YAN'S *LIFE AND DEATH ARE WEARING ME OUT*

An oft-debated excerpt from Mo Yan's *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* refers to the County Chief Chen Guangdi's public humiliation as a "capitalist roadster" by Cultural Revolution Red Guards. A papier-machete donkey hangs over his neck because he rode a donkey while inspecting the villages. Unlike most narratives about the Cultural Revolution struggle sessions, which focus on the victims' trauma and suffering, the narrator includes a counternarrative that transcends Chen Guangdi's victimhood:

> When I linked his memoirs and my recollection of him wearing the papier-mâché donkey, I understood why that goofy smile had adorned his face. [County Chief Chen Guangdi] said that when he followed the beat of the drums and gongs and started dancing in his papier-mâché donkey, he felt himself slowly changing into a donkey, specifically the black donkey that belonged to the independent farmer Lan Lian, and his mind began to wander, free and relaxed, as if he were living somewhere between the real world and a wonderful illusion. To him it felt as if his legs had become a set of four hooves, that he had grown a tail, and that he and the papier-mâché donkey around his waist had fused into one body, much like the centaur of Greek mythology. As a result, he gained a firsthand perception of what it felt like to be a donkey, the joys and the suffering. (2008, 156)

Mo Yan's portrayal of the Cultural Revolution in the above excerpt was a point of contention in the reception of his Nobel Prize win. While some critics argued that his use of humor and magical realism obscures the horrors of the Cultural Revolution and deflects criticism away from the Chinese state authorities (Yu 2012; Link 2012), others find that it merely points at County Chief Chen's "empathetic imagination" towards the Cultural Revolution (Huang 2016). Shiamin Kwa (2023), however, questions this interpretation, as it overlooks the unreliability of the narrator in this passage; after all, the novel also features an unreliable character named "Mo Yan", thereby destabilizing the realm of fiction and reality.[4] In the following, I would further argue that such semantic fluidity also shows in the narrative's use of the Samsaric cycle of reincarnation.

At the behest of Lan Qiansui, the above excerpt is narrated by Lan Jiefang, two relatives of Lan Lian, the independent farmer who bravely resisted the Maoist policy of agricultural collectivization. It is important to note that Qiansui asks Jiefang to "focus on the fun part" (155) of his experiences during this period. It follows that

County Chief Chen Guangdi's fantastical transformation into a "black donkey" answers to Qiansui's request. Indeed, it turns out that part of Lan Qiansui's long journey of reincarnation sees him transform into the donkey which Chen Guangdi rode during his inspection.

The Buddhist notion of Samsaric cycle of reincarnation serves as the basis of the narrative structure of *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out*. The novel begins in 1950 when Ximen Nao is wrongfully killed during the Land Reform era because of his status as a landlord. He lingers in Hell for another two years, where he endures horrendous torture, thus accumulating even more resentment in the process. Although Lord Yama, judge of the underworld, accepts Ximen Nao's innocence and agrees to send him back to the mortal world, he is reborn in the form of five different animals, as a donkey, an ox, a pig, a dog, and a monkey. Finally, he is reincarnated as a baby with a large head, named Lan Qiansui. In Buddhism, the nature of one's rebirth is partially based on the quality of one's intentional action, or karma. While the kinds of rebirth are not necessarily categorized as "reward" or "punishment", it is generally assumed that an animal rebirth is "bad", and a human rebirth is "good". Actions leading to "bad" rebirth include greed, hatred or delusion, and actions leading to "good" rebirth entail a record of generosity, kindness, wisdom and mental clarity (Harvey 2017, 87). Considering how Ximen Nao eventually was reborn as Lan Qiansui, it implies that Ximen Nao has, to a certain extent, replaced his hatred for others with kindness and compassion. What is unclear is how Ximen Nao managed to develop such spiritual and ethical growth during his cycle of reincarnation.

In her reading of the phenomenological "poetics of affect" in Ximen Nao's reincarnations, Melinda Pirazzoli (2021) argues that the primary reason for the rebirth from animal to human is Ximen Nao's physical proximity to Lan Lian and his son Lan Jiefang as a reincarnated animal. Throughout 50 years of modern Chinese history, from the Agricultural Collectivization campaign, the Great Famine, and the Cultural Revolution through to post-Mao China, Ximen Nao accompanies Lan Lian and Lan Jiefang in various animal forms. In this process, Ximen Nao learns of the importance of individuality, empathy, and moral integrity. If Lan Jiefang and Lan Qianshui's narration of County Chief Chen Guangdi's transformation into a donkey is understood through the lens of multidirectional memory, it would suggest that in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, the memories of the Cultural Revolution give voice to the silenced Lan Lian. As described by Mo Yan in his Nobel lecture, Lan Lian is a "character who takes a stand against contemporary trends", and the novel as a whole is about "man's fate and human emotions", "man's limitations and human generosity", and "people's search for happiness and the lengths to which they will go, the sacrifices they will make, to uphold their beliefs" (Mo Yan 2012).

However, the Samsaric cycle of reincarnation suggests that the boundaries between present life and afterlives are blurred (Harvey 2017, 85). As Samsara is Sanskrit for "wandering on", the Samsaric cycle as narrative device indicates that the starting point of memories is unclear. As such, the validity of insights concerning the dialogical remembering between a landlord (Ximen Nao), animals (donkey, ox, pig, dog,

and monkey), a reborn baby (Lan Qiansui), an independent farmer (Lan Lian), and his son (Lan Jiefang) are also put into question; after all, it is unclear at what point in time such memories begin. And if the origins of Lan Jiefang's memories of the Cultural Revolution are unclear, it follows that our insights about Lan Lian's individualism and compassion are also fluid and incomplete. In this sense, *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out* gives voice to the silenced Lan Lian and his spirit of independence by preserving the open-endedness of Cultural Revolution memories.

CONCLUSION

Efforts of peacebuilding strive for sustained peace through the pursuit of reconciliation and truth-seeking, thereby addressing consequences of past victimization and fostering a harmonious future for all parties involved. Although the desire for sustained peace is arguably universal, the pursuit of concrete pathways of peacebuilding remains a complicated matter. In aiming to restore justice, the historical and scientific approaches to reconciliation and truth-seeking have proven ineffective (Mendeloff 2007). It seems suitable, then, to consider John Lederarch's (2005) concept of "engagement" as a way to foster peacebuilding. The arts can play a powerful role by reaching the deep-seated causes of conflict, including memory, in ways that other media cannot. The arts also prompt creative thinking about various means of reconciliating collective memories of different cultural groups and political stances. And yet, the arts also inhabit the complex figurations that can lead either to violence or to flourishing (Hawksley and Mitchell 2020).

An example of the ambivalent role of the arts in facilitating peacebuilding is the Swedish Academy's recognition of "witness literature" via the Nobel Prize in Literature. The Academy's interpretation of the vague phrase "the most outstanding body of work in an idealistic tendency" as "witness literature" – that is, writings where literature and testimony converge – suggests a proximity to the art of peacebuilding. Yet the circulation of memory beyond nations and borders (or "transcultural memory") via world literature remains subjected to global market forces. The Eurocentrism and political bias of the Swedish Academy's administration of the Nobel Prize in Literature have led the public to view the prize as merely symbolic in its pursuit of peace, despite its lofty selection criteria. In Chinese literary circles, the simultaneous *celebration of* and *frustration at* Gao Xingjian's and Mo Yan's Nobel Prizes have been described as an irrational and emotional obsession with global literary honors – or a Chinese "Nobel complex".

This article offers a different reading by fleshing out the utility of the Prize's prestige for readers and writers of Chinese literature. Through the case studies of Gao Xingjian's *One Man's Bible* and Mo Yan's *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out*, we find the two Nobel laureates taking a proactive role in strategically appropriating the Western demands for national allegory, and exploring them through narrative devices, such as the interchanging of pronouns and the Samsaric cycle of reincarnation. They result in giving voice to the silenced individuals of the Cultural Revolution while preserving the fluidity of Cultural Revolution memories. Although empathizing with forgotten individuals may not immediately result in everlasting harmony

among Chinese-speaking communities, it does pave the way for the pursuit of such ideals. In this sense, the Nobel Prize in Literature lives up to realizing Alfred Nobel's aspirations for eternal peace – less because of its self-serving award policy than because of its laureates' efforts.

NOTES

[1] "我們不要太在乎諾貝爾文學獎。中國作家很少獲得諾貝爾文學獎，[…] 但任何獎項都會帶有感情甚至政治色彩，諾貝爾文學獎它是以西方的價值觀為評判標準的。" Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

[2] While Gao Xingjian remains officially banned, one could still read and even produce academic studies on Gao in China. For example, the first PhD thesis on Gao conducted within mainland China was completed in 2007 at Nanjing University. See Shen Weiwei (2019, 27).

[3] "沒有主義，卻有選擇，有所為，有所不為，有所為則姑且為之，有所不為並不就悉盡打倒。有所為逕自去做好了，能做多少做多少，也不必非此不可而殺身成仁，不管是被殺還是自殺。因此，沒有主義，不是虛無主義，也非折衷主義，也非唯我主義，也非專斷主義，既反對極權專制，又反對把自我膨脹為上帝或超人，也反感把他人踩為狗屎。"

[4] According to Wang Yiyan (2015), avant-garde literature in China emerged in the mid-1980s with the idea that the method of writing was more important than the subject matter. Writers including Mo Yan employed unreliable or multiple narrators and distorted perceptions of time and space in their works, effectively subverting Maoist discourse.

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Everyone's watching you: The future of society in Dave Eggers's *The Every*

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Everyone's watching you: The future of society in Dave Eggers's *The Every*

Surveillance. Dystopia. Techno-capitalism. Immunology. Totalitarianism.

This article explores Dave Eggers's 2021 dystopian novel *The Every* from the perspective of philosopher Roberto Esposito's intertwined concepts of community and immunity, as put forward in his books *Communitas* (1998), *Immunitas* (2002), *Bios* (2004), and *Common Immunity* (2023). In Eggers's novel, The Every is a gigantic, world-dominating corporation which, through soft totalitarian means, seeks to create a utopian, peaceful, politically correct, and environmentally friendly world. It thus aims to immunise the world from the violent void at the heart of community by encouraging surveillance (of self and others) through a wide variety of apps. However, in its attempt to create a homogenous, peaceful world, The Every arguably suffers from an excess of immunisation from Esposito's perspective. This results in an autoimmune crisis, leading to both the exclusion of large swathes of the population, such as the poor or the technophobe Trogs, and to increased mental illness and even suicide among those subjected to constant surveillance and self-censorship.

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This article aims to explore the techno-totalitarianism in Dave Eggers's 2021 novel *The Every*, a sequel to his bestselling 2014 novel *The Circle* that depicts a world dominated by a gigantic technology corporation. Throughout his career, Eggers has produced a variety of literary works in which he explores the effects of contemporary issues ranging from globalisation, technology and capitalism to civil war, migration and racism (Galow 2014). In writing *The Every*, Eggers addresses a number of worrying current trends, including our increasing willingness to cede our free will to algorithms, the rise of AI and the domination of the global market by a few huge multinational corporations (Ulin 2023; Krantz 2021).

In the novel, a tech-corporation called The Every uses soft totalitarian means to create a world which is ostensibly peaceful, politically correct and environmentally friendly, yet ultimately stifling and intrusive. Hence, as Eggers himself explains, the corporation aims to perfect humanity by constructing a "closed ecosystem" and "24/7 surveillance" (Krantz 2021). It produces, for instance, a variety of (self)surveillance apps in an attempt to protect its workers, and the public at large, from both external dangers and the vagaries of their own psyches. Thus, The Every's supposed utopia threatens to become a stifling dystopia. On this basis, the novel is explored from the perspective of Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito's interconnected concepts of community and immunity.

As this article puts forward, The Every aims to create and control a world which, to use the language of Esposito, has become totally immunised. According to Esposito, one of the foremost proponents of a philosophical immunitary paradigm along with Jacques Derrida and Peter Sloterdijk, immunity constitutes a simultaneous exemption and protection from the potential violence of community. Community, in Esposito's view, is based on a common void or exposure, or a common duty of care, rather than a shared identity (2020, 74). For Esposito, a certain amount of immunity is necessary and inevitable – indeed no community can exist without it. However, he argues that the contemporary world is characterised by a destructive excess of immunity, in the form of a tendency to overreact to perceived or even imagined threats, which he terms autoimmunity. In *The Every*, too, the corporation's excessive attempts to protect its workers and the general public eventually leads to an autoimmune implosion, leaving the company's regime on the brink of a brutal, thanatopolitical totalitarianism.

THE EVERY: DYSTOPIAN SETUP

The Every is set in an unspecified near future in which citizens are increasingly under surveillance by social media. Hereby, the novel can be considered a direct sequel to Eggers's bestselling *The Circle* (2014), which revolves around the eponymous internet corporation and the rise of the novel's antiheroine, Mae Holland (Galow 2014, 142–143). *The Circle* has received considerable scholarly attention, and been explored from a variety of perspectives, including its visions of surveillance and surveillance capitalism (e.g. Däwes 2020; Gouk 2018; Marks 2022) and posthumanism (Nayar 2022). *The Every* is set around a decade after *The Circle*, when Mae, who is described by the novel's rebellious protagonist Delaney Wells as a kind of "soulless, con-

scienceless, world-ending secular antichrist" (Eggers 2021, 28), has become the CEO. In the sequel, the corporation was renamed into The Every, "hinting as it did at ubiquity and equality" (12). Indeed, The Every has grown exponentially after absorbing the huge e-commerce site "the Jungle", a veiled reference to Amazon.com, Inc., along with a myriad of smaller companies to become "the wealthiest, most powerful and, subsequently, most dangerous monopoly of all time" (Marsh 2021). This paves the way for the "totalitarian nightmare" already foreshadowed in *The Circle* (Eggers 2014, 486). In this context, Wells, a humanities graduate with a childhood history of internet addiction, seeks to infiltrate the corporation in order to end its "malignant reign on earth" (2021, 19). Thus, in contrast to Mae, she can be read as a dystopian heroine in that she rebels against the totalitarian status quo, albeit unsuccessfully (Atchison and Shames 2019, 133–134).[1]

The Every, like many dystopian regimes both real and fictional, is founded on "an explicitly utopian ideology" (Galow 2014, 149) based on principles such as "perfect democracy, transparency and knowledge" (Linklater 2013). However, its utopian rhetoric merely strengthens its monopolism (Docx 2013) and, arguably, its eventual totalitarian hegemony. In *The Every*, then, the corporation, with broad public support, attempts to immunise its workers and consumers from uncertainty and danger primarily via a variety of surveillance apps, many of them biopolitical or psychopolitical in nature, in that they aim to exert control over minds and bodies. As Eggers's narrator points out: "The Every, with the wholesale complicity of humanity, wanted a different world, a watched world without risk or surprise or nuance or solitude" (Eggers 2021, 260). In other words, the company has now come close to achieving Mae's dream, that of "closing the circle" (2014, 246–247) or completing the corporation's drive towards hegemonic sovereignty, leading it towards a devastating autoimmunity.

As Meera Agarwal, a staunchly anti-Every professor, suggests in the novel, the success of authoritarianism in general, and of The Every's regime in particular, resides in its ability to immunise people from the unknown, "feeding the urge to control, to reduce nuance, to categorize, and to assign numbers to anything inherently complex" (Eggers 2021, 146). In her view, through its use of "technoconformity" (146), The Every poses "an existential threat to all that was untamed and interesting about the human species" (13).

Meera's former student Delaney obtains employment at the tech-corporation and, together with her friend Wes Makazian, puts forward a series of ideas for increasingly oppressive surveillance apps which, they hope, will cause a public outcry and lead to the corporation's collapse. However, while three routes of resistance are evident in *The Every* – political resistance (represented by presidential candidate Tom Goleta), protest (represented by Agarwal), and sabotage (represented by Delaney and Wes) – none of them are ultimately successful in toppling its rule (Wrobel 2023, 25).

Notably, contrary to Delaney and Wes's expectations, their ideas prove to be hugely popular, and they unwittingly infuse new life into a corporation which, unable to produce significant new ideas due to a stifling workplace atmosphere, had been on the verge of an autoimmune collapse. Thus, their increasingly intrusive apps sim-

ply lead to the strengthening of the company's monopolistic, quasi-totalitarian immunitary regime. Indeed, Wes himself, who eventually becomes a key player, comes to believe in The Every's utopian ideology due to what he sees as its potential to prevent violence: "I'm beginning to like the idea of a world […] without violent death or the possibility of it. And to get there, we need a streamlined decision-making process. Coordination. We can't have a multilateral mess" (Eggers 2021, 224).

In this context, therefore, this article focuses on various episodes from the novel to shed light on The Every's catastrophic attempt to create a peaceful world order from the perspective of Esposito's intertwined concepts of community and (auto)immunity, which are explored in greater depth in the following section.

ROBERTO ESPOSITO: COMMUNITY AND IMMUNITY

Esposito's conception of community varies considerably from its dominant understanding in contemporary political philosophy, where it is frequently framed as based on a common attribute, definition or predicate "originating from and reflecting individual identity", and whose members are perceived as owners of "a good, a value, an essence" which is common to them all (2009, 2). For Esposito, in contrast, rather than bolstering a common identity, community deprives its members of identity, or at least puts it at risk (2023, 17). His view of community can be placed in the context of a wider exploration of non-identitarian conceptions of community in continental philosophy towards the end of the 20th century, including Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community* (1993), Jean-Luc Nancy's *Inoperative Community* (1999) and Maurice Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community* (2006). Esposito bases his argument on an etymological exploration of the Latin term *communis,* signifying *cum* (with) *munus*, with *munus* referring to an obligation, a burden or a duty of "mutual care" (2020, 74; 2023, 15).

In this sense, then, community can be understood as "a totality of persons united not by a shared property but by a shared lack, a debt or an obligation" (2009, 3–8). In other words, community is sharing "nothing in common" (2023, 18), and its constitutive void also reminds us of "our constitutive alterity with respect to ourselves" (2009, 6–7). On this basis, community is thus inherently related to violence and death, reflected in mythological depictions of communities founded on battles or on fratricidal violence (2013, 123–124), so that community's "heart of darkness" is found in the fact that it is essentially limitless, with neither an inside nor an outside, and therefore nothing to protect its members from each other (125–126).

In contrast to community, immunity implies exemption from the *munus*; it is the "purely negative right of each individual to exclude all others from using what is proper to him or her" (2011, 25). Thus, while *communitas* at its widest can encompass all human beings, and its members share a donative obligation towards others, *immunitas* implies both exemption and protection from the common *munus* (2023, 16). Therefore immunity, a concept whose roots lie in judicial discourse, and which was much later expanded to the biomedical domain, refers to any situation where there is a protective response in the face of a risk, particularly a risk of trespassing or the violation of borders. Once the community is identified with a specific people,

territory or essence, so that it is marked with "patriotism and local and factional interest" (2009, 16), then, it becomes walled in within itself and separated from the outside, effectively immunised. Immunity, consequently, has a potentially exclusionary effect as it "cuts through the community along lines of inclusion and exclusion that, by qualifying its members socially and politically, make them different from each other" (2023, 18).

Esposito emphasises, however, that no community can survive without a certain amount of immunisation (2023, 18–19); community and immunity are therefore "so tightly bound together that they can never be thought of separately" (15). Esposito, like Peter Sloterdijk, views the roots of humanity's drive to immunisation from a potentially hostile external world as ancient, indeed timeless. For Sloterdijk, for instance, we have always created a variety of immunitary spheres ranging from "the maternal womb to contemporary metropolises" (Esposito 2023, 151) which protect us from "the outside, the unfamiliar, the unfaithful, the strange and far away" (Sloterdijk 2011, 28). For Esposito, however, the immunitary paradigm really becomes dominant with the development of modern political thought (2020, 74), particularly with the work of Thomas Hobbes, where the attempt to "eliminate and control conflicts and contradictions in life by setting limits to human behaviour" effectively depoliticises society in favour of artificial formations such as the sovereign or institutions (Dişci 2023, 4). Here, like Agamben, Esposito diverges from Michel Foucault's account of biopolitics, which Foucault locates in a supposedly post-sovereign modern period of governmentality (Prozorov 2014, 94; Foucault 1990, 143).

On this basis, Esposito emphasises that, while the immune response is necessary, it can also become excessive, with potentially disastrous consequences. This can be seen in autoimmune disease, the *horror autotoxicus*, where the immune system itself turns against and attacks the very body it is supposed to protect. In this context, in Esposito's view, and echoing Derrida (Borradori 2003), we are currently experiencing a "global autoimmunity crisis" which has overtaken the world since September 11, 2001 (Esposito 2008, xiii). For Esposito, then, while Nazi Germany constitutes the prime example of a (thanatopolitical) autoimmunity crisis (136–144), immunitary measures in the contemporary world have again become excessive, leading to a decline in tolerance, and the diffusion of excessive individualism and alienation (2008, 148; Mutsaers 2016, 101–102), a tendency which was only exacerbated during the recent pandemic (Esposito 2023; 2020, 73).

However, Esposito proposes an alternative, more optimistic conception of immunity where it can potentially form the basis of a politics of life rather than death (Lemm 2013, 11). It is here where his conception of biopolitics diverges from that of Agamben, in that, while Agamben sees biopolitics as essentially death-driven and thus as something which it is necessary to overcome (1998), Esposito arguably provides for a potentially more positive approach to biopolitics, one which, as Catherine Mills points out, "does not rest on the oppressive and exclusionary presumptions of the modern West" (2018, 3–4).[2] Esposito notes that, while the immune system has traditionally been described in military terms as a "war" between pathogens and soldier-like immune cells, it has more recently been suggested that the immune sys-

tem is also characterised by tolerance, so that the body is understood as "a functioning construct that is open to continual exchange with its surrounding environment" (2011, 17). Rather than a strict delimitation between self and other, then, the newer model of immunity suggests the genuine possibility of a community based on an intertwining of self and other which remains open to difference (Lemm 2013, 12). It thus becomes a question of articulating community and immunity not in terms of an opposition but "in a sustainable form that does not sacrifice one in favour of the other" (Esposito 2020, 78), or as a "single common immunity, a co-immunity meant to protect human beings – not some *from* others but some *with* and *for* others" (2023, 156). As explored below, however, the immunity sought by The Every is far from being a co-immunity built on openness to the Other; it is, instead, a stifling, exclusionary immunity which ultimately tends towards an autoimmune destruction.

CLOSING THE CIRCLE? THE EVERY'S (AUTO)IMMUNITARIAN REGIME

The Every campus, described as a kind of "human zoo" (Wrobel 2023, 20), can itself be understood in terms of an attempt to immunise its inhabitants from the outside world. Indeed, the campus, known as "Everywhere", resembles one of Sloterdijk's immunitary spheres, "immune-systematically effective space-creations" (2011, 28) in which human beings attempt to find shelter from a hostile outside (Esposito 2023, 151). Notably, the corporation seeks to protect its campus from the vicissitudes of contemporary life, including exploitation and environmental degradation; as Delaney quickly learns, "unsustainable or improperly sourced goods", plastic packaging, processed or factory farmed foods and non-biodegradable toys are not allowed on campus (Eggers 2021, 2).

The immunitary isolation of The Every workers, known as "Everyones", later increases further when they, including Delaney herself, are pressurised into moving onto campus dormitories to reduce their negative impact on the environment. The strictly regulated, minimalist dormitory "pods" (2021, 41) themselves resemble smaller bubbles inside the larger immunitary bubble of the campus. Whereas Sloterdijk connects the creation of immunitary spheres to "the artificial, social construction of the incubating sphere found in the mother's womb" (Couture 2015, 57), Delaney herself compares her dormitory bed, a tube measuring eight by three feet where AI monitors her sleep, to a coffin (Eggers 2021, 148), perhaps the excessive, autoimmunitary equivalent of the protective maternal uterus.

The extent of the Everyones' attempts to immunise themselves both from the excesses of 21st century "culture" and from the natural environment are satirised in Eggers's depiction of Delaney's Welcome2Me event intended to introduce her to a group of her co-workers. Delaney chooses a visit to a beach to observe an elephant seal colony; the seemingly innocuous trip, however, turns out to be a disaster from the perspective of the Everyones, who later refer to it as the "Playa 26 Debacle". While still on the bus, they protest at everything from Delaney's non-politically correct choice of delicatessen and music to the vegan-unfriendly sight of farm animals. However, it is the encounter with the seals themselves that overcome the Everyones'

sensibilities, accustomed as they are to effectively living within an immune bubble, "the hermetic seal enveloping so many now" (132). Feeling exposed to the large mammals, an Everyone complains that "There should be clearer boundaries", and many, unable to cope with the cruelty of nature, feel traumatised when they learn that most of the seal-pups will not survive (119–126).

Later, one of Delaney's co-workers, Joan, explains that the Everyones become unsettled by any kind of uncertainty, particularly when outside the protective sphere of the campus: "The Every is a closed ecosystem, and a closed ecosystem is wary of, or even hostile to, anything that might upset that equilibrium" (134). It quickly becomes clear, however, that The Every also aims to immunise the Everyones – and the population at large – from the inconstancy of their own and others' psyches. It does this through a series of apps which carry out biopolitical and/or psychopolitical surveillance and control of their users, such as OwnSelf, which plans its users' time while selling their data to advertisers (41), or TruVoice, which polices speech and messages for political incorrectness, and informs human resources of inappropriate language use (44–45).

Such apps, therefore, curb their users' animal tendency to aggression and procrastination. Based on Esposito's reading of Sigmund Freud, they can be understood as part of an immunising *dispositif* which aims to protect us from "the chaos of instinct" (Duque 2023, 3) and, more broadly, can be linked to what Esposito calls the immunitary *dispositif* of the person, according to which "a human being is a person if, and only if, he or she is the absolute master of the animal that dwells inside" (Esposito 2012, 25). This atmosphere of surveillance also encourages self-censorship, particularly among the Everyones: "There was with each of them, a line that was not crossed […] some subject, some sentence would go too far" (Eggers 2021, 16). Thus, as Esposito points out, immunitary logic seeks to protect life by "subjecting it to a constraint that diminishes its vital potency, channelling that power within certain borders" (2023, 20). In the interests of transparency, for instance, the Everyones are also required to wear a cam, and Delaney notes its inhibitory effect on her behaviour: "She was less interesting, surely, and less funny – for humor does not easily survive the intense filtering that the twenty-first century made mandatory – but she was also kinder, more positive, more generous and civil" (Eggers 2021, 51).

Indeed, Delaney and Wes, in an attempt to provoke a public backlash which would destroy The Every, promote many of its most aggressive surveillance apps including the notorious Friendy, which supposedly evaluates sincerity. As Delaney explains: "We inject the place with poisonous ideas, the corporation adopts them, promotes them, and pushes them into the collective bloodstream of the world's people" (86). However, their ideas, contrary to their expectations, prove extremely popular. In this sense, Delaney and Wes inadvertently act as a kind of *pharmakon*, as a cure as well as a poison (Esposito 2020, 77) for the company, which had been unable to produce significant new ideas due to an atmosphere of excessive immunity which stifles creativity, "an involuntary reaction to the frozen atmosphere there" (Eggers 2021, 112). Mae in particular is notable for being "intellectually celibate" (112 and 145), which puts her leadership position at risk. Thus, rather than killing the corporation, the new

ideas produced by Delaney and Wes seem to vaccinate it, preserving life through a taste of death (Esposito 2020, 77).

However, perhaps unsurprisingly, this constant (self)surveillance has negative consequences for mental health, exemplified, for instance, in Delaney's frazzled colleague Kiki, who is eventually hospitalised for anxiety and insomnia (Eggers 2021, 238). Therefore, while this neo-Freudian immunitary *dispositif* helps to control the animal instincts, it also "provokes neuroses", and "tends to liquidate life, precisely through its control" (Duque 2023, 3). In many cases, however, the consequences are even more serious, leading to a precipitous rise in suicides, both among the Everyones and the population at large. Professor Agarwal, for instance, notes that "The Every offers the world the fruit of a poisoned tree" and blames the "inexorable rise" in suicides on the manic internet use and surveillance encouraged by the corporation (Eggers 2021, 111–112). This, then, resembles an autoimmune collapse, when "the immune system reacts so powerfully that it turns against the very body it should defend, destroying it" (Esposito 2020, 77).

The hyper-immunised world of The Every contrasts with that of those who, either by choice or sheer poverty, fall outside its scope. Notably, the development of a makeshift city of tents just outside the campus, "providing the starkest reminder of what happens when a society has a threadbare safety net and no plan for those who fall through it" (Eggers 2021, 133), can also be read in terms of the exclusionary nature of immunisation, which creates a division between "those who possess it and those who do not" (Esposito 2023, 186). This improvised community thus resembles Esposito's *communitas*, in that its members have nothing in common except for their exposure to the void of poverty, hunger and violence. Here, the immunitary regime of The Every appears to take the form of a "privilege" for the Everyones, who are protected from the risky, "common situation" of devastating poverty (186) faced by the shanty-town dwellers. Thus, as Esposito points out, once communities are immunised they "are always determined by boundaries, external and internal, to structure their populations in groups based on different ranks, power and wealth" (18).

Those excluded by choice are the tech-skeptic Trogs, possibly a contraction of troglodytes, a slur which they had proudly adopted themselves, and which eventually came to refer to "anything resistant to tech takeover" (Eggers 2021, 25). Like the prole area in *1984*s London, Trogtown is comparatively colourful and lively, the only area of the city where people live in relative freedom from the regime's surveillance. However, for the corporations' supporters, such as Wes following his conversion, trog living is "anarchic […] anti-community […] anti-social, anti-human" (223), and the trogs' freedom is to be short-lived, as children are already prohibited from living in trog homes (166). For the time being, however, Trogtown provides a space of relative reprieve from the immunitary regime of the Every, allowing Delaney and Wes to speak freely, and Gabriel Chu, an echo of Orwell's O'Brien, to approach and attempt to entrap Delaney with the offer of joining an imaginary resistance movement (282–285).

However, The Every's influence gradually encroaches on all kinds of resistance, eventually putting an end to political freedom too. As Delaney notes, the corpora-

tion has effectively provided every country with a "digital secret service police", enabling "the end of American democracy and the rise of illiberalism here and abroad" (63). Perhaps most worrying, however, is the extension of its online voting software, Demoxie, to most of the world's democracies. Demoxie, first developed in *The Circle*, allows voters to directly submit online votes on a variety of subjects ranging from healthcare to international relations. Thus, described as "100 percent participation. One hundred percent democracy" (Eggers 2014, 32), Demoxie is proposed as a way of rendering democracy more direct and transparent (Maurer and Rostbøll 2020). However, it also undermines democracy, highlighting what Derrida refers to as the suicidal autoimmune tendency inherent in democracy itself, democracy's tendency to suspend itself in the name of self-protection (Derrida 2005; Esposito 2023, 56). Demoxie effectively removes the right to vote from those unable or unwilling to open an Every account (Eggers 2021, 100), and does not allow for the institutionalisation of the conditions necessary for voters to make informed judgements (Maurer and Rostbøll 2020). Moreover, Demoxie undermines the electorate's right to a secret ballot, as voters' personal and electoral backgrounds only remain private "unless a government or Every strategic partner wanted that information, in which case it was readily sold" (Eggers 2021, 100).

In this context, the only serious political opposition to The Every comes from an anti-monopoly presidential candidate, Tom Goleta. Invited to give a speech on the campus, the homosexual Goleta's campaign is derailed by his inability to keep his eyes, recorded by eye-tracking technology, from "the bulbous regions" of the Everyones displayed in their tight bodysuits (175). However, the ensuing global spread of this technology and the consequent "eyeshaming" of vast numbers of people leads to a wave of "tens of thousands" of suicides, as well as a few hundred "Oedipals" who blind themselves. The spread of the technology also encourages increasing numbers of people, already accustomed to social isolation during the pandemics which preceded the novel, to retreat into the immunitary bubbles of their homes (176).

When a terrorist attack takes place on campus near the homeless encampment, security and intelligence are stepped up, leading to further bolstering of the immunitary space. The perpetrator, however, is never discovered, and life on campus grows more anxious, although it still appears safer than exposure to the common life outside the campus (191): "Between the chaos of Nowhere, the sporadic animosity expressed toward Everyones there, and Impact Anxiety, Everyones were now unwilling to leave campus ever – and conveniently, they never had to" (192).

The Every's surveillance also goes a step further with the development of HereMe, SaveMe, a project to prevent domestic abuse via cams installed in private homes, which, despite attempts on the part of the corporation's lawyers to block it, proceeds to become hugely popular. The public quickly acquiesces to the constant domestic surveillance, until the cameras "become ubiquitous and beloved in most every corner of the globe, giving humanity a new sense of control and safety", although they encourage a certain amount of self-censorship at home, leading to people growing quieter and more cautious (210), and arguably less vital.

Delaney is then seriously injured in a second bombing on campus, in which several Everyones are killed. While it is generally assumed that the attack was carried out by anti-Every trogs, Delaney herself considers it was an attempt on the part of the corporation's leadership itself, having discovered her subterfuge, to get rid of her (241–243). If its management has indeed attacked its own resources in an attempt to protect itself, then, the bombing can be read as autoimmunitarian, resulting from "an excessive demand of protection […] whose only finality is to enable more powerful means of preventive defence" (Esposito 2013). The attack results in increased immunisation, in the form of a further Every surveillance project, KnowThem, designed to notify users when they are near a convicted criminal, and the expansion of Friendy to identify potential malefactors (Eggers 2021, 238–241).

Following her recovery, Delaney goes to visit Agarwal, who is in remission from cancer, and is shocked when Agarwal reveals that she has been employed by The Every. However, on a hiking trip with Mae, where she is won over by Mae's seemingly sincere friendliness, Delaney herself begins to question her own opposition to her employer. Delaney pitches Mae some ideas which, she thinks, have a chance of bringing down The Every, but also risk closing the circle by potentially increasing the corporation's power to such an extent that it would "make the Dutch East Indies company look like a lemonade stand" (266). The first of these ideas, SumNum, is a single number which evaluates a person's behaviour from cradle to grave, effectively allowing or denying them access to, for instance, employment or marriage, while the second, the Consensual Economic Order, is designed to limit the variety of goods produced, in order to curb environmental damage while freeing the consumer from excessive decision-making (267–269).

Softening her opposition, Delaney begins to envision a more inclusive Every-led order: "Certainly the Everyones could see their way to allowing humans to exist apart from their quest for order? Yes. There would be room to co-exist" (270). Arguably, then, Delaney's more inclusive view of The Every resonates with Esposito's more optimistic vision of immunity, immunity as an inclusive "co-immunity" (Esposito 2023, 156) which opens itself, as Derrida also argues, to "something other and more than itself" (cited in Esposito 2023, 150). Delaney's dream of a more inclusive Every is, however, interrupted as Mae, fully aware of Delaney's plans to sabotage the corporation, murders her, pushing her off a cliff (Eggers 2021, 271), in a manner arguably reminiscent of the death of the newly converted Winston at the hands of the regime in *1984* (Orwell 2000, 300).

Thus, Delaney's death merely strengthens the tech-corporation's autoimmunitarian regime, as her murderer Mae appropriates and announces her devastating ideas, SumNum and the Consensual Economic Order, before an audience of "wonderfully compliant" Everyones (Eggers 2021, 273). On the implementation of these ideas, The Every would come close to fulfilling Mae's dream of closing the circle, creating a totally immunised totalitarian regime, so that, in Mae's words: "the world's last bits of chaos and uncertainty would evaporate like dew in sunlight. Where there had been din and disorder there would be the quiet hum of a machine that saw all, knew

all, and knew best – that was committed to the perfection of the people and salvation of the planet" (273).

This peaceful, protected world promised by The Every must, however, come at a cost, that of the loss of freedom and vitality, and the purging of undesirables, as Wes suggests: "This is another purging […] the improvement of the species, its perfectibility, is only possible by shaking off all our frailties and deviances […] the brash or incautious are eliminated, and the species moves on, only tamer" (167).

CONCLUSION

As this article has tried to demonstrate, The Every aims to construct a totally immunised world, an apparently Utopian society in which the corporation, its workers and the world at large would be protected from all kinds of uncertainty and danger, including environmental catastrophe. As Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga, for instance, notes, Eggers's dystopia is complex in that it explores how the noble aim of averting environmental collapse can be hijacked by platform capitalism, resulting in a new despotism (2024, 10–11).

However, the seemingly virtuous aims of the corporation and the novel's frequently humorous, satirical tone (Wrobel 2023; Caine 2021), do not detract from the gravity of *The Every*'s message. By the novel's end, the corporation's discourse becomes, effectively, totalitarian, in that it is "the declaration of the absence of the Other who establishes community", the creation of "a new form of enforced harmony" based on the belief that "it can immunise itself against the Other, difference, everything it sees as dangerous" (Dişci 2023, 15). As Mae chillingly suggests at the close of the novel, The Every's critics and opponents should be "excised" like a "small tumour" (Eggers 2021, 272), reflecting, in the context of Esposito's discussion of the autoimmunitary, thanatopolitical Nazi regime, "the tragic aporia of a death that is necessary to preserve life, of a life nourished by the deaths of others" (2008, 39).

In this context, like many dystopias, *The Every* can perhaps be understood not as a devastating prediction of our near future, but rather as a thought experiment, the construction of an alternate, imaginary world in which current trends are taken to an extreme. Such exercises of the imagination, as Terentowicz-Fotyga argues (2024, 1–2) are particularly necessary in the case of the contemporary development of digital surveillance capitalism as, due to its unprecedented nature, conventional and familiar experience and concepts are unlikely to prove sufficient or even useful to fully comprehend its implications (Zuboff 2019, 12).

Thus, rather than a simple prediction of disaster to come, or, conversely, a fantasy disconnected from reality, *The Every* can arguably best be read as a warning. The novel warns, extrapolating from current trends, of the development of a society based on excessive (self)control and isolation, which as Eggers and Esposito both note, are on the increase in today's world. Hence, Esposito's theory of (auto)immunity helps to shed light on how excessive moves towards isolation and insulation from the myriad threats, real and imaginary, posed by existence prove to be the greatest danger of all.

However, as Esposito suggests with his concept of co-immunity, based on a more inclusionary model of immunity, while we appear to be headed for the world of *The Every*, it does not have to be our fate. For him, then, while the protection of life is paramount – there is no freedom without life – it is necessary to distinguish "between systems designed to protect our individual and collective experience, making it safer, and apparatuses that excessively reduce our freedom, our sociability, our curiosity towards others" (2020, 78). It is precisely thought experiments like *The Every* which can help us to recognise the difference, providing us with at least a faint glow of hope. As Eggers explains, he wrote *The Every* in the hope that its readers would say "I don't want to live there. I don't want that to be our reality" (Krantz 2021). Therefore Eggers, like Esposito, is ultimately, and perhaps surprisingly, an optimist (Krantz 2021), as he battles against the algorithmification of culture in the hope of creating small pockets of freedom.

NOTES

[1] In a way, Wells is an echo of D-503, the protagonist in Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1920–1921), and Winston Smith of George Orwell's *1984* (1949). Tricked by a double agent, Smith rebels against the ruling party Ingsoc's totalitarian dictatorship. After ensuring prison and torture, Smith is killed right in the moment when he has come to love its leader, Big Brother. Orwell's plot, as he himself admitted, is closely modelled on that of Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, whose protagonist D-503, a spacecraft engineer, also attempts to rebel against the regime, the One State, but is eventually caught and subjected to a surgical removal of the imagination.

[2] While there is not enough space to go into a detailed comparison between Foucault, Agamben and Esposito's views of biopolitics here, Mills's book (2018) provides an excellent overview.

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Totalitarian systems and their peaceful alternatives in Karin Boye's *Kallocain* and Olga Ravn's *The Employees*

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Totalitarian systems and their peaceful alternatives in Karin Boye's *Kallocain* and Olga Ravn's *The Employees*

Dystopia. Fragility. Vulnerability. Peace. Posthumanism.

Drawing on recent discussions on fragility and vulnerability, this article delves into the questions of why and how the totalitarian systems collapse. Applied to Karin Boye's *Kallocain* (1940) and Olga Ravn's *The Employees* (2018), the concept of acknowledged fragility helps societies to locate an alternative to oppressive systems. In Boye's authoritarian world state, the eponymous substance is instrumentalized to eliminate dissidence, yet ultimately causes a rupture within the body politic. Likewise, Ravn's anonymous corporation's exclusionary tactics result in unexpected results among its humanoid crew. Both text's alternative visions of vulnerability can be characterized as peaceful and accepting of the interconnectedness of human and non-human life.

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The authors of *The Global Peace Index 2024* found that global peacefulness has deteriorated once again, marking the fifth consecutive year (Institute for Economics & Peace 2024). This disintegration is primarily due to a series of ongoing conflicts and a worsening security situation. The Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SPRI) arrives at an equally concerning conclusion in its 2022 report, *Environment of Peace* (Black et al. 2022). Increasing military spending and the failure of the international community to address the climate crisis are mentioned as the main reasons for the current state of the security situation. Given these alarming statistics, it comes as no surprise that academia has taken a keen interest in the subject of peace.[1] In the field of literary studies, this interest is often reflected in research focused on the portrayal of wars in literature, whether it pertains to the two World Wars or more recent conflicts.[2]

After the shocking brutality of World War I, the positive take on the necessity of war, advocated by many thinkers of the previous centuries, such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Jacob Burckhardt, was deeply compromised (Schölderle 2021, 97).[3] At the same time, there was little hope for perpetual peace throughout the 20th century. Wilhelm Janssen, writing in the middle of the Cold War in the 1970s, mentions the use of nuclear weapons as a breaking point, which shaped the thinking on peace after World War II. Following the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, peace indicated not solely a question of an ideal way of living together but also one of the survival of humanity as such ([1975] 2004, 590). In the 21st century, a global perspective on peace has become inevitable, mostly because of the rising interconnectedness of the whole world. This perspective shift can be partially explained by the crucial role that climate change has played in the understanding of peace in recent decades. When talking about a peaceful coexistence in the 21st century, "poverty, dysfunctional governance and conflict history" (Black et al. 2022, 2) are mentioned as driving forces behind the recent deterioration in peacefulness.

In this article, I will examine two dystopian novels from Sweden and Denmark respectively: Karin Boye's *Kallocain* (1940; Eng. trans. *Kallocain*, 1966) and Olga Ravn's *De ansatte* (2018; Eng. trans. *The Employees*, 2020).[4] *Kallocain* and *The Employees* tell of secular political systems that are presented to their members as the only way to organize society. I will argue that both Boye's state and Ravn's corporation represent totalitarian political systems, and they fail because of a fundamental disregard for their members' emotional and intellectual interconnectedness. In both texts, the vulnerability of bodies takes center stage, allowing the emergence of alternatives beyond the systems through positive sociopolitical cooperation. This contribution offers a new perspective on vulnerability and fragility understood as analytical tools for literary analysis.

VULNERABILITY AND FRAGILITY AS PRODUCTIVE FORCES

Vulnerability and fragility evince overlapping characteristics. Vulnerability, derived from the Latin word *vulnus* ("wound"), denotes "the capacity to suffer that is inherent in human embodiment", which arises from "our corporeality, our neediness, our dependence on others and our affective and social natures" (Mackenzie,

Rogers, and Dodds 2013, 4). Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers and Susan Dodds also introduce a second dimension, which addresses the relational character of vulnerability, emphasizing "the contingent susceptibility of particular persons or groups to specific kinds of harm or threat by others". This second approach to vulnerability underscores "the ways that inequalities of power, dependency, capacity, or need render some agents vulnerable to harm or exploitation by others" (6). Such agents can either be individuals oppressed by others or entire groups facing discrimination from the state or corporations.

Vulnerabilities can vanish and new ones can emerge (Dederich and Zirfas 2022, 2). They are continually evolving and are only observable "in an indissoluble relationship to specific social, cultural, historical and societal contexts and individual experiences" (4).[5] Sturla J. Stålsett echoes a similar sentiment: "However, seeing life as always dependent on a prior interweaving with other lives, and experienced reality as necessarily relational", he raises the question, "what it might mean politically to say that human beings, as communal beings, are constitutively vulnerable" (2023, 1). Acknowledging one's own vulnerability entails acknowledging a relationality with others. This implies positively charged aspects of vulnerability:

> [V]ulnerability as "ability" also necessarily implies openness, relatedness, mutability, and communicability, which could be seen as positively charged dimensions. They may represent an invitation to and a call for responsible relationships with other vulnerable beings; an expectation, or a demand that the vulnerable – human or nonhuman – is recognized, considered, cared for, respected, and protected. (2)

Rather than a weakness, vulnerability can be understood as a productive force, which foregrounds the emotional and intellectual interconnectedness of human and non-human life. The importance of this acknowledged interconnectedness for the continuation of life on Earth is highlighted in Judith Butler's recent work, *What World Is This?* Here, vulnerability is equated with interdependency, exposure and porosity (2022, 87), offering new insights into the frailty of our imperfect bodies.

While vulnerability addresses the potential for harm to be inflicted, fragility characterizes the constitution, be it a (non-)human body, object, political entity, or a planetary system. In the state of fragility, the integrity of an object or organism is still intact, yet its endangerment becomes apparent (Dederich 2022, 193–195) and can become manifest in form of a rupture (Arend, Sander, and Wetenkamp 2023, 8). If fragility is identified, measures can be taken to prevent the decay of the entity, but if ignored or not taken seriously, the rupture can lead to fragmentation (Dederich 2022, 196). After a phase of uncertainty, however, fragmentation can also have liberating effects, for example when a totalitarian state or an extractive economic system collapses and gives way to new ways of thinking and conviviality.

The unwillingness of individual actors to accept fragility as their own condition also stands at the center of Yener Bayramoğlu's and María do Mar Castro Varela's book *Post/pandemisches Leben. Eine neue Theorie der Fragilität* (Post/pandemic life: A new theory of fragility, 2021). They argue that during the pandemic, the fragility of life, relations, and communities became apparent (9). Part of Bayramoğlu's and Castro Varela's theory involves expanding the field of the applicability of fragility from

single objects to more diffuse entities such as political infrastructures (29–30). They attribute the failure to acknowledge the frailty of socio-political systems to the "politics of the strong", resulting in institutions being overwhelmed during the pandemic. This politics is marked by the unwillingness to confront the balance of the planet and the fragility of our bodies. Instead of seeing it as a shortcoming, Bayramoğlu and Castro Varela's theory advocates for living in and with the fragile (43).

THE TOTALITARIAN STATE IN *KALLOCAIN*

Karin Boye's final novel was published only one year before her suicide in 1941. Although the novel and Boye's overall body of work received significant attention in Scandinavia, it remains relatively unknown on the international stage.[6] *Kallocain* deals with technological progress and economization of human life in a totalitarian "World State".[7] The novel is written as a confession of the chemist Leo Kall. In service to the World State, Leo develops the substance *kallocain* that, when injected, compels people to reveal their innermost secrets. During his experiments, Leo learns of a potentially dangerous secret group of people opposed to the World State, known as the "desert society". Convinced that his boss and antagonist Rissen sympathizes with the group, Leo reports him to the authorities. Acting on his own suspicion that his wife Linda is in love with Rissen, Leo injects her with *kallocain* to find out. As Leo's actions result in Rissen's death penalty and Linda's disappearance, the end of the novel sees the World State overtaken by the Universal State after a brief war. Increasingly weary of the totalitarian systems, Leo wishes he could search out members of the obscure desert community and take part "in the creation of a new world" (Boye 2019, 169).

The concepts mentioned by Stålsett – openness, relatedness, mutability and communicability – illustrate the vision of vulnerability that the World State tries to uphold. It considers itself the headstone of human progress, dismissing earlier epochs as backwards and inferior. History is not understood as open and subject to change but as engineered by the World State and, therefore, obsolete. Instead of embracing the public sphere as an open space for diverse opinions (Kant 1991a, 55), and recognizing fragility as integral to every political entity, it suppresses emotional and intellectual bindings among individuals, making the relatedness among individuals impossible. Love is seen as a sentimental residue of a bygone era, as all positive feelings must be directed at the World State. Through establishing a closed, easily controllable society, the World State deems its social order to be enshrined "securely for all time" (Boye 2019, 8). Its vision of vulnerability suppresses every form of mutability, as every significant change or deviation from the "norm" is forbidden. This manifests in the strict hierarchy and uniformity of a society, in which everyone is addressed as "fellow-soldier" and lives in the same, standardized apartment. The possibility of a vulnerable position of the rigid, heavily rationalized system is never acknowledged.

Both mutability and communicability are best exemplified by the World State's use of *kallocain*. Leo's development of the truth serum is instrumentalized by the World State to eliminate dissidence and every form of political other-mindedness. The com-

munication between the state and its citizens happens one-way most of the time, from the center to the periphery, with citizens being solely on the receiving end. It is only during the *kallocain*-experiments and the subsequent court trials that the citizens are asked to deliver information serving the center's political ends. Overall, the World State's vision of vulnerability is based on a heavily controlled society of suppressed emotions and the persecution of political dissidence.

The state's effort to eliminate internal enemies reaches a climax in Rissen's trial,[8] an event that is meant to set an example of strength. Yet confronted with the state's own fragility in the shape of a single character, rupture in the political power is observable. Under the influence of *kallocain*, Rissen's speech makes a case for the emotional and intellectual interconnectedness of human beings, an aspect that the state refuses to acknowledge: "[Truth] could be a bridge between one person and another – as long as it is voluntary, yes – as long as it [is] given like a gift and received like a gift" (Boye 2019, 155). Strikingly, Rissen's speech addresses both the state as an unpersonal center of power and its subjects. This enables him to prompt people to confront their own defenselessness. When he asks everyone in the courtroom whether they understand that truth loses its value when not shared voluntarily and free of coercion, he answers the question himself: "No, you haven't noticed it, of course, because then you would see that you have been scraped bare, exposed right down to your naked skeleton – and who has the strength to see that?" (155–156). The state representatives' refusal to acknowledge their own "nakedness" is underscored by the futility of their effort to identify and punish every alleged enemy. This task is near impossible given the predominance of one-way communication between the state and its subjects.

Leo's wife Linda becomes aware of an alternative to the World State society that offers a more wholesome vision of vulnerability (Meurer-Bongardt 2022; Wennerscheid 2023). While the state perceives her solely as a "production machine" of future soldiers, she opposes the notion that a state or parents can own a child. She contrasts the economic notion of "producing" children merely for the State's military purposes with the feminist idea of a society comprised by mothers and individuals, who comprehend the true meaning of childbirth. As argued above, signs of fragility of an entity can lead to fragmentation if not identified and confronted properly (Dederich 2022, 196). After making her fading loyalty visible (Hammarström 1997, 229), Linda articulates a new vision of motherhood as "a productive, life-giving force", which is not reserved for women only (Wennerscheid 2023, 211). This new way of living together peacefully encompasses "unconditional love, empathy, caring, nursing, growing, educating and leading with response directed at both human individuals and other beings" (Meurer-Bongardt 2022, 239), presenting a wholly new understanding of relatedness. Linda's programmatic vision clearly echoes Stålsett's call to view vulnerability as a prerequisite for responsible relationships "with other vulnerable beings" (2023, 2).

The values implied by the alternative society contrast strongly with the bureaucratic and hierarchical structure of the World State. The guarantee for a peaceful coexistence lies in the voluntary nature of the social contract that its members uphold. Linda underscores this when she repeatedly stresses the urge to leave everything be-

hind to search for a community of like-minded people. Shortly before the outbreak of the war between the World State and the so-called Universal State, Leo experiences an analogous desire to be on the way to somewhere (Boye 2019, 164). Under influence of *kallocain* during the trial, Rissen echoes the same sentiment: "At least I'm alive – in spite of all they have taken from me – and right now I know that *what I am is on the way somewhere*" (157; emphasis in the original). This "somewhere" might be located among unknown ruins in the desert, a contaminated environment where the members of a secret society congregate. Strikingly, Linda, Leo and Rissen express the wish to seek out the place despite its apparent uninhabitability. This not only highlights the strength of their will but also the resilience of individuals in search of meaningful interpersonal connections.

While Kant argued that peace can only be achieved through the rationality of reasonable citizens in a republican contract (Behnke 2012, 254), *Kallocain* scrutinizes this notion by pointing toward a life outside the state. Indoctrinated to seek science-based explanation for every observable phenomenon, Leo realizes the insufficiency of this approach when confronted with a starry night at the end of the novel. Mesmerized, he reflects on the origins of the stars, yet he cannot grasp his amazement while looking at the sky and forgetting everything else. After waking up from this trance, he is aware that something has changed: "I felt that I had touched the living depths that Rissen had cried out for and Linda had known and seen. 'Don't you know that this is where life springs up?' the woman had said in my dream. I believed her and was certain that *anything at all could happen*" (Boye 2019, 164; emphasis in the original). Although the "living depths" are part of every single individual, Leo's experience has significance for society as a whole: "There was no hesitation in me anymore. I was taking part in the creation of a new world" (164).

The secret society that Leo intends to join is defined by traits that not only stand in opposition to the World State's politics, but also to Kantian peace theory. Firstly, the peacefulness of the alternative society is not ensured by the "spirit of commerce" or by the congregations of republics adhering to the international right (Kant 1991b, 113–114). The sole foundation of peace is that citizens join the community voluntarily. The absence of a centralized, coercive state power stands at the heart of the desert society. Secondly, this community acknowledges the fragility of human bodies. Members shake hands, a ritual deemed unhygienic by the World State. In the desert society's meetings, there is a sense that "people are looking through you. As though you were naked or worse than naked. Spiritually naked" (Boye 2019, 78). The ritualization of the fragility and vulnerability is described by a citizen who attends their meetings: one person hands a knife to someone else, then lies down on the bed and pretends to be asleep, hereby creating a situation in which the person's fragility and vulnerability is greatly accentuated. In this ritual, the faux-sleepers acknowledge the exposure of their bodies to injury as a fundamental characteristic of human life.

This portrait of the alternative society stands in crass opposition to the World State's desire to screen its citizens for its own political ends. Its failure to secure a peaceful future for its citizens is not only rooted in its unwillingness to acknowledge any fragility, but also fails because its quest to eradicate fragility proves futile.

It is impossible to uphold a closed, heavily monitored society, where mutability and emotional bonds are prohibited. Instead of recognizing citizens as complex beings whose private and public roles are incongruent, the state aims for their synchronization to facilitate complete transparency. The irreconcilable rupture between the private and public realms becomes apparent during the trial nevertheless, as the powerful drug *kallocain* exposes the limits of coercive power to uphold a stable social order.

THE TOTALITARIAN CORPORATION IN *THE EMPLOYEES*

The Employees by Danish author Olga Ravn consists of statements ranging from a few words to five pages. The story is set on board a spaceship involving a crew comprised by both humans and humanoids, all employed by an unnamed corporation. A brief introduction states that the latter commissioned these interviews to better understand why the productivity of the employees has decreased. Apart from the crew and interviewers, mysterious objects appear which are believed to influence the employees' working capacity. These objects were found on a planet called New Discovery and fluctuate between inorganic, stone-like entities and pulsating living organisms. In *The Employees*, the lines between human and non-human are constantly blurred. The reader cannot tell apart human and non-human respondents, as the humanoids are able to imitate and appropriate almost every human reaction and emotion. At the end of the novel, the humanoids start to isolate themselves from the humans and become increasingly menacing. This leads to the eruption of violence against the interviewers, which ultimately serves as a pretext for the termination of all life onboard. The longest surviving humanoids descend to New Discovery to complete their mission – before succumbing to their inevitable death hours later.

Employing similar tactics as the World State, the company strives for total transparency of the crew. Its vision of vulnerability involves a closed society under surveillance, there being no space on board that remains out of the company's reach. Apart from installing cameras and using crew members as spies, the company conducts and censors interviews, thereby strengthening its power and emphasizing its privileged position in knowledge production (Fricker 2007, 13). Emotional bonds among the crew members are forbidden. To keep the possibility of a revolt to a minimum, some human employees are provided with holograms of their children. The employees' names are rarely used; meanwhile, their rank and position in the spaceship-hierarchy are of paramount importance, echoing the societal organization in *Kallocain*. Every sign of individuality is considered a hindrance to the corporation's productivity. In terms of communicability, the employees, very much like the citizens of the World State, are passive subjects of communication. In contrast to the World State's use of an injected drug, however, the corporation relies on a more conventional capitalist practice, the compilation of a company report (Kraglund 2019, 89). Although the report-format implies a two-way conversation, this is not the case. The individuals who conduct the interviews remain opaque, as their questions are withheld from the readers and can only be reconstructed from the redacted answers. The interviewers exploit the answers of the employees with one goal in sight: productivity increase.

Similarly to the World State, the company treats vulnerability as an undesirable set of qualities, creating an environment of oppression, control and obedience.

Instead of questioning the imperatives of productivity and efficiency and thus acknowledging the fragility of its own economic system, the company resorts to denial. It paints an image of an indestructible entity that serves a higher ideal, extending humanity into a post-Earth future. However, this invincibility is gradually exposed as a mere facade throughout the narrative. One of the interviewers retorts: "You shouldn't take it for granted that people agree to be interviewed here. […] Your voices are friendly, your clothes are black, and from your sleeves your soft, writing hands protrude. The pores in the skin make them look so fragile, as if one could caress them and at the same time carefully peel the skin away, and it would hurt you" (Ravn 2020, St. 115). The fragility of the mortal body implies its possible fragmentation and destruction. This insight, made by a humanoid, culminates in the murder of one of the interviewers. The humanoid responsible for their death says: "I regret that one of you was killed in the process. It wasn't our intention that anyone should die" (St. 118). Shocked by their physical self-assertion, the corporation resorts to the "politics of the strong" (Bayramoğlu and Castro Varela 2021, 28) – by opting for a complete and deadly shutdown of the operation.

Faced with its exposed fragility, the corporation's exclusionary tactics play out in two phases. Firstly, the company orders the complete dismantling of the humanoid part of the crew. When this fails, the management calls for a final violent act, the termination of all life aboard the spaceship: human crew members are killed, the humanoids rebooted. The last words are articulated by an older model of humanoids, whose shutdown lasts several days. Their testimonies, placed at the end of the novel, lack enumeration and point at the organization's partial failure (or unwillingness) to impose its order. This narrative decision addresses the possibility of an existence outside of the totalizing, efficiency-driven corporation. The unnumbered statements are devoid of an interviewer's voice, as the recording machines were left on before their death. For once unsuppressed by the interviewers' questions, the humanoids decide themselves what they are going to say, experiencing an unprecedented level of self-determination: "And you're dead too. Your bodies are lying here" (Ravn 2020, Appendix 1). The dead bodies of the interviewers, the final manifestation of fragmented corporeality, point towards a failed experiment. They also mark a sudden lack of coercive power, leading to a rupture in the power structure.

A changing power structure shapes the last part of the novel. The conscious decision of the humanoids and their free self-articulation contrasts with the interviewees who, earlier in the narrative, lacked agency to do so. This becomes especially clear when read against the first page of the novel: "*The following statements were collected* […] *with a view to gaining insight into how they* [the employees] *related to the objects*" (I). The humanoid's statement contradicts the original goal of the company to strive for complete overview and transparency. It allows readers to glimpse an alternative in which the non-human longs for a peaceful relationship with the environment of New Discovery (Wennerscheid 2023, 221): "[W]e wish to spend our final time in the valley, where flowers and trees have begun to grow forth out of the soil and

the thrusting plants have pushed various objects to the surface, where they now lie scattered about in the moist earth" (Ravn 2020, Appendix 3). The visit to the valley only lasts several hours. Despite such brevity, this interval sees significant development playing out among the humanoid crew, and offers the glimpse of an alternative to the corporation's neoliberal and extractive system. Throughout the novel, there is a consensus that the humanoids are immortal and therefore do not comprehend the concept of death. This idea is articulated by one of the humanoids after the murder of the interviewer: "We don't really understand death, since we ourselves can't be destroyed and will go on regenerating" (St. 118). After achieving freedom to wander on New Discovery, a humanoid appropriates what was hitherto seen as a solely human feature: "We've talked about the risk that in committing ourselves to this decision we might not be re-uploaded, and this we accept" (Appendix 3). The acceptance of one's own finality can only emerge outside of the coercive power wielded by the totalitarian corporation, where the subject's "relation to death" (Hägglund 2019, 4) and to other beings becomes apparent.

FRAGILITY AND VULNERABILITY AS A CONDITION OF THE PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

As I have argued, the totalitarian systems rendered in *Kallocain* and *The Employees* disintegrate due to their unwillingness to accept their own fragilities. The World State aims to eradicate its suspected enemies, while the company in *The Employees* attempts, through an interview report, to increase the productivity and efficiency of the spaceship's crew. Both endeavors originate in a desire to achieve complete emotional and intellectual transparency of the individual. In both novels, the plea for a new vision of vulnerability lies in the shadows of totalitarian control. In *Kallocain*, the unique aspect of the desert society is that its members join voluntarily. Within this community, the focus is on the ritualization of the fragile human body, whose mortality is highlighted by the contaminated surroundings of the desert ruins. In *The Employees*, which portrays the alternative vulnerability less explicitly, the reader gets a glimpse of a possible change in the attitude towards mortality. Provocatively, this change is articulated in a post-human framework, an aspect that sets the novel apart from *Kallocain*. Only after the humanoids have acknowledged their vulnerability, a radically different future can emerge.

The reason for the continuing interest in *Kallocain* lies in its focus on the fragile relationship between humans and their natural environment, affirming the novel's status as a predecessor to dystopian, utopian, and ecocritical literature of the 20th century. Most obviously, this is shown in George Orwell's *1984* (1949), but also in experimental science fiction texts, such as Harry Martinson's poem *Aniara* (1956), which relates the story of a spaceship that departs from the war-ravaged Earth and loses the course on its way to Mars. Regardless of its positive notion of humanity, the poem represents a bridge connecting Karin Boye's texts with Olga Ravn's *The Employees*, adding further evidence for the abundant tradition of Scandinavian dystopian and science fiction. In offering a glimpse of radically different futures, readers are asked to participate in imagining a world beyond totalitarianism. Such visions encompass

the start of a new society, throwing the stories' protagonists into unknown, possibly dangerous territories. They invite readers to "keep faith with what offers no guarantee" (Hägglund 2019, 377). After having explored the limitations of the systems that seemed indestructible at first, we can concentrate on building a periphery opposed to the centralizing, oppressive power, however futile it may turn out to be.

NOTES

[1] Among the numerous publications on peace, two notable handbooks can be named: Hampson, Özerdem, and Kent (2020) and Gießmann and Rinke (2011).

[2] Kaewert (2023) and Kempter and Engelbrecht (2021).

[3] Even the thinkers of the Enlightenment were torn on the topic of war. Andres Behnke points out that in Immanuel Kant's discussion of war, there is a clear ambiguity. While he mentioned its strengthening effect on populations, he simultaneously recognized the destruction it wrought on humanity (2012, 251).

[4] Both novels have been examined through an ecocritical lens, as researchers emphasized their shared concern on forging an innovative relationship between humans and non-human entities (Wennerscheid 2023).

[5] Original: "[…] im nicht auflösbaren Bezug zu spezifischen sozialen, kulturellen, historischen und gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhängen und individuellen Erfahrungen […]" (Dederich and Zirfas 2022, 4) Unless otherwise noted, all translations from German, Danish and Swedish are my own.

[6] Considering it laid the groundwork for the classical dystopian genre and the fact, that it was published nine years before George Orwell's *1984* (1949), the international obscurity of Boye's highly influential novel is astonishing (see also Gammelgaard 2023, 436–437).

[7] In the following, I consider the World State an obscure decision-maker that places citizens in a vulnerable position. In doing so, I aim to do justice to Karin Boye's depiction of a highly diffuse political entity that appears unapproachable, and whose structure remains in the dark for the main protagonist Leo Kall.

[8] The name Rissen implies the German word "*Riss*" ("Rupture"). Considering Boye's time spent in Berlin in the 1930s, this wording is hardly a coincidence.

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The terrible within the peaceful: Christoph Ransmayr's *Morbus Kitahara*

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The terrible within the peaceful: Christoph Ransmayr's *Morbus Kitahara*

Christoph Ransmayr. *Morbus Kitahara/The Dog King*. Declaration of peace. Memory. Post-apocalyptic. War. Atomic bomb. Visualization.

Christoph Ransmayr's *Morbus Kitahara* (1995; translated as *The Dog King*, 1997) tells the story of deconstruction, destruction, and despair in a world of eternal peace. The three protagonists Ambras, Bering, and Lily move through a post-apocalyptic landscape where they are constantly reminded of an unnamed past catastrophe and a past war. Despite their attempts to leave their generational guilt behind, the darkness of history catches up with them. This article analyzes how the novel addresses the protagonist's mental and corporeal struggle for survival alongside its gloomy outlook on the prospect of globally enforced eternal peace. However, eternal peace is an ambigous concept and refers to a narrative of oppression in a post-apocalyptic world.

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The desire for eternal world peace in times of war is very urgent, especially today, and fought for by activists of the peace movement. But what if the actual implementation of peace results in anything other than a peaceful state? In his novel *Morbus Kitahara* (1995; Eng. trans. *The Dog King*, 1997), Christoph Ransmayr investigates this question and develops a postwar scenario in which all characters suffer from the ambiguity of peace which ends war but does not overcome the violent condition of life in the nuclear age.

The plot unfolds in a post-apocalyptic setting: After a long war, eternal peace has been attained but the protagonists struggle to survive in the harsh reality that knows neither forgiving nor forgetting. The novel portrays a society shaped by regression instead of progression as atonement. As a consequence, the authorities of Moor, a former spa town, destroy all traces of technical infrastructure and introduce violent practices of remembrance. The so-called "Stellamour's peace plan" (Ransmayr 1997, 30) strives to transport them back in time: "Back! Back, all of you! Back to the Stone Age!" (32), as commanding officer Eliot orders. The three protagonists, Ambras, Bering and Lily, represent different perspectives on how the traumatizing past has influenced the lives of the individuals.

Instead of a historiographical perspective, the following analysis uses concepts of visualization to show how narrative structures of seeing vs. non-seeing are connected to terror, trauma and the post-apocalyptic. It focuses on the struggles of Ambras, Bering and Lily in a world of peace without hope for a better future.

POST-APOCALYPTIC PEACE

It can be argued that *The Dog King* negotiates the relation between fact and fiction by developing an alternative history of the 20th century. It discusses the question of what would have happened if, after World War II, the Morgenthau-Plan had been installed instead of the Marshall-Plan, aimed to destabilize Austria and Germany. Scholarship has drawn parallels between the catastrophe in the novel, one that is never mentioned in detail nor named, and the Holocaust, comparing Moor's former labor camp, located near a quarry with the National Socialists' concentration camp Ebensee in Upper Austria (Graml 2020, 155–158). Ian Foster uses the term "alternative history" for *The Dog King*. His definition relies on Darko Suvin's account, according to which alternative history answers to the necessity for change of the overall history in the fictional world, especially when confronted with severe structural or social problems (Foster 1999, 111). The suggested proximity of the novel to science fiction opens up a new field of discussion in which *The Dog King* can be seen not only in reference to the historical past but also as a literary construct which borrows elements of speculative fiction. Thus, the historiographic background of the terrors of National Socialism provides a starting point for fictional debates on dealing with trauma and the inheritance of guilt. In the novel, memories of an insurmountable past are omnipresent. The impossibility to overcome the past is closely related to the topos of unrepresentability of the Holocaust, which according to Konrad Paul Liessmann is also the novel's main subject (1997, 151). Daniela Henke discusses the novel's use of the sublime in combination with the irrepresentability of the horrors of National

Socialism in the arts. In her study, Henke defines the sublime by reference to Immanuel Kant, Jean-François Lyotard, and Theodor W. Adorno, and detects that historic terror is reflected in Ransmayr's literary account of nature. According to Henke, the author uses narrative strategies to alienate space and time so that the novel fulfils the responsibility to thematize the Holocaust despite the impossibility of representation. The Holocaust is mediated through the counterfactual narrative told by Ambras, one of the protagonists, who was tortured by the past regime and whose background story is related to Jean Améry's concentration camp memoirs. At the same time, the novel does not claim historic accuracy and differentiates between "telling" and "informing", as Henke states (2023, 244, 257, 262–264, 287–289). I agree with Henke's aesthetic remarks but want to develop them further, showing how nature and the protagonists are put in dialogue to visualize the impact of trauma.

While the protagonists' lives demonstrate what could have happened if the course of history went in a different direction, as Klaus R. Scherpe argues, they are still confronted with the consequences of a past that affects both the real world and the fictional post-apocalyptic setting (2002, 165). Since the unnamed catastrophe remains a vague backdrop, the "apocalypse" itself cannot be described as a conclusive event in the past but continues into the present and the future. Christian Zolles, Martin Zolles, and Veronika Wieser define the apocalyptic as a process of relating to a final end (2013, 22). Following these arguments, the unnamed terror in *The Dog King* can be seen as a prototype of the apocalyptic, whereas the main storyline serves as a post-apocalyptic narration of the end of the world, a perpetual state that cannot be overcome. In view of the concept of peace, the post-apocalypse in *The Dog King* focuses on permanent destabilization of society. This is a slow process which is shown in the destruction of infrastructure, in the degeneration of people's values and in their inability to thrive as individuals as well as the concealing visual concept of the illness Morbus Kitahara itself. This term is archaic for *Retinopathia centralis serosa*, a disease that causes visual impairment, such as distorted, dimmed, or blacked-out central vision (Porter 2024).

PATHS THROUGH THE (POST-)APOCALYPTIC SPACE

The novel's main storyline is set in Moor, the hometown of Bering, Ambras and Lily. Moor is depicted as a post-apocalyptic place where the apocalyptic past is still present, as Bering and Ambras face the overlapping realms of their traumas, their physical bodies and the town Moor itself. Bering, who was born on the day of the final bombing of Moor, is described paradoxically as "a child of war [who] knew only peace" (Ransmayr 1997, 5). He represents the generation after the catastrophe and is constantly reminded by the guilt of his ancestors. Ambras, on the other hand, has experienced torture and hate towards his community on his own body. The relationship between him and Bering is more than just one between a boss and his bodyguard but stands for the relation between (the heir of) the perpetrator and the victim of the old regime.

My definition of trauma relies on Saima Nasar's and Gavin Schaffer's account of the term as a "double wound" affecting body and mind over time and space (2020,

1010). The trauma is visible not only in Ambras's body but also shows in the natural environment and politics of Moor:

> Rising above the quarry, mightier than all else that could be seen of the world from Moor, were the mountains. Every rockslide that poured down out of those icy regions to be lost in its own dust, every gorge, every opening on a ravine with its swarm of jackdaws, led deeper into a labyrinth of stone where all light transformed itself into ash-gray shadows and blue shadows and polychrome shadows of inorganic nature. On the wall map at headquarters the name of these mountains, written across its peaks and meandering contour lines, was edged in red: *The Stoney Sea*. Forbidden, inaccessible, all its passes mined, this sea lay between zones of occupation, a bleak no-man's land buried under glaciers. (Ransmayr 1997, 23–24)

The description of Moor as no-man's-land brings colonial language to mind, in fact reversing the supposed laws of progress: instead of "discovering" spaces and filling out white spots, Moor is already marked on maps but is destined to be transformed back into wilderness. The hopelessness caused by the American occupation is mirrored by the landscape: the mountains and the lake, two natural boundaries, enclose Moor. The binary between firm stone on the one side and deep waters on the other side represents the desperation of the protagonists who can never escape the terror, even after leaving their hometown. Significantly, the stony landscape surrounding Moor also acts as backdrop to one of the memory ceremonies, "Stellamour's Party", in which Moor's inhabitants must re-enact scenes from the labor camp dressed up in prison uniforms, carrying papier-mâché stones across a staircase. The metaphor of the stone barrier reappears in various forms and marks a condition of despair: as it is almost impossible to cross "The Stoney Sea", it is also impossible to deal with the trauma, as there are constant reminders of a past that the protagonists are forced to relive. This makes it impossible to tackle issues of responsibility, leaving especially the future generations, Bering and Lily, in total desperation.

Even once they finally move out of Moor, the reference to stone and to stony materiality remains. Another reference to natural obstacles is also shown in the town's name itself, as Moor translates as "swamp", a reference to the possibility of sinking into quicksand. This characterization of the town solely by references to nature depicts a scenario of darkness and terror. The geography and geology of Moor is mirrored in the cultural practices of the harsh conditions of peace.

In this landscape of terror, the three protagonists, Ambras, Bering and Lily, attempt to move forward to find peace within. Ambras, the oldest, has experienced the past terrors and confides his experience to Bering:

> I *was* in the quarry even when I was walking through the rubble of Vienna or Dresden or any of the other harrowed cities of the early Stellamour years. I just needed to hear the din of hammers and chisels somewhere or watch someone climb a staircase with some burden on his back, even just a sack of potatoes – and I was in the quarry. I did not come back. I never left. (Ransmayr 1997, 169)

Ambras's experiences in the camp disrupted his perception of time and space, as he is constantly reminded of what he suffered. Enduring physical pain combined with the surrounding natural and cultural landscape make it impossible for him

to leave the past behind. The materiality of the stony surroundings as well as Moor's gloomy ambiance take a toll on Ambras: while he is trying to leave the past and trauma behind, he gets drawn back to Moor, which has inevitably become a state of mind he can never escape. Time and place become obsolete due to his experiences. History as well as peace are eternally present.

After the war, Ambras is responsible for the town's quarry. Again, the space of stones becomes a central part of his life, although he is no longer an inmate but has control over the workers. Although there are some moments when Ambras does feel empowered, he remains withdrawn from public life for most of the time. Living in the Villa Flora with a pack of wild dogs, he is envied, even feared. The unusual, floral name of the house implies the possibility to thrive, contrasting strongly with the stony surrounding and materialization of the trauma that is manifest in the building's history: once inhabited by a Jewish family who was turned in, the villa was then used by an officer of the regime and later falls into decay. Ambras's decision to move in can therefore be read as a reappropriation of stolen possession of the old regime's victims. "Flora" refers to another side of the botanic, which is the wilderness. This aspect is also highlighted by the pack of dogs that lives with Ambras, the "Dog King", a motif that reappears later in the narrative, as the protagonists move to Patano, Brazil.

Bering's account of history differs from Ambras's since he did not experience those past terrors himself. He represents a new generation after the war but is unaware of what happened exactly. Ambras first introduces him to the camp's gruesome history:

> It had taken a long time for Bering and those like him to realize that not all the unfortunates from the barracks had vanished into the earth or the great brick ovens by the gravel works, but that some of them had escaped to live in the same present, in the same world, as they themselves. Beside the same lake. On the same shore. But once the Dog King and other former zebras, who had exchanged their uniforms for army coats and bomber jackets, assumed positions of responsibility by order of the occupying army and under its protection – and not just at the quarry but also at sugar-beet factories, saltworks, and secretariats – then even those born after the war in the most remote village by the lake were forced to recognize that the past was not past by a long shot. (Ransmayr 1997, 142)

Bering realizes that the past is far from over, and his attempts to live a carefree life, such as his love for Lily, constantly fail. Moreover, he is painfully aware of his parents' psychological decline, for example his father's delusion that he is a soldier at war once again. It can be argued that Bering's trauma is transgenerational as he is confronted with the heritage of guilt and atonement. The prominent barracks are a central and visual reminder of his inherited guilt.

Similar to Ambras, Bering also experiences his trauma through his own body: "His vision, his world had a hole in it" (Ransmayr 1997, 149). His vision deteriorates until he is diagnosed with the retinal eye disease Morbus Kitahara. However, he takes great care that neither Ambras nor Lily find out about his struggle: "But he is – and he still guards this secret as if not just his staying on at the house of dogs but also his life is at stake – he is on the road to darkness" (Ransmayr 1997, 213). The in-

tertextual reference to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) suggests another connection to the (post-)colonial context. In his novel, Conrad thematizes colonial violence and raises the question of how cruelty can be justified vis-à-vis the concept of civilizational progress in the period of the Enlightenment. In a similar vein, Bering interprets his medical condition as a metaphor for Moor. The decaying town, the hostile environment and its traumatized inhabitants provide a path into darkness and despair – where once again terror keeps repeating itself. The spots in Bering's vision can therefore be read as Moor's stony landscape, blocking not only clear vision but a way out of trauma.

Attila Bombitz reads the eclipse of Ambras's vision as an ontological metaphor representing the blindness of both Moor's inhabitants and of the occupiers. According to Bombitz, this relates closely to the end of the world – also in a global sense (2009, 27). As Bering proceeds on his way into darkness, the novel's plot concentrates on vocabulary and themes of the end. The chapter "A Beginning of the End", about halfway through the novel, marks a climax: the post-apocalyptic proliferation of nature and the decay of human infrastructure accelerate. The eclipse of Bering's vision symbolizes the beginning of the end.

While Moor is depicted as a devastating place through the eyes of Ambras and Bering both in a literal and symbolic sense, Lily has a markedly different take on her hometown. She is an ambiguous character who cannot be grasped completely as she is constantly on the move. Even though she belongs to the same generation as Bering, Lily is the only one who is not paralyzed by history, even though her father was a perpetrator of the old regime. Her ability to cross impregnable borders is therefore closely linked to her idea of being able to leave the post-apocalyptic behind and imagine a better future. In contrast to Bering, Lily takes the current conditions for what they are, asserts her independence, and looks out for herself.

The chapter "A Beginning of the End" marks a turning point because the quarry is fully depleted, leaving Moor to become a mere military training camp. While this also opens up new pathways for the protagonists, the chapter addresses how terror condenses: first of all, the use of the indefinite German article *ein* suggests that there are more than just one beginning of the end. Arguably, as different narratives merge into one final ending, this points at the concept of circular time: the chapter is just another beginning of the inevitable end. Second, the chapter marks a period of deterioration in the narrative, which is linked to Bering's unbearable eye-condition. Just before the chapter "A Beginning of the End", the chapter "Eyes Open" informs the reader about the death of Bering's mother. This marks not only the end of Bering's troublesome childhood but initiates another phase of darkness as the protagonist is left alone in his mourning. When leaving the cemetery, Bering sees that "light was still burning in only a few of Moor's windows" (Ransmayr 1997, 211). The impression of darkening not only refers to the grey space of trauma, but also to Bering's eye condition that gets more severe during the novel. The light-dark-contrast is mirrored again in Bering's surroundings, and is brought up in the novel whenever the story reaches a turning point. In "A Beginning of the End", it is the transformation of Moor into a military camp. Third, the quarry's end also has an environmental dimension,

as the ongoing extraction of granite can be read as a tipping point in the barbaric violence against nature – with severe implication for living conditions. Finally, Lily rejects Ambras's proposal to move into "the lowlands" and aspires to leave everything behind: "If it's to be up and away, then let it be farther away. A lot farther" (220). Lily's use of the formula "up and away" which is translated from the German expression "auf und davon" (2017, 277) relates to other texts by Ransmayr that were published after *The Dog King*, for example the novel *Der fliegende Berg* (2006; Eng. trans. *The Flying Mountain*, 2018), or poetological texts like *Geständnisse eines Touristen* (Confessions of a tourist, 2004) as well as "Auf und davon" ("Up and away") in the anthology *Die Verbeugung des Riesen* (A giant takes a bow, 2003), which draw a connection between Ransmayr's enthusiasm for travel and storytelling. However, in *The Dog King* this formula refers to Lily's aspiration for a future beyond the harsh reality of Moor. "Up and away" becomes a perspective which allows the protagonists to imagine a different life far from the traumatizing past. Those expectations, however, remain unfulfilled.

BRAND – CITY OF LIGHTS

The first chance to leave Moor arrives when Bering's father develops mental health problems. Bering and Lily take him to one of Brand's military health institutions. Just as the political and environmental situation is escalating, the individuals' plight becomes unbearable. After a deadly encounter with a gang in the mountains, Bering is overwhelmed when they arrive in Brand:

> Lights, countless lights: the beams of headlights slipping past or crossing one another; fingers of light grasping at the night, then dipping into it to re-emerge at some other point of darkness. Signal flares in red. Flashing lights. Rows, blocks, and floating patterns of illuminated windows. Swarms of sparks! Towers and palaces riddled with light – or were those high-rises? Army bases? Sample books of light, tracks of luminescence stretching to infinity along nocturnal streets and boulevards; runways embroidered with sparks, spiral nebulae. Flowing lights, leaping, flickering, softly glowing, and blue-beaming lights, tangled garlands of light and pulsing lights, barely discernible and as silent as the constellations glistening through the thermal currents and eddies of this summer night. The first thing the travellers to the lowlands saw of Brand was a chaos of light. (Ransmayr 1997, 253)

The chaos of electric light that welcomes Brand's visitors opposes the darkness of Moor as well as the eclipse of Bering's gaze. But the bright-dark-opposition is more than a mere marker of two colliding worlds: soon after arriving in Brand, the two protagonists learn of the nuclear bombing of Nagoya, a Japanese city on the island Honshu. According to Foster's analysis, this narrative anachronism links the alleged Stone Age that was proclaimed by an officer in Moor with the Nuclear Age in Brand by means of a journey through the mountains (Foster 1999, 123). The symbolical parallel between the joyful brightness of the electric lights in Brand and the deadly brightness of nuclear detonation point at global US-American dominance (Landa 1998, 140). There are inhumane costs tied to life in a supposed state of peace. The novel reads:

> Stellamour's army, which for decades had fought alongside ever-changing allies on tangled fronts that crossed every longitude and latitude and had gained the victory and left behind a Peace of Oranienburg here, a Peace of Jerusalem there, a Peace of Mosul of Nha-trang or Kwangju, of Denpasar, Havana, Lubango, Panama, Santiago, and Antananarivo, peaces, peaces everywhere…and in Japan this army had forced even an emperor to his knees and in token of its invincibility had branded a mushroom on the sky above Nagoya. […] And what, except a World Peace, could follow such a war? (Ransmayr 1997, 272–273)

The world in *The Dog King* is a world of eternal peace in which warlike conflicts have come to an end. However, eternal peace does not mean a peaceful environment. Here, peace is enforced by the United States while other forms of petty violence remain in place, which shows in Bering's reliance on a weapon to defend himself at any time. Peace means the dominance of a political regime. In Moor, politics of regression thwart people's self-development and enmesh them in a constant struggle for survival; meanwhile, life in Brand, where US forces live, appears convenient. Brand can be seen, as Bombitz argues, as a counter-world to Moor. While Moor represents defeat, darkness and terror, Brand symbolizes progress, but under its own rules (2009, 26).

The novel questions the ambiguity of peace. It doubts if the declaration of peace is possible without compromise. One could postulate that peace is introduced as an administrative instrument to proclaim the end of all evil and past terror; at the same time, it is also used as a political strategy to gain and extend control. The declaration of world peace appeals to everybody because who would indeed wish for war? Peace as an alternative to war gives hope, yet only testifies to the power of a new regime. As the above quote shows, the new regime defeats all former enemies – in the name of peace. I argue that the declaration of world peace in the novel refers to globalization under the influence of the post-world war USA. Thus, the world peace in *The Dog King* can be read as a critique of prevailing power structures and the desire to control as much territory as possible. However, the authorities remain almost invisible throughout the novel. Apart from Major Elliot, the voices of those responsible are consistently mediated, resembling the surveillance state portrayed in George Orwell's *1984* (1949).

The brutality of how global peace is installed is shown by the atomic bombing. Neglecting the violent act of war, people in Brand celebrate the nuclear cloud as a symbol of eternal peace, disregarding its horrors. Hereby, the idyllic concept of peace unravels, giving away its true function as an ambiguous strategy of power and domination. After all, the new regime is not primarily interested in introducing peace but in implementing control by consolidating a binary of good vs. evil. Brand's brightness offers a tempting promise to the people from Moor: to leave darkness, guilt and atonement behind. Such metaphorical and literal brightness, however, blinds people in order to cover up its ideology. What Bering sees is the chaos of light and brightness which stands in contrast to the common conception of peace.

Brand also seems to open up new opportunities for Bering regarding his impaired vision. The city of lights first seems to outshine his darkened spots providing another light-dark-contrast. Even his mood changes for the first time in the novel to enthu-

siasm, suggesting that light was missing from his life in Moor. This impression is supported by Bering's diagnosis of Morbus Kitahara as a temporary condition, as medical stuff assures him. His distorted vision is described as mushroom clouds reminiscent of Nagoya (Ransmayr 1997, 279–280). As Jutta Landa argues, the bodyscape and landscape coalesce in the novel. She interprets that "the blinding light of the atomic explosion has healing potential, its artificial sun possibly burning away the disease" (1998, 141). Even though Bering's condition is getting better, he – and the people of Brand respectively Moor – are now exposed to a concept of peace which means the elimination of enemies in a very cruel way. The shadows of the past represented by Bering's spots are lifted – the brightness of Brand and the atomic bombs become dazzling, revealing the true meaning of peace in the novel. However, what now lies in the open, in the light, is the unbearable trauma that Bering also realizes while gaining his full vision back.

BRAZIL – A UTOPIAN APOCALYPSE

After Moor is transformed into a military training camp, Ambras, Bering, and Lily migrate to Brazil, where another quarry is to be opened with the help of Moor's relocated extraction infrastructure. This radical relocation promises that people can continue their lives and apply their skills in another space. At first, the move to another continent seems like a dream come true, especially for Lily. In her imagination, the name Brazil "was not just a word on the map in Lily's tower, not just the name of a longing, the name of a country beyond reach, but a goal, and that the trip there was also just a journey from one place to the next, no different from the trip across the lake to the Blind Shore, no different from a trip to Brand" (Ransmayr 1997, 316). Brazil appears to offer a way out of the circular time of terror.

After arriving in Rio de Janeiro, the group is greeted by Muyra who brings them to Ilha do Cão, which translates as "dog island", referring to the Villa Flora, the "house of dogs" of the "dog king" in Moor. The uncanny return of the past is also mirrored in the name of the town where the Brazilian quarry is located: it turns out to be "Pantano", which translates to German as "Moor". Moor and Pantano, two swamps, provide analogous settings in which the protagonists sink into their own past, causing the beginning and the end of the novel to coincide, as Liessmann observes (1997, 157). Muyra explains that the island's name is derived from bloodhounds which used to guard the island's prison. Lily is the only one who can voice the similarities between Pantano and Moor: "What is this here? The lakeside resort at Moor? […] She wants to go to Santos, and is standing in the middle of Moor!" (Ransmayr 1997, 349) As the only protagonist who makes a self-determined decision, she decides to leave for Santos, a pseudo-utopian place that her family wanted to emigrate to.

Toward the end of the novel, the light-dark-correlation becomes especially interesting as its opposition dissolves. During the last chapter, words that imply fire as much as smoke become more frequent. The "pennant of smoke" (346) or "the columns of smoke" (353) seem to shape the atmosphere of Pantano leaving the impression of an unclear and ambiguous mood. However, what makes the ending most gripping is the different semantical conceptions of the smoke. While Ambras is re-

minded of his past as a prison camp inmate, Bering's vision is impaired again. This time it is not his eye condition that keeps him from having a clear view, but the jungle or "Nebelwald" in the German original (Ransmayr 2017, 439), that culminates with another "pennant of smoke" (1997, 354). He projects his impaired vision onto Lily: "Where Lily is, there are always spots. Camouflage spots, blind spots, there is always something to remind him of Moor, of what he has survived" (351). By comparing Lily with the symptoms of his retinal illness, Bering accuses her of blocking his way into a brighter future. This not only refers to Bering's individual relationship struggles as his love for Lily remains unrequited but also to Lily's family history. As the daughter of a perpetrator, she personifies guilt and the impossibility to separate political responsibility from her mourning of a family member – which again leaves an impression of darkness. In a desperate state of mind, Bering tries to shoot Lily to finally leave the dark spots behind and to liberate himself from the past, but he kills Muyra accidentally. Without realizing that he hit the wrong person, he convinces himself that it was just an accident: "He didn't pull the trigger. The rifle kicked at him and bruised his forehead. He doesn't even have to drop the weapon. It leaps from his hands. He didn't do anything" (352). The last sentence represents his generation's attitude toward the past, namely the pretense of innocence and not being responsible for any catastrophic event. It would seem that this narrative repeats the new regime's concept of peace, justifying violence to establish the alleged good. The murder of Muyra (in place of Lily) was an attempt to finally overcome his illness.

After realizing that he murdered a defenseless person, Bering seeks solace with Ambras, who is caught by his past once more. At the "dog island", a former prison, he relives the memories of the labor camp:

> He can smell the ovens. The corpses. […] Anyone who does not shout his number loud enough at roll call can be burning by the evening. – can be smoke dispersed into the night and trickling back down over the camp in the cold of the next morning, falling as soot, black dust, onto columns of workers moving toward the quarry, filling their noses with stench, creeping into their lungs, their eyes, ears, and dreams. […] Are they shooting yet? The shot he hears – is that shot meant for him? He is not afraid. For he is searching for his love, for everything he has missed for so long now – searching where so many lost things get caught. He walks into the fence. (348)

Ambras cannot differentiate between the fog caused by the tropical climate (or the smoke of a nearby bush fire) and the smoke of the concentration camp of his past. His misconception renews his trauma, causing him to commit suicide as the only way out of his misery. Regarding the light-dark-correlation, the fog is a state between total darkness and light which prevents Ambras and Bering from seeing clearly, leading them to a fatal decision. The perimeter of light and dark that were very clear in Brand start to merge and finally resolve in their final fatal fall.

Unaware of Ambras's imagination, Bering takes him to climb up a rocky path to look for Murya. In his delusion, Ambras does not recognize Bering and carries on with his plan. He steps into the supposedly electrified fence, but "[h]e simply steps into emptiness" (355). Since both men are tied to a connecting rope, Bering's dead-

ly plunge drags Ambras with him. While Bering feels as if realizing his childhood dream to fly like a bird, Ambras also seems to be finally free, since he becomes lighter and his trauma disappears.

This ending connects the darkness of the storyline with a conciliatory solution, thereby creating a highly aestheticized finale. In the final scene, in which both beginning and end come together, spatial and temporal peculiarities start to merge. The last chapter directly connects with the novel's opening:

> Two bodies lay blackened in the Brazilian January. A fire that for days now had leapt through an island's wilderness, leaving charred corridors behind, had freed the corpses from a tangle of blossoming lianas and also burned the clothes from their wounds – two men in the shade of an overhanging rock. They lay a few yards apart wrenched to inhuman poses among stumps of ferns. A red rope that bound them together guttered in the embers" (3).

Such circularity not only suggests that history is bound to repeat itself without mercy but goes beyond that. The rope between Ambras and Bering – which should secure them in the rocky areas – turns fatal. It is a symbol of their relationship not only between friends or between a boss and his bodyguard but of the victim and the perpetrator. As Ambras and Bering both die, the binary between guilt and atonement and of past and present/future are dissolved. Furthermore, the rope is described as red – referencing the red thread of fate. The thread, as a common symbol representing various cosmological, biological or social connections, stands for orientation but also affiliation. Furthermore, it symbolizes fate and time – a narrative that is rooted in mythology (Greber 2021, 220). In *The Dog King* the red thread can stand for the close relation between Ambras and Bering, but at the same time, the red stands out from the grey stony surroundings.

The red thread can also be read as a structural or narrative device referring to the "visual" effects of the novel as signal lights: the bright embers at the beginning and the fire at the end of the novel form a frame suggesting a concept of circular time. The novel itself approaches an interesting way of the bright-dark correlation: while Moor depicts a state of despair, where there is no hope for progression, Brand seems to provide possibilities for a carefree future. However, Brand's lights, which translate as "fire", are ambiguous: Beside the artificial lights, the brightness of the bomb of Nagoya represents the devastating results of progression and peace. The fire ("Brand") appears again in Pantano, which can be read as a blend of Moor and Brand as it takes up motifs of both places. Pantano's fire and its different conceptions result in an ambiguous state, where darkness and light cannot be separated anymore. Both Ambras and Bering, are captured by the smoke and fog, making both of them unable to see clearly and to act rationally.

CONCLUSION

Christoph Ransmayr constructs a very complex world which is certainly influenced by history and a reflection on alternative narratives. His highly poetic novel includes reflections on nature, trauma, and coexistence in a postwar society, while at the same time, it criticizes globalization and the disguise of power structures

through the promise of eternal peace. Eternal peace, however, differs quite drastically from utopian or idyllic concepts: As shown in Moor, Brand, and Brazil, peace has a devastating aftertaste. In a great struggle, the authorities install a binary system of good vs. evil, but the novel's aesthetic and stylistic strategies deconstruct those efforts by making the brutality beneath the alleged peace visible. The inevitability of the past links the novel to an apocalyptic narrative: firstly, on a structural level as the end is connected to the beginning; and secondly, time and space keep repeating themselves, as the "house of dogs" reappears as "dog island" and temporal distances dissolve in circular time. Finally, even though the novel oscillates between darkness and brightness, despair dominates: death offers the only way out of the circular time of terror.

The concept of peace is also realized in Ransmayr's aesthetic language of light and darkness: as much as Bering's Morbus Kitahara prevents him from having a clear vision of the vocabulary of smoke, clouds and fire also stand for ambiguity between revealing and concealing the past and the ongoing terror of the present. The terror cannot be overcome as the end and the beginning of the novel coincide. The bodies in the beginning are darkened by the fire, suggesting that if they would not have died before, they might have become victims of the fire, resulting in an ultimate deadly end. The burnt bodies take up the language of brightness and darkness, symbolizing the fatal end that waits inevitably for the protagonists – and, possibly, all civilization in the Nuclear Age. Eternal peace, one could argue, is only achieved and experienced in the final ending, when the loads and clouds of Ambras's and Bering's lives are lifted in their fatal fall.

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The pursuit of harmony: Groups and communities in post-apocalyptic narratives

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The pursuit of harmony: Groups and communities in post-apocalyptic narratives

Apocalypse. Community. Harmony. Post-apocalyptic fiction. Survivors. State of nature.

This article analyzes the challenges faced by survivors within the unforgiving environments of fictional post-apocalyptic worlds as they seek refuge, better living conditions, and the possibility of rebuilding civil society. Grounded in an interdisciplinary framework that merges literary criticism with social contract theory – particularly drawing on the concept of the state of nature – the article examines how the apocalyptic event itself influences the ideology, goals, and behavior of communities of survivors. By focusing on the social dynamics and background of these groups in various post-apocalyptic works, the study elaborates on recent academic literature which highlights harmonious relationships in post-apocalyptic contexts.

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Post-apocalyptic narratives, where conventional social structures no longer exist, create a unique setting for the formation and development of novel relationships among people. This potential has been explored in a number of scholarly works, with authors analyzing the potential for harmonious relations in the post-apocalyptic setting from specific theoretical perspectives. In her ecocritical study, Lidia María Cuadrado Payeras (2021) introduces the concept of "eco resilience" to examine nature's agency within contemporary Canadian apocalyptic fiction. Similarly, Andreas Nyström (2021), drawing on spatial theory, investigates the *haven* trope in stories about nomadic survivors seeking a physical refuge to escape the fear that follows them. José Duarte (2015) identifies a hopeful undertone in post-apocalyptic movies. On a similar note, road, a symbol deeply embedded in American culture, represents not only a dystopian landscape marked by violence and fragmentation, but also the promise of a new beginning. These studies illustrate a recent tendency to hint at subtly constructed instances of harmony among diverse entities in post-apocalyptic narratives, even as such stories mainly foreground the harsh consequences and challenges arising from societal collapse. Relationships defined by mutual understanding and coexistence emerge across multiple dimensions: between survivors and the drastically transformed environment, among the individuals, within communities of survivors and between the communities that emerged from the apocalypse. In gloomy portrayals of a post-apocalyptic world, however, survivors are often isolated from harmonious relations and are solely motivated by a desire to survive.

This article elaborates on the fragmented examination of relationships established in the aftermath of apocalyptic events, with a particular focus on the dynamics within and among survivor groups and communities that arise in fictional post-apocalyptic contexts. Here, the catastrophic event itself acts as a factor that shapes the identity of the groups of survivors, the goals which the groups strive to achieve, and the strategies they employ to navigate a hostile, resource-depleted environment. The discussion is grounded in the theoretical framework of the state of nature, a term of political and social contract theory which refers to the existence of people without an overseeing authority and which is often implemented in post-apocalyptic fiction. The argument is rooted in Claire P. Curtis's book *Postapocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract* (2010), in which she addresses the human fascination with the end-of-the-world narratives, blending literary criticism with political theory Curtis reconceptualizes the model of social contract as a tool to interpret the "elusive significance of human security and vulnerability" (Davis 2010) in a post-apocalyptic setting. In this spirit, the present analysis extracts and employs the concept of the state of nature from social contract theory to gain interdisciplinary insight into the dynamic interactions and harmonious relationships that emerge within and across communities of survivors, as well as in their engagement with the altered post-apocalyptic landscape.

Post-apocalyptic narratives have periodically reappeared throughout different historical eras, reflecting their societal anxieties toward technological advancements. In the first half of the 20th century, the depiction of post-apocalyptic sce-

narios, though scarce, echoed the emerging anxieties of technological misuse and global conflict in the wake of both world wars. Literary works such as Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* (1912) or Stephen Vincent Benét's *By the Waters of Babylon* (1937) highlighted the likelihood of human extinction in the light of imperialistic ambitions and advancing technological warfare. In the later decades of the 20th century, the context shifted dramatically. Post-apocalyptic fiction came about as a response to the growing awareness of environmental degradation and the prospect of nuclear annihilation during the Cold War. *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959) by Walter M. Miller Jr. and Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957), among other post-apocalyptic works of the 1950s, address the problem of historical recurrence in the face of a devastating nuclear war, exploring the enduring search for meaning among the ruins of a collapsed civilization. In the present day, the resurgence of the post-apocalyptic genre often mirrors global concerns surrounding climate change, continuous technological development, and pandemics. Fluctuating between civilizational restoration and destruction, post-apocalyptic narratives may reflect contemporary concerns about the sustainability of human progress and the ethical use of technology.

The present article compiles a multimedia corpus to analyze the dynamics of communities of survivors in post-apocalyptic settings. It begins by examining the influence of the cataclysmic event on the ideologies and behavioral traits of survivors, with an initial focus on the video game *Fallout* (1997–) and *The Walking Dead* (both as comic book series [2003–2019] and television series [2010–2022]). Subsequently, Stephen King's *The Stand* (1978) and Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014) are used to illustrate how the catastrophic event is simply one of the elements which affect the ideology and social structure of the groups. The second section of the article is devoted to Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006). The analysis of *The Road* centers on the survivors' elusive and shifting understanding of refuge, suggesting that in post-apocalyptic narratives, the idea of a safe haven may surpass physical, tangible locations and lack a precise definition.

DEFINING THE (POST-)APOCALYPSE

The term "apocalypse" has a range of connotations, from historical and theological meanings to contemporary predictions of global devastation. In contrast to the Greek word *apokálypsis*, meaning "revelation" or "disclosure", the modern understanding of the word is strongly influenced by popular culture, which narrows down the meaning of "apocalypse" solely to the devastating cataclysmic event that causes *the end of the world as we know it*, as the popular formula suggests (Rawles 2009). Narratives within the apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic genre may delve into the events preceding the apocalypse while critically illustrating how these catastrophic events contribute to the human impact on Earth's ecosystems (Baysal 2021; Ginn 2015). They may also examine the aftermath of such an event, typically by portraying survivors who have to adapt to the environment inevitably changed by the apocalypse.[1] Given that this concept *reveals* and *discloses* life in a world devoid of social, cultural, legal, economic, and moral norms, it can be argued that the narratives of contemporary post-apocalyptic fiction reflect the theological roots of the term (Yar 2015, 7). Such stories reveal

the fundamental character of humans (which might have been hidden until then), since the survivors are compelled to exist in a state of constant emergency and fear, evoking the Hobbesian notion of the state of nature.

The post-apocalyptic genre is frequently praised for its didactic potential (Curtis 2010; Mannix 1992; Wagar 1982), indicating that certain actions must be avoided to guarantee survival (or, better yet, to completely prevent the occurrence of a given cataclysmic event), while other actions are necessary for the very same reason; this approach ensures the survivors' future livelihoods, requiring them to carefully evaluate how to reach a more peaceful state than they currently find themselves in.

The exploration of harmonious relations within post-apocalyptic narratives, as mentioned previously, offers a fresh perspective to a genre traditionally dominated by stories of despair and destruction. Their sole focus on the fortitude of the human spirit, even in the most challenging circumstances, expands the genre's emotional and thematic range. Nevertheless, while the emphasis on hope and rebuilding brings an optimistic counterpoint to otherwise bleak stories, it does not fully encompass the post-apocalyptic condition. By focusing primarily on positive outcomes, there is a risk of underrepresenting the severity and permanence of the chaos that, as one can assume, would realistically characterize life after a cataclysmic event. The portrayal of terror and violence in the post-apocalyptic landscape has been of interest to many analyses, with critics praising fiction's ability to portray a devastated world and still retain its expressive qualities. According to Susan Sontag, film works that depict the total collapse of modern civilization follow "an aesthetics of destruction" (2013, 162) that evokes a sense of allure. As noted by Peter Yoonsuk Paik, such narratives flesh out an expansive range of horrors to offer a plausible, realistic idea of a transformed, post-apocalyptic world (2010, 22). Debbie Olson (2015) expands on both Sontag's and Paik's assertions, suggesting that to depict a violent post-apocalyptic landscape conveys the survivors' (often ultimately unsuccessful) struggle to either endure or recover what was lost in the wake of the apocalypse; in addition, Olson states that post-apocalyptic fiction induces a form of nostalgia in the reader by depicting a devastated landscape stripped off contemporary benefits and conveniences. Although the pre-apocalyptic world is not short of social issues – including the ones shared with its post-apocalyptic counterpart – the survivors still tend to romanticize such shortcomings and indulge in retrospection. The intensity of this nostalgia directly corresponds with the severity of the circumstances that survivors encounter. In a different piece, Olson (2015) also argues that children depicted in post-apocalyptic fiction express both extreme nostalgia for the past and, at the same time, an optimistic outlook for the future.

Sontag, Paik, and Olson acknowledge the devastating impact of apocalyptic events, particularly the destruction of the environment and the disintegration of social structures; in such heavily affected landscapes, survival becomes a challenging task. Scholars also contend that post-apocalyptic settings expose true human character, as survivors are prompted to act spontaneously and impulsively. The idea that the apocalypse is capable of revealing hidden realities leads back to its theological meaning; in an environment where moral principles are scarce, one's actions reflect

their true selves. Exposure to a lawless world causes the individual to reveal their core values, the nature of social relationships, and people's primary goals, including the great lengths to which they might go to attain them. A question arises as to why such essential truths about human behavior, actions, and objectives were not revealed in pre-apocalyptic society. What social constructs or norms were in place that kept such realities hidden?

LIVING IN HARMONY IN THE STATE OF NATURE

The characteristics of groups and communities, the influence of an apocalyptic event on their behavior, and the desire to achieve peace are all part of post-apocalyptic stories, usually paired with the survivors' struggle in a world overwhelmed by violence and terror. A considerable portion of this aggression can be attributed directly to the apocalyptic events themselves, especially when they result in the widespread destruction of the Earth's ecosystem. Another critical factor that contributes to post-apocalyptic violence is human behavior itself (Moon 2014, 192). Authors of post-apocalyptic fiction frequently utilize the cataclysmic event as a means to erase all traces of organized society – including infrastructure, healthcare, or governmental bodies – only to create a power vacuum where violence and terror can thrive, unrestricted by laws or social norms. Acts of cruelty become central themes, reflecting the raw human nature in the absence of legal or moral constraints. These fictional narratives resemble philosophical inquiries into the state of nature, a notion that contemplates the hypothetical behavior of individuals in the absence of structured social order. In this vein, Paul Williams notes that the post-apocalyptic landscape "mirrors the pre-colonial and 'pre-civilized' world" and that "[b]oth spaces are positioned outside human civilization, either awaiting its imprint or the result of its self-destruction" (2005, 304). While philosophers have speculated on human life before the formation of civil societies, post-apocalyptic narratives explore these themes in the context of their collapse. Furthermore, the concept of the state of nature explores how organized societies could possibly emerge from basic, primitive conditions; post-apocalyptic fiction provides a perspective on the development of groups and communities from such beginnings.

Thomas Hobbes' seminal treatise *Leviathan* (1651) posits that in the state of nature, where there are no natural inequalities among humans, no individual has significant power over another, which leads to a life filled with violence (2017, 96). Hobbes claims that the lack of a governing authority results in perpetual conflict (Thivet 2008). This view was met with criticism by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. His *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (*Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, 1755) argues that Hobbes misinterpreted the behavior of individuals because he based his view on those who were already deformed by the ills of civil society. According to Rousseau, it was the impact of civilization on an individual that led Hobbes to envision the inherent wickedness of humans in a world devoid of rules or authorities. The philosophical investigation into the state of nature and its representation in post-apocalyptic literature has been discussed in several recent works (Curtis 2010; Duncan 2018; Kolpin 2014; Okung-

bowa 2019), which illustrate an ongoing discourse between political theory, social anthropology, and literary criticism. Such studies demonstrate how the post-apocalyptic landscape provides a unique framework for analyzing the raw, unmediated conditions of humanity stripped of its social structures.

How can survivors transition from a state of nature to the rebuilding of civilization under such harsh circumstances? According to Rousseau, humans, in their original state, embody the archetype of the noble savage, as they are peaceful and inherently good. In theory, the destruction of civilization following an apocalyptic event offers the opportunity for a return to this primordial state of happiness, unaffected by the injustices and corruption that Rousseau attributes to civil societies. Hobbes, on the other hand, perceives the state of nature along the seminal formula of *bellum omnium contra omnes* ("war of all against all"), where the absence of authority ensures that there is constant fear among all individuals and the constant threat of violent death. Hobbes contends that in order to escape this hopeless state, a civil state must be established through a social contract; according to this mode of thought, rebuilding civilization after collapse is not only advantageous but also necessary to bring safety and order back. Post-apocalyptic fiction more often than not conforms to Hobbes' view that civilization is essential for reducing the drastic consequences of social collapse rather than Rousseau's idealized portrayal of pre-social humanity. The crucial element thus lies in establishing a social contract, in which individuals within a group consent to unite under shared rules, laws, and moral principles – a fundamental step towards rebuilding what was lost in the wake of the apocalypse. The social contract also represents the initiative of a governing body to maintain control over individuals, ensuring that the authorities possess the means to enforce rules and manage society effectively, which is essential for the stabilization and restoration of civil order. While post-apocalyptic works may embrace the ideals of communities and their motivation to renew civil society (as opposed to solely focusing on their struggle to survive), they are still set in a lawless setting. The shift towards civil society is supported by the model of the social contract, in which individuals gain a certain degree of protection or rights in exchange for surrendering some of their freedoms (Curtis 2010, 9–10).

The discourse on eternal peace – spanning political theory, international relations, and sociology – offers guidelines and strategies from influential thinkers; it is believed that following these instructions will pave the way to achieving peace. Immanuel Kant, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, or, more recently, Immanuel Wallerstein have proposed specific steps towards achieving this objective. The overarching goal of their strategies is to create an equilibrium that, if disrupted, endangers peace efforts. For Kant (1795), this balance involves the synergy of republican governance, a federation of free states, cosmopolitan rights, and gradual disarmament. Meanwhile, Rousseau (1782) emphasizes the harmony between a political authority and the public that endorses it, which in turn creates a social framework where legal and moral practices support peace. According to Wallerstein (2004), the key to preventing wars is achieving a balance in the distribution of power and resources on a global scale. The pursuit of equilibrium – defined by distinct steps that aim

for harmony – first requires the cultivation of harmony between individuals, communities, and their surroundings. Only after the interdependent entities establish compatible relationships can the resulting harmony make way for the emergence of peace. Therefore, peace does not merely rise as a goal that is directed at higher levels of governance; it develops organically as a result through the collaborative and harmonious actions of social entities, both on an individual and group level.

Applied to a post-apocalyptic setting, this line of thought indicates that it takes more than to form strong interpersonal relationships and communal bonds to achieve harmonious balance. It involves a wider range of alignments, such as harmony between survivors and nature or between individuals and particular ideologies shaped by the catastrophic events. Forming groups can greatly improve the capacity to accomplish its members' goals, as harmony within these groups and between them and their environment, or in their dedication to a shared ideology, enhances their effectiveness. Nevertheless, a harmonious state can only facilitate peace as long as it extends inclusively across all segments of society and integrates external considerations – whether economic, environmental, or governmental – as well. The exclusion of any of these considerations disrupts the equilibrium and makes peace unattainable. For instance, a group of survivors may seek to achieve harmony in a drastically altered environment, perceiving the new state of nature as superior to the pre-apocalyptic world. The harmonious relationship of a specific group with the transformed environment may be advantageous and beneficial; however, if other communities resist the transformation of the environment and, instead, work to reinstate the pre-apocalyptic social structures, the pursuit of harmony by one group, guided by an ideology that is in contrast with others, can lead to a conflict.

In the view of such a conflict of interests, J. Derek Lomas and Haian Xue emphasize that harmony poses a considerable conundrum (2022, 10); accordingly, harmony aims for sameness and is, therefore, "morally suspect" (7) because it marginalizes the spectrum of human diversity. Instead of perceiving differences as incompatible, the focus should be on combining diverse elements in a manner so that "both the parts and the whole are mutually strengthened. Harmony is a theory of fitness – describing the fitting of parts with each other and their fitness within a whole" (6). The concept of harmony encompasses multiple levels, including individual, communal, economic, and environmental aspects. In this vein, post-apocalyptic works that tell of hope amidst destruction explore a complex harmonious relationship between humans and nature; the works may further criticize the alienation of humans from the natural world or highlight the strengthening of this relationship following the cataclysmic event. Post-apocalyptic stories about survivors who strive for a return to cosmopolitan life may illustrate the need for harmony among individuals (Drake 2018). Furthermore, the portrait of post-apocalyptic terror and violence may emphasize the significance of remaining in harmony with the moral principles of the pre-apocalyptic world. These narratives advance numerous ways of interpreting the pursuit of harmony; each story offers a unique perspective on how survivors handle the challenges of their new reality.

APOCALYPSE AS THE SHAPING FACTOR

There is a direct and discernible connection between the type of apocalyptic event that ends the old world and the ideological and behavioral characteristics displayed by the post-apocalyptic groups or communities that form in its shadow. In the *Fallout* videogame series (1997–), the religious movement "The Church of the Children of Atom" emerges in the aftermath of a global thermonuclear war between the US and China. The movement's followers hold the atom, visually represented by nuclear weapons, in the same regard as a god. The survivors have found refuge in the ruins of Washington, D. C.; at the center of the wasteland lies an undetonated atomic bomb, which they consider sacred. According to existing scholarship, the worship of atomic energy does not represent a religious, post-apocalyptic tradition in itself, but is a testimony to the immense trauma of the nuclear holocaust that the individuals experienced (de Wildt et al. 2018, 6). Nevertheless, the presence of an undetonated bomb positioned in a landscape ravaged by nuclear destruction takes on a divine significance for the cult's members. Gregory B. Sadler identifies religious communities, along with families, gangs, or clans, as groups in which mutual cooperation, authority, and rules come together to forge bonds among members, resulting in relatively stable and peaceful coexistence (2010, 9). "The Church of the Children of Atom" exemplifies such a community, as it embodies a hierarchical, cult-like structure. At the top of this hierarchy stands a prophet who issues commands and has control over others. Since the group considers atomic energy and radiation as divine gifts – regardless of their adverse effects – their bond of faith guarantees that the members typically refrain from aggressive behavior towards other survivors and rather commit themselves to worship alone.

However, the impact of an apocalyptic event shapes not only the ideologies but also the behavioral characteristics of individuals, which may reflect their ability to adapt to the altered environment around them. *The Walking Dead*, as both a television (2010–2022) and comic book series (Kirkman, Moore, and Adlard 2003–2019), centers around the struggles of survivors in a zombie apocalypse, effectively demonstrating the adaptation of survivors to a transformed landscape. Zombies, referred to as "Walkers", constantly chase after living humans, who they identify by scent and hearing. One of the antagonistic groups, "the Whisperers", manages to blend in with the Walkers by wearing skin suits and communicating in a low voice (Venable 2022). In addition to the ideological principles observed by "The Church of the Children of Atom", the Whisperers' community is also shaped by behavioral practices.

Having established a group hierarchy similar to that of a wolf pack, the Whisperers exhibit hostility towards other survivors (non-members) and continuously make an effort to maintain the natural order, even at the expense of eliminating any sign of a civilized human community. Graeme J. Wilson highlights a notable shift in zombie narratives; while early portraits of zombie apocalypses related the undead to a colonial discourse, depicting them as dangerous, irrational beings, recent zombie fiction subtly reflects Western tropes, mainly individualism and conservatism, within the groups of survivors (2019, 41). Although the Whisperers defy conservative symbols, they do possess non-interventionist tendencies, as they purposefully refrain

from engaging in conversation and interaction with other groups of survivors. Although the Whisperers' avoidance of direct conflict might imply that they are a group working towards achieving peace, this is not the case. While they coexist in harmony with their environment, including the Walkers, and thrive in the primitive state of nature, the other groups do not share this harmonious relationship with their surroundings, which leads to the emergence of tensions and hostilities. The Whisperers also frequently and deliberately encounter life-threatening situations when blending in with a horde of zombies. Yet, their goal is merely to survive without establishing any form of organized community.

Alpha, the leader of the Whisperers, asserts that the group lives in harmony with nature, which entails recognizing zombies as part of the fauna. The Whisperers not only tolerate the Walkers, but also use them to their advantage. Disguised as zombies, they steer a massive horde of Walkers to demonstrate their power to other groups of survivors. Their prioritization of maintaining the current state of nature and staying in harmony with their surroundings rather than returning to pre-apocalyptic norms leads to actions that harm survivors outside their community. In this case, harmony trumps peace.

Although there is a link between the essence of apocalypse and the subsequent actions and ideologies of the groups that emerge in its wake, there are more contributing factors which predetermine their characteristics. Stephen King's *The Stand* (1978) and Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014) both explore the aftermath of a deadly pandemic that wipes out a vast majority of the world's population. There are, however, significant differences in the way survivors think and act in these novels. In *The Stand*, the devastated US becomes a battleground for the struggle between factions, thus representing binary concepts of good and evil. The character of Randall Flagg, personifying pure vice, creates a society based on tyranny and control. This community is an antithesis to the "Boulder Free Zone", which, despite the moral transgressions of some of its members, strives to become the bedrock of renewed civilization. The antagonism between Flagg's community and the "Boulder Free Zone" corresponds to Brettwag Samuel Stifflemire's notion of a dichotomy that naturally arises between opposing groups in post-apocalyptic works (2017, 246). The basis for this division stems from the fundamentally conflicting moral principles that each group adheres to. In contrast, the novel *Station Eleven* depicts a post-apocalyptic landscape that is less hostile; it follows the "Traveling Symphony", a group of actors and musicians who journey through the Great Lakes region, performing Shakespeare's plays and classical music. Their mission – to preserve art in a desolated world – greatly differs from the survivalist mentality in *The Stand* even though both novels narrate the same type of a cataclysmic event.

The difference between King's and Mandel's stories boils down to the former's desire to write epic fantasy reminiscent of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955) set in contemporary America; in *The Stand*, the deadly superflu virus causes the immediate breakdown of civil society, spurring chaos and oppression. *Station Eleven*, on the other hand, depicts a post-apocalyptic world with less violence due to the pandemic seeming to have a less drastic effect on culture and human relation-

ships. This allows the nomadic actors and musicians to bring hope through their performances, which would be hardly possible in King's harsh and chaotic America. Graham Wolfe describes Mandel's novel as theater fiction rather than strictly post-apocalyptic (2022), which reflects the novel's interest in showing the lasting connection of humans with art, as opposed to *The Stand*'s focus on the conflict between civilized people and terror. Therefore, in addition to the essence of the apocalyptic event, it is also the magnitude of its impact on the world – including the environment, society, individuals, or culture – that predetermines the attributes of post-apocalyptic factions. As shown in the case of a devastating pandemic, its severity has a direct influence on how the formed communities act and behave.

APOCALYPSE NOW, PEACE TOMORROW

Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* features a unique depiction of maintaining moral values in the face of survival challenges. Unlike previous narratives where larger groups seek harmony, the protagonists in McCarthy's novel are a small family unit, which enhances the intimate theme and hardships they confront. The unforgiving environment prevents the survivors from settling in one location, in contrast to the relatively spatial stability granted to communities in previously mentioned works. *The Road* follows the bleak journey of an unnamed father and his son as they journey through a devastated, ash-covered North America, a few years after an unnamed apocalyptic event. The novel effectively captures the anxieties concerning an imminent threat to Western civilization after the tragic events of the September 11 attacks (Hicks 2016, 83), depicting a pervasive sense of grave danger that the protagonists need to repeatedly confront. Through a series of flashbacks, the narrative briefly touches on life before and shortly after the disaster, including the pregnancy of the son's mother. Their journey is a quest to reach "the coast", where the father hopes to survive the next winter. Hoping to find a place that is more hospitable, they follow deserted country roads while hiding from marauders and cannibals, scavenging for food and medicine. In the recurring conversations between father and son ([2006] 2009, 5, 24, 35, 92), the coast represents a potentially safe haven, a location that may be less savage and vicious than the circumstances which they currently find themselves in. Despite the father's remaining doubts about their destination, he recognizes the hope to be a driving force that helps them endure the challenges along the way. At the end of the novel, the freshly orphaned boy is approached by a man (172), who, armed with a shotgun, invites the boy to join him. Skeptical, the boy wonders if the man is "carrying the fire", a phrase not only representing the hope and righteousness of Western civilization (Hicks 2016, 79) but also a common trope in post-apocalyptic narratives that depict the heroic acts of survivors. After finding out that the man has two children with him (indicating that they were not killed to serve as nutrition), the boy choses to trust the man and joins their group.

Phillip A. Snyder interprets the ending of *The Road* as a continuation of the legacy of "carrying the fire" (2008, 84). McCarthy closes the story without departing from the raw tone that is consistent throughout the entire narrative; his style emphasizes

a bleak and unfiltered view of reality, where brief moments of hope and humanity are overshadowed by the relentless danger and brutality. Towards the end of the novel, the father and the boy fail at finding better living conditions, as the town they reach is inhabited by hostile survivors who injure the father mortally. Yet, the encounter between the boy and the unknown man suggests that striving towards a harmonious state – the driving force behind father and son's journey – was not interrupted. The boy finds a new footing in a family of survivors, who embody the hope and moral principles his father taught him, and who did not give in to inhuman, primitive practices despite the harsh realities of their world. John Kloosterman views this new group as a reflection of the father's skepticism and isolationist tendencies, a precursor to a future focused on familial bonds rather than the rebirth of society (2015, 9). Therefore, while the father and the boy do not discover a tangible shelter in the shape of a secure community, the novel implies that such a sanctuary does not necessarily have to be physical. The dire consequences of the apocalyptic event prompt the survivors to continuously seek peace. In the bleak and barren world that McCarthy populates with cannibals, thieves, and marauders, any form of harmonious living, such as discovering safe bunkers, food shelters, or meeting other survivors who mean no harm, can only be temporary. To maintain such states of peace for a longer period of time, the survivors must persistently seek them and stay on the move.

Throughout the novel, the father and the boy also experience moments of joy; nevertheless, it would be an exaggeration to regard these moments as peaceful. Rather, they momentarily lift the main protagonists from their grim circumstances and grant them a brief distraction from the constant struggle for survival. One of such moments occurs when the father crafts a flute for the boy:

> The father carved the boy a flute from a piece of roadside cane and he took it from his coat and gave it to him. The boy took it wordlessly. After a while he fell back and after a while the man could hear him playing. A formless music for the age to come. Or perhaps the last music on earth called up from out of the ashes of its ruin. (McCarthy [2006] 2009, 45)

The father not only gives the boy a flute to distract him but also seeks to provide him with a connection to the values and virtues of the old world. The father is successful as his son, while playing the flute, is "lost in concentration" (45). Yet such moments are only transient; as the story progresses, when the father asks about the flute, the boy declares that he "threw it away" (94), only to point out that such temporary distractions cannot truly distract from the oppressive reality of the post-apocalyptic setting. This scene also demonstrates how the father and the boy's need to be constantly on the move prevents them from fixating on any non-survival activity for too long, arguably the precondition to develop a minimal degree of cultural life. Another instance of a momentary distraction indicates the obstacles the father must overcome to achieve a harmonious state. As the father-son duo wanders through the woods near a river, they come across morel mushrooms and camp by the river. Yet the father understands that what drew them to this site could also draw other, potentially hostile survivors to the same spot, which would possibly entail a violent confrontation. Furthermore, the worsening weather conditions prompt the father to decline the boy's request to spend an additional day by the waterfall.

We could stay one more day.
It's not safe.
Well maybe we could find some other place on the river.
We have to keep moving. We have to keep heading south. (24)

The father's isolationist tendencies compel him to remain on the move, avoiding prolonged stays in one location in order to avoid hostile encounters. As Claire P. Curtis observes, "[s]ecurity, which is essentially absent, can only be glimpsed in continuing to move down the road, in the luck of a found cache of food, or the discovery of a cistern of water untouched by the ever present ash" (2010, 25). The dialogue between the father and the boy – related by an omniscient narrator – reveals the former's thought process in evading danger and seeking safety. In the post-apocalyptic world of *The Road*, safety, relative comfort, and food resources are the essential aspects that cause the survivors to regard a certain location as a peaceful refuge appropriate for settling. However, when determining whether a location is suitable, the father does not consider only these factors; he also assesses the potential appeal of the location for other survivors. A paradox arises: if a place seems too ideal, the father avoids it, as others might find it attractive and decide to occupy it as well. For this reason, the father-son duo avoids locations that are roadside or easily accessible.

While the hope for finding the ideal refuge – according to the father's overprotective requirements – might appear utopian, the protagonists find solace in places and situations that meet even just one or a few of the criteria. Nevertheless, McCarthy's novel does feature a single instance of genuine sanctuary, a small underground bunker, which illustrates the dynamic nature of peace (Hicks 2016, 86), which the survivors struggle to achieve. The moment when the father and the boy discover the hidden bunker filled with supplies marks a rare pause in their continuous journey. This discovery presents them with an opportunity to experience both physical and psychological solace, diverging from their pursuit of safety without ever truly reaching it. Driven by desperation, exhaustion, and the acute pressure of dwindling supplies, the father discovers the bunker. As he walks across the lawn of a deserted house in a devastated town, he contemplates their dire situation and decides to deviate from his usual course of action:

How many days to death? Ten? Not so many more than that. He couldn't think. Why had he stopped? He turned and looked down at the grass. He walked back. Testing the ground with his feet. He stopped and turned again. Then he went back to the shed. He returned with a garden spade and in the place where he'd stood he chucked the blade into the ground. (78)

Remarkably, the father finds the physical shelter only after he decides to stop moving and pursuing the elusive idea of such a refuge. Hidden underground, the bunker is stocked with all the necessary provisions (81), bearing the strongest resemblance to a peaceful refuge described in the novel. Although meeting many requirements for a safe haven, the father insists that they can only stay in the bunker for a few days. Andreas Nyström explains this decision by interpreting the underground sanctuary as a Foucauldian heterotopia, marking a spatial turn from mind to body and from time to space:

> [T]he bunker in *The Road* vacillates between a safe place of rest and a dead end: the haven can potentially be turned into a dark underground cellar where marauding cannibals might easily trap the man and his boy. As such, it can be read as a heterotopian mirror in which the man sees the utopian promises of a place of true rest, but since the utopian impulses of the bunker hinge on the existence of a vanished world, it simultaneously reflects a place of death – a grave (2021, 73–74).

Elaborating on Nyström's perception of the bunker as a grave (both in metaphorical and very possibly literal sense), the unfavorable post-apocalyptic setting compels all survivors to maintain constant vigilance; therefore, staying in the bunker is detrimental in the father's view. If moving down south towards the coast works to the protagonists' advantage – that is, their survival – then stopping is akin to giving up the will to survive and surrendering to the post-apocalyptic horrors.[2] The phrase "carrying the fire", the father's mantra, encapsulates the need to preserve moral values and sustain hope even in uncertain times. It implies that in order to survive, one must remain on the move, as if the chaos and violence of the world are always one step away, waiting to catch up. This continuous movement is both a physical tactic and a metaphor for the ongoing struggle against the decline of moral values. The father and the boy's journey is a paradox: in order to find harmony, one must avoid safe locations.

The Road is a specific example of a post-apocalyptic work that focuses on the importance of a family's ability to survive in a barren world. The novel depicts several groups of survivors, but it is only the family unit that, although not thriving, does manage to endure the challenges surrounding it. In the post-apocalyptic setting, every individual has to face the terrible consequences of the cataclysmic event, but it is the "good guys" – as McCarthy terms them – who must display extra vigilance over the threats posed by marauders, cannibals, and road agents. Compared to the protagonists, the antagonistic groups in *The Road* face fewer difficulties when dealing with the apocalyptic aftermath. What is it that distinguishes these two factions, and on what basis can the groups in the novel be categorized as either good or bad? Moreover, what criteria, for example, does the boy rely on to classify the family group he encounters at the end of the novel as "good guys"? In this regard, moral principles play a major role and also explain why life in a post-apocalyptic setting is more challenging when adhering to "good guy" norms. Given that the state of nature allows for behaviors that would be considered immoral or illegal in a pre-apocalyptic society, maintaining moral integrity entails greater challenges. It is much simpler to pursue one's goal – that is, survival and sustenance – in a lawless environment without regard to ethics, for example by imprisoning people to ensure a steady supply of nutrition. The relatively minor struggles faced by the antagonistic groups in *The Road* should not hide the fact that their objectives further accelerate the prevailing terror and violence. Likewise, the tougher challenges encountered by the father and the boy should not compromise the profound virtue of their goal: to reach a safe haven and survive the surrounding chaos and brutality, all while maintaining their humanity and civility.

CONCLUSION

Post-apocalyptic fiction presents a variety of goals that groups of survivors aim to achieve. This includes the ambition to harm others' existence and endeavors that unite survivors for a better future. Striving for peace without harmonious relationships between individuals and groups is pointless, since the post-apocalyptic setting is hostile to all forms of life as well as to the very fabric of civil society. Cataclysmic events fundamentally reshape social norms and the goals of survivors, which leads to the formation of communities with particular ideologies. The motivations of the groups and the behavior of their members are not only responses to the power vacuum or the absence of civilization, but they are significantly influenced by the type and scale of the apocalyptic event itself. This forces individuals to form groups by shaping their core identities, beliefs, objectives, and ways of life. Nevertheless, reaching a harmonious state is a foundational step towards achieving peace. Post-apocalyptic narratives emphasize that harmony needs to be extended to all segments of society to establish an equilibrium; without harmonious relationships, the balance is endangered, and conflicts emerge.

The post-apocalyptic genre frequently reflects a Hobbesian state of nature as it depicts the necessity for organized communities with distinct authority and rules. Such organization is vital for survival; individuals sacrifice some independence in return for the semblance of security and social order; however, to achieve lasting peace requires that the notion of harmony is not isolated. The establishment of groups in the wake of the apocalypse does not nullify the present state of nature. Instead, it allows members – whether they form part of religious cults, familial units, warring factions, or peaceful communities – to rely on the group's established moral norms, rules, and authority for security. This provides survivors with a degree of safety in an otherwise cruel and ravaged world. Nonetheless, the essence of the goals they pursue is often futile. While post-apocalyptic fiction may depict survivors who find peace within specific spatial and temporal confines, such as physical shelters, it may also portray characters who, struggling with constant challenges, are compelled to lead a nomadic life and endlessly search for peaceful refuge.

Through the lens of social contract theory, post-apocalyptic fiction thus offers insights into survivors' pursuit of harmony and the importance of an organized community that enables its members to achieve desired goals. This perspective suggests that the father's excessively vigilant, almost paranoid behavior in *The Road* prevents him and his son from finding stable and permanent refuge. Immediately following the apocalyptic event, survivors find themselves freed from any laws or rules but their own. At the same time, the very same freedom leaves them exposed to the ever-present fear of violence. This vulnerable state causes individuals to form organized groups and select a new arbiter of justice, who in turn provides them with a degree of safety. Depicting harmony as a state that is elusive and temporary in adverse circumstances underscores that it is often mere hope or the idea of harmony that sustains the groups and allows them to carry on. Examining the dynamics within post-apocalyptic narratives not only enhances the comprehension

of the genre, but also offers an original take on the state of nature, the foundations which safe communities and the reconstruction of civil society must build upon.

NOTES

[1] Originally, post-apocalyptic narratives may also portray cataclysmic events that are unavoidable and beyond human influence or tales of heroic characters who prevent the apocalypse (ideally at the last moment). Such stories, categorized as genre fiction, typically lack the kind of layered, well-narrated plot that would lend itself to a closer analysis (e.g., John Barnes's *Directive 51* [2011] or James Wesley Rawles's *The Coming Collapse* series [1998–2014]).

[2] According to Curtis, the option to give up the will to survive – that is, "a failure of will and love" (2010, 29) – is shown by the son's mother, who commits suicide. Her decision to end her life follows a conversation on the struggle to live in a cruel, barbaric world. Moreover, the mother explicitly rejects the label of a survivor and instead refers to herself and her husband as "the walking dead in a horror film" (McCarthy [2006] 2009, 32). In refusing to identify as a survivor, the mother rejects the idea of overcoming the misery that surrounds them, as it would only confront them with unmitigated violence.

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The image of Persian women in Lomnitsky's travelogue *Persia and Persians*

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The image of Persian women in Lomnitsky's travelogue *Persia and Persians*

Imagology. Persian women. Russian travelogues. Russian Orientalism. Colonialism.

The article analyzes the portrayal of Persian women in the 19th-century literary travelogues using an imagological approach. The study aims to critically examine the colonial discourse employed by Stanislav Yulyevic Lomnitsky (1854–1916) in his 1901 travelogue, *Persia and Persians*, which establishes Persia and the Persians as the "other" in contrast to the Russian "self". Moreover, it delves into how Lomnitsky's work frames the East from the perspective of the West. By shedding light on these perspectives, the research provides a critical examination of Lomnitsky's colonial discourse within the context of Persia, offering insights into the interplay between cultures.

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Travelogues are significant sources of knowledge about the culture, rituals, customs, geography, and climate of nations, countries, and civilizations. Although travelogues may contain valuable information, they are usually affected by the hegemon's viewpoints about the status of the concerned society, turning them into strategic tools for the purposeful study of that society. Travelogue images are formed and recorded by the following facts: life, social status, and ethical character of the author; the mental stereotype, which was formed about the destination country; the purpose of the trip; the purpose of recording images and writing a travelogue; cultural, social, political, and economic situation of the destination country; diplomatic relations between the origin and destination countries. Having that in mind, the study of the Western intrusion of Persia (known since 1934 as Iran) should be understood in line with their colonial ambitions.

Although the 19th century is marked by the rivalry of Western powers over winning the Persian kings and usurpation of their natural resources, Persia has never been formally colonized. This fact has led to the indirect intervention in the country as visitors, merchants, Orientalists, and spies, giving way to a plethora of travelogues on Persia. These accounts include topics as diverse as the climate, military, commerce, economic and cultural opportunities and challenges, and human and cultural geographic maps of different regions. Manfred Beller's entry for "East/West" in the book *Imagology* presents Persia as one of the cultural centers of the East, with images such as mosques, minarets, fountains, camels, desert dwellers, and harems (Beller and Leerssen 2007, 317). The entry for "Iran" by Natalia Tornesello further adds that in the Islamic world, the Persians have evidenced a national identity more than others (Beller and Leerssen 2007, 189). Travelogues carry a general message about the colonies that label them with backward, primitive, feudal, and pre-industrial badges. The colonized is characterized by passivity rather than agency, the East is framed within a Western perspective and the resulting generalization leaves the colonized bereft of human dignity.

In the middle of the 19th century, Persia became an arena for the clash of economic and political interests of Russia and England. One notable travelogue is Stanislav Yulyevic Lomnitsky's book *Персия и персы* ([Persiia i persy] Persia and Persians, 1901), containing sketches of everything that he saw in a colorful narrative, allowing one to see aspects of the daily life of the country, which are usually closed to the eyes of the "Ferengi" (Christian, European, Westerner). Lomnitsky (1854–1916) nicknamed Rejep (from the Arabic given name Rajab), was a law graduate and a journalist. His book was a kind of response to Lord Curzon's work *Persia and the Persian Question*, published in 1892 in London. Along with general information about the history and the customs of the country, it asserts the priority of Russian policy in the region as opposed to the policy of England. At the time the Russian-British rivalry over the Persian natural resources was really strong and Lomnitsky reflects on the issue (1901, 208, 210, 211, 235). In the introduction he elucidates that: "In all its proximity, Persia is for us a *Terra Incognita*. The fact made me publish it" (3).[1]

The primary focus of this article lies in scrutinizing Lomnitsky's representation of Persian women, specifically examining instances where colonial discursive themes

emerge. By analyzing the discursive nodes embedded within Lomnitsky's portrayal, it aims to provide a deeper understanding of the colonial dynamics. Representation of cultural relations inherently involves cultural confrontation, as the author's own cultural values and presuppositions inevitably influence their portrayal. This introduces subjectivity, blurring the line between a true "image" and objective information. Cultural differences play a significant role in shaping perceptions, often leading to a flawed understanding of a nation's divergence from the rest of the world based on cultural and local variables (see Beller and Leerssen 2007, 3–32). In Lomnitsky's work, cultural differences may explain his portrayal. However, it should be acknowledged that this portrayal may perpetuate a misconception of total difference between nations.

RUSSIAN ORIENTALISM

Edward Said's exploration of Orientalism reveals it to be more than a mere geographical categorization of the world into two disparate halves – the Orient and the Occident. It encompasses a complex web of "interests" that are pursued through various methods such as scholarly discoveries, philological reconstructions, psychological analyses, and sociological and landscape descriptions (1978, 20). This comprehensive framework not only creates a hierarchical division but also serves as a vehicle for the construction of cultural narratives. It shapes his critical insights into the construction and perpetuation of cultural biases inherent in Orientalist discourses.[2]

In the second half of the 19th century, the struggle for influence in the Middle East between the European powers intensified dramatically. In the words of Denis Volkov:

> Having been defeated by Russia in the wars of 1804–13 and 1826–28 and, due to further developments in its domestic political and economic life, by the end of the century, Persia had ceased to be any military threat whatsoever to its "big northern neighbor" and had turned into an arena of diplomatic rivalry, mainly between Russia and Great Britain. This very rivalry, solidly based on two differently nuanced senses of the superiority of the two powers towards the object of the contest, shaped the nature of Russian–Persian relations during the latter part of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. (2018, 59)

In 1897, the Russian War Minister Kuropatkin advised Tsar Nikolas II against the annexation of new territories in Persia and suggested, instead, to pressure Persia to equally cut the hands of other Western forces off its territories and resources (Volkov 2018, 60). Therefore, the Russians started sending delegates to sketch a map of Persia's major resources. The northern parts of Persia were prioritized due to their borderline location and geographic proximity to Russia. This way, the Russian Persian policy began to be gradually shaped by the Russian version of Orientalism known as "Persian studies" and the early delegates became the original sources of the field.

Volkov notes that by the late 19th/early 20th century Russian Oriental studies had evolved into a rather developed multi-branched system for the production of scholarly knowledge on the Orient. It comprised manifold Orientological scholarly (research-oriented) and academic (teaching-oriented) institutions as well as re-

lated structures in the Russian military and diplomatic services, and even within the Russian Orthodox Church. All of them were deeply intertwined in terms of both administrative organization and the content and forms of the activities they carried out (57).[3]

The Russian Cause (*Russkoe delo*) is the idea of "civilizing" the Orientals and promoting the Russian competition with the rest of European forces over access to the resources and geographic regions in Persia. The idea is reflected in almost all accounts of Russian diplomats, military officers, and practitioners, books and official correspondences, and the existing literature and Oriental studies programs.

If Edward Said's work is not wholly relevant to Russian Orientalism, it does raise some important questions about the relationships between knowledge and power (Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2010, 19). Regarding Russian exceptionalism, Stephanie Cronin argues that the Russian empire is distinct from the other European powers in their scholarly reflections of colonialism. She points out that the tsarists turned into the major figures of Oriental studies, while the Orientalists, in turn, were employed in Central Asia and the Caucasus administrative bodies as well as in the Russian foreign ministry. Another point that Cronin mentions is that key figures of imperial Russian Orientalism were themselves not European but Oriental, like the Iranian-born Mirza Alexander Kazem-Bek (2015, 650). Of course, in the end, from his point of view, many imperial Russian Orientologists appear to conform neatly to Said's paradigm, and even perhaps to illustrate its central tenets more perfectly than their Anglo-French progenitors (652).

In her book *Russia and Iran in the Great Game*, Elena Andreeva, while pointing out the Russians' efforts to dominate the East through Russian Orientalism, asserts that Russian Orientalism differs from the familiar Western Orientalism in its intertwining with a specific Russian identity, forming a blend of Western and Eastern elements. This dual identity has numerous consequences, one of which is a profound feeling of inferiority. This trait is particularly evident in Iran-Russia relations because Russians, when interacting with Iran, define it as their "other" while simultaneously competing with the British, who see themselves as the true embodiment of the Western European "self". Russians have always tried to conceal this feeling of inferiority (2007, 144, 145).

Susan Layton carefully weighs the contradictory ideologies competing to contextualize Russia's interactions with the Muslim mountain peoples. On one hand, the state was promoting a view of a European mission to civilize these tribes, positioning themselves as bringers of progress. On the other hand, romantic perceptions of these same tribes emerged through noble primitives whose extermination was viewed with unease. Layton highlights how such narratives of chivalric and gallant Russians who saved the womenfolk from their home "barbarism" legitimized the Russian expansion. However, the way this was instituted in literature set a deep division along lines of gender: if men here were constructed as barbarians, then women were built as helpless victims that needed to be rescued. This stark binary, as Layton points out, served to reinforce the colonial narrative of legitimation for the Tsarist conquest (2009, 166).

IS RUSSIA EUROPE OR NOT?

After the decline of the medieval realm of Rus', around Kiev, in the 13th century, Russia emerged onto the European political scene, and into the European imagination (Beller and Leerssen 2007, 226). While already a major European power by the 18th century, the Russian political system was rather different from the rest of Europe – which were modern nation-states with constitutional politics. Besides, Russia's sizeable territory was considered an alarming threat to most European countries. Europeans often viewed Russia as uncivilized and backward, its vast territory and distinctive political system, a far cry from the constitutional monarchies of Western Europe.

The late 18th century is the period when a new understanding of the West's self-definition and its alleged racial superiority emerged, crystallizing in the mid-19th century. This shifted the approach toward "internal Orientals" such as Eastern Europe, who, though highly lacking in civilizational elements, were considered superior to people of the East, for example in Asia. Zhand Shakibi points out that the belief in the innate differences in temperament and abilities based on race of different human groups assisted greatly in the development of Orientalism and colonialism. This racial explanation was quite attractive to the Romanov government and Russia since they had claimed a racial affinity with the West (2018, 46).

In the second half of the 19th century, two major groups represented Russian politics. Some among the Western commentators held that in order to progress, Russia needed to either follow the European constitutional and parliamentary model in favor of forming a republic, or to develop into an industrial nation-state under monarchy. The Slavophiles, on the other hand, defended the Russian exceptionalism by maintaining autocracy, the Orthodox Church, and the empire system – rather than the nation-state – as the distinctive features that distinguished the Russian politics and society from the rest of Europe.

It is noteworthy that the concept of Eastern Europe as a separate and unique region was actually a construction of Western European powers during the 18th and 19th centuries. Larry Wolff traces the origins of this concept to the Enlightenment period when Western European intellectuals and travelers began to view Eastern European countries as "backward" and "barbaric" in comparison to their own societies. This perception was further reinforced by the rise of nationalism in the 19th century, where Eastern Europe became a symbol of the "other" and a threat to Western European identity (1994, 32).

As Mary Roberts states, since the Enlightenment, Russia has persistently been positioned as Western Europe's East while elite Russian culture often defined itself as European in contradistinction to its Eastern neighbors, and the Russian imperial imaginary sustained self-defining differences between a Western center and Eastern periphery of the Empire (2023, 253). This issue is also reflected in Russian literature. For example, Petr Chaadaev writes: "We are neither of the West nor the East and we possess the traditions of neither" (quoted in Taroutina and Leigh 2023, 14). According to Fyodor Dostoevsky: "In Europe we were hangers-on and slaves, whereas we shall go to Asia as masters. In Europe we were Asiatics, whereas in Asia we, too, are European. Our civilizing mission in Asia will bribe our spirit and drive us thither"

(quoted in Taroutina and Leigh, 2023, 94). Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz states that, "Russia's destiny is to become the link that joins two worlds, the western and the eastern" (quoted in Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2010, 31).

The Russian understanding of national identity, coming as it did from Western-oriented narratives and imagery, has determined in many ways its relationship with the West. As such, this element has been a strong determinant of Russia's behavior toward Iran. The self-understanding of Russia as a great Christian power and a world empire has essentially molded its approach to national identity, and then to the world – specifically, to Iran. It is in this framework that one can assess how Lomnitsky attempted in his work to convince the readers that Russians are indeed Europeans: "The house of Mr. Panyanets is truly a hospitable shelter for all Europeans, especially for Russians" (1901, 352). This excessive emphasis on being European, together with an orientation toward European standards, served as a means for hiding inferiority complexes.

Until the end of the 19th century, Iran had not been widely explored by Russian geologists from the point of view of mining, a niche that was rapidly occupied by German and British entrepreneurs. In September 1898, Lomnitsky visited Persia as the representative of the Russian government and the mining association A. M. Goryainov and F. E. Yenakiev for the purpose of negotiations on the extraction of ores. With the assistance of the Russian government, Goryainov and Yenakiev were granted a concession by the Persian government for the exploration and operation of mines in the Azerbaijan province of Iran. The activity of the partnership consisted of the acquisition for the purpose of selling all mines, as well as applications for deposits in the concession area. Lomitsky examined the little-known mountain route from Tehran to Babolsar in north Persia and to the Gaz trading post, and according to Russian sources, he also prepared geological surveys in the region. Seemingly the reason why Andreeva (2007, 56) introduces him as an engineer.

THE DICHOTOMY OF WESTERN/EASTERN WOMEN

The central theme of Lomnitsky's book is the dichotomy between the East and Europe. The Russian author considers himself a European in the East without making a distinction between Western and Eastern Europe. In several parts of his book, he indicates that Russia is part of Europe by descriptions and comparisons that reproduce the dichotomy. According to Lomnitsky, Persia is positioned as an Eastern country within the framework of Orientalism, thereby reinforcing various Eastern stereotypes.

The dichotomy leads to prejudice as the author's first description of a Persian woman attests: in the early pages of the third chapter, the initial mention of the word "women" is observed: "Walking through the regions and observing scenes of people's lives, the idea developed in me that the eastern women are very shy" (1901, 30). He observes a group of women who are busy weeding the crops in the farms while "The presence of foreign passerby or native non-Muslims does not disturb them" (30). As they go their way and approach the route that the Russian convoy normally takes, "They bid farewell with their curious stares, laughing and prancing in their

pleated, embellished clothes" (30). The final statement does not suggest a sign of shyness as women are going ahead with their normal activities. Meanwhile, the East-West dichotomy and the generalization of the East to Persia reproduce the imagery. As mentioned, although this is the seemingly the first encounter with women in Lomnitsky's account, his stereotypical imagination toward the East leads him to the cliché of the "eastern woman" and by extension, the "shy Persian woman"; thus, in this section, the one-way perspective of subject to object is quite prominent. In Andreeva's opinion, however, this author "does not always stereotype Iranians" unlike typical Russian visitors (2007, 124). Matvei Gamazov (1812–1893) states that there is a lack of feminine delicacy among Muslim women (1857, 19). According to Susan Layton, the Islamic East monopolized a contemptible traffic in human beings and the treatment of women in particular as marketable property (2009, 172).

Another characteristic of the book is generalizations that normally lead to clichés about Persia within the conceptual framework of the "East". In describing his residence in a village near the city of Rasht, he points to the absence of furniture in the place and adds: "A proverb says you cannot find furniture and women in an eastern guestroom" (Lomnitsky 1901, 33). In a similar move, Lomnitsky states: "I was once talking to an intellectual Muslim about the harsh lives of eastern women. He protested, saying that is not the case as there is no place for brothels and prostitution in Islam" (103–104). He then adds his own comment:

> Apart from the Quran, the eastern system of habits, images, and traditions, particularly the Quranic interpretations by certain clergies downgrade women in society. It is so severe that if a man sees his wife in the street, he hesitates to talk to her. Talking to one's womenfolk in streets is shunned and it is rooted in the belief that women are low, impure, and disgusting creatures with whom you would better keep all relationship clandestine. (105)

In another comment, Lomnitsky remarks:

> Overall, the eastern women are wary of the tradition that obligates them to cover their faces. In no area in the East, in streets or other public places, one can spot a man with his wife, a brother with his sister, or a father with his daughter. It happens that they even pretend to be strangers. And it is not common for strangers to meet in public especially if one side is a lady. (108)

In another part, he elaborates on the physical beauty of Persian women by pointing out that they do not rely on blushes for beautification: "Yet, 90 percent of the eastern could fare without cosmetics" (115). The generalization of the prejudice peaks here:

> Male lust, domestic solitude, unemployment, and eastern temperament in most cases force women to unbelievable behaviors that are shameful to describe. It seems that nymphomania does not take victims anywhere as in the East. Besides, this numbness and inert life of Persian women entails illnesses that begin with obesity. (117)

The author's prejudice extends beyond women to encompass girls and children as victims, as evidenced by the statement, "Children and especially girls are known for early puberty in the East" (172).

He resonates with the myth of Eastern indolence: "Laziness in the Orient cannot be judged from our point of view; it is a traditional phenomenon, caused by the climate, the abundance of natural resources, and many circumstances of the social order" (118). One of the most obvious sources of the topic, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, is written by Hussein Al-Attas (1977). The author confronted the question of why the natives of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines were for centuries being described as "lazy" by the ruling colonizer. He took neither the behavior of the natives, nor the attempts at justifying tyranny, as the reason for this allegation. Instead, he concludes that the assumption reflects the prejudices of the West and has been part of a political project. In Al-Attas's own account, his book is "an attempt at correcting the unilateral view of the colonizer toward the native Asian and his society" that tries to illustrate how the image of the "lazy, boring, backward, dishonest native" gave the colonizer the prerogative to define them as dependent beings in need of intervention for betterment. The application of the concept of "myth" for the indolence allegations of the Eastern people assists Al-Attas in explaining its constructivist nature and showing how it is constructed by the ruling mechanisms of the colonizer, rather than reflecting the objective realities in the field.

The application of "climatological" clichés based on the climate zone theory would also be useful in understanding the theme of the lazy native. This theory "attributes variations between human societies to climate differences (alongside climatologically-influenced factors such as properties of the soil and nutrition), both with regard to people's physical stature, skin color, and vitality and with regard to their practical and spiritual abilities and their personal characteristics" (Beller and Leerssen 2007, 298).

The opposition between North and South is largely determined by the climatological arguments (which are also activated in Orientalist discourse); the opposition between West and East reflects historical events and political and religious cleavages. Its mythical character is demonstrated, however, by the mobility of the imputation of "Easternness". The idea of despotic empires or cruel hordes threatening true civilization from the East can be applied in widely different contexts (317).

The western travelogues of the East are fraught with similar descriptions, such as the following one of the spring climate: "The odor of almond and olive buds fills the air… No wonder why they say women go crazy in the season of almond and olive flowers" (Lomnitsky 1901, 135). It connects the beautiful fragrance of almond and olive blossoms with the stereotype that Eastern women cannot restrain themselves during this time. This kind of linking of natural beauty to supposed feminine instability is typical of the orientalist intention of exoticizing and misrepresenting the cultures of the East. It is important to realize how these innocent-sounding descriptions add to a problem in understanding the East, framing the Eastern woman as eternally passionate and volatile, thereby reinforcing old prejudices.

In Chapter 5 of his book, entitled "Women's Status in Persia", Lomnitsky refers to the Quranic verse on the obligation of hijab, and proceeds to posit the Muslim/Arab woman against the European woman (while there is no mention of the Persian or eastern woman in these accounts, the conceptual framework implies them):

> Nonetheless, the Quran stands against the fundamental European thought system, especially when it comes to the question of how a European woman who is used to freedom could conform to the slave-like condition with three to four co-wives in a harem of a dirty, careless, bad-looking husband? […] most of our women caught up in the Persian harem come from a humble background. They get corrupt there and once released, turn into harlots. (88)

In parts of the book, the author departs from the dichotomy between the East and Europe to highlight the resemblances: "It should be noted that prostitution is there in Persia, although clandestinely. […] There are also brothels not always available to Europeans. […] The evenings of some streets resemble those of boulevards of Paris or Nevsky Prospect" (104). Instead of generalizations, here the author takes advantage of unification to compare Persia to Europe or Russia.

He points to two differences too, the first in dress, addressing the antagonism of the clergy and most traditionalists to women's education: "Nonetheless, a woman who has the least of knowledge does not waste her time and will not wear the revealing clothes that women in our European culture do" (112). The second difference is in marriage: "There is no spinster among the Muslim women. Also, they are alien to mean European concepts of mésalliance, illegal cohabitation, and illegal childbirth" (104–105).

ORDINARY AND NOBLE WOMEN

Most descriptions of women in the book refer to ordinary women. The author's two-year travel to the northern parts and the capital city of Persia gave him the chance to visit women from various ethnicities and backgrounds. Most of the images he presents of the Persian women point to their physical beauty. The discourse of Orientalism is not monolithic, and in Lomnitsky's writings, Iranian women are not presented as the "other" or inferior to European women. For example, he describes their beauty in this way: "The tawny skin of Persian women brings them a special beauty that finds a humorous, delicate paradox under cosmetics. […] Overall, the face of the Persian woman is pretty and intricate" (115). In his opinion, this beauty becomes more elegant in mountain areas as people there have not intermingled with other ethnicities and have preserved their originality.

Lomnitsky praises the beauty of Iranian women because their originality reminds him of the ancient Egyptian images:

> In remote villages of Damavand highlands, you see acient Egyptian women whose faces are engraved on vases. […] I believe that the original beauty exclusive to the Iranian woman could best be described this way. These women are of a natural attraction and absorb not only the ordinary man but also even the typical sculptor. Enough to say that mostly they have big, black and slanted eyes, thick brows, long, soft hair, and small mouths in tiny, oval-shaped faces. (115)

In comparing the beauty of Iranian women to that of ancient Egyptian women, the author attempts to bridge the gap between the "self" and the "other". The Iranian women are beautiful because they are in possession of Egyptian beauty.

The image of women's bodies from all nomad groups "are very similar to delicate brass sculptures" (116). Along the eastern hillside of Damavand, by a river, he is attracted by a young woman and describes her face:

> I stare at this attractive face with its delicate, oval shape with an ambiguous sense of satisfaction. Her eyes are big, slanted, and happy. Meanwhile, under the long eyelashes that bend upwards, she looks at me. The small lips and long nose that seem to move with every smile, and the natural, thin brows that sluggishly move upward are cherishable. (350)

To the author who is absorbed by the woman, every feature of her face and body is alluring: "Her light, charming voice, her tall body, and her balanced happiness. You think her body is made of bronze" (269). The conversation with the fair eastern woman reminds the author of a poem by Nikolay Nekrasov (269). After the woman leaves, Lomnitsky notices that he is in chilly water to his ankles. In his view, the only exceptions are women in Gilan and Mazandaran: "Women of Gilan and Mazandaran are not beautiful the way women in central and southern parts are. Here, women look like Greeks and Italians" (359).

It seems that the age of women has impacted the author's evaluation: "The sight of women sitting four-angled by the hookah with a long piece of wood in their mouths is not very pleasant" (40). Somewhere else we read: "Women have eccentric faces. When sitting, all Persian women look like an upside-down horseradish" (139). As if the older, the uglier: "Among the ten women, two were younger. […] The other women with their wrinkled faces and hanging noses looked like ghosts who are installed on mountains to freak humans" (316).

In some of these images, the cultural "other" is depicted. These are personal descriptions of women with whom he has had more interactions for various reasons (such as his host). "The wife of our hostler, like other Mazandarani women, did not wear a mask and I had the chance to see her kind, attractive face. A neat woman with a large skirt that was not enough to cover all her body, and indeed her small, feminine feet" (350).

In what follows, we go through the image of a Persian women's clothes. The clothes of the Iranian women outside the house is very different from that at home, due to the Islamic rule of hijab: "Upon exiting the house, the Iranian woman wears a bad-looking chador – for the rich, silk and for the poor, woolen – complemented in ugliness with very loose trousers, long socks, and a white cotton mask" (111). It is noteworthy that the clothes have been shared by women from all classes. The author confesses that the image does not attract him. However, Persian women have another reaction: "Large groups of women in thin, domestic chadors and smiling faces are weeding… laughing and prancing in their pleated, embellished clothes" (30). Women don hijab even in prayer: "They worship like men except they cover their heads and faces" (1901, 64). It is noteworthy again that, unlike the author's description, the face of the Muslim woman is not covered in prayer.

Ordinary women's clothes vary in different regions: "The women of nomad tribes do not cover their faces and enjoy more freedom. Their family position is much better than urban women" (116); "Women of mountain tribes usually wear white chadors

and no veils" (316). In Mazandaran, "Women villagers rarely use veils. Like mountain women, they mostly cover part of their faces with their headscarves" (350).

From the viewpoint of the author, the domestic clothes of the Persian woman, particularly rural and poorer ones, are strange: "The clothes of farmer women and generally the poor Persian women astonish the observer: using long, stretch socks by them is unfathomable. The rest of their clothes are limited to a shirt and a bust. The shirt is as small as the bust, covering only to the edges of the skirt" (112). However, he clarifies that this is so only to the European visitor's eye: "So, the movements of the Persian woman look risky to the European's eye as the upper body clothes are of a kind that they move up much with every movement" (112).

The author's familiarity with the internal condition of Persia and his knowledge of its social affairs allows him to provide a more complete image of Persian women's clothes in the 19th century. He explains that Persian women have not always been obliged to cover their faces as in different eras, their clothes have had variations:

> The old clothes of women were not much different from that of European women. In old Persian paintings, women are seen in long, beautiful clothes with not very open necks. Based on these pictures, one can validate that the tradition of covering the face and wearing a chador is not a very old one. The clergymen have recently protested the modern clothes. (Lomnitsky 1901, 113)

Lomnitsky notes that older Iranian women were unfamiliar with the practice of covering their faces, suggesting that it was a newer custom not widely followed by Zoroastrian women at the time. He continues:

> The late Nasiruddin Shah (1896–1831) allowed women to appear in public without a veil. But the stupid critics were horrified by the decision and threatened to protest. Despite the agony of the eastern beauties, the decision was annulled. Some people hold that the late Shah was so impressed by the ballet he saw in Europe that immediately after his return to Tehran he ordered his women to wear ballet costumes. (111)

In another part of his book, he further goes through the clothes and behavior of Zoroastrian women as distinct from Muslims, and further separates himself from the European and eastern dichotomy:

> Guebre [a Zoroastrian] and Parsi women do not cover their faces and enjoy some freedom. They even dress like Europeans in India. Most of them are also very attractive. Guebre women usually wear long gowns and baggy pants, and they do not change their outfits when they go out. Their faces are friendly and pleasant, unlike any other I have seen. They greet a European with respect and modesty, but without any hint of flattery or coquetry. They may be the only women in the world who are not whimsical. (230–231)

Lomnitsky has also provided a full description of noble women's clothing:

> Very short silk skirts tied with a ribbon above the knees. Then a pair of blue or white stretch socks comes up close to the many flounces of the skirt. And a pair of light shoes. The breast is covered with a short blouse that comes to the edge of the skirt, and a second blouse of wool or silk. And lastly, a very short velvet or silk blouse like a bust that is either sewed or tied with ribbons. (113)

In his belief, even their black chador is bad-looking and its only difference with the poor is that it is made of silk (112). He points out that European clothes are common among noble Persian women:

> They say that one of the princesses who wanted to show off her beautiful figure started to imitate the costumes of European ballet dancers. Noble women order clothes of European styles. They have made changes to the styles, as Persian women do not know corsets. Maybe that is the reason they always give birth to healthy children and are immune from women's diseases. (114)

In another account, we read: "Tens of Persian women move easily on beautiful, saddled horses. Their black chadors are tied, but the white veil that covers the face is removed to the left side of their shoulders. It looked like they were wealthy women of nobility with urban mannerisms" (316).

Lomnitsky is not afraid in some cases to be seen; he describes his own position with irony. He speaks about himself as an object and informs the reader about the interrelation between himself and the "other". Without any false modesty, he says that he is simultaneously a subject and an object.

WOMEN AS SEXUAL OBJECTS

According to Lomnitsky, a large proportion of the Persian people were illiterate, including three-fourths of Persian farmers (190). Apparently, the rate was higher among women, due to prejudices against their education: "No one cares about women's education in Persia. Even among the nobility many women are illiterate" (100). Pointing to this fact, he mentions religious beliefs as the main obstacle:

> Mohammad has forever downgraded women in the Muslim world to slavery: "Women are your farms, do tilth as you please."[4] This statement accosts men. Thereupon, a woman is only reared up to be a wife and upon reaching 12, she gets married. She is taught all arts in a way to regulate her husband with her beauty. The 10-year-old Persian maiden is a full-fledged woman, and in case her parents are rich enough, she could find a husband of her own folk. The pretty, but poor woman in most cases, finds a secondary place in the harem of a rich man. Nowadays, Persian people let their daughters read and write. (115)

This image is apparently indicative that in the dominant Persian discourse, women are recognized only in their sexual roles. It indicates that women in Persia are treated in a way that they do not envisage any other relationship other than sexual intercourse with men (116). Lomnitsky brings temporary marriage or concubine as a testament to the sexual objectivity of Persian women:

> Concubine is a tradition that is held on special occasions. The man, who goes on pilgrimage, trade, or hunting trips, can hold such a kind of marriage in his temporary stays. The continuation of such marriages depends on the duration of his stay in the place of concern. There are cases in which the contract extends to the death of a woman as his sole beloved. When returning from the trip, the new concubine takes place at the grave dismay of the former wife. But then again, the man says the helpful statement *sic volo, sic iubeo* which the upset woman can only obey. As most usually is the case, a clandestine fight with the hidden beloved starts at this point. In many cases, concubine is a mere prostitution which is mediated by a middleman. (101)

Lomnitsky gives another Persian tradition as proof of his claim, according to him, in some less culturally advanced areas of Persia, it was customary for women to receive a form of dowry known as shirbaha upon their marriage. In northern Persia, there was a small village called Miandoab situated along the Tehran–Tabriz highway, notorious for its market where girls are available for marriage. For a sum of 30 to 40 tomans (equivalent to 40–50 rubles), any Persian man could find a suitable wife.

In Lomnitsky's perception, the Persian man's extensive privileges in family life were an indication of the Persian woman's sexual objectification. According to him, the head of the family had absolute power over his wives and can at any time divorce them, without giving any reasons. In his portrayal, women had no place in the Persian family:

> Women play a very sad part in family life; their husbands treat them as animals, and a poor Persian always mourns over the death of his donkey more than the death of his wife. If his donkey dies, it often means losing his whole property; if his wife dies, it is easy to find ten others to replace her; he only has to be able to feed her, while marriage itself will cost him a few *krans.* (103)

Of course, there were exceptions to the rule. For example, he states that his friend's sister was married to an accomplished Persian gentleman, famous for his wisdom and self-control. She was his only wife, was in charge of household matters, and they had three children who continue their studies in Russia and France.

Despite his attempt at impartiality, Lomnitsky admits the incomprehensibility of a Persian's inner feelings: "When a Persian becomes part of a European family, for instance, as a long-term servant, their human emotions gradually awaken and develop. While Persian men have more opportunities to integrate with Europeans, this is nearly impossible for women" (1901, 363). By expanding the focus on subjectivity in cultural representation and the impact of cultural differences, Lomnitsky's statements can be better understood within the broader context of cultural confrontation and the challenges of accurately capturing the inner experiences of individuals from different backgrounds (363). This recognition of subjectivity and cultural confrontation in representation is crucial as it underscores the importance of critically examining and questioning our own cultural biases, fostering a more nuanced and empathetic understanding of diverse cultures and societies.

CONCLUSION

Lomnitsky's travelogue is not the first about Persia and the Persians; previously, other travelers had visited Iran and prepared materials. However, his distinction lies in the creation of specific images and his relatively precise classification, which might not have been collected with such quality and accuracy before. The author stands in the position of an omniscient being, looking down at the object and describing it. He speaks from a position of superiority, borrowing stereotypical views from the Western world and preconceived views of himself about Easterners as others.

In Lomnitsky's *Persia and Persians*, there is a recurring presence of colonial rhetoric, wherein he compares Persian cultural shortcomings based on his internalized cultural ideals. This creates a tone that exhibits self-perceived intellectual superiority

from the Western perspective, leading to the imposition of ideas that are often humiliating. Occasionally, he draws comparisons between Persia and the West, reinforcing the concept of self-superiority and perpetuating the "otherization" of Persia – an approach that reflects colonial tendencies found throughout parts of his book. His use of terms such as "Easterners", "Iranian", "Muslims", and "harem", whose Latin equivalents are not used but instead are used in their direct Persian spelling and pronunciation, may suggest an image of a chasm deep between two identities. This analysis demonstrates how Lomnitsky's work, along with Russian travelogues generally, perpetuated and was influenced by colonial perspectives. These perspectives were rooted in the belief of Western intellectual and cultural superiority, resulting in the objectification and marginalization of Eastern women within the broader discourse of colonialism.

NOTES

[1] Unless otherwise stated, all translations by E. K. R.

[2] As Schimmelpenninck van der Oye notes, "some Russian Orientologists do not fit Said's mould, while others do. It is impossible to reduce Russian scholars of Asia to a single archetype" (2011, 45). Therefore, though Lomintsky is not known as an Orientalist, he could be read in relevant frameworks.

[3] For more study on Russian Orientalism, see Taroutina and Leigh 2023, and Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2010.

[4] This statement is part of the 233 Verse of Chapter 2 of the Quran that is wrongly attributed to the Prophet (PBUH) by the author. The complete Verse reads: "Your wives are a place of sowing of seed for you, so come to your place of cultivation however you wish and put forth [righteousness] for yourselves. And fear Allah and know that you will meet Him. And give good tidings to the believers." For more information on the meaning of this verse, refer to: Al-Mizan (an exegesis of the Quran), Vol. 3. https://www.al-islam.org/al-mizan-exegesis-quran-volume-3-sayyid-muhammad-husayn-tabatabai/suratul-baqarah-verse-222-223.

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JEAN-MARIE SCHAEFFER: La vie des arts (mode d'emploi) [The life of the arts (A user manual)]
Vincennes: Éditions Thierry Marchaisse, 2023. 336 pp. ISBN 978-2-36280-305-5
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What are the origins of the arts? What exactly does the notion "contemporary art" mean and how has its usage evolved in French and other languages? Can artificial intelligence create works of art? Is there a European (artistic) culture? These questions and many more are explored by Jean-Marie Schaeffer, a specialist in philosophical aesthetics and art theory, in his latest book, *La vie des arts (mode d'emploi)* (2023).

Schaeffer is a researcher at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) and the director of studies at École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS) in Paris, whose long-term research draws on knowledge from the philosophy of mind, cognitive science and anthropology. One may wonder why he discusses art in the plural rather than in the singular. Obviously, art and the arts do not mean the same thing for him: while art is perceived as the effect of interactions between arts (9), the arts refer to various manifestations and relations of art, not only in terms of ties between particular works of art, but also with regard to their connection with science, politics, economy, and other forms of social life. By briefly looking at these apparently self-evident notions in the introduction, Schaeffer gives a hint of how his book should be approached – as a manual ("mode d'emploi") that invites reflection, yet allows for going beyond expectations.

The book is divided into four sections, each of which is composed of several chapters and dedicated to different aspects of the life of the arts. Part I, entitled "En compagnie de l'œuvre" (In the company of the work), primarily focuses on the reception of works of art. The key term of Schaeffer's thinking is the term "aesthetic experience" – developed especially in his previous book *L'expérience esthétique* (The aesthetic experience, 2015) – meaning on one side the content (Erfahrung), i.e. the result of our interactions with the world, on the other side the way we experience these interactions (Erlebnis). It is directly related to the type of attention we pay to a work of art characterized, in the words of psychology, as a divergent cognitive style ("le style cognitif divergent") as opposed to a convergent one (standard attention). According to Schaeffer, aesthetic experience is an attentional activity based on hedonic calculus, more exactly on "experienced utility" (the activity itself is more important than its result) and regulated by the satisfaction or dissatisfaction it causes (27). The reflection on the specificity of aesthetic experience necessarily touches upon the never-ending debate on whether the appreciation of artworks is rather subjective or objective. Drawing on Marcel Proust or Immanuel Kant, Schaeffer assumes that neither of the opposing positions adequately describes the situation since the appreciation is always linked to the objective properties of the work and depends on individual preferences and attentional abilities of the recipient. He therefore characterizes the appreciation as relational (30).

Since aesthetic experience has an evaluative dimension, it goes without saying that a critical discourse is an inseparable part of the social life of all artistic activities (42), even though its role differs depending

on a particular type of art. In this regard, Schaeffer's observations on the upcoming replacement of professional criticism by amateur criticism (in particular in case of popular music or movies displayed on YouTube) are particularly relevant.

Part II, "Sept questions à propos de la création artistique" (Seven questions about artistic creation), deals with the character of art and the origin of the arts, tradition vs. innovation, high art vs. low art, art(s) and science(s), contemporary art and artificial intelligence with regard to artistic creation. Schaeffer departs from the analysis of some basic terms related to artistic creation, such as "culture(s)", "art(s)", "world(s) of art", and points out numerous difficulties in terms of their definition. Nevertheless, his description of cultural practice as artistic practice defined as such only if it can achieve its ultimate social function through its appropriation by appreciative attentional conduct, either sensitive or intellectual, or both of them (66), stands as an example of Schaffer's philosophical thinking about some common notions, which we often use somewhat mechanically without recognizing their meaning. The same goes for the term "the origin of art", often associated with the paintings of Lascaux Cave, which he does not consider as appropriate, because the beginning of art should not be perceived as a single event but rather as a process. That is why Schaeffer prefers to use the term the "birth" or "genesis" of art instead of the origin.

The fact that "art was not invented once, but many times" (92; all translations from the French are by the reviewer) partially explains why Schaeffer repeatedly refuses to apply the notion of "progress" to artistic practices, which is generally associated with innovation. Insight into the opposition between tradition and innovation in the history of arts shows that what we consider innovation is in fact the result of a strangeness effect, simply because an "innovative" artwork does not correspond to our horizon of expectations (97). While the idea of perfection or improvement is proper to science, artistic innovation should be appreciated rather in terms of "the expansion of creative possibilities it produces" (104).

An interesting viewpoint is offered on the highly discussed and controversial Nobel Prize in Literature awarded in 2016 to the American singer and songwriter Bob Dylan. According to Schaeffer, the debate which revolved around what is literature and what is not in fact implied the question of the hierarchy of arts (112). The distinction between high art and low art, practiced in one form or another since ancient times and replaced at the beginning of the 20th century by the dichotomy "true art" vs. "kitsch", is gradually fading. This shift is driven by social changes, among others the democratization of individual tastes and the advancement of technology.

Artistic creation can also be approached from the perspective of its relation to science – a work of art can either apply knowledge, or knowledge represented by a work of art can interact with scientific knowledge (132). Schaeffer also analyzes differences between the two forms of knowledge, scientific and artistic. While he admits that a work of art has a cognitive dimension, he points out that its modalities of knowledge differ from those in which philosophy and science operate. Artistic cognition is, according to Schaeffer, experiential, affectively invested and singular, i.e. embodied in a concrete work (142). Among major changes in the actual life of arts stimulated by scientific progress, the author distinguishes a gradual hybridization of arts and sciences due to the use of technologies (e.g. conceptual art), migration of technological programs into art (e.g. Hiroshi Ishiguro), or the creation of genuine collaboration between scientists and artists (AI).

Special emphasis is placed on the analysis of the terms "art contemporain" (Eng. contemporary art, Ger. *Gegenwartskunst*) and "modern art". Schaeffer argues, based on data from Google Ngram Viewer, that these terms are not equivalent in English, French and German due to national specificities in their usage. Likewise, the question

of the role of artificial intelligence in artistic creation is highly discussed in the book, covering such topics as the difference between robots and AI programs (DALL-E 2, Midjourney), the specificity of generating images by algorithms and the difficulty of distinguishing them from the images created by humans. In this regard, Schaeffer points out, among other things, the possibility of future replacement of human artists by AI algorithms and the problematic legal ownership of artistic production generated by an AI algorithm. However, while the author admits repercussions of IA algorithms on certain categories of artists (e.g. illustrators, designers), he is much more skeptical about the possibility that a text generated by ChatGPT, which he designates as an "unintentional pastiche" (182), could ever become a literary narrative.

Part III, "Les arts dans la société" (Arts in society), deals with the role of politics on artistic creation, the biological age of artists, sex, gender, and the place of women in art, cultural transfer and artistic practices, or European identity. While illustrating the place of art in different political regimes, Schaeffer highlights the extreme resilience of artistic practices (189) even under autocratic and totalitarian regimes and a close link between access to arts and democratic political regimes. As Schaeffer states, the life of the arts is possible only when the freedom of a creative act meets the freedom of the public. This freedom is, however, being nowadays again threatened in some parts of Europe by a revival of characteristics typical of Stalinist totalitarianism (Schaeffer refers to the politics of Viktor Orbán's Fidesz and to the report issued by the Artistic Freedom Initiative in March 2022).

With regard to the place of women in art, Schaeffer analyzes the female nude in the history of painting, which has been in majority of cases represented as an object of erotic desire of men, while the male nude and the nude in general reflecting a female desire has been quasi absent. The philosopher also reflects on "queer art" which, despite its diverse forms, is characterized by the blurring of boundaries, the emphasis on the body, and the use of multiple modalities, media, and locations.

Art can also be viewed as a means of cultural dialogue, playing a role in cultural transfer. The forms of the transfer are various and inevitable in the development of all human communities, so "there is no such thing as a 'pure', unmixed culture" (246). A cultural transfer equals a dialogue only under the condition that all the partners are active (all the participants must be "affected" and "transformed" by the exchange; thus, some transfers are unilateral) and equal (one culture can accept or refuse what is offered by the other one; 250). Long-distance transfers and counter-transfers constitute a special case. The question of cultural dialogue also includes other phenomena, such as the globalization of arts, world literature, universal art, cultural unity within the EU, etc.

Finally, Part IV, "Arts et économie" (Art and economy), exposes the issues, such as the relationship between art and money, the unstable situation of contemporary artists, or financial speculation with art articles. Schaeffer also raises the question whether a true work of art is compatible with economic success (represented e.g. by Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons or Takashi Murakami). As Schaeffer convincingly explains, transition from a demand market to a supply one, vocational system (based on inner motivation of an artist) and need for originality and novelty are the factors that have made art market risky and uncertain. Schaeffer also mentions other aspects of the economy of arts, such as the digital economy (NFT – non-fungible tokens, blockchains), copyright, securing artworks, etc.

Schaeffer's book covers a wide range of topics from essential but still thought-provoking questions about the nature, history and place of art(s) in culture through tricky and burning issues (e.g. the impact of modern technologies on art) to the questions addressing readers' own aesthetic experience. The author enters, in an erudite and

reader-friendly manner, into a dialogue with sociologists (e.g. Howard S. Becker, Nathalie Heinich), philosophers (e.g. Arthur Danto, Joëlle Zask), and economists (e.g. David W. Galenson), while analyzing various, classical as well as more recent works of art (Herrad of Lansberg's illuminated encyclopedia *Hortus deliciarum*, Nescio's poem "Dichtertje", Rose-Lyn Fisher's photo series *The Topography of Tears*, etc.). Far from being (and aiming to be) exhaustive, the publication primarily broadens readers' perspectives on the life of the arts, and the plurality of their forms, functions, social and historical context, which the author expresses hope for in the introduction (12). The decision to start the book by the examination of aesthetic experience and critical evaluation is justified by the fact that most humans participate in the life of the arts precisely by means of these two activities. That is why the book has the potential to appeal to not only to specialists in art, but also to a wide public. The chapters can be read on their own, regardless of their position within the book. What is more, they are all followed by a short bibliography entitled "Pour aller plus loin" (For further information), providing suggestions for further reading. *La vie des arts (mode d'emploi)* is a useful and necessary book providing inspiring excursions into thinking on known and less known aspects of the exciting adventure that is the world of art.

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THEODOR W. ADORNO: Poznámky k literatuře I [Notes to literature I]
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Je známe, že Adornova reflexia umeleckých foriem tvorí integrálnu súčasť postupov a procesov, ktorými tento nemecký filozof a estetik napĺňa svoje filozofické ambície. A tie nie sú vôbec skromné. Adornova filozofická pozícia, formulovaná ako negatívna dialektika a charakterizovaná aj ako anticipácia francúzskeho poštrukturalizmu (k tomu pozri Michael Hauser: *Adorno: moderna a negativita*, 2005, 17 – 19), prejavuje okrem iného záujem o tie problémové motívy, ktoré už Platón alebo neskôr (v zhode s tradíciou) G. W. F. Hegel pomerne hlasno zavrhli či vylúčili z okruhu svojich filozofických záujmov: o nekonceptuálnosť, individualitu, partikularitu – v zásade teda o to, čo je vo vzťahu k pojmovému nepojmové, identickému neidentické (bližšie pozri Theodor W. Adorno: *Negative Dialectics*. Prel. E. B. Ashton, [1966] 2004, 8). Práve dialektika ako „myšlení rozporu" (Hauser 2005, 70), ako myslenie s „dôsledným zmyslom pre neidentitu" (Adorno 2004, 5) podľa Adorna umožňuje nahliadnuť skutočnosť, že pojmové systémy, ktoré kladú svoje hranice pomocou zjednocujúcich princípov, zároveň týmto spôsobom sprostredkúvajú ako to, čo nie je identifikované, aj svoje *neidentické*, t. j. to, čo pojem už nepokrýva, čo vylučuje, čo už nie je prípadom pojmu (por. Hauser 2005, 75 – 79; tiež Adorno 2004, 8). Tieto súvislosti potom (v dôsledku) vytvárajú príležitosť na rozvinutie radikálnej kritiky racionality, ktorej nosnou líniou sa v Adornovom prístupe stáva odmietnutie filozofickej tradície a formulovanie z neho vyplývajúceho záväzku „osvobodit myšlení od jeho tradičních filosofických předpokladů", ako o tom píše prekladateľka, filozofka Alžbeta Dyčková v úvode k recenzovanej publikácii (11).

České vydanie Adornových *Poznámek k literatuře I* (*Noten zur Literatur I*), ktoré boli ako zbierka prvýkrát publikované v roku 1958, obsahuje 16 esejistických textov – z nich prvý, „Esej jako forma", má kľúčový význam pre porozumenie Adornových pozícií; sám Adorno ho – ako v úvode pripomína Dyčková – označoval za svoj programový text (11). Jeho význam spočíva (okrem iného) v dvoch momentoch: jednak predstavuje jeden z tých krokov, ktoré majú viesť „k osvobození filosofování jako takového" (12), jednak navrhuje vnímať esej ako formu, ktorá svojím nemetodickým postupom dokáže sprostredkovať to, čo Adorno nazýva duchovnou skúsenosťou (*geistige Erfahrung*). „Duchovná skúsenosť" je zásadným pojmom Adornovej perspektívy, konvenuje totiž s jeho poňatím *neidentického* – v tomto zmysle sa duchovná skúsenosť „vymyká systematickému myšlení a uniká přímému jazykovému vyjádření" (12). Impulzy duchovnej skúsenosti sú podľa Adorna vrastené aj do tradičného myslenia, to si však „na ně kvůli své formě nedokáže vzpomenout" (27). Esejistická forma takto profiluje svoje špecifiká z napätia, ktoré vzniká medzi ňou a formou tradičného myslenia (Adorno ju situačne spája s termínmi ako ortodoxnosť, dogmatizmus a podobne). Esej, ktorú Adorno presadzuje napriek (či práve vďaka) jej „špatné pověsti" (17), sa vyznačuje nedisciplinovanosťou či presnejšie nedisciplinovateľnosťou, ktorá ju však práve tým robí schopnou sprostredkovať to, čo sa

pojmu/systematickému mysleniu/diskurzívnym formám vymyká alebo čo zakrývajú. Ak si pripomenieme dominantnú pozíciu formy tradičného myslenia, teda skutočnosť, že v širších reflexívnych súvislostiach prevládajú práve jej princípy, môžeme Adornovo presadzovanie eseje i jeho vlastné esejistické písanie vnímať ako korektív *moci* (formy tradičného myslenia), cielených manipulácií či redukcií, disciplinujúcich antagonistickú povahu reality: „Zatímco věda podle svých zavedených způsobů klamně redukuje to, co je v antagonistické a monadologicky rozštěpené realitě složité a komplexní, na zjednodušené modely, jež poté zpětně diferencuje podle jejich údajného materiálu, esej naopak setřásá iluzi prostého a v základu logického světa, iluzi, která se tak pěkně hodí k obhajobě pouze jsoucího" (30).

Širšou, kontextuálnou okolnosťou Adornovho zdôrazňovania významu a funkcií eseje je skutočnosť, že autor v celom svojom diele rozvíja antisystémové formotvorné postupy (k tomu pozri Susan Buck-Morssová: *Původ negativní dialektiky*. Prel. M. Ritter, 2020, 125 – 126), ktorých účelom je „odrážet komplikovanost a nesystematičnost jím popisované zkušenosti" (Dyčková 2024, 15). Termín „odrážet" je tu konzekventný: ak sú história, spoločenská realita i ľudia samotní rozporuplní, potom by moderné myslenie malo jednak prijať formu mimésis (por. Hauser 2005, 19, 138), jednak uplatnením rozporuplnosti či fragmentárnosti „deptat kategorizující, definující mentalitu" a zdôrazniť tým (proti nej) svoju flexibilitu, ktorá sa vystríha dogmatizmu (Buck-Morssová 2020, 126). Žáner-forma eseje sa v naznačených súvislostiach Adornovi javí ako vhodné médium na uskutočnenie týchto zámerov. Esej vníma ako kritickú formu par excellence, jej tendenciou totiž odjakživa bolo „likvidovat názory, a to včetně těch, ze kterých sama vychází" (2024, 33). Subverzívna intencia eseje je namierená predovšetkým proti metódam a predpokladom vedeckých postupov; esej jednoducho odmieta hrať „podle pravidel organizované vědy" (24), na počiatku ktorej stáli štyri karteziánske pravidlá formulované v Descartovej *Rozprave o metóde*. Esejistická forma tak predstavuje protest proti týmto pravidlám, esej v tomto kontexte napríklad prejavuje nevôľu vyvodzovať myšlienky v náležitom poradí a postupovať od najjednoduchšieho až k znalosti najzložitejšieho; ona sama vychádza priamo z najkomplexnejších súvislostí a požaduje, aby „hned v prvním kroku bylo myšlení o věci stejně mnohovrstevnaté jako věc sama. Slouží tak jako korektiv zabedněné primitivnosti, která vždy doprovází převažující *ratio*" (29 – 30). Zároveň ohlasuje potrebu zrušiť teoreticky zastarané nároky na kontinuitu tým, že ako bytostne vlastné znaky svojej formy prezentuje diskontinuitu a myslenie v zlomkoch. Jej motiváciou je to, že „zlomkovitá je sama realita" (31); ak veda presadzuje jednoznačnosť logického poriadku, potom „nás klame o antagonistické podstatě toho, čemu je tento řád vnucován" (31). Kontradiktórnosť esejistickej formy voči diskurzívnym metódam však nemá viesť ku konštatovaniam, ktoré by v nej chceli vidieť formu nelogickú. Adorno trvá na tom, že esej nie je nelogická – s logickými pravidlami korešponduje do tej miery, do akej musí celok jej viet do seba náležite zapadať. Ak esej obsahuje rozpory, potom sú to iba tie, „jež zakládá věc sama" (37).

Esej sa teda ako forma sústreďuje na odkrývanie toho, čo ortodoxnosť myslenia na veci cielene zakrýva (39). Dosahuje to narušovaním ortodoxnosti, čo je proces, ktorého súčasťou je napríklad aj odmietnutie eseje definovať vlastné pojmy. Pokiaľ vedy pracujú s predstavou (Adorno tu hovorí o povere), že „pojmy jsou o sobě neurčené a určují se jen pomocí svých definic" (27), esej predkladá svoje pojmy priamočiaro, bezprostredne, pretože „chápe, že požadování striktních definic dlouho sloužilo k tomu, aby se ustanovujícími manipulacemi s významy pojmů odstranil iritující a nebezpečný aspekt věcí, jež v pojmech žijí" (27). Esej v tejto súvislosti rešpektuje, že všetky pojmy sú implicitne konkretizované už jazykom, v ktorom sa nachádzajú, pričom k ich spresneniu dochádza iba na základe ich vzájomných vzťahov. Pojmy, nepreddefinované, uvoľne-

né pre kryštalizáciu v procese „proplétání se“ vo vzájomných vzťahoch, už nevytvárajú súvislý rad operácií a myšlienka sa tu nevyvíja jednosmerne (27). Naopak, v tejto situácii pojmy iniciujú konfigurácie, ktoré sprostredkúvajú duchovnú skúsenosť ako to, čo „ukazuje“ neidentické: „Esej pojímá tuto zkušenost jako svůj vzor […]. Eseji jde […] o vzájemné působení jejích pojmů v procesu duchovní zkušenosti“ (27 – 28). Ak teda esej sprostredkúva duchovnú skúsenosť, robí tak svojou vlastnou (jedinečnou) pojmovou organizáciou (28).

Vyššie anotované momenty Adornovho záujmu o duchovnú skúsenosť možno zachytiť v ďalších esejach zbierky. Tie tematizujú diela i koncepčné súvislosti tvorby takých autorov ako Homér, Heinrich Heine, Honoré de Balzac, Ernst Bloch, Marcel Proust, odkazujú však afirmatívne alebo polemicky na celú plejádu osobností kultúrnych (umeleckých) dejín a prepájajú ich diela, postoje, názory či myšlienky so širokým spektrom typologických problémov. Výberovo/atomisticky možno spomenúť tematické komplexy dotýkajúce sa: antimýtickej intencie epickej naivity (esej na túto tému sprevádza úvahy o homérskej epike, ktoré formuloval Adorno spolu s Horkheimerom v *Dialektike osvietenstva*); používania cudzích slov, ktoré okrem iného dokazujú nemožnosť jazykovej ontológie; významu interpunkčných znamienok a ich podielu na rozpade jazyka; postavenia rozprávača v románovej forme, ktorá žiada zavedenie estetickej dištancie a tým i kapituláciu pred všemocnou skutočnosťou; muzikálnosti románových foriem; konfrontácie empirického Ja s jeho neidentitou (u Prousta) a podobne. Mimoriadne podnetná je tiež esej, ktorej zámerom je pochopiť Beckettovu hru *Koniec hry* tak, že sa bude snažiť pochopiť jej nepochopiteľnosť, „čili konkrétně rekonstruovat smysluplnou souvislost spočívající v tom, že hra smysl nemá“ (258). Sledujúc tento zámer Adorno zároveň rozvíja kritiku existencializmu, ktorý Beckett v mnohom prekonáva.

Na záver ešte poznámka o podmienkach diskurzívneho vzťahovania sa k Adornovým esejam. Konštatovať Adornovu nezrozumiteľnosť alebo zdôrazňovať zložitosť jeho textových kompozícií (Dyčková 2024, 14) by sa zdalo byť nevinnou rétorickou figúrou, keby sa v tom neprezrádzali obmedzené možnosti diskurzívnych foriem myslenia, o ktorých Adorno tak často hovorí. Platí totiž to, čo formulovala už prekladateľka Dyčková (14), totiž že Adorno tvorbu ním preferovaných autorov vníma predovšetkým cez ich potenciál prispieť k odhaleniu duchovnej skúsenosti; ich diela v sebe prenášajú „něco, co se vymyká systematicky popsatelné objektivitě“ (14). To spolu s vyššie uvedenými charakteristikami eseje dáva dôvod konštatovať náročnosť pokusov diskurzívne sumarizovať, a teda de facto *systematizovať* obsahy Adornových esejí o literatúre. Autor predvádza „praxis“ svojho programového textu a necháva momenty svojich esejí preplietať sa „jako vlákna ručně vázaného koberce“ (27). Len výpočet týchto momentov a opis vzťahov, ktoré medzi sebou nadväzujú, by bol/by musel byť rovnako nasýtený ako hustota textúry Adornových esejí. Jeho eseje, vychádzajúce z najkomplexnejších súvislostí a trvajúce na mnohovrstevnatosti myslenia (o literatúre), takto metakomunikačne vystavujú diskurzívne žánre (ako napr. recenzie) skúsenosti ich vlastnej nedostatočnosti – v tom rezonuje predĺžené gesto šibalskosti Adornovej dialektiky. Povesť o enigmatickosti Adornovho myslenia nevyhnutne založilo systematické myslenie.

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PAVEL BARŠA: Dekadence a obrození: Krize evropského liberalismu a „židovská otázka“ [Decadence and revival: The crisis of European liberalism and „the Jewish question“]
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Pavel Barša patrí v českom a čiastočne aj v slovenskom prostredí medzi najznámejších (a dúfajme, že nie aj medzi posledných) verejných intelektuálov idúcich v stopách francúzskych predchodcov ako Émile Zola či Jean-Paul Sartre. V desiatkach kníh pokryl nepreberné množstvo zväčša kontroverzných tém. Už iba ich výpočet a stručná charakteristika by presiahli priestor, ktorý má k dispozícii recenzent. Dôvod, prečo sa práve v kontexte tzv. svetovej literatúry zaoberám dielom politológa Pavla Baršu, súvisí s jeho najnovšou knihou *Dekadence a obrození* s podtitulom *Krize evropského liberalismu a „židovská otázka“* (2024). Z pozície historika ideí sa v nej zaoberá intelektuálnymi koncepciami nemecky píšucich židovských mysliteľov a ideológov prelomu 19. a 20. storočia. V užšom zmysle skúma modely prekonávania kríz kolektívnych identít zoči-voči nástupu demokratizmu, ktorého hovorcovia vo vtedajšej strednej Európe argumentovali v duchu antiliberalizmu a spravidla tiež antisemitizmu. Ide už o Baršovu tretiu knihu na podobnú tému – v prvej sa venoval spomínaniu na holokaust a v druhej ľavicovým „riešeniam židovskej otázky“ –, čo súvisí s autorovým pôvodom, ako sám naznačuje.

„Židovská otázka“ Pavlovi Baršovi v jeho najnovšej knihe splýva s úpadkom buržoáznej ideológie, ktorej symptómom bola dekadencia, teda subjektivizmus, pasivita a únik od svetských problémov. Keďže kapitalizmus bol nielen z perspektívy antisemitizmu stotožňovaný so vzostupom židovskej strednej vrstvy, medzi dekadentmi boli nadpriemerne zastúpení práve synovia židovských parvenu. Mnohí z nich však následne začali hľadať cesty, ako sa dostať z estetickej a dandyovskej izolácie a navyše „obrodiť“ aj kolektív, z ktorého prevažne pochádzali. V očiach antisemitov mohlo za úpadok ich židovstvo, chápané čoraz častejšie ako „rasa“, ktorej charakteristík sa krstom vraj nedalo zbaviť. Barša skúma, ako na tieto výzvy reagovali sionisti na čele s Theodorom Herzlom, Franzom Rosenzweigom či Martinom Buberom, ale aj zástancovia „asimilácie“ ako viedenskí literáti Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Karl Kraus či Georg Lukács, z ktorých prví dvaja sa oddávali „reakčným“ predstavám o obrodení aristokracie, zatiaľ čo budapeštiansky rodák Lukács sníval o splynutí s proletariátom. Barša vo svojej interpretácii zohľadňuje i pozície Otta Weiningera, ktorý chcel prekonať židovstvo „konverziou“ k „árijskému kresťanstvu“. Napokon autor odhaľuje súvislosti medzi pozíciami ďalšieho Viedenčana, zakladateľa psychoanalýzy Sigmunda Freuda a nemeckého spisovateľa Thomasa Manna, ktorí vystupovali voči židovskej buržoázii afirmatívne a považovali ju za priekopníčku univerzalistických hodnôt.

V recenzii sa sústredím práve na nemeckého držiteľa Nobelovej ceny za literatúru Thomasa Manna, známeho okrem tematizovania dekadencie svojím rezolútnym antifašizmom. Barša zdôvodňuje jeho zaradenie medzi uvedených židovských intelektuálov tým, že hoci nemal židovský pôvod, pokladal „stejně jako židovští autoři židovskú otázku za součást debat o dekadenci a možném

obrození moderní – buržoazní či měšťanské – Evropy“ (346). Mann navyše v Baršovej knihe nevystupuje ako okrajová postava, ale je doslova v jej centre. Analýzy jeho literárneho diela zaberajú najviac priestoru, zo štyroch častí knihy sú im venované hneď dve, teda presne polovica, na rozdiel od väčšiny židovských intelektuálov, v ktorých prípade si Barša vystačil s jednotlivými podkapitolami. Prečo sa Barša Mannovým dielom takto dôkladne zaoberá, naznačuje hneď na úvod. Fakt, že sa Mann oženil so Židovkou, ako aj pomoc židovských kritikov a vydavateľov v začiatkoch kariéry vraj mohol spôsobiť, „že si jako s nepřáteli Němců vystačil ve svém národně-konzervativním období s Francouzi […]“ (31). Po príklone k demokracii a liberalizmu v dôsledku prvej svetovej vojny vkladal Thomas Mann do Židov nádeje, že Nemcom pomôžu „překročit propast mezi jejich izolacionizmem a zakořeněním a západním universalismem a vykořeněním“ (31). Táto tendencia mala vyvrcholiť v postave biblického Jozefa z románového cyklu *Jozef a jeho bratia* (1934 – 1943): „Lidský typ, jenž odpovídá liberální civilizaci […]: jeho outsiderství již nehrozí strhnout společnost do propasti, ani jí neslibuje obrození či spásu, ale realizuje se paradoxně uvnitř ní ve zprostředkovatelství a hře, v nichž je také překonána dichotomie mezi jednáním (vůlí) a poznáním (představou), akcí a kontemplací“ (31 – 32). Zdôrazňovaním Jozefových „androgynních rysů“ Mann okrem toho odmietol „maskulinistický diskurz, jenž údajnou dekadenci buržoazní kultury přičítá na vrub rostoucí zženštilosti buržoazních mužů a obecněji míšení pohlavně rodových rolí spjatého s emancipací žen“ (32).

Pavel Barša svojím záberom a jazykom urobí dojem aj na germanistu (ktorý má prinajmenšom na Slovensku tendenciu tešiť sa už len z toho, keď sa niekto v česko-slovenskom kontexte podujme oživiť Thomasa Manna, dnes v tomto kúte sveta akoby zabudnutého). Jeho rozbor Mannových diel pôsobí suverénne a originálne, napríklad náčrt ideologického boja o dušu Hansa Castorpa z románu *Čarovný vrch* (1924) je analyticky presný a zároveň intelektuálne občerstvujúci. No pokiaľ ide o Mannov literárny príspevok k debatám o „židovskej otázke“, teda o vlastnú tému knihy, ukazujú sa zároveň limity Baršovej metódy, ktorá má asi najbližšie k dejinám ideí (bez bližšieho špecifikovania). Tieto obmedzenia vyplývajú z toho, že autor nerecipoval relevantnú sekundárnu literatúru – odkazuje vlastne iba na práce konzervatívneho Mannovho životopisca Hermanna Kurzkeho, v prípade jozefovskej tetralógie ešte doplnené o odkazy na práce Jana Assmanna a v jednom prípade Jacquesa LeRidera. Keby Pavel Barša poznal aspoň monografiu Heinricha Deteringa o stereotypoch odlišnosti u raného Manna, vedel by, že si nevystačí s obrazom francúzskeho nepriateľa. Presnejšie, že nešlo ani tak o obrazy nepriateľa, ale o ambivalentné stereotypy „Židov, žien a literátov“, s ktorých odlišnosťou sa často snažil stotožniť, ale ešte častejšie ju stigmatizoval. Mannovo rané dielo sa nedá redukovať na novelu *Tonio Kröger* (1903), kde sa protagonistovi podarí udržať rovnováhu medzi vlastnou rasovou a sexuálnou odlišnosťou, resp. činorodým životom „zdravej“ väčšiny. Prevažná väčšina Mannových dekadentných postáv vo svojich snahách stroskotá a končí tragicky. Predovšetkým však medzi jej neprajníkov patria desiatky epizodických postáv, stereotypizovaných ako židovské. A netýka sa to iba „židovskej novely“ *Krv Wälsungov* ([1906] 1921).

Bez zohľadnenia literárneho antisemitizmu u raného Thomasa Manna sotva pochopíme jeho neskorší filosemitizmus, ktorý naďalej pracoval s ambivalentnými obrazmi etnickej a rodovej odlišnosti, hoci sa ich usiloval prekódovať. Veľmi názorným príkladom je poviedka *Zákon* z roku 1943, ktorej protagonistom je biblický Mojžiš a jeho úsilie presvedčiť Hebrejov o existencii Jahveho a potrebe viery v neho. V tomto prípade problémom nie je iba metóda, ale aj chýbajúci literárnohistorický kontext. Barša pojednáva o *Zákone* spolu s Freudovou poslednou knihou *Muž Mojžiš a monoteizmus* (1939), pričom u oboch podčiarkuje zdôraz-

ňovanie všeľudského univerzalizmu na úkor partikulárnej obmedzenosti a kmeňového egoizmu v duchu simplifikujúceho protikladu „Sinaj verzus Sion". Až potom nasleduje Baršov rozbor jozefovského cyklu, ktorý predkladá ako „Mannovu syntézu" v zmysle vyššie uvedeného mýtu stredu, sprostredkujúceho medzi oboma pólmi, medzi ktorými sa zmietala „nemecká duša", teda medzi abstrakciou a matériou, morálkou a hriechom, mužským a ženským, a ktoré antisemiti pripisovali „Árijcom", respektíve „Židom". Problém nie je iba v tom, že chronológia vzniku oboch diel je opačná: na románovom cykle Mann pracoval takmer desaťročie, kým poviedka *Zákon* vznikla takpovediac ako jeho post scriptum, na objednávku za dva mesiace. Pôvodne malo ísť o úvod ku kolektívnej zbierke próz, ktorá mala byť morálnou obžalobou Hitlera a nacistov. Egyptológ Jan Assmann v jednej novšej štúdii (túto Barša neuvádza) poukazuje na skutočnosť, že Mann chcel z judaizmu odvodiť nutnosť uzákoniť všeobecné ľudské práva, čo však je celkom ahistorický a eurocentrický prístup, pretože morálne prikázania sú buď dedičstvom všetkých náboženstiev, alebo žiadneho. Mannov Mojžiš navyše podľa Assmanna nie je zakladateľom monoteizmu, ale predsavzal si poľudštiť necivilizovaných barbarov, a tým zároveň ukázať, akých barbarov Hitler urobil z civilizovaných Nemcov. Túto tézu ďalej rozvinul jeden z najvýznamnejších súčasných odborníkov na Mannovo dielo, švajčiarsky germanista Yahya Elsaghe, ktorý sa primárne zaoberá jeho literárnym spracovaním „židovskej otázky", Barša ho však nerecipuje. Elsaghe poukazuje na Mannov ďalší dôležitý zdroj, vplyvného švajčiarskeho religionistu Johanna Jakoba Bachofena, ktorý ako dieťa 19. storočia pomocou kategórií rodu vytvoril zvláštnu víziu akéhosi konzervatívneho pokroku, keď pôvodný prírodný stav sexuálnej anarchie (heterizmu) malo nahradiť tzv. materské právo, ktoré údajne stálo na počiatku individualizačného procesu, lebo dalo deťom matku a vytvorilo tak základy, na ktorých mohlo ďalej budovať „otcovské právo". Praktikujúci protestant Bachofen bol antijudaista, a preto ignoroval Hebrejskú bibliu a odvolával sa na iné kultúry. Mann túto medzeru rozpoznal a zaplnil svojou poviedkou. Mojžiš v nej na dvakrát poľudští Hebrejov (apelujúc na „krv otcov") po tom, čo prvý raz atavisticky upadli späť do „heterizmu" a zabudli dokonca i na „materské právo". Na záver prekľaje Hitlera za to, že uvrhol Nemcov do podobného regresu. Mann teda ešte aj ako „filosemita" pracoval s antisemitskými stereotypmi, ibaže ich prekódoval a podsunul nacistom. Jeho racionálny príklon k republikánstvu a demokracii neznamenal, že celkom rezignoval na sémantiku „konzervatívnej revolúcie", s ktorou koketoval krátko po prvej svetovej vojne (svedčí o tom napokon aj preferovanie „otcov" pred „matkami", ktoré nielen v tomto prípade vyvažuje „androgýnne rysy" mnohých Mannových postáv). V tom spočíva jeho skutočná „syntéza".

Spôsob, akým Barša pristupuje k Mannovmu dielu, ktorému venoval vo svojej knihe suverénne najväčší priestor, je príznačný. Autor má určite právo na zjednodušenia, kniha má zjavne osloviť aj širšiu čitateľskú obec, hoci vyšla v akademickom vydavateľstve v edícii moderných „klasikov" ľavicového myslenia. Ak však jej zámerom má byť podnecovať k premýšľaniu o koreňoch dnešného blízkovýchodného konfliktu (zväčša medzi riadkami, na povrch to presiakne na strane 151), pôsobia zjednodušujúce opozície rušivo a stranícky. Netýka sa to iba protikladu „Sinaj verzus Sion", ale najmä antitézy „univerzalizmus verzus partikularizmus", ktorá podobne ako pojmový pár „antisemitizmus a filosemitizmus" vyznieva priveľmi kategoricky, moralizujúco a ahistoricky. Napríklad Buberove metafory krvi nie sú smrteľne vážne prejavy latentného židovského rasizmu, ale dekadentná estetická hra – z dnešného pohľadu možno nebezpečná, ale v dobovom kontexte ak aj nie nevinná, tak prinajmenšom naivná; smrteľne vážne ju bral až Buberov generačný druh Franz Kafka, ako v dôležitej monografii ukázal Caspar Battegay. Ani partikularizmus nemusí byť chcený, naopak, môže byť násilne vnútený,

ako vieme z reflexií Jeana Améryho, sionistu zo solidarity s obeťami holokaustu. Skúsenosť násilia zostáva partikulárna a akýkoľvek pokus univerzalizovať ju je vopred odsúdený na neúspech – čo nie je v nijakom rozpore s univerzalizmom ľudských práv. Na hranice svojej solidarity s Izraelom napokon narazil krátko pred smrťou aj Améry, keď sa dopočul o mučení v izraelských väzniciach. Napriek tomu, že to zasiahlo najhlbší nerv jeho identity, keďže prežil nacistickú tortúru, túto solidaritu nevypovedal. O tom, či by to urobil dnes, môžeme už iba špekulovať.

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SOŇA PAŠTEKOVÁ: Reflexia ruského formalizmu v diele Mikuláša Bakoša
[The reflection of Russian formalism in the work of Mikuláš Bakoš]
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Profesor Mikuláš Bakoš (1914 – 1972) patrí k významným predstaviteľom slovenskej literárnej vedy druhej polovice 20. storočia. K jej rozvoju prispel nielen ako sprostredkovateľ poznatkov ruskej formálnej školy a stúpenec štrukturalistickej metodológie literárnovedného výskumu, ale aj ako vedec so širokým spektrom bádateľských záujmov a tiež ako zakladateľ a dlhoročný riaditeľ Ústavu svetovej literatúry a jazykov Slovenskej akadémie vied. Je preto len prirodzené, že k jeho vedeckému odkazu sa slovenská akademická i vysokoškolská literárna veda vracia ako k žriedlu inšpirácie so zámerom v polemickej diskusii a kritickom prehodnotení výsledkov jeho práce prispieť k rozvíjaniu najmä metodologických aspektov humanitného výskumu. Dôkazom tohto faktu je aj monografia Sone Paštekovej *Reflexia ruského formalizmu v diele Mikuláša Bakoša*, ktorá je potvrdením autorkinho dlhoročného záujmu.

Monografiu tvorí sedem kapitol, ktoré sú koncipované a, ako uvádza autorka, pôvodne aj uverejnené v podobe samostatných štúdií v domácich i zahraničných literárnovedných časopisoch a zborníkoch; pre potreby monografie však boli prepracované a doplnené. Škoda len, že ani v zozname literatúry, ani v krátkej edičnej poznámke na konci monografie nie sú uvedené konkrétnejšie bibliografické údaje o ich publikovaní.

Monografiu otvára „predstavenie" jej protagonistu v stručnej kapitole „Kontroverzný mýtus literárnovednej slavistiky Mikuláš Bakoš". Paštekova tu v hutnej skratke prezentuje nielen sféry pôsobenia ruského formalizmu na Bakošovu vedeckú prácu, ale špecifikuje aj oblasti jeho prínosu k rozvoju slovenského literárnovedného myslenia (literárna teória a história, vedecká metodológia, literárnovedná terminológia, textová analýza a interpretácia, moderná naratológia, slovenská verzológia, reflexia literárnej avantgardy, súdobá porovnávacia literárna veda; 7), a definuje tak kľúčové roviny, v ktorých reflektoval teoretické postuláty formalizmu a štrukturalizmu. Týmto aspektom Bakošovho vedeckého odkazu venuje pozornosť v ďalších štúdiách monografie. Akcentuje pritom najmä fakt, že Bakoš dokázal tvorivo skĺbiť metodológiu formalizmu a štrukturalizmu s historickou poetikou, pričom ich jednotu vnímal ako základ exaktnej textovej analýzy, estetickej funkcie literárneho diela i vnútroliterárneho slohovo-druhového vývinu.

Kapitola „Teoretické postuláty ruského formalizmu v bádateľskom odkaze Mikuláša Bakoša (Paralely estetické i osobnostné)" mapuje recepciu teoretických výdobytkov ruského formalizmu v slovenskom literárnovednom kontexte od 30. rokov minulého storočia. Autorka si pritom všíma metodologickú podnetnosť prísne scientologického prístupu ruských formalistov k analýze umeleckého textu pre Bakošov vedecký rast i rozvoj celej slovenskej literárnej vedy, ako aj širšie spoločensko-historické peripetie, ktoré tento proces negatívne ovplyvňovali najskôr v 40. rokoch, po prvom vydaní antológie prác ruskej formálnej školy v jeho vlastnom výbere a preklade (*Teória literatúry: Výber z „formálnej metódy"*, 1941), keď bola kol-

portácia tejto knihy z dôvodu židovského pôvodu a komunistického zmýšľania autorov jednotlivých štúdií dokonca zakázaná, a aj v 50. a 70. rokoch (po druhom vydaní knihy v roku 1971), keď sa im zasa vyčítala nedostatočná ideologická angažovanosť a odklon od marxisticko-leninskej metodologickej orientácie. Ideologický tlak v 50. rokoch prinútil aj Bakoša k istej „úlitbe" vrchnostiam (dobovo poplatné práce *Stalin a umenie*, *O socialistickom realizme* a i.), ktorá však niesla zreteľne prechodný charakter. V ďalších častiach kapitoly Pašteková venuje pozornosť jednak vlastným Bakošovým prácam, v ktorých možno zreteľne detegovať prítomnosť teoreticko-metodologických východísk ruskej formálnej školy a českého štrukturalizmu (avantgardný zborník *Áno a nie*, antológia *Avantgarda 38*, diela *Vývin slovenského verša*, *Problémy literárnej vedy včera a dnes*, *Literárna história a historická poetika* a i.), ako aj dielam najvýraznejších predstaviteľov ruskej formálnej školy (Viktor Šklovskij, Boris Ejchenbaum a i.) a tiež monografii Leva Vygotského *Psychológia umenia*, ktorá polemicky rozvíja odkaz formalistov. V závere kapitoly si autorka všíma aj paralely kultúrneho pôsobenia a spôsobov komunikácie protagonistov formálnej školy s neskoršími etapami vývoja literatúry a literárnej vedy, pričom konštatuje: „Formálnou školou proklamovaný prísny scientizmus sa neraz prelína s avantgardnou provokatívnosťou a hravou performatívnosťou, príznačnou pre oveľa neskorší postmodernizmus. […] Ruskí formalisti svojím originálnym metodologickým prístupom vniesli do modernej literárnej vedy nielen nový systém skúmania a exaktne prepracovanú terminológiu, ale aj nečakané čitateľské a divácke napätie" (34 – 35).

Kapitola „Čím nám bol Mikuláš Bakoš? (Paradoxy reflexie v slovenskom literárnovednom myslení)" prináša precízne spracovanú sondu do reflexie Bakošovho vedeckého odkazu v prostredí slovenskej literárnej vedy. Pojem „paradoxy" v jej podnázve indikuje podľa vyjadrenia Sone Paštekovej fakt, že hoci „komplexný a systematický výskum vedeckého diela M. Bakoša na Slovensku dodnes absentuje, […] do istej miery ho supluje skôr sporadická, no pomerne bohatá a kvalitná reflexia" (37). Potvrdzuje to celý rad štúdií nielen mladších Bakošových spolupracovníkov a neskôr aj následníkov, ku ktorým autorka štúdie – pars pro toto – radí napríklad rusistky Emu Panovovú, Soňu Lesňákovú, slavistu a komparatistu Dionýza Ďurišina, polonistu Pavla Winczera, romanistu Ladislava Franeka, germanistu Ivana Cvrkala, slovakistu Viliama Marčoka i príslušníkov najmladšej slovenskej literárnovednej generácie Róberta Gáfrika či Dušana Teplana. V kapitole sa analyzujú alebo aspoň stručne sumarizujú či komentujú príspevky viac ako 25 slovenských humanitných vedcov venované Bakošovmu vedeckému odkazu. Jeho staršiu i novšiu recepciu člení Pašteková na komparatistickú, metodologicko-teoretickú a historickú, štrukturalistickú, verzologickú, terminologickú a translatologickú a na teoretické otázky literárnej moderny a avantgardy (39). Hoci reflexia – ako vysvitá aj z vyššie uvedených faktov – má charakter dlhodobého procesu, najzásadnejšie práce sa koncentrujú do obdobia slobodného bádania posledných zhruba troch desaťročí a vedú k opodstatnenému záveru, ktorý Pašteková sumarizuje takto: „Prezentovanie rozmanitosti aspektov vnímania Bakošovho diela vo vzájomnom zrkadlení, dopĺňaní sa a interakcii metodologických prístupov, polemík i nesporného novátorstva dynamicky prekračuje svoju dobu ako otvorený koncept vedeckého myslenia" (57). V tom nesporne spočíva aj jeden zo zásadných faktorov trvalého inšpiratívneho pôsobenia Bakošových prác.

Translatologickým a terminologickým aktivitám Mikuláša Bakoša sa venuje štvrtá kapitola „K Bakošovým prekladom vedeckých prác ruských formalistov (Terminologické posuny literárnej vedy v procese prekladu)". Táto sféra Bakošovej činnosti je spätá predovšetkým s jeho výberovými prekladmi vedeckých štúdií ruských formalistov uverejnenými v prvom a druhom vydaní antológie *Teória literatúry: Výber z formálnej metódy* (1941, 1971). Pašteková tu na prekladoch programových statí Šklov-

ského „Umenie ako postup“ a Ejchenbauma „Ako je urobený [v 1. vyd. zrobený] Gogoľov ‚Plášť‘“? analyzuje nielen ich tematiku, ale aj – a najmä – Bakošove terminologické prekladateľské hľadania čo najadekvátnejších riešení pojmov „prijom“ či „skaz“. Dochádza pritom k argumentačne precízne zdôvodnenému záveru, že „v prirodzenom súlade s vývinom európskej literárnej vedy 20. storočia smeruje Mikuláš Bakoš pri preklade literárnych pojmov a kategórií prác ruských formalistov […] v prvom vydaní antológie (1941) na prvý pohľad skôr k naturalizácii (aj vzhľadom na miestami už archaickú slovenčinu). Avšak rešpektujúc dobovú úroveň vývinu slovenskej literárnej vedy a jej úzu tu, podobne ako aj v druhom vydaní antológie (1971), preloženom modernejšou slovenčinou, sa pri prekladoch […] usiluje o istú rovnováhu/harmóniu, pohybuje sa na osi naturalizácia – exotizácia (medzi domácim a prevzatým pojmovým aparátom literárnej vedy), a tak tenduje skôr k istej hybridizácii pri hľadaní ideálnych riešení či relevantných terminologických ekvivalentov pre potreby ich integrácie do metodologického aparátu slovenskej literárnej vedy“ (67 – 68).

Kapitola „Historická poetika Mikuláša Bakoša v metodologickom procese (Svetová literatúra v interakcii vnútroliterárnych a medziliterárnych vzťahov)“ analyzuje jednak Bakošovu koncepciu historickej poetiky s postupným vývojom k jej aplikácii na širšie nadnárodné literárne celky (vrátane kreovania teórie svetovej literatúry) a jednak metodologický význam tohto konceptu pre neskoršie komparativistické práce jeho nasledovníkov, predovšetkým Ďurišina a Gáfrika. Historická poetika v Bakošovom chápaní „umožňuje riešiť jeden zo základných problémov literárnej vedy, syntézu štrukturálneho a historického prístupu k literárnym javom, čím dáva možnosť spojiť synchróniu a diachróniu vo výskumoch literatúry“ (75). Je to teda sféra, v rámci ktorej sa stretajú statický/systémový a dynamický/vývinový aspekt literárnej vedy. To podľa jeho názoru otvára cestu k tvorbe a aplikácii metodologickej koncepcie modernej komparatistiky založenej na dialektickej dynamike vnútroliterárnych a medziliterárnych vzťahov.

Pašteková sa v snahe o komplexný obraz Bakošovho vedeckého odkazu nevyhýba ani problematickým aspektom jeho literárnovedných aktivít. Dôkazom je kapitola „Hľadanie metodológie v okovách ideológie? (Úvahy o zložitých vedeckých cestách Mikuláša Bakoša)“, ktorá sa citlivo, ale pritom s náležitou mierou objektívnosti zamýšľa nad dôsledkami ideologického tlaku na Bakošove „vedecké cesty“, ktorý viedol k dočasnému rozporuplnému ústupu z jeho jasných exaktných metodologických pozícií.

Monografiu uzatvára kapitola „Mikuláš Bakoš o vzťahu slovenskej a českej literatúry a literárnej vedy“, ktorá zasadzuje Bakošovo dielo do širšieho slovensko-českého či česko-slovenského kontextu. Pašteková tu v prvej časti venuje pozornosť tak Bakošovej vlastnej interpretácii príklonu, respektíve odklonu slovenskej literatúry k/od českej v jednotlivých etapách ich vývoja, ako aj jeho výkladu vzťahu slovenskej literárnej vedy k podnetnému pôsobeniu prác Jana Mukařovského, Felixa Vodičku a Pražského lingvistického krúžku. V druhej časti kapitoly sa zameriava na posúdenie recepcie Bakošovho vedeckého odkazu v prostredí slovenskej a českej literárnej vedy s osobitným zreteľom na štúdie Ladislava Franeka a Iva Pospíšila.

Šírkou tematického záberu, hĺbkou ponoru do skúmaného materiálu, logikou výkladu a koncíznosťou jeho interpretácie i bohatou bibliografiou predstavuje monografia Sone Paštekovej *Reflexia ruského formalizmu v diele Mikuláša Bakoša* spolu so zborníkmi *Mikuláš Bakoš a moderná literárna veda* (ed. Dušan Teplan, 2016) a *Mikuláš Bakoš – pluralitný literárny vedec v metodologickej diskusii dneška* (eds. Soňa Pašteková – Dušan Teplan, 2022) významný vklad k poznaniu a aktualizácii vedeckého diela Mikuláša Bakoša.

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KATARÍNA BEDNÁROVÁ – MÁRIA KUSÁ – SILVIA RYBÁROVÁ: Slovník prekladateliek a prekladateľov: vedy o človeku a kultúre. Bratislava: VEDA, vydavateľstvo SAV – Ústav svetovej literatúry SAV, v. v. i., 2024. 464 s. ISBN 978-80-224-2070-9 (print), ISBN 978-80-224-2077-8 (online).
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The dictionary of Slovak translators in the humanities and social sciences presents – through the portraits of almost one hundred translators and their selected bibliographies – a comprehensive overview of a substantial part of the book production of the most important works of philosophical, sociological, historical, literary, and artistic orientation, published and translated in Slovakia from the interwar period of the 20th century to the present day. It provides profiles of the personalities of Slovak socio-humanistic translation, defines their dominant focus, and also creates a unique history of the reception of this literature in Slovakia. Together with the introductory contextual articles, bibliography of translations, selection of secondary literature on individual entries, index of names, and other materials, it also allows for their reconstruction, thanks to the linking of individual entries and translators through the translated authors as well. Although the dictionary was published in Slovak, it also contains three introductory texts in English translation: Foreword (K. Bednárová – M. Kusá), Contexts of translation in the humanities and social sciences I: Mapping the field (K. Bednárová), Contexts of translation in the humanities and social sciences II: The publishing environment in the coordinates of the socio-cultural and political system (1918–1989) (M. Kusá).

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V politickom aj duchovnom zmysle patrí utopický mierový apel k mocným hnacím silám ľudskej predstavivosti. Mierovú rétoriku možno však ťažko oddeliť od vojnovej reality; nakoniec totiž vedie úsilie, ktoré má slúžiť vyššiemu cieľu, často k nespravodlivosti a násiliu. Autori a autorky štúdií v tomto čísle diskutujú o európskych, amerických a čínskych textoch, ktoré predstavujú široké spektrum imaginácií mieru, od naivného nadšenia pre riešenia zhora nadol až po skľúčené elégie nad zánikom občianskych slobôd.

The utopian appeal of peace, both in a political and spiritual sense, belongs to the powerful drivers of the human imagination. Yet the rhetorics of peace are difficult to untangle from the realities of war; after all, efforts that supposedly serve a higher purpose frequently result in injustice and violence. In the present issue, an international group of scholars discusses European, American, and Chinese texts that cover a wide spectrum of imagined peace, ranging from naïve enthusiasm for top-down solutions to dejected elegies for the demise of civil liberties.