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GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS

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Thematic Issue

Calamity and Immunity

To the victims of the global coronavirus pandemic ...

GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS

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Varia Issue

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS: An International Journal in Contemporary Philosophy and Culture
Volume IV, Number 01 (2021): 07-08

Editorial

Introduction

The current thematic issue cover topics of interest in literary criticism, philosophy, and transcultural studies. Three articles focus directly on the theme of "Calamity and Immunity," whereas an article and a translation with commentary draw attention to the contemporary relevance of two thinkers from the Indian subcontinent.

The opening two articles identify Jacques Derrida's sense of autoimmunity in reading two contemporary novels. Yasemin Karaağaç brings to the fore the interrelations of autoimmunity with hostility and hospitality in Ismail Kadare's novel *The Fall of The Stone City*. The novel, which narrates the events of two successive political contexts in Albania – the German occupation during the World War Two and the post-war communist regime – has proven a prolific resource for Karaağaç to put to work the conceptual instrumentarium of deconstruction in revisiting the relations, actions, and fate of its main characters.

For her part, Catherine MacMillan focuses on the political sense of autoimmunity, which she reads throughout José Saramago's novel *Seeing*. The novel, which depicts a political crisis after democratic elections, has offered an opportunity for MacMillan to explore potential benefits and risks from actions of governments addressing such crisis. Employing the concept of autoimmunity, she keenly shows its convergence with Saramago's reflective narrative in support of the need for democracy as a permanent political critique.

The third article also makes use of Derrida's deconstructive philosophy for purposes of literary critique, this time in conjunction with Alice's Jardine's feminist notion of gynesis and in a reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's Novel *The Scarlet Letter*. Here the concepts of immunity and autoimmunity are deployed along with those of woman-in-effect, trace, patriarchy, discourse, and phallogocentrism, amongst others, in a joint deconstructive feminist perspective aiming to identify the sense of life-affirmation throughout Hawthorne's narrative and thus trace what Derrida has called 'the becoming literary of the literal'.

In her article, Priyambada Sarkar offers a comparative discussion of aspects of the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Rabindranath Tagore. She focuses in particular on Wittgenstein's claim that 'ethics and aesthetics are one' and endeavors to identify it in Tagore's work. In an exposition full of insights, which goes over an admirable amount of the works of and the research on these two thinkers, Sakar shows that for both of them words fall short of conveying the sense of value, but that the clarification of this peculiar 'running against the boundaries of language' is conductive to the harmony of philosophical and poetic thinking.

The issue ends up with a selection of the songs of Lalon Fakir, the Bengali poet-philosopher from the 19th century, translated and with commentary by Sayed Muddashir Hossain. Lalon's songs are unique and remarkable in many ways, as has been also his life story. Today's reader will be able to find in them that, among other things, questions about religion,

gender, and social equality, which are major concerns of our time, were raised so keenly and long ago by this brilliant – at once poetic and philosophic – mind. Hossain's commentary is very informative, proving truly useful in grasping the sense of Lalon's unique metaphorics.

We hope you enjoy these pieces and find in them something to benefit from. Thank you for your time!

Rossen Roussev

GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS: An International Journal in Contemporary Philosophy and Culture
Volume IV, Number 01 (2021): 09-24

Calamity and Immunity

HOSTILITY, HOSPITALITY, AND AUTOIMMUNITY IN KADARE'S *THE FALL OF THE STONE CITY*

Yasemin Karaağaç

Abstract

The paper explores Ismail Kadare's novel The Fall of The Stone City from the perspective of Derrida's concepts of hospitality and autoimmunity. According to Derrida, the concepts of unconditional hospitality and autoimmunity overlap in their absolute openness to the Other, which potentially constitutes both a risk and an opportunity in the context of deconstructing and destabilizing the binary opposition between friendship and enmity. The aim of the paper is to show the relevance of this point in a discussion of key events in the novel. More specifically, the invasion of Albania by German troops and the disastrous regime of Stalinist communist partisans will be analyzed through Derrida's concepts of hospitality and autoimmunity. In addition, the encounter of the German commander with his old college friend, Albanian Big Dr Gurameto, during the invasion of Albania is seen as suggestive of the breakdown of the clear distinction between friendship and enmity. The arrival of the German commander, who is Big Dr Gurameto's old friend but an enemy in the eye of the public, will be examined also in view of Derrida's concept of arrivant, as well as of his concept of hospitality. In this sense, this paper will discuss the destabilizing of the binary opposition between friendship and enmity, and its engagement with hospitality and autoimmunity.

Keywords: Derrida, hospitality, autoimmunity, deconstructing, friendship, enmity

Ismail Kadare, the best-known Albanian author internationally and a laureate of a number of prestigious literary awards, wrote much of his work under the Communist dictatorship of Enver Hoxha. Like many other Albanian writers who experienced control, repressions, and often imprisonment under the communist regime, Kadare suffered threats and had to compromise in order to see his work published. However, he can still be considered a writer of subversive works in the cultural context of socialist Albania. He has produced a variety of literary texts that explore his country's historical situation and culture, and his novels render him a unique

chronicler of Albanian history. Kadare, is known as both a guardian of the Albanian identity and "a universal writer in a tradition of storytelling that goes back to Homer."[1]

Albania was ruled by a Stalinist regime which lasted five years beyond the death of Enver Hoxha in 1985. After consecutive breaks with Yugoslavia, Moscow, and China, by 1978, the country was sealed off from Europe and the West, as much as from world communism.[2] During World War II it was invaded by both Italians and Germans, and after the fall of communism it had its vested interest in the Kosovo War. During the communist regime, many of Kadare's works were censored, but they were published in various forms and formats, and were both published and translated inside and outside Albania. In his early years, under the Hoxha regime, Kadare realized that "a dictatorship may be made of harder material than the dictator himself" and as he matured he thought that "the writer and the dictator share something in their control over the worlds of imagination and reality."[3] Based on his experiences during the dictatorship years, Kadare offers a large body of novels, essays, and stories that present a perspective on related political and historical events in the Albanian history to the readership in Europe and the world.

The Fall of The Stone City[4] can be seen as a great portrayal of the social and political situation in Albania during the time of dictatorship, capturing the themes of resistance and totalitarianism, as well as the dark political threats that the people faced during that period. The events in the novel take place in the year 1943 in Kadare's birthplace, the ancient stone city of Gjirokastër, which had been occupied by the Italian army since 1939. In the course of the war, the German Army invaded the city from occupied Greece to replace the Italian occupation with a new one. The novel thus depicts how the war disrupted people's lives and how they struggled against the political regimes of the various occupying forces, adding up to the Ottoman Empire, Italian fascism, German Nazism, and Stalinist communism.

At this point, the Albanian resistance started with fire on German motorcyclists and tanks. The main action of the story began with the meeting of two old college friends – the Nazi commander Colonel Fritz von Schwabe and Big Dr Gurameto, a popular surgeon in the city. Gurameto invited von Schwabe for dinner at his home with other guests, including Little Dr Gurameto, a friend and colleague of Big Dr Gurameto's. The townspeople, who hear the music from the doctor's gramophone and the clinking of glasses and dishes from his house during the night, presumed that Big Dr Gurameto betrayed his country, and even celebrated and toasted the German invasion. However, Big Dr Gurameto persuaded his old friend to release the local hostages, including a Jewish pharmacist captured by the Germans, to which von Schwabe eventually conceded supposedly for the sake of their old friendship. Consequently, after the hostages were freed, Big Dr Gurameto became almost a heroic figure for the Albanian people for having secured better fortunes for the city. Still, the dinner remained a mystery for the townsfolk until its secret was revealed at a later time when Stalinist functionaries arrested and tortured the two surgeons to speak out the truth about that evening.

[1] Peter Morgan, *Ismail Kadare The Writer and the Dictatorship 1957-1990* (UK: Legenda, 2010), p. xv.
[2] Ibid., p. 1.
[3] Ibid., pp.115-116.
[4] Ismail Kadare, *The Fall of The Stone City* (Great Britain: Canongate Books, 2008).

When the Stalinist regime took over the country, the two foremost investigators in Albania at the time, Shaqo Mezini and Arian Ciu, examined the full list of the surgeons' patients because the two doctors were charged with planning to commit political murders of communist leaders. In the process of the investigation, Big Dr Gurameto learned that the man who was supposed to be his old friend attending the dinner back then was a German Colonel called Klaus Hempf, who only presented himself as Fritz von Schwabe. The two Nazi colonels met by chance in a field hospital in May 1943. The mortally wounded von Schwabe asked – as daying wish – his fellow officer, who was to be transferred to Albania, to find and bid farewell to his old Albanian college friend. Hempf promised to carry out his wish, as von Schwabe died in his arms on May 11, 1943. Four months later, on September 16, 1943, the Nazi tanks invaded Albania and the name of the city, Gjirokastër, reminded Hempf of his promise. When reaching to Big Dr Gurameto, Hempf passed himself off as Colonel Fritz von Schwabe, even as the latter had already died on the front a few months before. Subsequently, Big Dr Gurameto supposed that he was greatly altered by time and his wounds. Thus, in due course, the deathbed encounter between von Schwabe and Hempf in a military hospital was followed by the mysterious dinner and, years later, by the Stalinist political investigation, after extracts from Hempf's diary made these events known.

The novel vividly depicts this period of Albania's history and the victims of the German invasion. It also presents us with a picture of the totalitarian communist regime that followed, which was supposed to liberate the Albanian people from the fascist occupying forces but instead brought about another disastrous rule. In this framework, *The Fall of The Stone City* also offers a perspective for discussion of binary oppositions such as hospitality and hostility, friendship and enmity, as these are the primary concepts explored in the novel. Kadare tells his story from a perspective that challenges well-established notions by juxtaposing them with their opposites in the course of the events he narrates. It will be primarily these binary oppositions that will be analyzed here through Derrida's concepts of hospitality and autoimmunity.

In this respect, the challenged borders between these binary oppositions prompt an examination of the notion of foreigner/stranger, who can appear as enemy or friend within Derrida's concept of hospitality. In *Of Hospitality*,[5] Derrida analyses the sense of hospitality (*xenia*), which derives from the Latin *hospes,* meaning 'host, guest, or stranger'. Since by its etymology it carries its contradiction within itself, hospitality can be understood as the reception of a stranger (*Xenos*) in a most general sense which accommodates two opposing meanings. Derrida points out that this is indicated in the translation of *Xenos* in French with two contradictory meanings: as *étranger* (stranger or foreigner) or as *hôte* (host).[6] Thus, for him, this coexistence of meanings reveals the apparently paradoxical relation between hospitality and hostility, in which both of these concepts haunt each other ambivalently – "the foreigner welcomed as a guest or as enemy. Hospitality, hostility, *hostpitality*."[7]

In this framework, Derrida carries his study further and puts forward two kinds of hospitality, namely, *unconditional* and *conditional* hospitality. For Derrida, the ideal hospitality is unconditional hospitality where the Other is welcomed with no expectation to adapt to the

[5] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, translated by Anne Dufourmantelle (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
[6] Ibid., p. 41.
[7] Ibid., p. 45.

traditions, conditions or rules of the host. That is, in unconditional hospitality, the Other is accepted with absolute openness. This indeed implies a risk that the guest might turn out to be an enemy/parasite. And yet, the uninvited guest/stranger might be as well a friendly guest. This ambiguity in the sense of hospitality can be related to Derrida's concept of *autoimmunity*, which is described as "that strange behavior where a living being, in quasi-suicidal fashion, 'itself' works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself against its own immunity."[8] In other words, autoimmunity can be seen as a potentially destructive threat to its own immunity while it tries to protect its own community or sovereignty. Since it is the instance of the body attacking its own immune system, autoimmunity can be considered an internal occupation which also allows the intrusion of the Other.[9] Derrida further explains autoimmunity in *Rogues* as follows:

> For what I call the autoimmune consists not only in harming or ruining oneself, indeed in destroying one's own protections, and in doing so oneself, committing suicide or threatening to do so, but, more seriously still, and through this, in threatening the I (*moi*) or the self (*soi*), the ego or the autos, ipseity itself, compromising the immunity of the autos itself: it consists not only in compromising oneself (*s'auto-entamer*) but in compromising the self, the autos – and thus ipseity. It consists not only in committing suicide but in compromising sui- or self-referentiality, the self or sui- of suicide itself. Autoimmunity is more or less suicidal, but, more seriously still, it threatens always to rob suicide itself of its meaning and supposed integrity.[10]

Thus, autoimmunity can be understood in terms of a self-attacking move, which allows for the destruction of one's self, such that the relation "is neither one of exteriority nor one of simple opposition or contradiction."[11]

On this basis, Derrida's hospitality and hostility will be used as umbrella concepts throughout the discussion of the theme of friendship and enmity. The paper aims to explore the interwoven relation of hospitality and hostility in the novel by examining the two old friends' promises and threats to each other in the context of friendship and enmity under the German occupation of Albania. As it is related to the theme of hospitality, the concept of the *arrivant* will be analyzed here as well; and additionally, the communist regime will be discussed as a destructive threat from the perspective of autoimmunity.

Besides hospitality, hostility and friendship are also underlined in *The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini*, the traditional Albanian legal code mentioned in the novel. As Ramazan Balcı explains, "*The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini* had continued to survive as a national law which had never lost its effectiveness among Albanians, since the 11th century. The works on this subject, evaluate this code as a part of the oral folk tradition, and especially draw attention to its cultural aspect."[12] In addition, in his *Essays on World Literature: Aeschylus, Dante, Shakespeare* (2018), Kadare emphasizes the importance of the guest as having almost deified status for the

[8] Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 100.
[9] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 123.
[10] Ibid., p. 45.
[11] Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror,* p. 114.
[12] Ramazan Balcı, "The Ottoman Practices of *The Kanun of Dukajini*: The Method of Cibal," *Türkiyat Mecmuası*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2016), p. 33.

Albanian people according to *The Kanun*.[13] Indeed, hospitality is to such an extent at the core of *The Kanun* that penalties have to be applied if someone breaks its rules. Since it plays such an important role in the Albanian culture, hospitality cannot be simply ignored.[14]

As mentioned above, for Derrida, ideally hospitality is unconditional, which essentially means welcoming the Other without asking questions about his or her name, identity, state or origin; as opposed to conditional hospitality, which requires the guest to adapt to the rules and the norms of the host. More broadly put, whereas in conditional hospitality the host has control over the guest in terms of control over national borders,[15] in its very essence Derrida's claim suggests that hospitality should be unconditional and should involve openness to the stranger whoever or whatever she or he may be. As Derrida puts it, a visitor can be "a foreigner, an immigrant, an uninvited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female."[16] Thus, it can be said that unconditional hospitality does not limit the visitor – the Other – or force the visitor to adjust to the host's space, for "hospitality should be neither assimilation, acculturation, nor simply the occupation of my space by the Other."[17] Instead, as he claims that unconditional hospitality should be ideally the case, for Derrida the host should open his or her space without any request to do so:

> I have to – and that's an unconditional injunction – I have to welcome the Other whoever he or she is unconditionally, without asking for a document, a name, a context or a passport. That is the very first opening of my relation to the Other; to open my space, my home – my house, my language, my culture, my nation, my state and myself.[18]

Hence, Derrida, in his comments on unconditional hospitality, emphasizes the ambiguous relation between the host and the Other, and especially the moment that welcoming "the Other whoever he or she is unconditionally" implies a risk. As Derrida points out, this risk functions such that "I have to accept if I offer unconditional hospitality that the Other may ruin my own space or impose his or her own culture or his or her own language."[19] It is therefore uncertain whether the visitor is a friend who brings peace or is an enemy who will harm the host. Instead, Derrida argues, "The one inviting becomes almost the hostage of the one invited, of the guest, the hostage of the one he receives, the one who keeps him at home."[20]

According to Derrida, an *aporia* stands at the centre of the concept of hospitality in terms of the opposition of "*The* law (of hospitality), in its universal singularity, to a plurality that is … a number of laws that distribute their history and their anthropological geography

[13] Ismail Kadare, *Essays on World Literature: Aeschylus, Dante, Shakespeare* (New York: Restless Books, 2018), p. 78.
[14] Ibid., p. 75.
[15] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality,* p. 135.
[16] Ibid., p. 77.
[17] Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, "Politics and Friendship: A Discussion with Jacques Derrida," 1997, http://www.dariaroithmayr.com/pdfs/assignments/Politics%20and%20Friendship.pdf
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality,* p. 9.

differently."[21] He elaborates further that in this sense "*The* law is above the laws. It is thus illegal, transgressive, outside the law."[22] Thus, one can say that both concepts (of law and laws) depend on each other, that this is a two-way dependence as "*the* unconditional law of hospitality needs the laws, it *requires* them" in order to become "effective, concrete, determined."[23] In this sense, the conditional hospitality corrupts the unconditional hospitality, and vice versa. As Derrida puts it, "We will always be threatened by this dilemma between, on the one hand, unconditional hospitality that dispenses with law, duty, or even politics, and, on the other, hospitality circumscribed by law and duty. One of them can always corrupt the other, and this capacity for perversion remains irreducible. It *must* remain so." [24]

The slippery ground of this concept is supported by Derrida's concept of autoimmunity. In his article "Hostipitality," he argues that this dilemma results in hospitality auto-immunizing itself:

> Hospitality is a self-contradictory concept and experience which can only self-destruct – put otherwise, produce itself as impossible, only be possible on the condition of its impossibility – or protect itself from itself, auto-immunize itself in some way, which is to say, deconstruct itself – precisely in being put into practice.[25]

In this sense, Derrida takes the biological term 'autoimmunity' in order to deconstruct 'hospitality' as the self-destructive tendency of the political and philosophical theories that are apparently intertwined with the concept of the Other. The key moment here is that if unconditional hospitality involves openness to stranger, then, it implies a risk. Autoimmunity, on Derrida's view, emulates this risk highlighting the vulnerability and powerlessness of the immune system, which works to destroy its own protection. What here makes the juxtaposition between unconditional hospitality and autoimmunity possible is that, although they are different concepts, they share common features such as risk and promise.[26] They both convey "a double bind of threat and chance, not alternatively or by turns promise and/or threat but threat in the promise itself."[27]

Thus, for Derrida, autoimmunity[28] is a direct attack against itself – its own immune system – for itself. It is self-destructive and a "quasi-suicidal" drive attacking one's own

[21] Ibid., p. 79.
[22] Ibid., p. 79.
[23] Ibid., p. 79.
[24] Ibid., p. 135.
[25] Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality," *Angelaki* 5, no.3 (2000), pp. 4-5.
[26] Andrea Timár, "Derrida and the Immune System," p. 5.
[27] Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror,* p. 82.
[28] Derrida appropriates this medical term standing for the biological condition in which living system immunize itself against its own immunity. His use of the term dates back to the 1990s, particularly in *Spectres of Marx* (1994)*, Politics of Friendship* (1997), and *Faith and Knowledge.* He admits that it is a central concept in his philosophy, especially following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, most notably in an interview with Giovanna Borradori (2003), and, later on in *Rogues* (2005). However, Derrida's formulation shows contrasts with actual implications of the biological concept. As Andrea Timár points out, Derrida's concept is closer to the body's reaction to infection by the AIDS virus, which "stands in an uneasy, almost spectral relationship with autoimmune diseases. For whereas in autoimmune diseases the immune system destroys the body's own organs, during HIV

immune system, which was to protect oneself and one's own identity.[29] Furthermore, Derrida explains that autoimmunity also allows for the intrusion of the Other through the destruction of the immune system.[30] As this is a situation in which, as a result of internal corruption, the immune system destroys itself, the suggestion here is that this sense of autoimmunity also destabilizes the binary opposition between friend and enemy. Respectively, the relation of friend and enemy between Colonel Fritz von Schwabe and Dr Gurameto here will be discussed in terms of this sense of autoimmunity as well. And overall, along Derrida's sense of unconditional hospitality, so specified as autoimmunity, *The Fall of The Stone City* can be read as destabilizing this binary opposition by making it possible for the Other to be understood as both a threat and an opportunity.

The story begins in the stone city of Gjirokastër in 1943 in the middle of World War II. In September 1943, Albania was occupied by Nazi forces and German soldiers advanced on the ancient gates of the city. The two popular surgeons, Big Dr Gurameto and Little Dr Gurameto, having the same surname without a family connection, are presented as having a significant role in the unfolding events. The important difference between the two doctors is that Big Dr Gurameto studied in Germany whereas Little Dr Gurameto studied in Italy, which was to play a part in their respective professional esteem in the course of the events. The Italian invasion, or, as some people called it – "Albania's unification with Italy," changed the "equilibrium between the two doctors and elevated one at the expense of the other."[31] The relation between the two doctors is another important factor to analyze in the novel from the perspective of autoimmunity. In the novel, Little Dr Gurameto is presented as the projection of Big Dr Gurameto's unconscious, a "projection which the people around him for some inexplicable reason had accepted."[32] From this point of view, the projection of Big Dr Gurameto's unconscious can be seen as an autoimmune system.

In 1943, Italy lost her big brother, Germany, and the German Army was coming as a "friend" with the aim of liberating the country from "the hated Italian occupation and restoring Albania's violated independence," as written in the leaflets that were dropped from German aircrafts over Gjirokastër.[33] The leaflets, which were prepared in two languages, German and Albanian, caused different opinions among the city's inhabitants: it was possible for Germany to be seen as a friend or an enemy. It is important to note here that for Derrida the arrival or visitation of the other can also be an invasion. As he puts it, "if I accept the coming of the other, the arriving (*arrivance*) of the other who could come at any moment without asking my opinion

infection, the immune system destroy itself, and becomes entangled in a process that inevitably leads to its total destruction. Thus, Derrida's definition of autoimmunity echoes, in fact, the medical definitions of AIDS, but unlike AIDS, autoimmunity becomes a political concept in Derrida's thinking". (See Andrea Timár, "Derrida and the Immune System," *Et al: Critical Theory Online,* 2015, http://etal.hu/en/archive/terrorism-and-aesthetics-2015/derrida-and-the-immune-system).

[29] Michael Lewis, "Of (Auto) Immune Life: Derrida, Esposito, Agamben," in *Medicine and Society, New Perspectives in Continental Philosophy*, ed. Darian Meacham (New York: Springer, 2015), p. 216.

[30] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 123.

[31] Ismail Kadare, *The Fall of The Stone City,* p. 4.

[32] Ibid., p. 164

[33] Ibid., p. 6.

and who could come with the best or worst of intentions: a visitation could be an invasion by the worst."[34] In the same vein, in *Aporias* (1993), Derrida presents us with his notion of *arrivant*:

> The new *arrivant*, this word can, indeed, mean the neutrality of *that which* arrives, but also the singularity *who* arrives, of he or she who comes, coming to be where s/he was not expected, where one was awaiting him or her without waiting for him or her, without expecting it, without knowing what or whom to expect, what or whom I am waiting for – and such is hospitality itself, hospitality toward the event.[35]

In this sense, the arrival of Colonel Fritz von Schwabe, a commanding officer of the German Army, can be considered as that of an uninvited guest or as a new *arrivant*. Although, as accompanied by German tanks and troops, he appears a destructive stranger and an inevitable force against Albania, as a new *arrivant* he is not yet "an invader or an occupier, nor… a colonizer,''[36] even if he also becomes one. He actually claimed that he came to Albania in order to find his old college friend and he expected to be welcomed by the Albanian hospitality as laid down in *The Kanun*. When von Schwabe and Big Dr Gurameto met, the doctor failed to recognize his college friend. He thought that he could not recognize him because of the passing of time, his military uniform, or the two scars on his face, but an emotional reunion still took place:

> "Like the *Nibelungenlied*, eh? Or the *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini*? Do you remember what you told me in the Widow Martha's Tavern? About Albanian honour, hospitality?" ...
> "I've dreamed of this meeting for so long,…and so when they gave me orders to take this tank division and occupy Albania, my first thought was of you. I would not invade Albania but save it, unite it with the eternal Reich and of course, before anything else, I would find you my brother. And I set off happily to the country where honour rules, as you used to say."[37]

Von Schwabe proceeded to show his disappointment from the Albanian hospitality: "Dr Gurameto, they fired on me in your city…I was fired on. I was betrayed… It was my fault for believing you. Nostalgia had turned me soft and without thinking I had put my men in mortal danger… Gurameto, you traitor, where's your Albanian honour now?"[38] Fritz von Schwabe makes it clear that he already expected his old friend's warm welcome and unconditional hospitality as presented in the old days, "I sent you word. I dropped thousands of leaflets from the air. I told you I was coming as a guest. I asked the master of the house, 'Will you receive guests?'…Where is your honour, Dr Gurameto? Have you nothing to say?"[39] As the novel has it, von Schwabe criticizes the host's tradition even though he himself is an *arrivant* or a guest. Although he does not question Gurameto's Albanian identity directly, he calls into question his Albanian tradition of hospitality. We can note here that on Derrida's view the arrival of otherness surprises the host, "enough to call into question, to the point of annihilating or

[34] Jacques Derrida, Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality," *Angelaki* 5, no.3 (2000), p. 17.
[35] Jacques Derrida, *Aporias* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1993), p. 33.
[36] Ibid., p. 34.
[37] Ismail Kadare, *The Fall of The Stone City,* p. 31.
[38] Ibid., p. 32.
[39] Ibid., p. 32.

rendering indeterminate, all the distinctive signs of a prior identity, beginning with the very border that delineated a legitimate home and assured lineage, names and language, nations, families and genealogies."[40] In this sense, von Schwabe can be considered an *arrivant*, who surprises Big Dr Gurameto and has enough authority to question his hospitality, Albanian honor, and loyalty to *The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini.* Thereupon, Big Dr Gurameto defended himself, saying:

> "I did not fire on you, Fritz."
> "Really? It was worse than that. Your country fired on me."
> "I answer for my own house, not the state."
> "It comes to the same."
> "It does not come to the same. I am not Albania, just as you are not Germany, Fritz. We're something else."[41]

After this conversation, Big Dr Gurameto invites von Schwabe for dinner. It is not known to the city's population what this occasion was really about – "Some still called it the 'dinner of shame' but others referred to it as the 'resurrection dinner'."[42] Some people thought that Gurameto's plan was to "cock a snook at the Germans," while others believed he followed the Albanian custom and welcomed them, opening his house to everyone, friend or foe.[43] However, Big Dr Gurameto's intention was different: he was planning to convince Fritz von Schwabe to release the Albanian hostages taken by the occupiers. On that evening, Big Dr Gurameto, while looking out for his guest towards the gate of his yard, felt sorrow that he had never known before. In this case, applying Derrida's sense of unconditional hospitality appears to be seemingly impossible, as this requires that one accept the guest without any anticipation or expectation, while relinquishing control over one's own space. Derrida's remarks on the *aporia* of hospitality are fitting here:

> For there to be hospitality there must be a door. But if there is a door, there is no longer hospitality. There is no hospitable house. There is no house without doors and windows. But as soon as there are a door and windows, it means that someone has the key to them and consequently controls the conditions of hospitality. There must be a threshold. But if there is a threshold, there is no longer hospitality.[44]

In this sense, it can be said that the threshold of the house is already a representation of the limit for unconditional hospitality. Hence, the concept of unconditional hospitality, or pure hospitality, seems impossible. Although Big Dr Gurameto, as the master of the house, showed his hospitality to the colonel and the German servicemen, the colonel's confession effectively turned the master of the house into stone; hence, Big Dr Gurameto's hospitality turned into conditional hospitality upon asking the colonel to release the hostages:

[40] Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, p. 34.
[41] Ibid., p. 32.
[42] Ibid., p. 27.
[43] Ibid., pp. 21-22.
[44] Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality," p. 14.

> "And so, as I told you, when the order came to occupy – I mean to unite Albania, my first thought was that I would visit my brother. I would find him wherever he was. And look, I have come. But you… You fired on me, Gurameto. Treacherously, behind my back."
> "It wasn't me."
> "I know. But you know better than I do that your *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini* demands blood. German blood was split. Blood is never counted as lost… Eighty hostages will wash away that blood. While we are dining here, my men are rounding them up."[45]

Here, the dilemma at the heart of the hospitality, which Derrida sets out in *Of Hospitality emerges again*: "How can we distinguish between a guest and a parasite? In principle, the difference is straightforward, but for that you need a law; hospitality, reception, the welcome offered, have to be submitted to a basic and limiting jurisdiction."[46] Although Big Dr Gurameto granted Fritz von Schwabe access to his house as if he were a valued guest, von Schwabe turned out to be a parasite and broke the code of honor at the heart of hospitality. As Derrida states, "Not all new arrivals are received as guests if they don't have the benefit of the right to hospitality or the right of asylum, etc. Without this right, a new arrival can only be introduced 'in my home', in the host's 'at home', as a parasite, a guest who is wrong, illegitimate, clandestine, liable to expulsion or arrest."[47] Therefore, apparently, it can be said that the guest turns out to be a destructive enemy – a parasite – or a threat, who ruins the host's nation or space and abuses the host's hospitality. Undeniably, this implies the risk of pure hospitality, for, as Derrida says, "[…] That is the risk of pure hospitality and pure gift, because a gift might be terrible, too."[48] In the novel, Fritz von Schwabe violates Gurameto's hospitality, which potentially shows the colonel as a destructive enemy. Apparently, the collapse of the ethical boundaries of being a guest and a friend displays the ambivalent nature of the friendship between two men. At this point, this leads us to another of Derrida's works, *The Politics of Friendship*, in which Derrida discusses the paradoxical closeness between friendship and enmity in the lens of integration between politics and friendship. Big Dr Gurameto asked the colonel to free the hostages; however, the colonel insisted on not releasing them until he learned the name of the people who fired on him: "Gurameto, my brother, I do not want to spill Albanian blood. I came as a guest, with promises and gifts, but you fired on me. Give me those damned names, give them to me and the hostages are yours, instantly."[49]

Here, other relevant questions arise: What does it take to understand a private friend or a guest as a public enemy? Alternatively, what does it take to distinguish friends from the public or the private enemy?

Derrida takes these questions and reinterprets the communal and individual enemy, which are also discussed by Carl Schmitt. Schmitt, argues that the meaning of friend can be only determined within the distinction between friend and enemy.[50] For Schmitt, in politics, the enemy is always the public enemy; however, Derrida's reading of Schmitt deconstructs this approach. As Derrida puts it, "The enemy in the political sense need not be hated personally,

[45] Ismail Kadare, *The Fall of The Stone City,* p. 35.
[46] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality,* p. 59.
[47] Ibid., p. 59.
[48] Jacques Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility," p. 71.
[49] Ismail Kadare, *The Fall of The Stone City,* p. 39.
[50] Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship,* trans. G. Collins, (London, UK: Verso, 2005), p. 373.

and in the private sphere only does it make sense to love one's enemy, that is, one's adversary."[51] Derrida suggests here that one can destroy one's enemy in the public sphere while continuing to love him/her in private:

> The friend (*amicus*) can be an enemy (*hostis*). I can be hostile towards my friend, I can be hostile towards him publicly and, conversely, I can, in privacy, love my enemy. From this, everything would follow, in orderly, regular fashion, from the distinction between public and private. Another way of saying that at every point when this border is threatened, fragile, porous, contestable … the Schmittian discourse collapses.[52]

In this sense, for Derrida, "friend and enemy are not mutually exclusive opposites."[53] Although Derrida focuses on the concept of friendship, he believes that enemy precedes the friend and that war is a condition of friendship.[54] In this sense, the love of the political enemy at a personal level can be seen as the most notable aspect of Kadare's novel. Although Fritz von Schwabe was a public enemy, he released Albanian hostages for the sake of his friendship with Gurameto, giving the order to free the hostages, including also a Jewish pharmacist, following a long discussion with Big Dr Gurameto:

> "Dr Gurameto, you've broken your word. There is a Jew here."
> "A Jew? So what?"
> "So what? You know I can't release Jews."
> "Jews, Albanians, it's all the same."
> "It's not the same, Gurameto, not at all."
> "Albanians do not betray their guests. You know that, Fritz. This Jew is a guest in our city. We can't hand over a guest."
> "Because the *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini* forbids it?"
> "I told you this long ago in the tavern. It's been our law for a thousand years."[55]

Based on the dialogue above, although the two men have different political views, von Schwabe and Big Dr Gurameto appear to embody the paradoxically close relationship between friendship and enmity. In this relation, it is very indicative that the friendship argument applies also to the Jewish hostage, even though the colonel's hostility towards Jews is quite obvious. This is because, despite being a political and public enemy, Fritz ultimately turns out to be a friend at a personal level: "The doctor and the colonel muttered to each other in private for a long time and again the situation changed. Nobody explained why. Colonel Fritz von Schwabe, bearer of the Iron Cross, took a deep breath and ordered the hostages to be freed. Not just some, but all of them."[56]

Meanwhile, at the dinner, Big Dr Gurameto's daughter passed round the drinks to the colonel, then to her father, her mother, the others present, and finally to her fiancé. After everyone emptied their glasses, they collapsed on the sofa and the carpet and fell into a deep

[51] Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship,* p. 88.
[52] Ibid., p. 88
[53] Antonio Calcagno, *Badiou and Derrida: Politics, Events and their Time.* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 46
[54] Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship,* pp. 132-172.
[55] Ismail Kadare, *The Fall of The Stone City,* pp. 45-46.
[56] Ibid., p. 47.

sleep. The next morning, she woke up and found herself lying fully clothed on the bed in her parents' room. In the living room, she "saw them stretched out where they had fallen, arms outspread and mouths gaping, her father, fiancé and mother, in whose lap an officer had laid his head; and then the colonel, his face still masked, and the others, frozen, white, like sculptures."[57] She thought that her father had already planned to poison his guests alongside with his own family; Big Dr Gurameto suspected his daughter of the same.[58] But nobody could solve the mystery of the situation, i.e. nobody knew who had put the poison into the drinks. Here, the German colonel and soldiers who were supposed to dominate the doctor's space became victimized in the house. The guests became oppressed subjects in the host's place and the host turned out to be the oppressor. Thus, there seems to be a reversal of the relation between host and guest into a relation of victimized guest and host oppressor. At this point, the supposed poisoner was trying to protect her family and home by serving the drinks to the colonel and soldiers, and took the risk of serving the same drinks to the whole family. This can be discussed in terms of autoimmunity. The supposed poisoner directly attacked herself/himself and her/his whole family, making the gesture of autoimmunity, which is "both self-protecting and self-destroying, at once remedy and poison."[59] According to Derrida, "Autoimmunity is always more or less suicidal, but more seriously still, it threatens always to rob suicide itself from its meaning and supposed integrity" as "it consists not only in committing suicide but in compromising sui- or self-referentiality, the self or sui- of suicide"[60] In this way, the autoimmune entity apparently threatens the whole family in order to protect them against the German oppressors. As has been discussed above, despite the threat of the Nazi occupation, it is the supposed poisoner himself/herself who arguably constitutes the greatest threat to the family.

It has been suggested that the concepts of hospitality and autoimmunity are similar in that both contain openness to the outside, which implies risk. As Michael Naas says:

> If autoimmunity describes the way in which an organism, an individual, a family, or a nation, compromises its own forces of self-affirmation so as to become open and vulnerable to its outside, then autoimmunity is always a kind of hospitality – the welcoming of an event that might well change the very identity of the self, of the *autos,* the welcoming of an event that may thus bring good or ill, that may invite a remedy or a poison, a friend or a foe. To be open to the event, to offer hospitality, it is essential *not to know* in advance what is what or who is who.[61]

Immunity can be bound up with the conditional hospitality where people are able to protect their sovereignty and defend themselves from the intrusion of the Other. Thus, ''autoimmunity is not an absolute ill or evil. It enables an exposure to the other, to *what* and to *who* comes – which means that it must remain incalculable. Without autoimmunity, with absolute immunity, nothing would ever happen or arrive; we would no longer wait, await, or expect, no longer expect one another, or expect any event."[62]

[57] Ibid., p. 48.
[58] Ibid., p. 119.
[59] Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror,* p. 124.
[60] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues,* p. 44.
[61] Michael Naas, *Derrida from Now On,* p. 32.
[62] Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror,* p. 152.

In addition, in the context of autoimmune logic, the communist Albanian groups can be seen as the other threat to life in Albania. As the course of events unfolds in the novel, the communists claim that the nationalists and royalists are preparing to do a deal with the Germans.[63] However, communists' calls for war provoked only chaos and anxiety throughout the city. They knock on the doors and brake into houses: "'Territorials' as the local communists were called, helped the patrols to carry out arrests of prominent nationalists."[64] The conspiracy to demolish the entire city, cabals and other horrors lead people to go against their own allies. In this context, Derrida argues, "In all wars, all civil wars, all partisan wars or wars for liberation, the inevitable escalation leads one to go after one's rival partners no less than one's so-called principal adversary."[65] Thus, while the communist groups are supposed to protect their own country, they themselves constitute also a threat to the Albanians. This finds an explanation within Derrida's sense of autoimmunity. He argues that the autoimmunity turns on itself, and "must then come to resemble [its] enemies, to corrupt itself and threaten itself in order to protect itself against their threats."[66]

In 1953, the two surgeons were arrested on suspicion of murder and charged with being terrorist doctors: "The Soviets themselves had broadcast the news, calling it 'murder in a white coat'."[67] The accusation was in the political murder of communist leaders; supposedly, "Under the direction of a Jewish organization known as the 'Joint', a group of doctors was preparing the greatest crime in the history of mankind: the elimination by murder of all the communist leaders throughout the world, starting with Joseph Stalin."[68] The foremost investigators of Albania's Communist regime, Shaqo Mezini and Arian Ciu, interrogated the two doctors for the murder of patients during surgical procedures, and tortured them in the Cave of Sanisha until they died. The interrogation was to make them confess 'the whole truth' about the dinner on the night of the reunion Big Dr Gurameto with his old college friend who turned out to be commander of German troops invading Albania.[69] The investigators were not convinced by Big Dr Gurameto's answers: "Isn't it a bit like of one of those old fairy tales we learned at school? Quite apart from the dinner with music and champagne, the release of the hostages and the salvation of the city, doesn't it look a bit like a game? Why not stop this charade and tell us what was really behind it?"[70] They did not believe Gurameto's answers because Colonel Fritz von Schwabe had allegedly died in a field hospital in Ukraine long before that dinner.[71] Furthermore, the investigators maintained that Big Dr Gurameto was part of the aforementioned Jewish organization because he asked von Schwabe to release a Jewish pharmacist that night. Thus, they considered it an evidence against him and claimed that Big Dr Gurameto was collaborating with the Nazis to establish Jewish rule throughout the world, and to murder the

[63] Ismail Kadare, *The Fall of The Stone City*, p. 55.
[64] Ibid., p. 68.
[65] Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, p. 112.
[66] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues,* p. 40.
[67] Ismail Kadare, *The Fall of The Stone City*, p. 102.
[68] Ibid., p. 103.
[69] Ibid., p. 113.
[70] Ibid., p. 113.
[71] Ibid., p. 116.

world communist leaders, starting with Stalin.[72] In this sense, we can also note that the "new regime" of communism appears to attack its own integral protection at the level of the state by destroying its own immune system. That is, the Stalinist regime corrupts the city of Gjirokastër and Albania, pushing the city as a whole through a peculiar autoimmune destruction. As Michael Lewis says, "the greatest threat of terror comes from within, in that destruction of the immune system which allows the relatively strict border between one's self and the outside to collapse, not because of an external enemy's attack but as a result of internal corruption."[73] Although the new regime was supposed to be associated with "reconstruction," it seemed that it came to resemble an enemy. Stalinists' anger, aimed at Gjirokastër because of the conspiracy plot, threatened the whole city. The Stalinist functionaries who interrogated and tortured the surgeons constituted the threat to the life in the city. In this sense, the autoimmune entity can be seen as turning on itself and starting to resemble enemy of Albania. Since autoimmunity implies opposites such as threat and chance, protection and destruction, the Stalinist regime, as *Other*, can be seen at first as promise, but then – as provoking an attack against the city. For Derrida, autoimmunity is essentially a relationship between self and other; however, it also deconstructs the binary opposition between self and non-self. Since autoimmunity is a self-destructive system, which implies an eroding of our defense mechanism to protect ourselves, it directly attacks itself such that the relation of self and other is no longer one of exteriority. Thus, according to the logic of this system, the self turns into a non-self or Other who sees itself as a threat to itself. In the same way, the communist regime can be interpreted also as self and Other or exterior force, whereas Little Dr Gurameto, who is an opposition of Big Dr Gurameto, can be seen as a non-self figure who was created as the self's defense mechanism.

At the end of the novel, in September 1993, shortly after the fall of communism in Albania, both doctors' graves were exhumed.[74] It was discovered that one of the shackled men that were exhumed was not Little Dr Gurameto but someone else who was never identified.[75] Since the little doctor had left so few traces behind himself, people began to doubt whether he ever existed[76] and many believed that "Little Dr Gurameto had been merely an exteriorization or projection of Big Dr Gurameto's unconscious."[77] This particular situation can be considered a model of autoimmunity on the level of the psyche. As Derrida says, "To put it a bit sententiously in the interest of time, without autoimmunity there would be neither psychoanalysis, nor what psychoanalysis calls the 'unconscious'."[78] In this sense, Big Dr Gurameto arguably created a persona in his subconscious in an attempt to protect himself. That is, he may have created this persona as a projection of his own negative sides in an attempt to protect his own status and his own life, very much as the living ego maintains its own autoimmunity in itself. This is the sense in which Little Dr Gurameto might be considered a non-self figure indicative of the self' protective apparatus. As Derrida explains in *Specters of Marx*, "the living ego is auto-immune. To protect its life, to constitute itself as unique living

[72] Ibid., p. 121.
[73] Michael Lewis, "Of (Auto) Immune Life: Derrida, Esposito, Agamben," p. 219.
[74] Ibid., p. 164.
[75] Ibid., p. 164.
[76] Ibid., p. 164.
[77] Ibid., pp. 164-165.
[78] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues,* p. 55.

ego … it must … take the immune defenses apparently meant for the non-ego, the enemy, the opposite, the adversary and direct them at once for itself and against itself."[79] It is in this sense that Big Dr Gurameto's creation of the little doctor can be seen as a kind of immune defense on the level of the psyche. Whereas the destruction of the immune system, which allows the intrusion of the Other, allows us also to say that the notion of autoimmunity can be used for deconstruction of the relationship between self and non-self, between self and other.[80]

In conclusion, *The Fall of The Stone City* is a remarkable novel which can be analyzed from the perspective of Derrida's concepts of hospitality, autoimmunity, friendship, and the arrivant, while destabilizing the binary oppositions between hostility and hospitality, friendship and enmity. As has been noted, according to Derrida, the concepts of unconditional hospitality and autoimmunity overlap in their core meanings because they are both open to the Other, which constitutes both a threat and opportunity. In this sense, as Derrida points out, the term autoimmunity is fundamentally different from other terms beginning with 'auto': "While all the other *autos* words, without exception, express the power, independence, and stability of an enduring self, *autoimmunity* evokes the powerlessness, vulnerability, dependence, and instability of every self or *autos*."[81] Thus, the paper draws attention to the risk of autoimmunity as a self-destructive term by investigating its sense through the political events and the level of the psyche. Overall, the aim of the paper has been to draw attention to the overlapping senses of unconditional hospitality and autoimmunity as openness to the Other, which can be understood as both a threat and a promise.

In the novel, the binary opposition of friendship and enmity with regard to the two men is discussed within the framework of deconstruction of the friend-enemy dichotomy, which becomes possible in terms of Derrida's concept of autoimmunity. Here, the key moment in the sense of autoimmunity is that, while an autoimmune entity aims to protect itself, in reality it constitutes a self-destructive threat to itself. Colonel Fritz von Schwabe as an arrivant was shown as expecting to be welcomed with the traditional Albanian hospitality. And yet, the hospitality offered by Big Dr Gurameto turned into conditional hospitality. We can conjecture here that either Big Dr Gurameto or his daughter used their immune defenses to destroy the enemy by attempting to poison the German Colonel and the other soldiers. At the same time, the poisoning can also be understood as an autoimmune process, as Gurameto's family was exposed to the poison as well. Furthermore, a transposition of the concept of autoimmunity at the level of psyche can shed light on Little Dr Gurameto's presence as a reflection of Big Dr Gurameto's subconscious. The rivalry between Big Dr Gurameto and Little Dr Gurameto, especially as represented at the level of psyche, could be discussed as competition between two of them. So far, Big Dr Gurameto was the victor on every occasion while his colleague was called the loser. Big Dr Gurameto's projection of his own failure on the imaginary little Dr

[79] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, translated by Peggy Kamouf (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 177.
[80] For other related discussions see Catherine MacMillan, "Looking for the Rogue: Democratic Autoimmunity in José Saramago's Seeing," *Global Conversations: An International Journal in Contemporary Philosophy and Culture*, Vol. 4 (2021), pp. 27ff; as well as, Rossen Roussev, "Feminism, Deconstruction, and Literary Criticism: A Deconstructive Feminist Reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's Novel The Scarlet Letter with the Help of Alice Jardine and Jacques Derrida," *Global Conversations: An International Journal in Contemporary Philosophy and Culture*, Vol. 4 (2021), pp. 68-69, 81.
[81] Michael Naas, *Derrida from Now On,* p. 125.

Gurameto can be understood as an attempt to protect the integrity of the ego. In this way, he apparently utilized immune defenses to constitute himself as a unique and significant figure in public. Big Dr Gurameto's immune defense suggests the concept of autoimmunity that helps explain "how we inevitably turn against ourselves, against the very principles that constitute and sustain ourselves and our identities." [82]

In addition, in the novel, the communist regime brought a high level of oppression in the city, including tragic results, as well as the psychological trauma of Big Dr Gurameto. After the communist regime took over the city, Big Dr Gurameto was arrested and kept in the Cave of Sanisha which was the most terrifying dungeon of the city's prison. The investigators tortured him and the marks of torture were clearly visible on his face; Big Dr Gurameto's psychological state became deeply imbalanced. Like an immune system, which functions in an uncontrollable way, the communist groups moved against the people in the city causing terror, which in reality came from a group that was supposed to protect them. In this way, in autoimmune fashion, the communists came to resemble their enemies.

Most generally, the work of Albania's best-known writer, Ismail Kadare, depicts his country's history, culture, and traditions while keeping a close look to the concepts of hospitality, hostility, and friendship. Here, these concepts are analyzed in the perspective of the concept of autoimmunity to support the main argument of this paper regarding his novel *The Fall of The Stone City*. However, the exploration of these concepts from Derridian perspective may arguably serve as an investigative model for approaching other contemporary novels, which deal with the experiences of hostility, hospitality, and autoimmunity within still other political, social, and cultural contexts.

[82] Ibid., p. 33.

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LOOKING FOR THE ROGUE: DEMOCRATIC AUTOIMMUNITY IN JOSÉ SARAMAGO'S *SEEING*

Catherine MacMillan

Abstract

This paper explores José Saramago's novel 'Seeing', which depicts an unnamed country in crisis following a mass casting of blank votes, from the perspective of Derrida's concept of (democratic) autoimmunity. For Derrida, democracy is an inherently aporetic concept, leaving democratic regimes potentially open to renewal and reevaluation but also to self-destruction. Democratic governments may, for instance, react to a (perceived) threat against democracy with measures that themselves undermine democracy, as in Derrida's examples of Algeria in 1992 or the post-9/11 USA. The paper argues that a similar mechanism is underway in 'Seeing', where the government restricts democracy, including declaring a state of siege and even carrying out a terrorist attack in the capital, in an attempt to protect a democratic system which they perceive as being threatened by rogues in the form of the so-called 'blankers'.

As Derrida suggests, the relationship between literature and democracy is an intimate, even symbiotic one, so that: "There can be no literature without democracy and no democracy without literature."[1] In this sense, literary works cannot be created and published without democratic openness and freedom of expression. Moreover, literature, with its "unconditional right to call everything to account"[2] plays a vital role in the discussion and questioning inherent in and necessary to democracy, "in the most open (and doubtless itself to come) sense of democracy."[3]

From this perspective, the novels of José Saramago can be understood as actively participating in the democratic process in that they are "interventions into society presenting and debating ethico-political questions and problems," effectively rendering them "a form of

[1] Jacques Derrida, *Passions: An Oblique Offering:* On the Name. Trans. David Wood (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), p. 28.
[2] Zlatan Filipovic, "For a Future to Come: Derrida's Democracy and the Right to Literature," *Journal of East/West Thought,* Vol. 3, no 1, p. 13
[3] Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 32.

political action."[4] Saramago himself sees his writing as inseparable from his political involvement as a citizen:

> As citizens, we all have an obligation to intervene and become involved, it's the citizen who changes things. I can't imagine myself outside any kind of social or political involvement. Yes, I'm a writer, but I live in this world and my writing doesn't exist on a separate level.[5]

This political involvement is perhaps most obvious in his later, more allegorical novels such as *Seeing (Ensaio sobre a Lucidez)*[6] or *Blindness (Ensaio sobre a Cegueira)*[7]; indeed both of these "essays in novel form" explore the nature of "the political."[8] In this context *Seeing,* a sequel to *Blindness,* questions and calls into account democracy itself.

Blindness, which depicts a country in the throes of an epidemic of white blindness, focuses on the maintenance of human relationships in the context of the breakdown of the state and "the smooth social function of civility, decency, law and order."[9] *Seeing* is set in the same unspecified country, which may or may not be Portugal,[10] four years after the end of the epidemic of white blindness and the restoration of democracy. Like *Blindness, Seeing* also deals with what, in the novel, is frequently termed as an 'epidemic'; not, this time, an epidemic of white blindness but rather one of white paper, in the form of the mass casting of blank ballots.

Seeing opens on an election day in the capital, when, it later turns out, 70% of the voters cast blank votes. The election is repeated eight days later, in accordance with national law; however, this time the proportion of blank votes, at 83%, is even higher. The government, in what is supposedly an attempt to rescue the democratic system, accordingly declares a state of siege in the capital, reminiscent of the state of emergency in *Blindness.* Thus, the government effectively abolishes the population's democratic rights and freedoms, and attempts to track down the purported ringleader behind the 'plague' of the blank votes. On this basis, as explored further below, this paper attempts to read *Seeing* in terms of Derrida's concept of autoimmunity, interpreting the novel as the story of a democratic government which, in the name of preserving democracy, actually ends up destroying the very democracy it seeks to protect.

As Rancière points out, even as they seek to impose democracy on other countries democratic governments "unrelentingly complain that democracy is ungovernable, that the democratic government is threatened by a mortal danger which is the excess of democratic

[4] Carlo Salzani and Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte, "Introduction: Proteus the Philosopher or Reading Saramago as a Lover of Wisdom," in Carlo Salzani and Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte (eds.), *Saramago's Philosophical Heritage* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 6.

[5] Stephanie Merrit. "José Saramago Interview: Still a Street Fighting Man," *The Guardian,* 30 April 2006, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/apr/30/fiction.features1

[6] Literally, 'An Essay on Lucidity'.

[7] Literally, 'An Essay on Blindness'.

[8] Jim Jose, "A Brutal Blow against the Democratic Normality: Unlearning the Epistemology of the Political," *Social Identities*, Vol 20, no.6 (2017), pp. 718-729.

[9] Duncan McColl Chesney, "Re-Reading Saramago on Community – *Blindness*," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 62 no. 2 (2021), p. 221.

[10] José Saramago, *Seeing*, translated by Margaret Jull Costa (London: Vintage, 2007), p. 81.

life."[11] According to Rancière, there are two possible readings of this situation; the democracy in question may be a false one characterized by corruption, duplicity, and lies. Alternatively, with reference to Derrida's concept of autoimmunity, he notes that it may instead point to a fundamental "difference inherent in the concept of democracy itself, a difference that prevents democracy from being achieved as a form of government."[12]

A reading of the (un)democratic situation in *Seeing* from the first perspective described above would certainly seem to be apt, particularly given Saramago's view that "People live with the illusion that we have a democratic system, but it's only the outward form of one. In reality we live in a plutocracy, a government of the rich."[13] Indeed, in her analysis of *Seeing* Bernadino states that 'Saramago's interpretation of democracy is not a matter of doubting democracy, but rather an utter disbelief in those that take power and use it to keep the machine working, i.e. to maintain a *status quo* that perpetuates power in the hands of oligarchies."[14]

However, without discounting such an interpretation, there is little evidence in the novel itself, despite the electorate's mass rejection of the *status quo,* that the democracy in question is especially corrupt *before* the phenomenon of the blank ballots. It is argued here, then, that *Seeing* can also be understood from the second perspective described by Rancière above, that of democracy as characterized by incommensurable differences and therefore unachievable as "democracy always carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction."[15] The Prime Minister in *Seeing* uses the same metaphor when he argues that the blank voting could propel the country towards:

> the ultimate disaster…the possibly definitive collapse of a political system which…carried within it…in its vital nucleus, in the voting process itself, the seeds of its own destruction or, a no less disquieting hypothesis, a transition to something entirely new and unknown, so different that we would probably have no place in it.[16]

In this light, *Seeing* can arguably be read as a satirical meditation on the potentially quasi-suicidal nature of democracy itself. As Jose, for instance, notes, for Saramago "totalitarianism is already lurking in the heart of representative democracy insofar as ever-increasing invocations of state power in the name of the people are its preferred solutions to crises."[17] On this basis, this paper attempts to explore *Seeing* through a discussion of Derrida's concept of autoimmunity, which he describes as "that strange behavior where a living being, in quasi-suicidal fashion, 'itself' works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself against

[11] Jacques Rancière, "Should Democracy Come? Ethics and Politics in Derrida," in Pheng Cheah and Suzanne Guerlac (eds.), *Derrida and the Time of the Political* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2009), p. 275.
[12] Ibid, p. 275.
[13] Stephanie Merrit, "José Saramago Interview."
[14] Ligia Bernardino, 'The Threshold of Democracy in José Saramago's *Seeing'. Gragoatá Niterói,* Vol. 23 No. 45 (2018), p. 331.
[15] Alex Thomson, "What's to Become of 'Democracy to Come'?," *Postmodern Culture,* vol. 15 no. 3, 2005. http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/issue.505/15.3thomson.html
[16] José Saramago, *Seeing,* pp. 162-167.
[17] Jim Jose, "A Brutal Blow," p. 727.

its own immunity."[18] Although Derrida's concept of autoimmunity is broad in scope – indeed he extends it to "life in general"[19] – he uses autoimmunity largely to refer to "deconstruction in the political realm."[20]

In this framework, primarily in *Rogues* (*Voyous*) which was published just a year before *Seeing*,[21] Derrida emphasizes the autoimmune nature of democracy,[22] which derives from the fundamental semantic undecidability inherent in the term democracy itself. As discussed further in the following section, autoimmunity here refers to a threat to democracy, a quasi-suicidal drive, which comes from *within* democracy itself.[23] [24] Interestingly, in a 2004 article, Saramago also suggests that democracy is in the process of committing a kind of autoimmune suicide: "Western democracy has entered a phase of retrograde transformation that it cannot halt and will foreseeably bring about its negation. No one need take responsibility for killing it: it is committing suicide."[25]

Autoimmunity, then, refers to "an enemy which is not external: it is not a virus or bacteria'; it is, rather, 'an internal enemy."[26] [27] [28] In the case of democratic autoimmunity,

[18] Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 100.

[19] Ibid, p. 187; on the relation of Derrida's view of immunity and autoimmunity to "life-affirmation" see Rossen Roussev, "Feminism, Deconstruction, and Literary Criticism: A Deconstructive Feminist Reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's Novel The Scarlet Letter with the Help of Alice Jardine and Jacques Derrida," *Global Conversations: An International Journal in Contemporary Philosophy and Culture*, Vol. 4 (2021), more particularly, pp. 68-69, 81.

[20] Dimitris Vadoulakis, "Autoimmunities: Derrida, Democracy and Political Theology," *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. 48, No.1 (2018), p. 30; for an application of Derrida's concept of autoimmunity to political events in literature see Yasemin Karaağaç, "Hostility, Hospitality, and Autoimmunity in Kadare's *The Fall of The Stone City*," *Global Conversations: An International Journal in Contemporary Philosophy and Culture*, Vol. 4 (2021), pp. 11ff, 20ff.

[21] In this regard, these works can be understood at least in part as a response to 9/11 and the ensuing events, including the USA's curtailing of civil liberties and the so-called 'war on terror', which was arguably also an important influence on Saramago's *Seeing.*

[22] Importantly, democracy for Derrida generally refers not only to a particular form of government but to a whole political culture including equality, rights, freedom of speech, protection of minorities from majority oppression. (Alex Thomson, "What's to Become of 'Democracy to Come'?," p. 5).

[23] Alex Thomson, "What's to Become of 'Democracy to Come'?," p. 3.

[24] Importantly, however, as will be discussed in the following section, autoimmunity can be an opportunity as well as a threat.

[25] José Saramago, "The Least Bad System is in Need of Change: Reinventing Democracy," *Le Monde Diplomatique,* 17 August 2004, http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/27/070.html

[26] Dimitris Vadoulakis, "Autoimmunities," p. 29.

[27] While autoimmunity is a medical term, Derrida justifies his use of the term in the political context by underscoring that immunity was originally a political/juridical term which was borrowed into the medical vocabulary. As Derrida points out, the word 'immunity' derives from the Latin *munus,* referring to the common community. Thus, to be immune (*immunis*), is therefore to be 'freed or exempted from the charges, the service, the taxes, the obligations' of a community; it is still used in a similar sense today in the context of parliamentary or diplomatic immunity. [Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," in Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (eds.), *Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 72].

[28] While autoimmune disease in medicine refers to a situation where the immune system attacks the body, however, autoimmunity for Derrida also involves the immune system attacking itself. Derrida's autoimmunity, can then

Derrida, writing in the era of the USA's so-called 'war on terror',[29] represents this figure of internal enmity as "the rogue or *voyou*."[30] However, for Derrida it is never entirely clear who these enemies of democracy are, as "the worst enemies of democratic freedom can, by a plausible rhetorical simulacrum…present themselves as staunch democrats,"[31] while, as is discussed further below, every democratic state is (potentially) a rogue state, so there are (no) more rogue states. In this context, then, this article undertakes a (perhaps impossible) search for the internal enemies of democracy, the rogue(s) or *voyou(s)*, in *Seeing.*

Derrida and Democratic Autoimmunity

For Derrida, democracy, ever since its ancient Athenian origins, has been a "concept that is inadequate to itself, a word hollowed out in its center by a vertiginous semantic abyss."[32] This semantic indeterminacy enables the term democracy to be appropriated by many different types of government, as is perhaps underscored by the wide variety of regimes that today call themselves democratic. While this openness or 'hospitality' which is characteristic of democracy can potentially prove an opportunity for self-perfection, it also risks leaving democracy vulnerable to those who wish to put it to an end.[33] Indeed Derrida argues that no enemy of democracy today, at least outside the Islamic world,[34] can refuse to call himself a democrat,[35] so that even "Le Pen and his followers now present themselves as respectable and irreproachable democrats." [36] Thus, "the great question of modern parliamentary and representative democracy, perhaps of all democracy, is that the *alternative to* democracy can always be *represented* as a democratic *alternation*."[37] [38]

In this sense, the figure of the internal enemy is crucial in understanding democracy's autoimmune tendencies. This enemy does not necessarily have to be a 'real' enemy; rather it is a figure who is incommensurable with ipseity' and which "regulates the discourses about power, violence and force." [39] Indeed rogues (*voyous*) themselves are internal enemies represented as "rebels, agitators and insurgents." However, labelling someone (or a state) as a rogue is "never neutral, but always a performative judgment, an accusation, or an interpellation.

imply both a quasi-suicidal self-destruction and a lack of protection from the Other which, like unconditional hospitality, may potentially prove to be a risk or an opportunity.

[29] During this period, the US frequently referred to states which it perceived as promoting terrorism or as enemies of democracy as 'rogue states', a term which was translated into French as '*états voyous'.*

[30] Dimitris Vadoulakis, "Autoimmunities," p. 29.

[31] Jacques Derrida. *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason,* translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford. Stanford University Press, 2005).

[32] Jacques Derrida. *Rogues,* p. 7.

[33] Samir Haddad, "Derrida and Democracy at Risk," *Contretemps: An Online Journal of Philosophy* 4 (2004), p. 33.

[34] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 2.

[35] Alex Thomson, "What's to Become of 'Democracy to Come,?," p. 5.

[36] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 30.

[37] Emphasis in the original.

[38] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues*, pp. 30-31.

[39] Dimitris Vadoulakis, "Autoimmunities," pp. 33-34.

To judge someone to be *voyou* is to "place them outside the law and to ally yourself with the law."[40] [41]

Derrida's concept of autoimmunity can thus be understood as part of the attempt to counter the "forgetting of *stasis*" which lies at the heart of democracy.[42] [43] As has been suggested, then, the "semantic abyss" or *stasis* inherent in the concept of democracy potentially harbors the seeds of its own autoimmune destruction. In other words, democracy contains internal tensions or challenges to its *ipseity,* including, and perhaps most notably, those between democracy and sovereignty, and between freedom and equality.

Regarding the *demos,* a key tension is that between inclusivity and exclusivity; any attempt to define the demos on the grounds of demographic or geographic conditions is ultimately exclusionary, so that "one electoral law is always at the same time more and less democratic than another."[44] Related to this, democracy contains a tension between freedom, defined as "unconditional, indivisible, heterogenous to calculation and to measure," and equality; thus "Derrida points to a primary suspension of freedom within the very concept of democracy."[45] Aristotle's solution to this quandary was that each equal participant should govern in turn; this is translated, in modern terms, into the democratic election.[46] [47] However, the election clearly implies a compromise, as liberty is limited in a cyclical fashion in order to safeguard equality, so that the two goals of equality and freedom are never completely fulfilled, at least not simultaneously:

> liberty and equality are only reconcilable in a roundabout and alternative manner, in alternance; the absolute freedom of a finite being (it is of this finitude that we speak here) is equally divisible [partageable] only in the space-time of a taking-in-turns.[48]

In these turns, freedom risks not only being suspended but even destroyed so that, for instance, fascist and totalitarian governments can (and have been) elected; moreover, as is discussed further below, the democratic process can be suspended by the government itself in the name of protecting democracy.[49]

A related autoimmune "aporetic embrace" [50] is that between democracy and sovereignty, the relationship between which is "mutually inseperable and incompatible" as both "appear unconditional."[51] For Derrida, "a pure sovereignty is indivisible or it is not at all"; it

[40] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues*, pp. 64-65.
[41] Alex Thomson, "What's to Become of 'Democracy to Come'?," p. 5.
[42] Dimitris Vadoulakis, "Autoimmunities," pp. 34-35.
[43] Dimitris Vadoulakis emphasizes that this *stasis,* or civil strife, is *etymologically* inherent in the term democracy itself. He bases this on Laroux's insight that the *kratos* in democracy signifies not only rule but also struggle.
[44] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues*, pp. 35-37
[45] Pheng Cheah, "The Untimely Secret of Democracy," in Pheng Cheah and Suzanne Guerlac (eds.), *Derrida and the Time of the Political* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2009), p. 78.
[46] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 46.
[47] Samir Haddad, "Derrida and Democracy at Risk," p. 33.
[48] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues*, pp. 46-47.
[49] Pheng Cheah, "The Untimely Secret of Democracy," p. 78.
[50] Ibid., p. 88.
[51] Ibid., p. 87.

can be understood in terms of Schmittian political theology in that it associates force, power and violence with "the right of the strongest, and then justifies force in the name of the health and the protection of the polity."[52] Democracy, then, needs sovereignty in order to rule effectively; however, in the process it also closes off and essentializes the *demos*:

> In its very institution, and in the instant proper to it, the act of sovereignty must and can, by force, put an end in a single, indivisible stroke to the endless discussion. This act is an event, as silent as it is instantaneous, without any thickness of time, even if it seems to come by way of a shared language and even a performative language that it just as soon exceeds.[53]

In this sense, sovereignty betrays the universality of democracy, so that "as soon as there is sovereignty, there is abuse of power and a rogue state";[54] in other words, *every* state, democratic or otherwise, is potentially a rogue state. Moreover, as soon as sovereignty begins to justify itself, as it must do in a democracy, it is no longer pure and itself undergoes an autoimmune de(con)struction: "the autoimmunity with which sovereignty at once sovereignly affects and cruelly infects itself."[55]

However, the autoimmune openness of democracy, while potentially destructive, can also provide an opportunity for criticism and renewal. As Derrida notes, "autoimmunity is not an absolute ill or evil. It enables an exposure to the other, to *what* and *who* comes."[56] This openness is linked to the fact that democracy "is the only system, the only constitutional paradigm, in which, in principle, one has or assumes the right to criticize everything publicly, including the idea of democracy, its concept, its history and its name."[57] From this perspective, democracy's autoimmunity thus contains a chance or promise, opening democracy up to change and reinscription, in the form of the 'democracy-to-come'.

Indeed, for Derrida, there is a promise, a historical inheritance, inscribed in the concept of democracy itself: "equality, freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of the press." However, this promise of an authentic democracy "is never embodied in what we call democracy,"[58] and indeed will never exist as a "past, present or future regime"[59] as it will *always* be characterized by an autoimmune indeterminacy:

> it will always remain aporetic in its structure (force *without* force, incalculable singularity *and* calculable equality, commensurability *and* incommensurability, heteronomy *and* autonomy, indivisible sovereignty *and* divisible or shared sovereignty, an empty name, a despairing messianicity or a messianicity in despair, and so on).[60]

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[52] Dimitris Vadoulakis, "Autoimmunities," p. 35.
[53] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 10.
[54] Ibid., p. 145.
[55] Ibid., p. 109.
[56] Ibid., p. 152.
[57] Ibid., p. 87.
[58] Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, "Politics and Friendship: A Discussion with Jacques Derrida," 1997. http://www.dariaroithmayr.com/pdfs/assignments/Politics%20and%20Friendship.pdf
[59] Michael Naas, "'One Nation . . . Indivisible': Jacques Derrida on the Autoimmunity of Democracy and the Sovereignty of God," *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. 36 (2006), p. 40.
[60] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues*, p.86.

Derrida's concept of the democracy to come is not, then, a Kantian regulative idea; rather, it can be likened to "the *khora* of the political."[61] Thus, importantly, the 'to come' of democracy to come does not simply refer to "a future democracy correcting or improving the actual conditions of the so-called democracies." Instead, the 'to come' here refers to a promise, duty or injunction "that is 'to come' immediately."[62] Moreover, the democracy to come is not necessarily a regime; democracy is "not confined to the political in the classical sense," or to citizenship or the nation state. It can, instead, refer to any experience characterized by openness to and respect for the Other, equality and justice.[63]

This (relatively) optimistic view of democratic autoimmunity in the form of the democracy to come is arguably prevalent in *Politics of Friendship.* However, Derrida's emphasis appears to switch to the *pervertibility* of democratic autoimmunity in *Rogues*,[64] [65] so that we can 'not only criticize, we can restrict democracy in the name of democracy."[66] In other words, in *Rogues* Derrida argues that threats to democracy can come from democratic governments themselves, who may put democracy at risk through curtailing democratic rights and freedoms, particularly in situations where democracy is already under attack.[67] A key question, therefore, for Derrida is whether a democracy must "leave free and in a position to exercise power those who risk mounting an assault on democratic freedoms."[68]

In this context, Derrida cites the example of the 1992 Algerian election which was cancelled by the government due to fears that a popular radical Islamist party, the Islamic Salvation Front (FSI), would abolish democracy if it came to power. In the face of this threat the government decided "in a sovereign fashion to suspend, at least provisionally, democracy *for its own good,* so as to take care of it, so as to immunize it against a much worse and very likely assault."[69] In this sense, the suspension of the election is autoimmune, a "suicide in order to prevent a murder."[70] Thus, as Johnson notes:

> Algerian democracy effectively 'secreted' its own auto-antibodies, in the forms of both anti-democratic (Algerian) martial law and anti-democratic (Islamist) revolutionary violence, each asserting some right to the claims of democratic legitimacy.[71]

Another important example is that of the US government's response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In his interview with Borradori, which took place shortly after the attacks, Derrida

[61] Ibid., p. 82.
[62] Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, "Politics and Friendship."
[63] Ibid.
[64] Leigh M. Johnson, "Terror, Torture and Democratic Autoimmunity," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 38 No. 1 (2012), p. 112.
[65] Alex Thomson, "What's to Become of 'Democracy to Come?'," p. 1.
[66] Marguerite La Caze, "Terrorism and Trauma: Negotiating Derridean 'Autoimmunity'," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 37, No. 5 (2011), p. 610.
[67] Samir Haddad, "Derrida and Democracy at Risk," p. 29.
[68] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues*, p.34.
[69] Ibid., p. 33.
[70] Alex Thomson, 'What's to Become of 'Democracy to Come?'," p. 1
[71] Leigh Johnson. "Terror, Torture and Democratic Autoimmunity," p. 113.

discusses these events in terms of autoimmunity.[72] What we have here is that governments such as that of the US fight against what they see as forces that are attacking what they value – a relatively stable, orderly, and open society underscored by democracy, freedom, and the rule of law. However, arguably, in attacking these terrorist forces, they are themselves destroying the very values that they were seeking to uphold through attacks on privacy, human rights and personal freedom. In this sense, then, Derrida notes that, in the context of its supposed "war" with so-called "rogue states" the US, together with its allies, *itself* behaved like a rogue state.[73]

Going Rogue? The Autoimmunity of Democracy in Seeing

As mentioned above, *Seeing* opens in a polling booth on a stormy day when very few people have, as yet, left their homes to vote. In an uncanny (un)foreshadowing of the mass casting of blank votes, the supposed abstention is considered a threat to the democratic system; however, commentators note that the capital city seems to set a good example for the rest of the country:

> just when the spectre of an abstention on a scale unparalleled in the history of our democracy had seemed to be posing a great threat to the stability not just of the regime but, even more seriously, of the system itself… As for the three parties involved in the election, the parties on the right, in the middle and on the left, they…issued congratulatory statements in which…they affirmed that democracy had every reason to celebrate.[74]

Despite the eventual turnout, however, the election day ends with a shock when it is revealed that seventy percent of the votes cast were blank. The blank vote is not a literary invention on Saramago's part; in his adopted country of Spain, for instance, they are formally counted and accepted. It is important to emphasize here that a blank vote is not an abstention, so that "what is at stake is neither a nulling nor a voiding, and certainly not not-voting."[75] This difference is pointed out by Saramago himself in an interview:

> Abstention means you stayed at home or went to the beach. By casting a blank vote, you're saying that you understand your responsibility, you have a political conscience and you came to vote, but you don't agree with any of the existing parties and this is the only way you have of saying so.[76]

As Vanhoutte notes, critics have often compared the blank voters in *Seeing* to Melville's character Bartleby the Scrivener who answers every question with 'I would prefer not to'. In

[72] Derrida dissects that this autoimmune response occurs into three overlapping 'moments'. The first 'moment' is when the USA is attacked by terrorists who were at least partly 'home grown' within its own borders. The second moment is one of traumatic repression of the events, which allows the trauma itself to be regenerated, sparking fear of a future, and even worse, traumatic terrorist attack. The third moment is that responding to terrorism by attacking so-called 'rogue states', such as Iraq and Afghanistan, in turn provides legitimation for further terrorist attacks. (Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, pp. 85-172); (La Caze, "Terrorism and Trauma." pp. 606-608).

[73] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues,* p. 112.

[74] José Saramago, *Seeing,* p. 15.

[75] Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte, "Bye Bye *Bartleby* and Hello *Seeing*, or On the Silence and the Actualization to Do … Not," in Carlo Salzani and Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte (eds.), *Saramago's Philosophical Heritage* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 241.

[76] Stephanie Merrit, "José Saramago Interview."

his 'non-action and non-refusal' Bartleby has become, for many political philosophers, a symbol of the power of passive resistance.[77] Žižek, for instance, states that "José Saramago's novel *Seeing* can effectively be perceived as a mental experiment in Bartlebian politics."[78] However, Vanhoutte points out that the blank votes in *Seeing* cannot easily be read *a la* Bartleby as a "non act that intends to counter a frail but possibly oppressive political regime"[79] because, as has already been suggested, the blank voters are *actively* taking part in the democratic process so that "the action undertaken by the population of the former capital … consists of positive action." [80] Indeed, then, the blank votes can be understood as a "refusal to refuse to participate."[81]

Thus, rather than a rejection of democracy itself, the phenomenon of the blank ballots in *Seeing* can be better read, as Saramago himself indicates, as a protest against the available candidates and parties, those of the left, the middle, and the right. In this sense, the blank voters' decision can perhaps be understood in terms of democracy's inherent openness as a system that "welcomes in itself, in its very concept, that expression of autoimmunity called the right to self-critique and perfectibility."[82]

However, the government in *Seeing,* the party on the right, portrays and perhaps perceives the blank votes as a threat to the democratic system. In consequence, it decides to impose a state of emergency on the country in order to counter what the Prime Minister describes as "a brutal blow against the democratic normality."[83] Later, the defense minister denounces the blank voters as terrorists; "what we are facing is terrorism pure and unadulterated; it may wear different faces and expressions but it is, essentially, the same thing."[84] The supposed enemy, then is an internal one, the most terrifying kind, as Derrida points out: "The worst, most effective terrorism… is the one that installs or recalls an interior threat at home and recalls that the enemy is also always lodged on the inside of the system it violates and terrorizes."[85]

Nevertheless, it is not so much the fact that blank ballots have been cast that bothers the government – this is, in fact, legal in the unnamed country – but it is rather the sheer quantity of the blank votes that supposedly poses a threat to the democratic system:

> the sole crime of these people was to cast blank ballots, it would be of little importance if only the usual ones had done it, but there were plenty, there were too much, almost all of them, what does it matter that it is your inalienable right if you are told that such a right has to be used in homeopathic doses, drop by drop, you cannot walk around with a full bowl overflowing with blank ballots.[86]

[77] Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte, "Bye Bye *Bartleby,"* p. 236.
[78] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 180.
[79] Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte, "Bye Bye *Bartleby,"* p. 234.
[80] Ibid., p. 241.
[81] Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte, "Only the country of the blind will have a king. On Žižek's non-lucid reading of Saramago's Essay on Lucidity [Seeing]," *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (2013), p. 7.
[82] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues,* p. 187.
[83] José Saramago, *Seeing,* p. 27.
[84] Ibid., p. 32.
[85] Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror,* p. 188.
[86] José Saramago, *Seeing,* p. 56.

The government decides to call a second election; in the meantime, it begins an attempt to gather intelligence on the motives behind the blank ballots by monitoring the polling stations and recording the voters' conversations in the hope of tracking down a purported ringleader. However, as Zivin emphasizes, due to an unhappy mixture of human and technological error, "the more the police record and analyze the conversations of voters, hoping to identify a guilty party responsible for the voting conspiracy, the more their efforts prove futile."[87]

In this context, in an "echo of Guantánamo Bay,"[88] 500 people are arrested at random to be interrogated further, submitted to lie detectors and possibly torture. Although there are no actual torture scenes in the novel, the narrator suggests the hypothetical possibility of the use of torture by the government;[89] "Were this innocent man to be interrogated tomorrow, we tremble at the mere thought of what could happen to him..."[90] Far from being an anathema to democratic states, however, Johnson argues that torture, together with terrorism, is an inherent component of democracy, as borne out by democracy's autoimmune tendency to secure itself even at the cost of using "anti-democratic" methods such as torture.[91]

In the second election, an even larger 83% of the votes turn out to be blank. In this context, the President describes the blank votes as a "modern-day black death" (or rather, the prime corrects him, a "blank death") threatening the "stability of the democratic system, not simply, not merely, of one country, this country, but of the entire planet."[92] In the aftermath of the disastrous election results, the government lifts the nation-wide state of emergency but declares an even harsher state of siege in the capital alone, where the blank voting has occurred. Thus, it is the capital city which is, effectively, declared rogue or *voyou,* an enemy of the democratic system. Indeed, as Derrida points out, there is an intimate connection between the *voyou,* originally a Parisian term, and the capital; "the voyou milieu is first of all the municipality, the polis, the city, indeed the capital city. And when one speaks of voyous, the police are never very far away."[93]

However, during the discussions preceding the imposition of a state of siege on the capital, the Minister of the Interior perceptively notes an important semantic difficulty:

> We all know that siege means blockade or encirclement, isn't that right…Therefore declaring a state of siege is tantamount to saying that the country's capital is besieged, blockaded or encircled by an enemy, when the truth is that the enemy, if I may call it that, is not outside but inside.[94]

Thus, of course, the use of the term siege in this situation is more appropriate than the interior minister lets on; it is the government itself, rather than the inhabitants of the capital, which turns out to be the chief enemy of democracy, the main *voyou.* However, from the

[87] Erin Zivin "Seeing and Saying: Towards an Ethics of Truth in José Saramago's "Ensaio sobre a Lucidez," *SubStance* Vol. 41, No. 1(2012), p. 112.
[88] Maria Aristodemou, "Democracy or Your Life! Knowledge, Ignorance and the Politics of Atheism in Saramago's *Blindness* and *Seeing," Law, Culture and the Humanities*, Vol. 9 No. 1 (2011), p. 175.
[89] Erin Zivin, "Seeing and Saying," p. 112.
[90] José Saramago, *Seeing,* p. 23.
[91] Leigh Johnson, "Terror, Torture and Democratic Autoimmunity," p. 107.
[92] José Saramago, *Seeing,* p. 51.
[93] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues,* p. 66.
[94] José Saramago, *Seeing,* p. 52.

government's perspective the rogues are clearly the blank voters. In an attempt to persuade the supposed rogues, "the degenerates, delinquents and subversives who had cast the blank votes of the error of their ways," the state of siege is "proper… not merely for show," including "a curfew, the closure of theatres and cinemas, constant army patrols, a prohibition on gatherings of more than five people, and an absolute ban on anyone entering or leaving the city."[95] Realizing that, as its offices are in the capital, the government itself will be among the besieged, it decides to relocate out of the city, along with the army and the police. The Prime Minister portrays the plan as a "painful" remedy for a "fatal" disease;[96] as Saramago's narrator points out, from the government's perspective the exodus was,

> a flight from the virus that had attacked the majority of the capital's inhabitants, and given that the worst is always waiting just behind the door, might well end up infecting all the remaining inhabitants and even, who knows, the whole country.[97]

The 'worst' here is reminiscent of Derrida's concept of 'the worst to come', a virtual or future trauma not only resulting from a past event but compounded by "the undeniable fear or apprehension of a threat that is *worse* and still *to come*."[98] For Derrida, such a virtual trauma underscored the USA's autoimmune (over) reaction to the events of 9/11, and was deepened further by the realization that the threat was no longer an external and easily identifiable one.[99] The same is arguably true of the government's overreaction to the supposed threat posed by the blank ballots in *Seeing*, framed not only as a menace to democracy in the country but worldwide, "the tip of the iceberg of a gigantic, global destabilization plot."[100]

As the Prime Minister declares the siege, he justifies the government's measures as responding to the (supposed) threat to national security posed by "the action taken by organized subversive groups who had repeatedly obstructed the people's right to vote."[101] Here, then, the government asserts its sovereignty, which Derrida defines as the indivisible and absolute "power to give, to make, but also to suspend the law; it is the exceptional right to place oneself above right, the right to non-right."[102] Indeed, the Minister of Defense, for instance, views democratic rights not as inalienable but as something which must be 'deserved' and therefore suspendable: "Rights are not abstractions…people either deserve rights or they don't, and these people don't, anything else is just so much empty talk."[103]

Although the government asserts its sovereignty ostensibly in the name of democracy, in doing so it constrains the democratic freedom of the *demos*. Moreover, the immunity, the absolute nature of sovereignty is also destroyed the moment the government seeks to justify itself, which it must do, at least in a democratic system:

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[95] José Saramago, *Seeing,* pp. 50-51.
[96] Ibid., p. 66.
[97] Ibid., p.67.
[98] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues,* pp. 104-105.
[99] Ibid., p. 106.
[100] José Saramago, *Seeing,* p. 32.
[101] Ibid., p. 57.
[102] Jacques Derrida . *The Beast and the Sovereign (Vol. 1).* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2011), p. 16.
[103] José Saramago, *Seeing,* p. 53.

> To confer sense or meaning on sovereignty, to justify it, to find a reason for it, is already to compromise its deciding exceptionality … to compromise its immunity… But since this happens all the time, pure sovereignty does not exist … it is always in the process of autoimmunizing itself, of betraying itself by betraying the democracy that nonetheless can never do without it.[104]

In *Seeing,* too, the government's sovereignty turns out to be far from indivisible and absolute, despite the siege conditions it imposes on the capital. This is indicated by the fact that it has to justify its imposition of the state of exception not only to the nation but also to the 'international community', which it does in the name of protecting democracy. Faced with the continued peaceful coexistence of the city's inhabitants, however, the government seeks to to stir up unrest in the capital, using 'agents provocateurs' to create "the kind of unstable situations which might justify, in the eyes of the so-called international community…the move from a state of siege to a state of war."[105]

The state of siege imposed by the government is, then, increasingly brutal, trampling on the democratic rights and freedoms of the capital's inhabitants until, as Bernardino notes, they seem almost to be reduced to "bare life" in Agamben's terms.[106] Thus "what looked like a democratic regime rapidly becomes a dictatorship" so that "democracy becomes a farce, a mere word through which the Government imposes a state of siege."[107]

In this sense, as a suspension of democracy carried out in the name of protecting democracy, the situation in *Seeing* can perhaps be compared with Derrida's examples of the Algerian government's postponement of democratic elections "in order to save a democracy threatened by the sworn enemies of democracy,"[108] or the USA's infringement of democratic rights and freedoms following the 9/11 attacks.[109] However, as has been discussed above, it is very unlikely that the blank voters in Saramago's novel ever really wished to overthrow the democratic system, a system in which, as has been discussed above, they actively participated. Moreover, no evidence is uncovered, despite the government's best efforts, that the blank ballot phenomenon was a co-ordinated action headed by some terrorist group.

The government's (over)reaction in *Seeing* goes beyond its imposition of the state of siege and its use of propaganda when it actually carries out a terrorist attack in the capital. This act of terrorism, the planting of a bomb in the former capital city's main overground metro station which ends up killing more than 30 people, is undertaken in an attempt to foment unrest among the populace against a supposed terrorist group behind the blank voters.[110] As was arguably the case of the USA in the wake of 9/11, the government in *Seeing* employs "terrorism … in the service of 'securing' the very democratic principles that ostensibly prohibit those practices."[111] As Johnson argues, the relationship between democracy and terror is an intimate

[104] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues,* p. 101.
[105] José Saramago, *Seeing,* p. 61.
[106] Ligia Bernardino, "The Threshold of Democracy," p. 321.
[107] Ibid., p.321.
[108] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues,* p. 35.
[109] Ibid., p. 40.
[110] José Saramago, *Seeing,* pp. 112-116.
[111] Leigh Johnson. "Terror, Torture and Democratic Autoimmunity," p. 107.

one, as can be borne out by a glance at the history of modern democracy, one of the founding moments of which was Robespierre's Reign of Terror.[112]

As Derrida puts forward, then, "'murderous' attacks from the outside of democracy and 'suicidal' attacks from within it are quite often indistinguishable."[113] In *Seeing,* public opinion regarding who actually carried out the terrorist attack is mixed. A minority of newspapers and some of the city dwellers do suspect that the government is behind the attack, including the leader of the city council who resigns as a result. However, the majority of newspapers blame the attack on "some terrorist group with some link to the insurrection by the blankers."[114]

What is striking, despite the state of siege and the terrorist attack, is that the government does not succeed in stirring up violence among the inhabitants of the capital. While there is a demonstration following the bombing, it is a peaceful one, resembling a display of mourning more than a protest march. The demonstration does, however, provoke many who voted for the party on the right to seek to leave the city. When they attempt to do so, the government persuades them that it is their patriotic duty to return to the city in the name of defending democracy; the Prime Minister instructs the Interior Minister to,

> tell them that all those who voted for the parties who built the current political system, including, inevitably, the party in the middle, our direct competitor, constitute the first line of defense of all democratic institutions.[115]

Even when the would-be refugees return to the city, the expected conflict between them and their largely 'blanker' neighbors does not break out; instead there is solidarity, as the latter help the returnees to carry their belongings home, including the "tea service … the silver platter … the painting and …grandpa."[116] Indeed, despite the suspension of the law and the absence of governing authorities in the capital, life in the city continues to function much as before, with people paying their rent, food still available in the supermarkets, and even the refuse continuing to be collected.[117]

Bernardino, for instance, attributes the extraordinary show of solidarity among the capital's inhabitants to their experiences four years earlier during the plague of white blindness depicted in *Blindness,* which has taught them to look for new ways of living together in society.[118] In *Blindness,* despite the failure of the state and the return to a quasi-Hobbesian 'state of nature' in the city, the small yet motley group led by the ophthalmologist's wife, the only character to maintain her sight during the epidemic, develops a sense of solidarity and belonging. This is, however, based not on a shared identity but, as McColl Chesney explains,

[112] Ibid., p. 116.
[113] Ibid., p. 111.
[114] José Saramago, *Seeing,* p. 117.
[115] Ibid., p. 138.
[116] Ibid., p. 132.
[117] Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte, "Bye Bye *Bartleby,"* p. 240.
[118] Ligia Bernardino, "The Threshold of Democracy," p. 331.

on "fundamental, ethical values" such as "generosity and altruism, dignity and self-respect, trust and responsibility, respect for others and for the dead."[119] [120]

The peaceful cohabitation and solidarity among the inhabitants of the capital in *Seeing* does not, however, provoke any softening in the government's approach. Indeed, in its desperation to uncover a rogue organization behind the blank ballots, the government fixates upon the figure of the ophthalmologist's wife who, as noted above, was a key character in *Blindness*. In that novel, mysteriously immune to the white blindness, she commits a murder in the chaotic context of the epidemic, killing the ringleader of a gang who raped and exploited the other inhabitants of the quarantine hospital before leading her group to safety. In *Seeing,* four years after the end of the plague of white blindness, a member of the group she helped ultimately betrays her by writing an anonymous letter to the government suggesting that she may be the ringleader behind the blank ballots. This accusation is based on a mysterious and illogical connection between the enigma of her immunity to the blindness epidemic and the mystery of the blank ballots.[121]

Despite this extremely flimsy 'evidence' the government, in its desperation to uncover a supposed plot behind the blank votes, seizes on the accusation, imagining the doctor's wife to be the leader, the chief rogue, of what Derrida calls a *voyoucracy,* a kind of state within the state:

> a corrupt and corrupting power of the Street, an illegal and outlaw power that brings together into a voyoucratic regime, and thus into an organized and more or less clandestine form, into a virtual state, all those who represent a principle of disorder …of plotting and conspiracy, of premeditated offensiveness or offenses against public order.[122]

The government consequently sends a police team, a superintendent accompanied by an inspector and a sergeant, into the city to interrogate the woman and her acquaintances. In this context, the ophthalmologist's wife herself ironically points out to the police superintendent just how ridiculous these assertations are:

> And I am to blame for what happened … And how did I get the capital's majority of the population to cast blank ballots, putting flyers under their doors, by midnight prayers and witchcraft, by spreading a chemical product in the water supply network, by promising each person the first prize in the lottery, or by spending what my husband earns in his office to buy votes.[123]

Although the doctor's wife has effectively become "a kind of public enemy number one,"[124] it gradually becomes clear to the superintendent that no proof whatsoever linking her to a terrorist organization behind the blank ballots is forthcoming; neither is there any evidence that such an organization exists. Following a conversation with the Minister of the Interior, who

[119] Duncan McColl Chesney, "Re-Reading Saramago on Community – *Blindness*," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, Vol. 62 No.2 (2021), pp. 213.
[120] Ibid., p. 213.
[121] José Saramago, *Seeing,* pp. 171-172.
[122] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues,* p. 66.
[123] José Saramago, *Seeing,* p. 237.
[124] Ibid., p. 298.

orders him to create evidence against her, the superintendent has a crisis of faith.[125] When the Minister of the Interior informs him that the newspapers will soon publish an exposé of the conspiracy, the superintendent responds by giving a newspaper his own version of the facts, which is later published before the government confiscates all copies of the report and shuts down the newspaper.

The novel ends with the shooting of the superintendent, followed by that of the doctor's wife, a heroic savior figure in *Blindness*,[126] [127] and her dog Constant, the "dog of tears," who "unleashed a terrifying howl" as his mistress is shot.[128] Thus, the novel ends on a particularly depressing note as, as Rollason points out, with "the disappearance of the last lucid woman, totalitarianism may yet install itself in the hearts and minds of a whole dehumanized population."[129]

The howling of Constant, the only character to be named in the entire novel, is also important here. As Salzani and Vanhoutte argue, dogs play a key role in Saramago's fiction, often acting as an almost supernatural guide to the human characters. This is particularly true of Constant who, as the only seeing character apart from the doctor's wife in *Blindness*, literally acts as a guide dog to the blind characters.[130] In addition dogs often play a vital part in Saramago's social critique; their howling, in particular, denotes a pacific revolt which can be likened to that of the blank voters.[131] The shots, along with Constant's howl, are overheard, significantly, by two blind men; the novel ends with the following exchange between them: "Did you hear something, Three shots, replied another blind man. But there was a dog howling too, It's stopped now, that must have been the third shot, Good, I hate to hear dogs howl."[132] [133]

Thus, Constant's death, and the cessation of his howl, can perhaps be understood as the silencing of pacific political protest, as represented by the blank voters in the novel, as the defeat of lucidity by blindness. However, the death of the howling dog connects to the epigraph of the novel, "Let's howl, said the dog," which Saramago explains as follows: "We are the dogs, and it's time that we start howling."[134]

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[125] Jim Jose, "A Brutal Blow," p.724.

[126] Christopher Rollason, "How Totalitarianism Begins at Home: Saramago and Orwell," in Mark Sabine and Adriana Alves de Paula Martins (eds.), *Dialogue with Saramago: Essays in comparative literature* (Manchester: University of Manchester, 2006), p. 16., http://yatrarollason.info/files/SaramagoandOrwell.pdf

[127] Jim Jose, "A Brutal Blow," p. 726.

[128] José Saramago, *Seeing,* p. 307.

[129] Christopher Rollason, "How Totalitarianism Begins at Home," p. 16.

[130] Carlo Salzani and Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte, "Saramago's Dogs: For an Inclusive Humanism," in Carlo Salzani and Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte (eds.), *Saramago's Philosophical Heritage* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 196.

[131] Ibid., p. 197.

[132] José Saramago, *Seeing,* p. 307.

[133] The meaning of the blind man's hatred of howling dogs is, however, ambiguous, as Jose notes: it is unclear whether the blind man is someone who hates dogs, or, alternatively, if he is simply relieved to see the suffering of a fellow creature come to an end. ("A Brutal Blow," p. 728).

[134] Carlo Salzani and Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte, "Saramago's Dogs", p 197.

Conclusion

In contrast to *Blindness, Seeing* ends on an apparently pessimistic, even depressing, note.[135] In its response to a perceived threat to democracy, the government attacks the very rights and freedoms associated with that democracy, resorting to 'arch-authoritarian' means including the imposition of a "state of siege, censorship, espionage, arbitrary arrest and indefinite detention, bombs planted by government agents."[136] In other words, in its pursuit of the supposed rogue behind the blank ballots, the state, in its crushing of the population's democratic rights and freedoms, effectively itself becomes a rogue state. This culminates in the killing of the doctor's wife, the superintendent, and the dog Constant, three characters who arguably represent political 'lucidity'.

Despite the government's authoritarian turn and the less than optimistic end of the novel, however, the message of *Seeing* is perhaps not entirely a hopeless one, as several commentators including, for example, Jose,[137] Vanhoutte,[138] or Bernardino,[139] have pointed out. Although the novel ends with the death of the three 'lucid' characters, many other 'lucid' men and women, characters "who have seen the light"[140] remain alive. These are, of course, the blank voters and, more broadly, the 'ordinary' inhabitants of the capital city.

Far from either simply being indifferent to or rejecting democracy outright, the blank voters demonstrate a desire to *question,* and presumably to improve, the democratic system. In this sense, the voters' action can perhaps be understood in the context of the *opportunity* provided by democratic autoimmunity in the form of the democracy to come. Rather than some ideal future regime, Derrida describes the democracy to come as "a militant and interminable political critique" which protests against "every political abuse, every rhetoric that would present as a present or existing democracy, as a *de facto* democracy."[141] In this sense, then, "even a state that appears to be drawing rapidly away from democracy may in fact be exposing itself even more to the possibility of what remains to come."[142]

This is reflected in the extraordinary solidarity shown by the population of the capital who, regardless of how they voted in the elections, live together in peaceful cooperation despite the government's attempts to stir up unrest among them. In this sense, these city dwellers perhaps come closer to fulfilling the promise of democracy, which for Derrida can refer "to any kind of experience in which there is equality, justice, equity, respect for the singularity of the Other at work."[143] than any so-called democratic regime. While the ending of *Seeing,* like the democracy to come, is left open,[144] a glimmer of hope, a promise, remains amidst the ruins of a rogue state. This hope, reflected in the city dwellers' search for a more truly democratic way of life, is also passed on to the reader as an exhortation to take up the howl of the dead dog

[135] Jim Jose, "A Brutal Blow," p. 726.
[136] Christopher Rollason, "How Totalitarianism Begins at Home," p. 15.
[137] Jim Jose, "A Brutal Blow," p. 726.
[138] Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte, "Bye Bye *Bartleby*," p. 240.
[139] Ligia Bernardino, "The Threshold of Democracy," p. 331.
[140] Jim Jose, "A Brutal Blow," p. 728.
[141] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues,* p. 86.
[142] Alex Thomson, "What's to Become of 'Democracy to Come'?," p. 7.
[143] Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, "Politics and Friendship."
[144] Jim Jose, "A Brutal Blow", p. 728.

Constant, to question and challenge the democratic regimes we live in, to respond to the injunction of the democracy to come. In Saramago's words,

> It's not a question of replacing one government with another, or others. It's a question of putting democracy, authentic democracy, at the heart of the discussion, of refounding the concept based on people's real needs, and of searching for a way to avoid a collapse which buries the yearning for liberty and dignity, makes the human being more vulnerable and leads him to the precipice.[145]

[145] José Saramago, "Refundar la Democracia. Entrevista," *Sin Permiso*, 2 February 2005, https://www.sinpermiso.info/textos/refundar-la-democracia-entrevista

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FEMINISM, DECONSTRUCTION, AND LITERARY CRITICISM: A DECONSTRUCTIVE FEMINIST READING OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S NOVEL *THE SCARLET LETTER* WITH THE HELP OF ALICE JARDINE AND JACQUES DERRIDA

Rossen I. Roussev

It is to the credit of human nature, that, except where its selfishness is brought into play, it loves more readily than it hates. Hatred, by a gradual and quiet process, will even be transformed to love...

Nathaniel Hawthorne

Abstract

The text explores interrelations between feminism and deconstruction for purposes of literary critique. The main theoretical sources are Alice Jardine and Jacques Derrida, whose views of 'gynesis' and 'deconstruction', respectively, are taken as complementary. The views in question are discussed first in order to assemble a joint critical perspective that brings forward their relevant conceptual intersections. Jardine's concept of gynesis is seen as a more specific form of deconstruction carried from a feminist standpoint, whereas various Derrida's concepts are brought to bear on the notion of deconstruction in a wider sense. Subsequently, issuing from the critical perspective thus outlined, we offer a reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel The Scarlet Letter, in which the main characters, their actions, and specific relations in which they enter are revisited in key terms of the vocabularies of these thinkers. More specifically, concepts like life-affirmation, woman-in-effect, trace, patriarchy, discourse, and phallogocentrism, among others, are transposed in a shifting horizon which carries their discussion from the realm of critical philosophical reflection into that of literary text.

Key terms: *gynesis, gynema, structure, sign, différance, (auto)immunity, patriarchy, writing, sexual difference, (phal)logocentrism*

A classic target of feminist literary critics, Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter: A Romance* has been also a subject to deconstructive reading.[1] In this paper, I shall aim to combine these two approaches at once drawing mainly on Alice Jardine's feminist view of *gynesis* and Jacques Derrida's deconstructive philosophy. Ideally, this would be a gender mindful reading, keeping in mind especially that the notion of *gender* has a special importance in both feminist and deconstructionist perspectives, while being not only a sensitive but also an open-ended issue today. Thus, much of the feminist tradition places emphasis on the 'gender' of the author (whether writer or critic) it approaches, whereas the tradition of structuralist and post-structuralist thought sees 'gender' as inherent to culture as a whole. For much of their early years, though, both of these traditions most typically issued from the preconception that the genders are essentially two, something that in our age is no longer the norm. Thus, to more fully sustain our gender mindful reading here, we will need to stipulate in advance that using terms like 'feminist', 'patriarchy', 'woman', 'man', 'feminine', or 'masculine', among others, need not interfere with the demands of any gender inclusive or gender specific perspective, as the issues raised from feminist and deconstructionist standpoints could be readily identified as – at the very least – complementary to any gender perspective. For instance, to uphold itself, any gender specific perspective today needs to critique the traditional patriarchal culture in its fundamentals and entirety at least as much as a feminist perspective does. Acknowledging this need while paying homage to Simone de Beauvoir, whose book *The Second Sex* marks the radical inception of feminist thought in the 20th century,[2] Jardine writes that "it is up to us to continue moving along the collective pathways she opened for use, in a way that not only change gender and sex arrangements for the better, but change the world for the better, profoundly, deeply, widely, and long term. Radically."[3]

With such thoughts in mind, we now approach Hawthorne's famous novel in two main steps. First, we assemble a deconstructive feminist critical perspective out of common and complementary aspects of the thought of Alice Jardine and Jacques Derrida. And second, drawing on that perspective, we offer a reading of the key developments in the novel's plot.

A Deconstructive Feminist Perspective

The deconstructive feminist perspective which I would like to outline here will have one essential feature, which can be described as *openness to the inexhaustibility of its own field*. This feature is what I think characterizes Jardine's notion of *gynesis*, as much as Derrida's deconstructionist philosophy, even as they articulate it in different ways. This openness is indeed as necessary as it is inevitable in the workings of discourse, as it is coded into the

[1] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical Background and Critical History plus Essays from Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives with Introductions and Bibliographies, edited by Ross C. Murfin (Boston: Macmillan/Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1991).

[2] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, translated by Constance Borde and Sheila M. Chevallier (New York: Random House, 2010); cf. *Le deuxième sexe, 1, Les faits et les mythes; 2, L'expérience vécue* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1949).

[3] Alice A. Jardine, "What Feminism?," *French Politics, Culture & Society*, Vol. 28, No. 2, SPECIAL ISSUE: Simone de Beauvoir: ENGAGEMENTS, CONTEXTS, RECONSIDERATIONS (Summer 2010), p. 72.

character of signification, from where it passes to all critique, interpretation, and culture. Likewise, this perspective will also have another feature, closely related to its openness and indeed one that can be sustained only in the realm of its openness, namely, *affirmation*, which will motivate its critical operation as an assertion of life. While affirmation is not a necessary outcome of neither gynesis nor deconstruction, it can be a motive by choice, which we here certainly make, as opposed to the nostalgic realization of the limits of discourse.

Jardine's View of Gynesis

As I see it, Jardine's notion of *gynesis* is an attempt to revisit and adopt elements of structuralist and post-structuralist critique of the Western intellectual tradition and culture for purposes of literary and cultural critiques in feminist perspective. This move is as natural and falls into the same (self-)reflective register as the application of universalistic expertise to solving particular problems, or as the search for points of intersection between what I have elsewhere called "global" and "local."[4] But it is not just a move from universal to particular, global to local, or vice versa, as in one important sense none of these takes in any way precedence over the others. There is simply nothing like a move from cause to effect – such as, for instance, from calamity to immunity, the thematic that motives us here – in the realm of discourse and signification to justify its workings precedentially as this has been done for the realm of natural phenomena. At the very best, the causal determinism is of limited use for purposes of a critique, compared to the vast potential of the realm of signification overall.

Jardine appears well aware of this prospect and her goal is not simply to invent a unique technique or conceptual apparatus to be applied in the feminist criticism of literature or particular products of culture. As she puts it, "I focus on written texts, but am more concerned about the *process* of (reading and writing) woman than about examining the representation of women in literature."[5] What Jardine seems to be looking for is to make feminist critique integrative to a lasting socio-cultural change by making it an indelible part of the discourse which is productive of culture as a whole. This, however, she does not seek to promote by adding her integrative gesture to the well-established pillars of the existent culture, and this for good reasons. The normative and justificatory pillars of the patriarchal culture have already produced a systemic effect of domination that assigns secondary social roles for women. Hence, she wants to start anew in a move that is at once discursive and emancipatory, critical and creative, indeed along her suggested contribution to critical theory – the practice of *gynesis*.

Jardine's eponymous book starts with questions that come from her "concern with women as speaking and writing subjects, their relationship to language, and how sexual difference operates linguistically in a literary text," which she also thinks "need to be addressed by feminists who ... are or will eventually be in dialogue with what is now commonly called 'modernity'...".[6] It is to be noted here that in recent decades the term 'modernity' has been

[4] Rossen Roussev, "Global Conversation on the Spot: What Lao-tse, Heidegger, and Rorty Have in Common," *Global Conversations: An International Journal in Contemporary Philosophy and Culture*, Vol. 1 (2018), pp. 11-38. http://philogc.org/vol-1/

[5] Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 19.

[6] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

loosely used to designate key developments and characteristics of the Western culture since the 17th century, while being opposed to 'postmodernity', which has been also loosely used to designate a period whose beginning has been variedly placed in mid 19th century, mid 20th century, or in the 1980s.[7] Jardine, in particular, has started her interrogation with the culture of modernity under the influence of the French post-structuralists of the 1960s and 1970s, most notably Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Hélène Cixous.[8] Her response to the challenges modernity posed to feminist thought was ever since thoroughly informed by post-structuralist critique of modernity and of the structuralist thought of thinkers, such as Jacques Lacan and Claude Lévi-Strauss.

What she accepts from the leading French thinkers of this period on the character of modernity is that "the conceptual apparatuses inherited from nineteen-century Europe" have obliterated how "our ways of understanding in the West have been and continue to be complicitous with our ways of oppressing." For, they have instead conditioned "the vicious circles of intellectual imperialism and of liberal ideology and humanism," all along "reified and naturalized categories and concepts like 'experience' and the 'natural'; or, in another mode, the Ethical, the Right, the Good, or the True."[9] Thus, beyond the conceptual mask of modernity, undone by the post-structuralist thinkers, a new world has appeared: a world that is now necessarily "denaturalized" and "*unheimlich*," finding itself in "a series of crises of legitimation" after its fundamental pillars – "Man, the Subject, Truth, History, Meaning" – have been radically called into question. [10] The ensuing attempts at "reinterpretation and reconceptualization" of what thus "eluded" the discourse of modernity – "the master narratives' own nonknowledge" – resulted in a peculiar conceptualization and understanding of 'woman': "This other-than-themselves is almost always a 'space' of some kind (over which the narrative has lost control), and this space has been coded as *feminine,* as *woman*."[11]

Thus, for Jardine, as for the tradition of structuralist and post-structuralist thought, 'woman' attains a peculiar cultural significance – that of alterity of the narratives of modernity, which have been historically inaugurated by the Cartesian subject, and which have failed to

[7] For most authoritative discussions on the opposition modernity-postmodernity, see Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1984), especially pp. xxiii-xxvff, 27-37ff, 46ff, 59ff, 79ff; cf. *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979), pp. 7-9ff, 49-63ff, 75ff, 97ff. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, translated by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1996), especially pp. 3ff, 83ff; cf. *Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: Zwölf Vorlesungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985), SS. 11ff, 104ff; Anthony Giddens, "Modernism and Post-Modernism," *New German Critique*, No. 22, Special Issue on Modernism (Winter, 1981), pp. 15-18; Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), especially pp. 1-10, 45-53; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991), especially pp. 10ff, 327ff; Agnes Heller, *A Theory of Modernity* (Malden, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), especially pp. 1-18; Okwui Enwezor, Nancy Condee, Terry Smith (eds.), *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2009).

[8] Alice Jardine, "What Feminism?," p. 68.

[9] Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, pp. 23-24.

[10] Ibid., pp. 24-25.

[11] Ibid., p. 25.

convey that alterity. It is in this relation that Jardine sees a necessity for a new form of thinking and discoursing, which is fitting to explore the alterity of modernity, or 'the space coded feminine'. She will call it *gynesis*:

> To designate that process, I have suggested a new name, what I hope to be a believable neologism: *gynesis* – the putting into discourse of "woman" as that process beyond the Cartesian Subject, the Dialectics of Representation, or Man's Truth. The object produced by this process is neither a person nor a thing, but a horizon, that towards which the process is tending: a *gynema*. This gynema is a reading effect, a woman-in-effect, never stable, without identity. Its appearance in a written text is perhaps noticed only by the woman (feminist) reader – either at the point where it becomes insistently "feminine" or where women (as defined metaphysically, historically) seem magically to reappear within the discourse. The feminist reader's eye comes to a halt at this tear in the fabric, producing a state of uncertainty and sometimes of distrust – especially when the faltering narrative in which it is embedded has been articulated by a man from within a nonetheless still-existent-discipline. When it appears in women theorists' discourse, it would seem to be less troubling. The still existent slippages in signification among feminine/woman/women and what we are calling *gynesis* and *gynema* are dismissed as "unimportant" because it is a woman speaking.[12]

This excerpt from Jardine's earlier publication conveys what I see as the operational gist of her notion of *gynesis* and is likewise suggestive of its interpretative potential. *Gynesis* is 'the putting into discourse of "woman"', where 'woman' has the cultural significance indicated in the structuralist and post-structuralist thought but is also indicative of a radical revision of subjectivity. Another important trait of *gynesis* is that it is a 'process', which in this way goes beyond the metaphysical anticipations of modernity, for instance, in that it is not anything like a program that can be accomplished and thus finished once and for all. It is more specifically a 'process beyond the Cartesian Subject, the Dialectics of Representation, or Man's Truth', which are now very much unmasked as the pillars of the original project of modernity. That process also creates 'neither a person nor a thing, but a horizon' which is called *gynema* described as 'a reading effect, a woman-in-effect, never stable, without identity'. The *gynema* of *gynesis* is thus nothing like a typical metaphysical product of modernity. Instead, it 'is perhaps noticed only by the woman (feminist) reader', though not exclusively, and seems to be an experience of what is 'insistently "feminine"' or of 'woman' as 'magically reappearing within discourse'. It can be marked by a sense of 'uncertainty' or 'distrust', most commonly evoked by a discourse authored by 'a man', but these would be 'less troubling' when detected in women's works, 'because it is a woman speaking'.

The suggestion that Jardine makes here is that a woman reader or critic appears to be in a better position than a male one would be to join in *gynesis* to explore the signification of the 'feminine' – the intrinsic 'otherness' of the discourse of modernity. Yet, with this project she does *not* aim at "painting contexts or texts, representing modernity or feminism, or defining women or woman"; rather she aims at "foregrounding a new kind of interpretant which has surfaced from the interactions among all of these – a 'woman-effect'" – in the hope that it could "open new spaces for women to write in."[13] Thus, Jardine clearly anticipates that bringing

[12] Alice Jardine, "Gynesis," *Diacritics*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Cherchez la Femme Feminist Critique/Feminine Text (Summer, 1982), p. 58.
[13] Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, p. 28.

together – in *gynesis* – the post-structuralist conjectures on the cultural significance of 'woman' and the American feminist tradition of literary criticism, which emphasized the gender in literary representation, will bring a special benefit for the latter. Consequently, drawing on feminist critics like Annette Kolodny and Elaine Showalter,[14] Jardine goes on to describe what she calls the *fundamental feminist gesture* of literary criticism as "an analysis (and critique) of fictional representations of women (characters) in men's and women's writing."[15] Whereas along these lines the gestures of post-structuralism and American feminism seem to be at first divergently positioned, this only motivates Jardine to seek ways to bridge them. In fact, her thought never ceases to oscillate between them. In the process, she raises more questions than she offers definitive solutions, but her discussion of the issues at stake unveils how they reappear within the perspectives of these two intellectual movements, thus availing insights in both directions while keeping the prospects for their mutual enhancement open-ended.

Acknowledging the tension between the two perspectives, Jardine looks for points in common and indicates three their intersections, which are of particular relevance for literary criticism, and which she identifies along modernity's notions of 'self', 'representation', and 'truth'. First, the post-structuralist thought, which does away with *subject*, *self*, and *author*, is in an outright tension with the feminist emphasis on the gender of representation. The manner in which Jardine tackles this intersect is exemplary for her approach of making a double gesture in the directions of both perspectives. On one side, she points out that the feminist's distrust of "this complex 'beyonding' of sexual identity is largely based on common sense" – precisely the one ("sense 'common to all', that is, humanism") that a true feminist critique endeavors to dispel.[16] On another, she makes the assertion that "when you problematize 'Man' (as being at the foundations of Western notions of the self)... you are bound to find 'woman' – no matter who is speaking – and that most definitely concerns feminist criticism."[17]

Second, drawing partly on Kristeva, Jardine points to the postmodernist notion of *representation* as a 'process' in a complex move from the 'phantasies' of the unconscious through the 'fantasies' of consciousness, a process which – as "attached to no self, no stable psychological entity, no content" – undoes the border between *theory* and *fiction*.[18] This process has found expression in "acceptably 'feminized' domains" such as art, literature, and religion (though not in theology), but its radical rethinking and liberation demand re-exploration of the Greek notion of *physis* – "making it speak differently, in new spaces, within entirely new structural configurations."[19] Again, troubling as this process of representation and self-exploration might seem to be for a feminist critique, Jardine emphasizes that it "has everything to do with woman and thus with women,"[20] a message that can be fittingly received by the postmodernist thinkers as well.

[14] Annette Kolodny, "Some Notes on Defining a 'Feminist Literary Criticism'," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Autumn, 1975), pp. 75-92; Elaine Showalter, "Towards a Feminist Poetics," in: Mar Jacobus (ed.), *Women Writing and Writing about Women* (New York, London: Routledge, 1979), pp. 22-41.
[15] Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, pp. 52, 57.
[16] Ibid., p. 58.
[17] Ibid., p. 58.
[18] Ibid., p. 59.
[19] Ibid., p. 59.
[20] Ibid., p. 59.

Third, drawing again on Kristeva, Jardine addresses the notion of *truth* in terms of the opposition between 'fiction' and 'reality'. One immediate concern that she raises in this regard is the safeguarding of women's "fictional heritage" from the proliferation of fictional products in our technological world, a safeguarding which must go along with "laying bare the logical, ideological, and historical links between that heritage and patriarchal culture."[21] Another concern she points to is the difference that a feminist theory could make, provided that "to treat both ... theory and fiction ... as fictions is to make a gesture assumed by contemporary thought and is also to conform to the feminist impulse."[22] In all events, the relevance of the postmodernist sense of truth to feminist critics amounts to a question they cannot forgo – "Is all of this another male fiction, or is it a larger process that can begin to free women – and men – from Man's Truth?"[23]

This question is Jardine's typical open-ended but is again pregnant with suggestions in both directions, as is also her project of *gynesis* as a whole. Apparently, on her view, *gynesis* encompasses the work of both French postmodernist thought (with its exploration of the cultural signification of *woman*) and American feminist literary criticism (with its *fundamental feminist gesture*) despite their noted divergence. They both venture on "a search for that which has been 'left out', de-emphasized, hidden, or denied articulation within Western systems of knowledge," but *gynesis* in France has proceeded "away from a concern with identity to a concern with difference, from wholeness to that which is incomplete, from representation to modes of presentation, meta-discourse to fiction, production to operation, and from Universal Truth to a search for new forms of legitimation through para-scientific (when not mathematical) models."[24] It would appear, though, that for Jardine each of the two perspectives by itself alone will not be as efficient in *gynesis* as both of them together. For,

> ... a radical reconceptualization of the speaking subject and language is, in particular, essential to the rethinking of feminism as concept and practice in the late twentieth century. At the same time, the explorations of "woman," with reference to both, in contemporary French thought, are not enough to do so because of the ways in which reality and its fictions have been deemphasized. The (American) feminist in dialogue with (French) contemporary theory may be in a special position to approach this problem by remediating and rethinking the feminist insistence on personal experience as practice with the movement of these theoretical fictions as experience and practice – thus working, potentially, toward a new disposition of the ethical grounded in symbolic process.[25]

We shall seek for such 'a new disposition of the ethical grounded in symbolic process' in our reading of Hawthorne' *The Scarlet Letter*, but we will also need to draw attention to several other elements of Jardine's view of *gynesis* to complete our idea of it. Such elements may not necessarily make the usage of *gynesis* for purposes of text reading any easier, as they point also – beyond any good intentions – to difficulties that might seem unsurmountable obstructions. And yet, even as Jardine has warned us that she is not offering definitive solutions, guided by

[21] Ibid., p. 60.
[22] Ibid., p. 60.
[23] Ibid., p. 61.
[24] Ibid., p. 36.
[25] Ibid., p. 47.

the belief that insights can only be more useful for the purpose than any conceptual irreconcilability, we could readily face them and see what we can get out of them.

One such element that poses difficulties for feminist critics is that, whereas it is inspired and guided by the signification of 'woman' and the representation of women, *gynesis* may not necessarily be about women, whereas "feminism is necessarily about *women* – a group of human beings in history whose identity is defined by that history's representation of sexuality."[26] Jardine is certainly aware that Hélène Cixous' view of *écriture féminine* ('women's writing') is essentially an attempt to differentiate and thus invent a specifically woman's discourse as distinct from the traditional man's discourse which misrepresents women.[27] Jardine also admits that "within traditional categories of thought, women can (have) exist(ed) only as opposed to men," that within a postmodernist perspective "women, especially feminists, who continue to think within those categories are, henceforth, seen as being men," and that this constitutes a problem for feminist critics as "it explicitly negates their own status as readers" – "genderizing the texts" effectively "problematized the gender" to the point of making it unavailable as both subject and object of text criticism.[28]

This by itself already consigns both postmodernist and feminist thought to crises of legitimation,[29] as modernity's grand narratives[30] can no longer work for either of them in this sense. What is more important, though, is that, no matter what form the resolution of such crises might take, the concerns for feminist criticism remain intact, for regardless of the acuteness of the postmodernist critical interventions into the narratives of modernity, for Jardine, they do not "seem to get beyond gynesis as it transpires within a *male* economy."[31] Likewise, even when "the demise of Truth," viz., "Man's Truth," is proclaimed, something that a feminist "will most certainly welcome," other key concerns will still remain; namely, "the very conceptual systems" that have inaugurated it, as well as the presence of these systems into "feminist thinking" in the form of "systems of defining the self, perception, judgment, and, therefore, morality."[32]

For Jardine, the way out of the conceptual conundrums in the wake of the crises of legitimation can only be *gynesis*. "The demise of the Subject, of the Dialectic, and of Truth has left modernity with a void that it is vaguely aware must be spoken differently and strangely: as woman, through gynesis."[33] Following Kristeva, who designates the intrinsic relation between *truth* (*vérité*) and the Lacanian *real* (*réel*) adopted in postmodernist thought with the neologism *vréel*,[34] Jardine describes the latter as "a kind of 'she-truth'" noting that it is also suggestive of

[26] Alice Jardine, "Introduction to Julia Kristeva's 'Women's Time'," *Signs,* Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn, 1981), p. 8.
[27] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1976), pp. 875-893.
[28] Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, p. 63.
[29] Ibid., pp. 65ff.
[30] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, pp. xxiii-xxvff, 27-37ff, 46ff, 59ff, 79ff; cf. *La condition postmoderne*, pp. 7-9ff, 49-63ff, 75ff, 97ff.
[31] Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, p. 144.
[32] Ibid., p. 153.
[33] Ibid., p. 154.
[34] Julia Kristeva, "The True-Real," in Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*, translated by Sean Hand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 216-217; cf. "Le vréel," in Julia Kristeva and jean-Michel Ribette (eds.), *Folle Vérité – Vérité et vraisemblance du texte psychotique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1979), p. 11.

the French *elle* (she) and thus of the truth-as-woman in *gynesis*.[35] The 'Real' is a key concept in the psychoanalysis of Lacan, where it is understood as what remains beyond the 'Imaginary' and the 'Symbolic', and has been also associated with Kant's *thing-in-itself*.[36] Lacan links it to a specific knowledge which he characterizes as "prohibited (*interdit*)," "impossible," "censured," and "forbidden," but which becomes accessible "if you write 'inter-dit' appropriately," for "it is said between the words, between the lines."[37] Lacan also links the 'truth' of that knowledge to 'woman' and acknowledges that, although he "does not know how to approach" it, "something true can still be said about what cannot be demonstrated."[38] Seizing upon these conclusions, Jardine asserts that "the true, after Lacan, can only be *inter-dit*, located between words, between lines," that it is intrinsically interlinked with the *Real* and *feminine jouissance*, and that they are thus all "*im-previsible*"; that is, "unseen and unforeseeable ...surging out of the unconscious, as terrifying as any God, no matter what name the latter carries."[39]

We need to keep in mind here that, as she explores the interlinkage in question, Jardine always does so with a view to feminist critique and the possibility that the conceptual apparatus of modernity with its front-runner – the speaking subject, dismantled as it is in postmodernist thought, be put to new uses at least provisionally. Lacan is also the psychoanalytic theorist who has offered a landmark discussion of *jouissance* and its links to the subject with its epistemic aspirations that has been most influential on the post-structuralist tradition. Opposing *jouissance* to the philosophical concept of 'being', at one point he declares that "thought is jouissance" and that "there is jouissance of being,"[40] and at another – that "the 'I' is not a being, but rather something attributed to that which speaks."[41] More categorically, though, he announces that,

> The world, the world of being, full of knowledge, is but a dream, a dream of the body insofar as it speaks, for there's no such thing as a knowing subject. There are subjects who give themselves correlates in object *a*, correlates of enjoying speech qua jouissance of speech.[42]

In trading the subject for jouissance, Lacan has also dwelled on *feminine jouissance*. For him, it is a jouissance which is "supplementary," "beyond the phallus,"[43] "of the Other," and so "radically Other that woman has more of a relationship to God than anything that could have

[35] Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, p. 154. See also Alice Jardine, "Opaque Texts and Transparent Contexts: the Political Difference of Julia Kristeva," in Nancy Miller(ed.), *The Poetics of Gender* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 96-115.
[36] Adrian Johnston, "Jacques Lacan," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/lacan/>.
[37] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book XX, *Encore 1972-1973*, translated by Bruce Fink (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company), p. 119; cf. *Le séminaire,* livre XX, *Encore 1972-1973* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975), p. 108.
[38] Ibid., pp. 119-120; cf. p. 108.
[39] Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, p. 167.
[40] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book XX, *Encore 1972-1973*, p. 70; cf. p. 66.
[41] Ibid., p. 120; p. 109.
[42] Ibid., pp. 126-127; p. 114.
[43] Ibid., pp. 73-74; cf. pp. 68-69.

been said in speculation in antiquity...."[44] Also, woman is said not to know it, not to "breathe a word" about it, which leads Lacan to conjecture a primary presence for the phallic jouissance,[45] as well as – to liken the feminine jouissance to "the essential testimony of the mystics," who "say that they experience it, but know nothing about it."[46] The unknowability and mysticism of *feminine jouissance* is due to the status of "the phallus" as "signifier that has no signified" but "is based, in the case of man, on phallic jouissance."[47] Feminine jouissance thus appears to be 'beyond the phallus', or a sort of surplus, an "extra (*en plus*)," [48] which will always make 'woman' appear in phallic presentation as "not-whole (*pas-tout*)."[49]

With such considerations in mind, Lacan makes two important assertions that are of particular relevance for feminist, as well as for any other, critical perspective: 1) that "if the unconscious has taught us anything, it is first of all that somewhere in the Other it knows (*ça sait*)," and 2) that "it knows because it is based precisely on those signifiers with which the subject constitutes himself."[50] That is, there is a certain kind of knowledge that is beyond the phallic signifier, is associated with the 'unconscious' and 'woman', is governed by feminine jouissance, and is based on and availed by that signifier which inaugurated the traditional subject. From here the notion of 'woman subject'; that is, a subject governed by *feminine jouissance*, is just a step away. Hélène Cixous' famous notion of *l'écriture féminine* presupposes this subject and also exacts it:

> When I say "woman," I'm speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history.[51]

Cixous clearly gives more than just theoretical import to the 'universal woman subject' which she also sees as a carrier or impetus of change. This subject of change has also a clear object of change – the phallocentric tradition with its entire history of writing and reason:

> Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason, of which it is at once the effect, the support, and one of the privileged alibis. It has been one with the phallocentric tradition. It is indeed that same self-admiring, self-stimulating, self-congratulatory phallocentrism.[52]

Jardine sees Cixous' work as "a step farther" in the postmodernist tradition that advances the cultural significance of 'woman' and 'l'écriture féminine', largely because Cixous has suggested that even "if feminine writing does not require the signature of a woman, women nonetheless, today (after psychoanalysis and Derrida), do have a privileged access to it" to the

[44] Ibid., pp. 82-83; cf. p. 77.
[45] Ibid., p. 60; cf. p. 56.
[46] Ibid., p. 76; cf. pp. 70-71.
[47] bid., p. 81; cf. p. 75.
[48] Ibid., p. 77; cf. p. 71.
[49] Ibid., pp. 7, 60; cf. pp. 13, 56.
[50] Ibid., pp. 87-88; cf. p. 81.
[51] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of Medousa," translated by Keith Cohen & Paula Cohen, *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1976), pp. 875-876.
[52] Ibid., p. 879.

point that "women ... seem to be, almost intrinsically, proto-postmodernists."[53] The notion of 'woman subject' having a 'privileged access' to the 'feminine writing' adds up a good deal of impetus to the potential of Jardine's project of *gynesis* for feminist critique and literary criticism, even as she has acknowledged the differences in focus and emphasis, to which that the postmodernist thought has awakened the French and American texts. Jardine actually believes that a continued dialogue between the French and American feminist writers can only help discover "*new* configurations of woman and modernity," as well as decide "the future of gynesis" and its relevance "for women."[54]

In this regard, and from the view point of feminist literary critique, Jardine notes that "the writing strategies intrinsic to modernity," which she identified in her discussion of the French postmodernists, are also at work "in the contemporary male American novel" but are imbedded in a "process" that is "qualitatively different" – "an *external* process, manipulating language and exploding the semantic spaces of the *referent*, rather than an *internal* one, imploding the *signifier* itself."[55] Indeed, Jardine claims that, grounded in an "ideology" of "unconditional freedom and originality of the author-self," the contemporary male American writer has "remained sovereign, never putting the authority of his own discourse into question in any radical way."[56] Thus, his text has remained arguably deaf to the "maternal," rather than "exploding paternal identity, concepts, and narrative to get at their feminine core, through ... a radical rearrangement of gender."[57] Nevertheless, on Jardine's view, this text has made an entrance into *gynesis* "at the level of *representation*," though in its own way, in which *gynesis* appears again "as the primary problem for any 'narrative' or 'subject-in-narrative'" but "without necessarily problematizing either one."[58]

We take it from here that, whereas it may have been limited, this entrance could by itself become a point of departure for a deconstructive feminist critique which uncovers the aspects of gynesis alongside the patriarchal ones as coded within a literary text. We can also assume that such an approach can be applied to earlier modern texts as well, as they have been exposed to an even lesser critique of the writing strategies of modernity than the contemporary ones. We hope this approach will be further facilitated if we throw light on Derrida's sense of deconstruction, to which we turn next.

Derrida's Philosophy of Deconstruction

Like Jardine's notion of gynesis, Derrida's view of *deconstruction* does not emulate a specific move between binary oppositions, even though he acknowledges their inevitability in discourse. His gesture of bringing Claude Lévi-Strauss' ethnological research to bear on the deconstruction of the structure of discourse is not a move from particular to universal, from local to global, or the other way around. These binary oppositions grow increasingly flexible as they are deployed – through the abstractions of discourse and culture – away from the

[53] Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, p. 262.
[54] Ibid., p. 264.
[55] Ibid., p. 234.
[56] Ibid., pp. 234-235.
[57] Ibid., p. 236.
[58] Ibid., p. 236.

visualities of nature to the point of their significatory self-disbandment, self-annihilation or, otherwise, deconstruction. This process is certainly more subtle and sophisticated than the discourse can convey, especially as the latter inevitably faces in it its own self-disarmament and structural incapacity to proceed beyond itself. It is nonetheless a process in which, as Derrida has shown, discourse becomes increasingly aware of its own "finite" capacity as a "field" which "excludes totalization."[59]

The sense of deconstruction [60] which Derrida conveys comprises a number of developments in what he calls the "history of meaning" and is tied with the concept of 'structure' that is central to the work of such figures as the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, among others. As is typically understood, 'structure' is what introduces order, organization, and systematicity in discourse to make it intelligible, for, as Saussure, the foremost originator of structuralism, puts it, "in language there are only differences without positive terms."[61]

Structure, Sign, and Play

In the opening of his most widely read essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida speaks of an "event" which constitutes a "rupture" in "the concept of structure," and which he links to the very sense of "the structurality of structure." More specifically, he points out that "although it has always been at work, [structure also] has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or of referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin."[62] For Derrida, the center of the structure plays the special role of ensuring its stability, organization, coherence, and thus intelligibility, but most importantly – of "limiting what we might call the *play* of the structure."[63] The center of the structure "closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible," but itself remains insusceptible to "permutation or transformation" and thus, despite its special function, "escapes structurality," which is why it was thought of, "paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside it*."[64] In other words,

> The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere*. The center is not the center. The concept of centered structure – although it represents coherence itself, the condition of the *episteme* as philosophy or science – is contradictorily coherent.[65]

[59] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p.289; cf. *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), p. 423.
[60] It is to be noted that, even as he used the term 'deconstruction' and its derivatives extensively, Derrida was not happy with the label 'deconstructionist' for his philosophy, which came to be applied to it rather by popular consent.
[61] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, in collaboration with Albert Riedlinger, translated, with an introduction and notes by Wade Baskin (New York: The Philosophical Library, Inc. 1959), p. 120; cf. *Cours de linguistique générale*, publié par Charles Bally et Albert Sechehaye, avec la collaboration de Albert Riedlinger (Paris: Payot, 1971), pp. 194-195.
[62] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.278; cf. *L'écriture et la différence*, p. 409.
[63] Ibid., p.278; cf. p. 409.
[64] Ibid., p.279; cf. pp. 409-410.
[65] Ibid., p.279; cf. p. 410.

Derrida points out further that throughout the intellectual tradition of the West that center has been taking different "forms or names," different "metaphors and metonymies" – such as "*eidos*, *arche*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject), *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth" – but it has always aimed at "the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word."[66] Thus, it became historically clear "that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, ... that it was not a fixed locus but a *function*, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play" to the point that "everything became discourse," or "a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences," thus "extending the domain and the play of signification infinitely."[67]

Whereas, for Derrida, there is no particular event or doctrine that marks the beginning of the rupture of the concept of structure, he has singled out the discourses of Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, in which its "work" has found "its most radical formulation."[68] Yet, for him, such discourses are inevitably involved in a "unique circle" which is indicative of "the relation between the history of metaphysics and the destruction of the history of metaphysics," and ultimately – of the impossibility of deconstructing metaphysics without using its concepts:

> There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.[69]

One example that Derrida gives in this regard is the concept of *sign*, a key concept of structuralist thought, which – as metaphysical concept – has to be "rejected," but which at the same time cannot be dispensed with in such a rejection.[70] The concept of the sign cannot secure a transcendence of, or a radical distance from, the metaphysical oppositions it enables (such as the one "between sensible and intelligible," as Lévi-Strauss had hoped); for we cannot annul its very own metaphysical "self-identity" (of an opposition between signifier and signified) without annulling also its functional capacity – we cannot annul its "metaphysical complicity without also giving up the critique we are directing against this complicity."[71]

In this relation, Derrida speaks of a "classical way" of annulling or "erasing the difference between the signifier and the signified," which involves "*submitting* the sign to thought," as opposed to his own, which contests "the system" of operation of the former one, and most of all – "the opposition between sensible and intelligible."[72] More particularly, Derrida points to what he calls "the *paradox* ... that the metaphysical reduction of the sign needed the opposition it was reducing," suggesting – in a circular fashion – that "the opposition

[66] Ibid., pp.279-280; cf. pp. 410-411.
[67] Ibid., p. 280 (emphasis added); cf. p. 411.
[68] Ibid., p. 280; cf. pp. 411-412.
[69] Ibid., pp. 280-281; cf. pp. 411-412.
[70] Ibid., p. 281; cf. p. 412.
[71] Ibid., p. 281; cf. pp. 412-413.
[72] Ibid., p. 281; cf. p. 413.

is systematic with the reduction," which in his view applies "to all the concepts and all the sentences of metaphysics, in particular to the discourse on 'structure'," and "explains the multiplicity of destructive discourses and the disagreement between those who elaborate them."[73] This means that no 'system' is possible without differences and oppositions, which are necessary for the 'reduction', explanation, or elaboration within its perspective, and ultimately – for the deconstruction of that system itself and its structural elements. That is, regardless of its primary purpose, every usage of metaphysical concepts, including those made within the "destructive discourses" of the likes of Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, "brings along with it the whole of metaphysics."[74] This also means that the metaphysical deconstruction of metaphysics (indeed its only possible deconstruction) needs to make usage of metaphysical oppositions, as much as to face the impossibility of accepting them, as in the case of Lévi-Strauss' ethnological research, where his fundamental opposition between *nature* and *culture* collapsed in the explanation of the universal normativity of incest prohibition.[75]

For Derrida, this indicates that "language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique," which he suggests could be done in two manners: one "questioning systematically and rigorously the history of these concepts," but in a way different from that of the "classic historian of philosophy," and instead – in a "step 'outside philosophy'"; and another, instrumental one, which, while questioning their truth-value, "conserves" their methodological utility.[76] He sees Lévi-Strauss' notion of *bricolage* as an example of the latter manner in the sense in which the *bricoleur* utilizes various tools that come handy, regardless of the purposes for which they may have been made originally.[77] What Derrida emphasizes here is that the value of *bricolage* is not just "intellectual" but also "mythopoetical," which for him emulates "the stated abandonment of all reference to a *center*, to a *subject*, to a privileged *reference*, to an origin, or to an absolute *archia*."[78] Thus, the important recognition that Derrida makes, along with Lévi-Strauss, is that the study of the myths is itself *mythomorphic*, "itself a kind of myth" – "the myth of mythology," answering "the arbitrary demand for a total mythological pattern," as much as "the philosophical or epistemological requirement of a center."[79]

Employing discourse for *totalization*, then, is in an important sense *useless* and *impossible*, but for Derrida this is not just because of the empirical impossibility for a finite subject to master the infinite field of its totalizing endeavor; most fundamentally, it is "because the nature of the field – that is, language and a finite language – excludes totalization."[80] It is rather that field's nature of "nontotalization" that needs determination and here Derrida reaches out to the concept of *play*:

> This field is in effect that of *play*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis,

[73] Ibid., p. 281; cf. p. 413.
[74] Ibid., p. 281; cf. p. 413.
[75] Ibid., p. 283; cf. pp. 415-416.
[76] Ibid., p. 284; cf. pp. 416-417.
[77] Ibid., p. 285; cf. p. 418.
[78] Ibid., pp. 285-286; cf. pp. 418-419.
[79] Ibid., pp. 286-289; cf. pp. 420-423.
[80] Ibid., p. 289; cf. p. 423.

> instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. One could say ... that this movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin, is the movement of *supplementarity*. One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the sign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center's place in its absence—this sign is added, occurs as a surplus, as a *supplement*.[81]

This passage condenses a great deal of Derrida's view on the nature of discourse and deconstruction. It suggests that both discourse and deconstruction are products of the work or 'movement' of what he calls *play*. The field of language is the field of *play* – 'a field of infinite substitutions'. It is 'a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite'. It is both 'a field of infinite substitutions' and 'finite' because 'there is something missing from it: a center'. It is thus both finite and infinite but that paradox would hold sway as paradox (in its proper sense of contradiction) only in an empirical (or otherwise logical) perspective; in the play of a center-less discourse it would stand as the normal state of affairs. In the 'absence of a center', the 'movement of play' is 'the movement of supplementarity', because 'the sign replaces the center' without being a center and thus adds up to the play, becomes 'a surplus' or 'a supplement'. And yet, that this 'supplement' is only "a floating one," serving only "a vicarious function" to make up for "a lack on the part of the signified,"[82] already suggests that all significatory discourse – with all its presumably centering but fundamentally arbitrary structurality – is duly owed a deconstruction. In other words, discourse already carries within itself its own deconstruction, which only needs to be read out, provided that one knows how to read it.

In this relation, Derrida speaks of certain *tensions* of the concept of *play* with those of *history* and *presence*, which he identifies in Lévi-Strauss as well. First, on Derrida's view, the tension between the concepts of *play* and *history* denies the latter its "classic" oppositionist stance to, and instead points to its "complicity" with, the metaphysics of presence:

> With or without etymology, and despite the classic antagonism which opposes these significations throughout all of classical thought, it could be shown that the concept of *epistēmē* has always called forth that of *historia*, if history is always the unity of a becoming, as the tradition of truth or the development of science or knowledge oriented toward the appropriation of truth in presence and self-presence, toward knowledge in consciousness-of-self.[83]

In other words, *historia* is always already *epistēmē*, if, in 'the tradition of truth', 'history is the unity of a becoming' as apperceived – along 'truth in presence and self-presence' – by a subject; that is, as 'knowledge in consciousness-of-self'. For Derrida, then, grasping "the internal originality of a structure" – including that of the "structure of structures, language" – would require "a neutralization of time and history," a sort of suspension of all "its past conditions," which would see that structure's emergence as, in Lévi-Strauss' words, "born in one fell swoop."[84] Now, for Lévi-Strauss, 'born in one fell swoop' does not mean 'created out of nothing', as certain "process" and "transformations" are assumed to be at work there, but – on

[81] Ibid., p. 289; cf. p. 423.
[82] Ibid., p. 289; cf. p. 423.
[83] Ibid., p. 291; cf. p. 425.
[84] Ibid., p. 291; cf. pp. 425-426.

Derrida's view – he saw the suspension of all factuality as necessary for "recapturing the specificity of a structure."[85]

On the other 'tension', the one between *play* and *presence*, Derrida points that whereas "presence" is a signification "inscribed in a system of differences," "play is the disruption of presence" and is thus a "play of absence and presence," which, "thought radically, ... must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence."[86] In this sense, for Derrida, "Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around," a stance which appears to condition two approaches to the "impossible presence":

> Turned towards the lost or impossible presence of the absent origin, this structuralist thematic of broken immediacy is therefore the saddened, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauistic side of the thinking of play whose other side would be the Nietzschean affirmation, that is the joyous *affirmation* of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation. *This affirmation then determines the noncenter otherwise than as loss of the center.* And it plays without security. For there is a sure play: that which is limited to the *substitution* of *given* and *existing*, *present*, pieces. In absolute chance, affirmation also surrenders itself to *genetic* indetermination, to the *seminal* adventure of the trace.[87]

Thus, both the 'negative, nostalgic Rousseauistic side' and the 'joyous, affirmative Nietzschean side' of thinking the *play* are two interpretative approaches, "two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play," which while "absolutely irreconcilable" find their ways into the common "field" of the human sciences.[88] These two ways of responding to the apparent lack or 'loss of the center', to 'the noncenter' of the structurality of structure, appear to posit two key aspects of the deconstructive critique, two demands which are as exacting as they are inevitable, and as non-binding as they are indeterminate: 1) the demand for a recurrent substitution of significations in a system of differences, a system of presence; and 2) the demand for the affirmation of play, of the adventure of life; that is, for life affirmation. Still, Derrida does not think we have a "question of *choosing*" here; rather our first task is to "try to conceive of the common ground, and the *différance* of this irreducible difference," a task which opens up a "glimpse" at the question of "facing the as yet unnamable," the question whose treatment portends promises, risks, and delusions that can only provisionally announce themselves in a metaphorics of "childbearing," "nonspecies," and "monstrosity."[89]

The Play of Différance

Derrida's view of *différance* adds up to the sense of his deconstructive approach by exploring interrelations of structurality with key concepts of the metaphysical tradition, including difference, being, becoming, causation, subject, time, space, trace, consciousness, and unconscious, among others. While fairly complex and demanding a close reading to get into its

[85] Ibid., pp. 291-292; cf. p. 426.
[86] Ibid., p. 292; cf. p. 426.
[87] Ibid., p. 292; cf. pp. 426-427.
[88] Ibid., pp. 292-293; cf. p. 427.
[89] Ibid., p. 293; cf. pp. 427-428.

sense, we will limit its discussion here to only some of its aspects that indicate the openness of deconstruction to literary texts.

Initially described as "neographism," *différance* obtains through the imposition of the letter "*a*" in place of the letter "*e*" in the French word *différence*.[90] As a mere "graphic difference," the *a* of *différance* can be "read or written," but it would remain inaudible in the spoken French language:

> The *a* of *différance*, thus, is not heard; it remains silent, secret and discreet as a tomb: *oikesis*. And thereby let us anticipate the delineation of a site, the familial residence and tomb of the proper in which is produced, by *différance*, the *economy of death*. This stone – provided that one knows how to decipher its inscription – is not far from announcing the death of the tyrant.[91]

Drawing on the links of the Greek word *oikos* (house) with 'tomb' (*oikesis*) and 'economy' (from *oikonomia* or "household management"), Derrida here associates the 'tomb of the proper' with 'the death of the tyrant'. This 'economy of death', which is an effect of *différance*, involves "the pyramidal silence" of the letter *a* in "the graphic difference"[92] and points to the need of 'deciphering its inscription'. Further on, drawing on Saussure's discussion of structurality of language, Derrida speaks of *différance* as "play of differences," which is "the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general,"[93] as much as it is "the condition for the possibility and functioning of every sign."[94] Yet, this seemingly transcendental characterization will be duly stripped of its transcendentality, as *différance* will be seen not only as "what makes possible the presentation of the being-present," but also as what "is never presented as such, … never offered to the present," nor "to anyone."[95] Thus *différance* will reappear as evading the language of presence very much as its letter *a* evades being detected in speech. We can conjecture here that as the silent *a* of *différance* can only be deciphered in its inscription, so too *différance* itself – in its non-presence, lack of being, transcendental inaccessibility – remains open to discussion, viz. interpretation, as much as anything belonging to the margins of the text. And yet, as "*différance* is neither a word nor a concept," and is thus "what is most irreducible of our 'era'" (and indeed without 'is'),[96] its discussion, which is to unfold inevitably in the language of presence, can only be paradoxical or non-literal.

Within the terms of this language, Derrida has traced two aspects of *différance* along the two senses of the French verb *différer* (and its Latin predecessor *differre*) – rendered in English respectively with 'defer' and 'differ' – as *temporization* and *spacing*: the former implying "an economical calculation, a detour, a delay, a relay, a reserve, a representation"; the latter – "dissimilar otherness or ... allergic and polemical otherness, an interval, a distance."[97]

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[90] Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 3; cf. *Marges de la Philosophie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972), p. 4.
[91] Ibid., pp. 3-4; cf. p. 4.
[92] Ibid., p. 4; cf. p. 4.
[93] Ibid., p. 11; cf. p. 11.
[94] Ibid., p. 5; cf. p. 5.
[95] Ibid., pp. 5-6; cf. p. 6.
[96] Ibid., pp. 6-7.
[97] Ibid., p. 8; cf. p. 8.

These two aspects of *différance* point to the fundamental categories of the metaphysical tradition 'time' and 'space', which in Derrida's discussion thus appear in perspective. A key pointer here is that the *a* of *différance* is understood as "immediately deriving from the present participle (*différant*), thereby bringing us close to the very action of the verb *différer*, before it has even produced an effect constituted as something different or as *différence* (with an *e*)."[98] In this sense, *différance* reappears as the overall dynamics that underlays or makes possible thinking in terms of language as differences; that is, it makes possible thinking, categorial thinking, metaphysical thinking, as well as writing, altogether.

The elusive character of *différance* has compelled Derrida to appeal in its discussion to Freud's concept of *trace* (*Spur*) and to Heidegger's usage of the same term, both of which are suggestive of a non-literal rendering of what otherwise appears unpresentable. Thus, Derrida has associated "the movement of signification" towards "the scene of presence"; that is, the "constitution of the present" of the language of presence – via differences and intervals, or temporization and spacing – with "archi-writing, archi-trace, or *différance*."[99] He uncovers *différance* as *spacing* within Freud's "concepts of trace (*Spur*), of breaching (*Bahnung*), and of the forces of breaching," by pointing that they "are inseparable from the concept of difference," as "there is no breach without difference and no difference without trace."[100] Then, he identifies *différance* as *temporization* by pointing that "all the differences in the production of unconscious traces and in the processes of inscription (*Niederschrift*)" can be interpreted as "putting into reserve," because Freud regards "the movement of a trace ... as an effort of life to protect itself by *deferring* the dangerous investment, by constituting a reserve (*Vorrat*)."[101]

Likewise, Derrida links his notion of *différance* with the defining concepts of the metaphysical tradition via Heidegger's usage of 'trace' as well. Heidegger's stance that the "oblivion of Being belongs to the self-veiling essence of Being," as "even the early trace (*die fruhe Spur*)" of the ontological difference between Being and beings "is obliterated when presencing appears as something present," for Derrida, points to *différance* as "other than absence and presence," as what "traces," and is thus the "erasure of the early trace of difference," as much as "its tracing in the text of metaphysics."[102] For Derrida, such a 'tracing' is possible via "an inversion of metaphysical concepts" in which "the present becomes the sign of the sign, the trace of the trace," and because, like Heidegger, he thinks that, even if lost, "the 'early trace' of difference" can still be "sheltered, retained, seen, delayed," precisely "in a text," which is a "form of presence."[103]

Not surprisingly then, for Derrida, such a 'tracing' leads where Heidegger found the first indication of the ontological difference – in Anaximander's usage of *to khreon*, which is typically translated as 'necessity' but – drawing on its etymology – Heidegger translates as

[98] Ibid., p. 8; cf. pp. 8-9.
[99] Ibid., p. 13; cf. pp. 13-14.
[100] Ibid., p. 18; cf. p. 19.
[101] Ibid., p. 18; cf. p. 19.
[102] Ibid., pp. 23-24; cf. pp. 24-25.
[103] Ibid., pp. 23-24; cf. pp. 24-25.

usage' (*Brauch*).[104] Heidegger's choice of 'usage' issues from his attempt to think "the oblivion of Being," the ontological difference, in the preconceptual terms of the early Greek thinkers.[105] Thus, rather than keeping to its restrictive sense of compelling necessity, "of what 'must be'," he sees *to khreon* in its principally unbound sense of "handing over of presence which presencing delivers to what is present, and which thus keeps in hand, i.e. preserves in presencing, what is present as such."[106] If "usage delivers what is present to its presencing" and is in this sense "the distribution of presencing into disorder," then it "conjoins the dis-"[107] – indeed the dis- of any difference and distinction, of the ontological difference, of the difference between usage and necessity, of *différance*. Heidegger then links 'usage' with 'trace' writing,

> What properly remains to be thought in the word "usage" has presumably left a trace (*Spur*) in *τὸ χρεών*. This trace quickly vanishes in the destiny of Being which unfolds in world history as Western metaphysics.[108]

Whereas this statement can be read as telling us that 'usage' and 'necessity' blend in *to khreon* in a not immediately discernable difference, it is also suggestive that – as Heidegger demonstrates – 'presencing' in preconceptual terms is traceable, as it leaves a 'trace', precisely in 'usage', in *to khreon*, as the non-causal rising of the ontological difference, as an effect of *différance*.

Such a tracing, though, cannot be literal. For, as Derrida has acknowledged along with Heidegger, "clearing the difference (*Lichtung des Unterschiedes*) ... cannot mean that the difference appears as difference."[109] In this sense, there can be no "proper essence of *différance*," nor "a Being nor truth of the play of writing such as it engages *différance*," nor "a unique word" or "a master-name" that can properly name it on the language of presence.[110] Instead, what we are left with for *différance* is to keep in mind that,

> This unnameable is the play which makes possible nominal effects, the relatively unitary and atomic structures that are called names, the chains of substitutions of names in which, for example, the nominal effect *différance* is itself *enmeshed*, carried off, reinscribed, just as a false entry or a false exit is still part of the game, a function of the system.[111]

The unnameable *différance*, the play that conditions the 'nominal effects', is itself a 'nominal effect' which is to be traced in writing. It is 'enmeshed' in 'chains of substitutions of names' in

[104] Martin Heidegger, "The Anaximander Fragment," in *Early Greek Thinking*, translated by David Farrell Krell and Frank Capuzzi (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), pp. 50-51; cf. *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1957), SS. 365-366.
[105] For insightful discussions of Heidegger's rendering of *to khreon* see W. Julian Korab-Karpowicz, *The Presocratics in the Thought of Martin Heidegger* (New York, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017), pp. 84ff; as well as Michael Eldred, *Social Ontology of Whoness: Rethinking Core Phenomena of Political Philosophy* (Berlin, Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2019), 8.1.1.6.
[106] Martin Heidegger, "The Anaximander Fragment," p. 52; cf. *Holzwege*, S. 366.
[107] Ibid., pp. 53-54; cf. SS. 368-369.
[108] Ibid., p. 54; cf. S. 369.
[109] Ibid., p. 51; cf. S. 365 (translation mine here).
[110] Jacques Derrida, "Différance", pp. 25-27; cf. *Marges de la Philosophie*, pp. 27-28.
[111] Ibid., p. 27; cf. p. 29.

whose 'structures' it can reappear only as 'a false entry or a false exit'. And yet, it is still 'carried off, reinscribed,' 'still part of the game, a function of the system', still leaving its trace in writing. While its eventual tracing cannot be smooth, or ever fixed, it has certainly become a venture in the history of metaphysics and its writing, where through the clearing of nominal effects *différance* has reappeared as the margin of its own text, leaving us with two already familiar options. What is certain, though, is that Derrida's preference is clear here:

> There will be no unique name, even if it were the name of Being. And we must think this without *nostalgia*, that is, outside of the myth of a purely maternal or paternal language, a lost native country of thought. On the contrary, we must *affirm* this, in the sense in which Nietzsche puts affirmation into play, in a certain laughter and a certain step of the dance.[112]

Nietzsche's affirmative philosophy is here offered as the alternative to the 'nostalgic' metaphysical thinking that anticipates the 'unique word' on the language of presence. This does not mean that Derrida suggests that the nostalgic thinking is to be fully abandoned, for in a certain sense this is never possible, either. This however does signal that the putative traceability of *différance* can be availed by way of a reinvention of its nominal effects in language. Such a reinvented language will not be necessarily literal but it will be in an important relation with the literality of the language of presence; that is, in *différance* with that language.

The Unconscious and the Becoming Literary of the Literal

It is in this sense, then, that Derrida draws attention to a necessary *becoming literary of the literal*, which he sees as indicated in Freud's investigations on the unconscious and its interplay with its repressive consciousness. The becoming literary of the literal is not an immediate consequence of Freud's insights, even if he himself has used them as means of literary critique, but one that Derrida elicits via a juxtaposition of Freud's concepts with the fundamental concepts of the metaphysical tradition. Of key importance here is Freud's concept of *repression*.

Derrida sees the Freudian "repression" as different from the "historical repression and suppression of writing," which inaugurates "philosophy as *episteme*" and the "truth as the unity of *logos* and *phone*," in that it is neither "forgetting" nor "exclusion" but rather a harboring of "an interior representation."[113] However, he also sees the "Freudian concepts" too "without exception" as "belonging to the theory of metaphysics, that is, to the system of logocentric repression," which is the repression of "forgetting" and "exclusion" of "the body of written trace as a didactic and technical metaphor," or otherwise – the "repression of writing" that represses "that which threatens presence and the mastering of absence."[114] Thus, Freud will go on a search for 'an interior representation' which – due to the character of its subject-matter – could not be possibly rendered *literally* within the terms of the language of presence.

Freud, therefore, will not assert its presence by straightening out its absence. Instead, he will use metaphors, such as 'trace', 'mystic writing pad', 'life', and 'death', to invoke the fundamental involvement of consciousness with the unconscious, only to assert through this

[112] Ibid., pp. 26-27; cf. p. 28.
[113] Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," in *Writing and Difference*, pp. 196-197; cf. "Freud et la scène de l'écriture," *L'écriture et la différence*, pp. 293-294.
[114] Ibid., p. 197; cf. pp. 293-294.

metaphorics the enigmaticity of that involvement. For Derrida, this is an assertion that suggests the enigma of writing itself and is likewise "a movement unknown to the classic philosophy ..., somewhere between the implicit and explicit."[115] Indeed, the 'classic philosophy' strives for lucidity keeping away from enigmaticity, whereas within the Freudian terms the enigma of writing is *asserted*, thus keeping writing open to interpretation as an endeavor of mediation between implicit and explicit, between unconscious and conscious.

Here, a translation in the usual sense will not be possible because there is no code available for its materilization, no signifier for signified. What we have is only the resistance to the repression, which is the way of life; that is, the resistance of 'life' to 'death' that places "death at the origin of life," for life "can defend itself against death only through an *economy* of death, through deferment, repetition, reserve," through "repetition, trace, *différance* (deferral)."[116] It is thus by such a life-protective resistance (or deferral) that in the lack of a translation code the unconscious can find its way to consciousness – not as "a transcription duplicating an unconscious writing," but as "originary and irreducible."[117] This however comes with a fundamental implication for writing in all its forms:

> Since consciousness for Freud is a surface exposed to the external world, it is here that instead of reading through the metaphor in the usual sense, we must, on the contrary, understand the possibility of a writing advanced as conscious and as acting in the world (the visible exterior of the graphism, of the literal, of the literal becoming literary, etc.) in terms of the labor of the writing which circulated like psychical energy between the unconscious and the conscious.[118]

'Consciousness' is not a substance on its own, which is radically differentiated from its other – it is 'a surface exposed to the external world', and therefore to the unconscious. Thus, rather than 'reading through the metaphor in the usual sense' – the sense of presence and of consciousness' own self-sufficiency in self-presence – it is that inevitable 'labor of the writing' that oscillates in undecodable manner 'like psychical energy between the unconscious and the conscious', to which our understanding of writing must remain open. For, "the trace is the erasure of selfhood, of one's own presence,"[119] that is, of consciousness, and of consciousness' self-sufficiency in self-presence.

When it comes to the field of the *literal becoming literary*, Derrida makes a rather straightforward statement that "despite several attempts ... a psychoanalysis of literature respectful of the *originality of the literary signifier* has not yet begun," thus suggesting that addressing the 'labor of writing' as a 'circulation between the unconscious and the conscious' aiming to trace that 'originality' is still wanting. For,

> Until now, only the analysis of the literary *signifieds*, that is, *nonliterary* signified meanings, has been undertaken. But such questions refer to the entire history of literary forms themselves, and to

[115] Ibid., p. 199; cf. p. 296..
[116] Ibid., pp. 202-203; cf. pp. 300-302.
[117] Ibid., p. 212; cf. p. 314.
[118] Ibid., p. 212; cf. pp. 314-315.
[119] Ibid., p. 230; cf. p. 340.

> the history of everything within them which was destined precisely to authorize this disdain of the signifier.[120]

What Derrida seems to suggests here is that 'the analysis of the literary signifieds' takes place within the field of 'nonliterary signified meanings'; that is, within the peculiar type of circulation of the signifier which belongs to the metaphysics of presence. This circulation is itself marked by the repressive 'disdain of the signifier', which materializes in writing. For its part, the 'disdain of the signifier' stems precisely from, has been 'authorized' by, 'the history of everything within the literary the forms', which has been ('destined' to be) repressed by that disdain. Here, it is important to note that this repressive procedure is inevitable and direct consequence of the radical differentiation of the signifier from the signified within the concept of the sign.

Here, we also need to keep in mind that the circulation of the signifier within the terms of presence is marked by the literality of presence itself; whereas the 'literary' is a deviation from that literality – a yet another delay, detour, *différance* of what 'must' be present in the inevitability of writing. It is thus the character of this detour that needs to be explored in literature, and through literature. For, the literary presence is not just – like any presence inaugurated by the signifier – a delayed presence, or a veiled absence; it is also an availed absence, an indicated absence, which is itself indicative, and indeed indicative of how the signifier reappears – within the socio-political metaphorics of Freud – as disdainful, repressive, exploitive, sublimatory. Still, one will have to know how to read such indications, which are – realistically – only pointers demanding a shuttled journey between presence and absence, between conscious and unconscious, a journey more suggestive than pinpointing, more literary than literal.

Style and Woman

As Derrida has linked deconstruction to affirmation, has also linked it to "the question of style" and the socio-cultural sense of "woman."[121] Drawing very much on Nietzsche's posthumously published notes, as well as on thinkers like Freud and Heidegger, he traces pointers of significance relevant to both feminist and deconstructive critique that bring to the fore the affirmative sense of "woman." Derrida admits that Nietzsche's discussion of women is mostly anti-feminist but focuses on those of his comments that are "apparently feminist."[122] This is not without Derrida's own interpretation but the affirmative sense of "woman" is detected in opposition to the values of the metaphysical tradition, such as "essence," "identity," and "truth" – values which Nietzsche himself has already rejected in his own way, which Derrida aims to deconstruct, and against which now "woman" is seen as "one name for that untruth of truth."[123]

This sense of "woman" is further juxtaposed with the metaphysical thinking which – in its apparently distorting operation – is incapable of grasping it. Instead, "woman" never succumbs to that operation but always evades it and points to its deconstruction:

[120] Ibid., p. 230; cf. p. 340.
[121] Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles/Éperons: les styles de Nietzsche*, French-English edition (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 36-37.
[122] Ibid., pp. 56-57.
[123] Ibid., pp. 50-51.

> ... the dogmatic and credulous philosopher who *believes* in the truth that is woman, who believes in truth just as he believes in woman, this philosopher has understood nothing. He has understood nothing of truth, nor anything of woman. Because, indeed, if woman *is* truth, *she* at least knows that there is no truth, that truth has no places here and that no one has a place for truth. And she is a woman precisely because she herself does not believe in truth itself, because she does not believe in what she is, in what she is believed to be, in what she thus is not.[124]

Here Derrida is quite clear – the lack of 'place for truth' for 'no one' cannot satisfy the searches of 'the dogmatic and credulous philosopher', even as he 'believes in the truth that is woman', for he knows 'nothing of truth, nor anything of woman'. It is instead 'woman' who 'knows that there is no truth' and thus 'does not believe in what she is, in what she is believed to be, in what she thus is not'. Thus, Derrida concludes,

> Woman (truth) will not be pinned down. In truth woman, truth will not be pinned down.
> That which will not be pinned down by truth is, in truth – *feminine*. [125]

It is to be noted here that this statement concerns the socio-cultural signification of "woman" previously discussed, which evades the conceptual instrumentarium of the metaphysical tradition, and is not to "be hastily mistaken for a woman's femininity, for female sexuality, or for any other essentializing fetishes" that could motivate someone sharing in the operation of that tradition.[126] That is, what inaugurates the metaphysical tradition, the 'truth', has no power over 'woman' and 'will not pin her down'. And even if 'woman is truth' – what is sought after, what is fetishized – 'she herself does not believe in truth itself'; she is beyond the truth, even as she instates that truth. Thus, she is actually "playing" with the truth and her relationship to truth is markedly "artistic" – her philosophy is an "artist's philosophy" while her "power is affirmative."[127]

Consequently, Derrida associates "woman" with "writing" and thus inevitably with "style," conjecturing in particular that "if style were a man (much as the penis, according to Freud is the normal prototype of fetishes'), then writing would be a woman."[128] Thus, "the questions of art, style and truth" are inevitably bound with "the question of the woman," and yet Derrida acknowledges that it is impossible to answer the latter; that is, to search and capture the dimensions of "woman" in terms of metaphysical presence, as much as "it is impossible to resist looking for her."[129]

Thus, Derrida focuses on the relation of "woman" to the metaphysical tradition, drawing particularly on Nietzsche's sense of "becoming woman," which, in Derrida's view, Heidegger has ignored, focusing instead primarily on Nietzsche's oppositional relation to that tradition.[130] Derrida links Nietzsche's sense of "becoming woman" with Plato's sense of "idea," and more particularly he sees the "becoming female" as a "process of the idea" (*Fortschritt der idee*)

[124] Ibid., pp. 52-53.
[125] Ibid., pp. 54-55.
[126] Ibid., pp. 54-55.
[127] Ibid., pp. 66-69.
[128] Ibid., pp. 56-57.
[129] Ibid., pp. 70-71.
[130] Ibid., pp. 84-85ff.

where "idea" is understood as "a form of truth's self-presentation."[131] Thus, "truth" and "woman," which previously have not always been bound together, now "together both form a history," indeed the history of the epoch in which "the becoming-female of the idea is the presence or presentation of truth."[132] We need to keep in mind here that, in Derrida's view, this peculiar inauguration of history has placed a "distance" between "the philosopher" and "the truth," such that the former begins aspiring for the later which in turn "becomes transcendent, inaccessible, seductive," such that "he can now only follow in its trace."[133]

We are already familiar with the clue of the 'trace' and its involvement with 'writing', and how – along the latter – Derrida also links it to 'woman' and her productive bondage with the 'idea' and the 'truth'. Now, another suggestive additive to this network of relations that he makes – again following Nietzsche – is the relation of 'woman' to the Christian religion. Nietzsche associates "becoming female" with "becoming Christian," which Derrida reads as "she castrates (herself)" because Nietzsche regards Christianity as "castratism (Kastrismus)."[134] As Christianity has used castration to "kill the passions," Derrida now sees Nietzsche's discussion of castratism as pointing to a subjection of "the truth of woman-idea" to "ablation, excision, extirpation."[135] Further on, as, for Nietzsche, "an attack on the roots of passion means an attack on the roots of life," for Derrida, "the Church is hostile thus to woman also who is herself life."[136] But Nietzsche is the philosopher of life and for him 'passions' stand for life, whereas the worst of them come into play exactly in those who have tried to most drastically kill them. For him, the true spiritualization is spiritualization of passions, not one that proceeds from excision/castration; Derrida quotes him:

> The spiritualization of sensuality is called *love*: it represents a great triumph over Christianity. Another triumph is our spiritualization of *hostility*. It consists in profound appreciation of the value of having enemies...[137]

Nietzsche's affirmation of life, as drawing on spiritualized passions, is thus the affirmation of 'woman', even as this affirmation finds no consistency in the "heterogeneity" of his text and style. It is thus arguable that at a certain point his anti-feminism is simply confronted and deposed by his feminism, and for Derrida this means that "woman is recognized and affirmed as an affirmative power, a disimulatress, an artist, a dionysiac," who "affirm herself, in and of herself, in man," rather than the other way around.[138] Accounting for Nietzsche's heterogenous approach, Derrida writes,

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[131] Ibid., pp. 86-87.
[132] Ibid., pp. 86-87.
[133] Ibid., pp. 86-89.
[134] Ibid., pp. 88-91.
[135] Ibid., pp. 90-93.
[136] Ibid., pp. 92-93.
[137] Ibid., pp. 92-93. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to philosophize with the hammer*, translated by Richard Polt (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997), p. 26; cf. *Götzen-Dämmerung, oder Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophiert*, im *Nietzsche's Werke*, (Leipzig: Druck und Verlag von C.G. Naumann,1899), Band VIII, S. 86.
[138] Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles/Éperons: les styles de Nietzsche*, pp. 96-97.

> Nietzsche might well be a little lost in the web of his text, lost much as a spider who finds he is unequal to the web he has spun. Much as a spider indeed, several spiders even. Nietzsche's spider.
> ....
> He was, he dreaded this castrated woman.
> He was, he dreaded this castrating woman.
> He was, he loved this affirming woman.[139]

But Nietzsche is not disturbed by such a predicament, for he does not believe in the truth, neither his own, nor of his own text, nor of "style in itself," nor of his own style, even as he speaks of "my truths" or of his being "capable of many kinds of style."[140]

Ultimately, Derrida links Nietzsche's discussions of 'woman', the sexes, love, and eroticism, to what he calls the "process of *propriation*," which he traces also in Heidegger.[141] As Derrida sees it, marked by the exchange of "give and take," "possess and possessed," propriation determines the sexes as much as sexuality, but it advances also a point of undecidability, as in the structural relation that it is "man and woman change places" or "exchange masks *ad infinitum*."[142] Derrida also thinks that "propriation ... is more powerful than the veil of truth or the meaning of being," but he warns against the naivete of simply ignoring the question of being, or of thinking that "the question of proper-ty is thus available to direct examination."[143] He further sees Heidegger's conjecture of propriety with the question of being or with the metaphysical tradition (as in the case of Nietzsche's thought) as a questionable gesture, which points to "proper-ty's abyssal structure."[144] This abyss is actually the truth's "bottomless abyss as non-truth, veiling and dissimulation," which obtains when "the question of production, doing, machination, the question of the *event* ... is uprooted from ontology" to leave us with "proper-ty" as "proper to nothing and no one."[145] Derrida associates this abyss of non-truth with "the style's form and the no-where of woman" of Nietzsche's, as well as with the undecidability of the "give/take" structure in the characterization of the sexes and sexuality.[146] His point appears to be that, if Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche as belonging to the metaphysical tradition is deconstructed along with that structure, then Nietzsche's thought opens up a new field of exploration, "an enormous field of dimensions immeasurable – except perhaps by the steps of a dove."[147] This field is that of 'the style's form and the no-where of woman' and can be measured only 'perhaps by the steps of a dove', which is indeed the 'trace' – the resistance of life to death, to poison/*pharmakon* which would be the price and value of that field's gift as indefinitely suspended.

The field of 'woman' thus lies open to style leaving traces in writing. Such traces will be open to interpretations very much as Nietzsche's seemingly isolated and contextually indeterminate note "I have forgotten my umbrella." But, as Derrida has noted, such hermeneutic

[139] Ibid., pp. 100-101.
[140] Ibid., pp. 103-105.
[141] Ibid., pp. 108-109.
[142] Ibid., pp. 110-111.
[143] Ibid., pp. 110-113.
[144] Ibid., pp. 114-117.
[145] Ibid., pp. 118-119.
[146] Ibid., pp. 120-121.
[147] Ibid., pp. 122-123.

exercises may not necessarily produce results of any worth and may just signal that "there is 'no totality to Nietzsche's text', not even a fragmentary or aphoristic," and equally – that "unprotected" as one may thus be against the weather, one may as well be "exposed to the thunder and lightning of an enormous clap of laughter."[148] This exposure to the uncharted territory of time/weather/'woman'/*différance*/ unconscious in the wake of such 'forgetting' leaves us facing our lack of knowledge of it. It thus points to the need of deconstruction of its essentialist interpretations, as well as of turning in our searches to nonessentialist 'traces' of reading, writing, unconscious, 'woman', *différance*. Hence, as searching for the "meaning of forgetting" points "to bringing the question of forgetting back to the question of being," with all ensuing associations in hand, we need to assert that "the forgetting of a being (an umbrella)" is not commensurable with "the forgetting of Being," for the latter cannot be grasped factologically.[149] Thus, our search will not amount to the putative essence of forgetting, though it will bring us deeper into the meaning of Being. As Heidegger puts it,

> Forgetting ... not only attacks the essence of Being (*das Wiesendes Seins*) inasmuch as it is apparently distinct from it, it belongs to the nature of Being (*Sie gehört zur Sache des Seins*) and reigns as the Destiny of its essence (*als Geschick seines Wesens*).[150]

In this sense, outside the factology of beings, Being is very much only a 'trace' of beings, turning their putative essences, as well as its own 'forgetting', into traces as well. And yet, the traces of Being and its forgetting are not commensurable with the traces of beings. Outside factology, traces are outside commensurability; they are 'traces'.

Immunity and Autoimmunity

As we began thinking the 'trace' within the terms of resistance of life to death, to poison/*pharmakon*, we embarked on the theme of calamity and immunity, which we now find suspended – along a good many of the oppositions deconstructed by Derrida – between life and death, give and take, possessing and possessed, conscious and unconscious, style and 'woman', as they join in the workings of writing. In Derrida's work, *immunity* has been linked with calamity in various ways and has been explored extensively for purposes of literary criticism, especially as *autoimmunity*.[151] Here we will focus specifically on its relation with some of the key terms of Derrida's thought that we already discussed in a search for pointers to the affirmative dimension of the deconstructive critique in literature.

As early as his *Specters of Marx*, Derrida links the terms of 'life', 'death', 'ego', 'the same', 'other', and 'différance' with those of *immunity* and *autoimmunity*:

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[148] Ibid., pp. 134-135.

[149] Ibid., pp. 140-143.

[150] Ibid., pp. 142-143; cf. Martin Heidegger, "On the Question of Being," *Pathmarks*, edited by William McNeill (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 314; *Zur Seinsfrage* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1967), S. 35.

[151] See, for instance, Yasemin Karaağaç, "Hostility, Hospitality, and Autoimmunity in Kadare's *The Fall of The Stone City*," *Global Conversations: An International Journal in Contemporary Philosophy and Culture*, Vol. 4 (2021), especially pp., 11-15, 20ff, http://philogc.org/vol-4/; as well as, Catherine MacMillan, "Looking for the Rogue: Democratic Autoimmunity in José Saramago's Seeing," *Global Conversations: An International Journal in Contemporary Philosophy and Culture*, Vol. 4 (2021), especially pp. 27ff, http://philogc.org/vol-4/.

> The living ego is auto-immune.... To protect its life, to constitute itself as unique living ego, to relate, as the same, to itself, it is necessarily led to welcome the other within (so many figures of death: différance of the technical apparatus, iterability...), it must therefore take the immune defenses apparently meant for the non-ego, the enemy, the opposite, the adversary and direct them at once *for itself and against itself*.[152]

Derrida suggests that 'the living being is autoimmune' because it goes against its own 'defenses meant for the non-ego, the enemy, the opposite, the adversary' as well. It manages to sustain itself, 'to protect its life, to constitute itself as unique living ego, to relate, as the same, to itself' by 'welcoming the other within' itself, even as the other is 'so many figures of death'. Here the operation of autoimmunity appears to join forces with the intervention of the other, the calamity of the other, against the ego's immunity; that is, with the forces of death against life, but it is ultimately what the ego needs to maintain its immunity, to protect itself from the forces of death, as well as from its own (auto)immunity. This basically means that a sustainable living being needs to 'direct its defenses at once *for itself and against itself*'; that is, to be at once immune and autoimmune. Thus, immunity and autoimmunity go together in the sustenance of life and need to be maintained through and through. The 'living ego' maintains them by playing them against each other, by playing life against death in life; that is, by welcoming death in life, by welcoming *différance*.

Other terms that later on add up to the sense of *immunity* and *autoimmunity* in Derrida's work include 'reason', 'unconscious', 'conscious', 'representation', and 'pharmakon'. In his view, not only is "reason" not entirely on its own in its workings, but we also need to "be suspicious of rationalizations" precisely "in the name of reason," for we can no longer just leave aside "the logic of the unconscious" availed to us by what can be seen as "a psychoanalytic revolution."[153] Quite to the contrary, it was the intervention of, "among other things, this poisoned medicine, this *pharmakon* of an inflexible and cruel autoimmunity that is sometimes called the 'death drive'," that has made it possible for us to realize that "the living being" is not reducible "to its conscious and representative form."[154] Thus, the 'living being', with all its rationality and conscious representations, has been shown to be intertwined with its 'other', including with what is most detrimental to it and threatens its own life, such as the poison of pharmakon or the cruelty of autoimmunity, which thus will need to be accounted for in all of its workings.

The Perspective of Deconstruction

Derrida's work has fundamentally revisited the Western philosophical and cultural tradition and has left its mark on both philosophy and literary criticism. His deconstructive critique has brought to the fore the fundamental interrelatedness of concepts like structure, sign, play,

[152] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (New York; London: Routledge, 2006), p. 177; cf. *Spectres de Marx* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1993), p. 224.
[153] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 157; cf. *Voyous: Deux essais sur la raison* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2003), p. 215.
[154] Ibid., p. 157; cf. p. 215.

différance, being, nothing, metaphysics, presence, language, literature, literary, literal, style, woman, authenticity, property, life, death, ego, instincts, trace, the same, the other, reason, unconscious, conscious, representation, and pharmakon, among others. It has thus helped dispel undue preconceptions in, as well as open new horizons for, understanding the cultural achievements of our era which has not always been able to come to terms with its own past in the best of ways. While adding up to those who throughout the tradition were able to expose the futility of its most ambitious metaphysical aspirations, Derrida stands for an approach that is alternative to the 'nostalgic' attitude of those who pledged all their hopes on the conscious rationality of the human knowing subjectivity. Drawing most of all on thinkers like Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, and Levinas, he saw – in the wake of the metaphysics – the deconstruction of the workings of the self-identical subject-consciousness as an affirmation that upholds the ways of life against the background of its threats. It would be thus the life-asserting effect of deconstruction that will induce most interest in its deployment in revisiting our cultural achievements and their 'truth'. This effect, which among other things is meant to assert *writing* through *différance*, *life* through *death*, *style* through *woman*, or *immunity* through *calamity*, is also meant to dispel the elements of metaphysical presence which it inevitably deploys, thus leaving only its 'trace' amidst the traces it would point to. This is also the effect that inaugurates the becoming literary of the literal, for which literature would be the resource.

In Summary

In our critical perspective here, the feminist perspective of Alice Jardine and the deconstructionist one of Jacques Derrida are seen as both intersecting and complementary. The main points of intersection and complementariness that interest us here are detectable in the juxtaposition of Jardine's terms *gynesis* and *gynema* with Derrida's *deconstruction* and *trace* respectively. Gynesis as 'putting into the discourse of woman' and deconstruction as dismantling the phallogocentric discourse of the tradition overlap in that they are both understood as a movement into the *open* socio-cultural territory designated as "woman." They complement each other in that gynesis is meant specifically as literary critique mindful of feminist perspectives, whereas deconstruction is a fundamentally philosophical rethinking of the tradition of writing as a whole. On the other hand, the supporting terms gynema as product of gynesis and trace as the product of deconstruction intersect in that they are non-fixed effects of reading and writing, while they complement each other in that they carry critical literary and philosophical insights respectively. As availing non-fixed effects of reading and writing, both gynesis and deconstruction respond to the need of critical reflection over the *becoming literary of the literal*, a field which opens up from dismantling the phallogocentric structures of discourse, and for which literature is a vast resource for exploratory insights.

A pivotal point in our critical perspective is *affirmation* in the life-asserting sense of Nietzsche, which Derrida opposes to the 'nostalgic' Rousseauistic sense of lost presence. It would be thus those exploratory insights which mark the affirmation of life (as opposed to those invoking a nostalgia over the dismantled discourse) that would be in focus here. They would be the pointers to the (*auto*)*immunity* of life, which – as contradictorily presentable within the terms of discourse – affirms itself, affirms life, even as it attacks itself, attacks life. As discursively presented in literature (but also in the specific media of other forms of art), life –

in its continuous struggle against death – even as it may appear as bogged in contradictions, absurdities, feelings, or 'errors' of untruth of any kind (be they tragic, comic, or anything in between), still *always and inevitably affirms itself by its own means*. It would be thus these means that would be in focus in our critical perspective here, which remains open to them as they leave their 'traces' in what is made present in discourse as a product of writing.

Reading Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter

Our intended deconstructive feminist reading of Hawthorne's famous novel will not aim to exhaustively present – and still less to define – all elements and aspects of this literary text that bear relevance to other possible feminist or deconstructionist perspectives. Such an ambitious task would in fact go against the precepts of our critical perspective and would reinstate what that perspective was meant to do away with by exposing it – the phallogocentric structures of discourse. Instead, we shall endeavor to bring out the 'traces' which a deconstructive reading aims to point at, while staying mindful for its feminist import or 'gynema'. For, both gynesis and deconstruction make the same gesture here – they seek to search through and bring to light aspects of the socio-cultural significance of 'woman'. In this way, they would also contribute to the exploration of 'the becoming literary of the literal' – the field which legitimately opens up for exploration upon the deconstruction of the phallogocentric structures of discourse and which we approach here through Hawthorne's literary work.

The traces or gynema, which we aim at, will prove to be chains of infinite substitutions, without fixed identities. For, regardless of the exigencies demanded by the phallogocentric structures of discourse, which relies on such fixities, it would be the joint work of *gynesis* and *deconstruction* that plays out its effects in the literary text in a way that is – in its very source – unstructured. The literary text, in its very creation as a cultural product and as art, is always already a subject to the play of differences designated as *différance*. When applied in reading affirmatively, that is, in deconstruction, the sense of *différance* deconstructs that text, making at the same time a life-asserting gesture. When joining in deconstruction, *gynesis* detects the affirmative feminist aspect of 'woman'. What more particularly makes gynesis different from deconstruction is its mindfulness of the power structures that bear relevance to the status of 'woman' from a feminist perspective. In other words, whereas both deconstruction and gynesis join in dismantling the phallogocentric discourse of the tradition, and by the same token – in exploring the socio-cultural space 'woman', gynesis plays its peculiar role of keeping in sight, of never missing from its sight, the feminist aspect of that dismantling, an aspect which a deconstruction, so to speak, *per se*, may as well forgo for other aspects of interest. In this sense, gynesis becomes a necessary element of any critical reading of a text that is meant to be at once deconstructive and feminist.

Characters and Setting

The novel *The Scarlet Letter* carries with itself numerous significatory pointers that can play out elements of our critical perspective. Central of these pointers are the novel's main characters of men and women, whom Hawthorne present as closely involved in the communal life the

1640s Boston. In this largely Puritan community, the characters appear in various relations both public and private, including with power structures, religious values, cultural precepts, social statuses, other races, nature, as well as of spirituality, piety, service, love, friendship, and parenting, amongst others. They are also presented as acting in several scenes that determine the plot of the novel and are connected by Hawthorne's explicative narrative.

The main scenes of actions include: the public ignominy of the main female character Hester Prynne, Hester's interview in the governor's house, minister Arthur Dimmesdale's vigil, the meeting of Hester and Dimmesdale in the forest, Dimmesdale's public confession and death. Some other scenes of significance include encounters and conversations between Hester and her daughter Pearl, Hester and her former husband Roger Chillingworth, Dimmesdale and Chillingworth, Dimmesdale and his elder colleague Reverend Mr. John Wilson, Dimmesdale and Pearl, Dimmesdale and the "witch-lady" Mistress Ann Hibbins, Hester and Mistress Hibbins, Pearl and Mistress Hibbins.

A characteristic dimension of the novel is the time horizon of its events. Besides the seven years of the plot we have time pointers for at least one year before its opening event, as well as for the years of Hester's life and in part the lives the remaining characters after its closing event. Likewise, Hawthorne makes a number of references to the time before and after these events, up to the time of about two hundred year to the actual writing of the novel. These include mentions of historical personages and events, as well as of changes in the overall ethos of the colony, which contextualize the plot chronologically as well as culturally.

Hawthorne's narrative connecting all the scenes of the plot in a unity is also characterized by a claim to objectivity, which he backs up with a reference to a script "authorized and authenticated" by Mr. Surveyor Jonathan Pue:

> The original papers, together with the scarlet letter itself, – a most curious relic, – are still in my possession, and shall be freely exhibited to whomsoever, induced by the great interest of the narrative, may desire a sight of them.[155]

We can note here that it was perhaps due to this claim to objectivity that his attitude towards his main characters show variations, rendering with equal rigor and depth their positive, as well as their negative traits. This is most obvious with regard to Hester, Dimmesdale, Chillingworth, and Pearl.

Thus, Hester Prynne, the main female character of the novel, is described as "a noteworthy personage," "a voluntary nurse," "an angel," but also as "an intruder and a nuisance,"[156] with "passion...imprisoned in the same tomb-like heart."[157] She is the woman whom the colony deems to have committed the sin of having a child out of wedlock, a proof of which is her baby girl Pearl, in conjunction with the absence of her long-awaited husband. As a punishment, she is ordered to wear a scarlet letter "A" fastened conspicuously on her clothing and is placed on the town's scaffold for a time of public ignominy. Asked to make known the name of the father of her child, she answers categorically "Never! It is too deeply branded."[158]

[155] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 44.
[156] Ibid., p. 43.
[157] Ibid., p. 144.
[158] Ibid., p. 68.

Afterwards, her life, although difficult and full of hardships, is an example of genuine penance and even a removal of the scarlet letter "A" is considered.

Arthur Dimmesdale, the main male character, is described as "a young clergyman" having "all the learning of the age," "melancholy eyes," "a vast power of self-restrain," "the speech of an angel,"[159] but at the same time "all that violence of passion."[160] Having won the hearts of the town with his inspiring speeches, he visibly suffers from an unclear disease of the heart. He is the unknown father of Pearl and Hester's accomplice in what Hawthorne calls their "mutual crime."[161] After publicly confessing his sin, he dies at the end of the final scene of the plot.

Roger Chillngworth is described as "a man of skill," "with such a rank in the learned world," "an eminent Doctor in Physic,"[162] "a wise and just man," but also "a fiend,"[163] "an enemy," "a devil," "with cruel purpose," and "malignity."[164] He is Hester's long-awaited husband who finally arrived but keeping it in secret upon witnessing her public ignominy. As the physician, friend, and enemy of Dimmesdale, he displays an eclectic array of both admirable and despicable traits, which has become a reason for this character to be associated with the Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's famous protagonist Faust.[165]

Pearl, as an incarnate evidence of her mother's sin, is described in polar terms as well. She is "a lovely child" with "a brilliant beauty" and "a look so intelligent," but "sometimes so malicious" and "accompanied by a wild flow of spirits," "a demon offspring," or an "elf-child."[166] In her portrayal, Hawthorne never seems to drop an initial concern, apparently well-embedded in his mind, that she, as a "sin-born infant," could easily go astray of the right morals. Conveying some community fears of her predisposition towards witchcraft, he makes Dimmesdale remark on her characteristic "passion" that "in Pearl's young beauty, as in the wrinkled witch, it has a preternatural effect."[167]

In this regard, another female character that gains relevance in our reading is Mistress Hibbins. Hawthorne straightforwardly associates her with the occupation of 'witchcraft', of whose prosecution, he admits, some of his direct ancestors were guilty. Although this character seems to be of marginal importance in the novel's plot, it acquires a particular significance in a critical reading in terms of gynesis, as in the patriarchal culture witchcraft – especially when associated with woman (as has been predominantly the case) – has been a subject of an utmost denunciation. When Hester encounters Mistress Hibbins after the scene in governor's house, and when Dimmesdale encounters her after his meeting with Hester in the forest, the "witch-lady" appealed them to join the "merry company" of the Black Man.[168] She appears also in the

[159] Ibid., p. 66.
[160] Ibid., p. 130.
[161] Ibid., p. 153.
[162] Ibid., p. 103.
[163] Ibid., p. 140.
[164] Ibid., pp. 152-153.
[165] David Leverenz, "Mrs. Hawthorne's Headache: Reading *The Scarlet Letter*," in Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, pp. 270-1.
[166] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, pp. 81-88, 94ff.
[167] Ibid., pp. 64, 165.
[168] Ibid., pp. 150, 172.

night of the minister Dimmesdale's vigil, as well as in the final scene of the novel's plot, where she makes the same appeal to Pearl, too.[169] All the time, the "bitter-tempered" lady shows a considerable insight, or at least suspicion regarding the relationship between Hester and Arthur, as well as regarding their inner states. Besides generally portraying Mistress Hibbins in negative terms, Hawthorne appears to suggest that source of her insights is linked to her secret occupations. "Dost thou think," she asks Hester, "I have been to the forest so many times, and have yet no skill to judge who else has been there?"[170] In this relation, it is also remarkable that Pearl proves capable of such insights and suspicions as well – she can suppose that Hester wears the scarlet letter "A" "for the same reason that the minister keeps his hand over his heart!"[171]

Patriarchy, Puritanism, and Phallogocentrism

The relationships of these characters cannot be fully understood without a reference to the rigorous morality of the Puritan religion, which reigns within the community of seventeen century's Boston. Feminist critique has already linked the Christian religion with "patriarchy" that sends – by the token of the scarlet letter – a "double message about sin and seduction," which "Hester passes on to Pearl," thus producing the effect of "gendered psychosexual identity" beyond "her individuality" to make of "woman" a symbol of 'frailty and sinful passion'."[172] In other words, this religion, as well as its ethics, represents by its symbolic forms a culture dominated by man, a culture which at the same time advances a certain gender valuation (indeed a 'gendered' valuation) that confers upon 'woman' a more or less fixed 'identity', distinct moral character, and respective social role of lower value to the effect of constituting her as a threat to the moral foundations of that culture.

In our reading, it is important to emphasize that in the Puritan community depicted by Hawthorne, the main female character, Hester Prynne, is present to wear the symbol of the sin, the scarlet letter "A" standing formally for "adulteress." At the same time, her naturally presumed male 'accomplice' in what that community, and apparently Hawthorne himself, deems to be a "crime" remains unknown. In fact, Hester's refusal to point out his name opens the possibility this to be every man in the community; very indicatively, though, while not in the know, that male dominated community refuses to accept such a sinner in itself, instead referring to him as its outcast – the Black Man in the forest. Thus, the signification of evil in that community appears as 'woman' only. Ironically, yet significantly still, the person speaking from the name of patriarchy's discourse on the day of her public ignominy, Arthur Dimmesdale, is actually this real accomplice and the letter "A" could equally properly be placed on him, as well as stand for his name. In his public appeal to her to utter the name, in fact his own, Dimmesdale – regardless of his inner struggles, motives, and expectations – in the end asserts that this name remain unuttered: "She will not speak."[173] This assertion is de facto a formal confirmation of the status quo of power relations and guild distribution in the public discourse.

[169] Ibid., p. 187.
[170] Ibid., p. 186.
[171] Ibid., p. 143.
[172] Shari Benstock, "*The Scarlet Letter* (a)doree, or the Female Body Embroidered," in Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, pp. 299ff.
[173] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 68.

In our critical perspective we also emphasize that, even as Hester Prynne accepts to keep the secret and to wear the scarlet letter "A" as symbol of the sin imposed on her by the patriarchy, she refuses to accept the sin as her, of the woman, *identity*. If sin at all, the sin has been committed by two – a woman and a man – and cannot have one identity only. She only accepts the suffering and the formal sanction of the redemption for a guilt that – if guilt at all – is not entirely her own: "And would that I might endure his agony, as well as mine."[174] The scarlet letter "A," the token of the sin, is just a signification forcibly attached to her, the woman.

Nevertheless, even as patriarchy's religion presupposes, the real redemption escapes all kinds of formality, and the sinner cannot remain hidden behind the mask of a symbolism he authorizes himself. In terms of gynesis, we can assume that this symbolism has been created along with the crime itself in the attempts to conceal that crime from the public eye from the position of power, by ascribing it to the one who does not have that power, the woman. It should be clear, though, that just because of that, this same symbolism is equally a failure on its own – it already presupposes and thus indicates the crime it aims to conceal.

Arthur Dimmesdale embodies the suffering for the sin hidden behind the public discourse. Another paradox of patriarchy's discourse is that it not only ascribes the 'guilt' for the sin to woman, it also misrepresents the actual consequences of this concealing for man himself. In the scene of Dimmesdale's public confession, witnessing his suffering while performing his "mission" to service the formal inauguration of man's power and symbolism ("the new Governor was to receive his office")[175] – "his mission to foretell a high and glorious destiny for the newly gathered people of the Lord" – the public discourse demonstrates its inability to adequately judge within its own terms: "This earthly faintness was, in their view, only another phase in minister's celestial strength."[176]

In our critical perspective, such a misjudgment is indicative for that the public discourse is begging for deconstruction. For, Arthur Dimmesdale, while serving man's world (presumably his own, if it is really his own), actually demonstrates that this seemingly celestial manifestation goodness is in reality a cover-up for evil (in a dual sense, as the sin in a Puritan sense and as his own suffering in a life-affirmative deconstructive perspective). Thus, he demonstrates – what in the terms of discourse could reappear only paradoxically – that 'happiness' is actually unhappiness, that the discourse is failing him, as it does not add up to his well-being, but only conceals his own desolation. He demonstrates that the men's world that oppresses woman at the same time oppresses man, since power, like gender, can be very much a fiction, a socio-cultural invention, a construct, no matter who has it or who is who.

When we say 'he demonstrates' here we mean that we take the character of Dimmesdale as a symbol of the patriarchal culture and revisit it in a life-assertive deconstructive perspective, in which its symbolism reappears as powerless or inadequate. Thus, as a reinvented symbol in our critical perspective, Dimmesdale, regardless of the extent in which he as a character realizes that, conveys the message – indeed the 'trace', the 'gynema' – that the public discourse is deconstructed. In this sense, he has lost his 'identity' as 'man' in men's world, as Hester has lost her 'identity' as 'woman' in that same world. The possibility that remains for their identities

[174] Ibid., p. 68.
[175] Ibid., p. 175.
[176] Ibid., pp. 191-193.

is that of "infinite substitutions," what Derrida attributed to the character of *play* inaugurating writing.[177]

Another character showing a 'lack of identity' with herself is Pearl. Hawthorne has demonstrated his and community's confusions with regard to her on a number of occasions. While she has been directly associated with the scarlet letter itself,[178] much of the uncertainties about her spring from a certain lack of consistency in her appearance and development in life from the standpoint of the public eye, to which Hawthorne himself attests:

> How strange, indeed! Man had marked this woman's sin by a scarlet letter, which had such potent and disastrous efficacy that no human sympathy could reach her, save it were sinful like herself. God, as a direct consequence of the sin which man thus punished, had given her a lovely child, whose place was on that same dishonored bosom, to connect her parent for ever with the race and descent of mortals, and to be finally a blessed soul in heaven![179]

That this statement is marked by Hawthorne's own patriarchal and religious bias is not so important for us here as that it is meant to be 'authentic'. For, in our deconstructive perspective we are most of all interested to expose the failure of the arbitrary structures of the patriarchal discourse to recapture what inevitably evades it – the unfixed identity of gender. It appears here that – in a logocentric gesture – through God's symbol of the sin is justified the man's symbol of the same sin. That is, that the symbol of God's, Pearl, has the same denotation as the symbol of man's, the scarlet letter "A." And this denotation is, according to Hawthorne, the 'woman's sin', (indeed as 'marked' and 'punished' by 'man'). However, the criticism as gynesis discerns in this attempt to link 'woman's sin' with woman's identity through a kind of *logic*, which then falls apart along the 'strangeness' of life, just another phallogocentric failure of discourse. It is the kind of logic that ventures to impose to Hester and to the reader thoughts like these:

> She knew that her deed had been evil; she could have no fight, therefore, that its result would be for good.[180]

> It was a look so intelligent, yet inexplicable, so perverse, sometimes so malicious, but generally accompanied by a wild flow of spirits, that Hester could not help questioning, at such moments, whether Pearl was a human child. [181]

In our critical perspective, this logic spectacularly fails to capture the trajectory of Pearl's life, as it disintegrates into a genuine confusion. The latter ensues from the decentering structures of discourse, which become traceable in a deconstructive perspective, traceable precisely due to Hawthorne's clam to 'authenticity'.

The confusion in question brought a commonly-felt anxiety for Pearl's future, which prompted a meeting-interview of the nobles of the town with Hester and her child set at the Governor's house. The spirit of the age related the wrong direction in the development of

[177] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 289; cf. p. 423.
[178] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, pp. 57, 81, 90.
[179] Ibid., p. 81.
[180] Ibid., p. 81.
[181] Ibid., p. 83.

female infant with the predominantly women's field of 'witchcraft', which in the perspective of gynesis can be seen as opposed to science, at the time a much-honored field of endeavor largely reserved for men. Among the novel's characters, Mistress Hibbins and Roger Chillingworth are fitting representatives of these two fields respectively. On the occasion of the meeting, Chillingworth, who had sought to extend his scientific searches over Dimmesdale's disease of the heart, Hester's secret, and Indian medicine, among others, could only qualify Pearl "A strange child!,"[182] which in our critical perspective is indicative of a yet another failure of the phallogocentric discourse to get its hold on the identity of 'woman'. On the other hand, the above-mentioned remark of Dimmesdale and intention of Mistress Hibbins regarding the child show a tendency in the community's thinking that Pearl's growing up with Hester could lead to her future commitment to 'witchcraft'. Hawthorne's narrative is unambiguous about that:

> The spell of life went forth from her ever creative spirit, and communicated itself to a thousand objects, as a torch kindles a flame wherever it may be applied. The unlikeliest materials, a stick, a bunch of rags, a flower, were the puppets of Pearl's witchcraft, and, without undergoing any outward change, became spiritually adapted to whatever drama occupied the stage of her inner world.[183]

Along with the status of her mother, Pearl's spirits, thoughts, speech, plays, creativity, objects of interests all contributed to the public concern that led to the meeting in the Governor's house. We already pointed that she was be capable of some unusual insights or suspicions similar to those of Mistress Hibbins as well. And now that her worrying image in the public eye was also sanctioned by the scholar's discourse as 'strange', it had to take the intervention of Dimmesdale – in his decentered, indeed dual, symbolic capacity – to leave her within the custody of her desperate mother.

We will need to bring Dimmesdale's intervention within the terms of our perspective, as it marks a landmark victory of the life-asserting thinking over the logic of the patriarchal discourse which proved impotent on the occasion and throughout the novel, including in its most phallogocentric version exemplified by Chillingworth. In our reading, Dimmesdale's intervention amounts to a gesture on his part to preserve 'the spell of life that went forth from her ever creative spirit', which also proves significant. For, with all the projective skepticism and uncertainty of the public eye regarding the future of the child, at the end of Hawthorne's narrative we are told that "Pearl was not only alive, but married, and happy."[184] She did *not* become a witch, and thus did *not* find her identity in terms of the phallogocentric patriarchal discourse. Instead, she defied that discourse and survived 'to be finally a blessed soul in heaven'.

For her part, Mistress Hibbins found her death and got an identity in this same discourse as 'witch-lady'. For, her opposition – radical as it was – to the predominant male cultural symbolism did not prove life-asserting; her intelligence – remarkable as it was – could not find a viable way outside the terms of the patriarchy. Instead, it can be argued that witchcraft is an opposition to the patriarchal culture within the terms; that is, with the symbolic means, of that

[182] Ibid., p. 100.
[183] Ibid., p. 85.
[184] Ibid., p. 200.

culture itself. For, it run against the mainstream patriarchal discourse only the discourse of the 'Black Man' – just another man who thought his terms were better. As a representative of this alternative patriarchy, Mistress Hibbins marked with her death the deconstruction of its discourse.

Similarly, Roger Chillingworth died at the end of the novel, since along with the deconstruction of the patriarchal discourse pronounced by the Dimmesdale's death his logocentric conquest became impossible and had to come to terms with its inevitable limits. Indeed, he had to come to terms with all that was left to motivate and move his own life and existence, which Dimmesdale's utmost deconstructive gesture – epitomized by his final service, discourse, welcome of woman, and impending death – placed under a grave threat:

> "Madman, hold! What is your purpose?" whispered he. "'Wave back that woman! Cast off this child! All shall be well! Do not blacken your fame, and perish in dishonor! I can yet save you! Would you bring infamy on your sacred profession?"[185]

Chillingworth, though, could save neither Dimmesdale nor himself, for he was not only depleted from but also misguided and consumed by his logocentrism, which led him astray from life in the direction of death along revenge. He could no longer play his patriarchal precepts of 'fame', 'honor', and 'sacred profession' against the interpolation of life – 'woman' and 'child'. He could now only witness in desperation the formless face of his own phallogocentric impotence:

> Old Roger Chillingworth knelt down beside him, with a blank, dull countenance, out of which the life seemed to have departed.
> "Thou hast escaped me!" he repeated more than once. "Thou hast escaped me!"[186]

It is remarkable that Hawthorne regards Dimmesdale's death as a "work of the devil" performed by Chillingworth. In this sense, like Mistress Hibbins, Chillingworth too is given a determinate identity in the patriarchal discourse. Termed 'devil' or 'unhumanized mortal', he could find no more life nor happiness but only death along his quest for revenge:

> This unhappy man had made the very principle of his life to consist in the pursuit and systematic exercise of revenge; and when, by its completest triumph and consummation, that evil principle was left with no further material to support it, - when, in short, there was no more devil's work on earth for him to do, it only remained for the unhumanized mortal to betake himself whither his Master would find him tasks enough, and pay him his wages duly.[187]

The criticism as gynesis uncovers here Hawthorne's patriarchal bias that does not allow him to see the death of the patriarchal discourse. For, he seeks the reason for Dimmesdale's death in some of the oppositional terms of the patriarchal discourse – the devil. Within our perspective this means that he links the death of the religious patriarchal discourse to the non-religious science and philosophy, which Chillingworth does indeed represent. However, Chillingworth

[185] Ibid., p. 193.
[186] Ibid., p. 196.
[187] Ibid., p. 198.

represents more particularly the logocentric discourse and he dies with the death of the patriarchal discourse as well, which points to an intrinsic connection between patriarchy and logocentrism as well. Thus, another opposition within the patriarchal culture has been deconstructed – the one between its religious and logocentric discourses; for they both comport to the signification of 'man'; that is, to phallogocentrism, thus excluding, reducing, repressing the signification of 'woman'.

Hawthorne's bias is also obvious in the characters with 'lack of identity' and has been practically proved by his claim to 'authenticity'. Within our perspective, the authenticity of the narrative accounts for the author's bias, even as the author may not be aware of this bias at all, while at the same time upholding the denouement of the novel as an 'authentic proof' for the main point of our critique. This 'proof' is not logical and is thus a "proof" only in quotation marks. For, as deconstruction and gynesis impel us to think, it cannot be conveyed by the means of the phallogocentric discourse of modernity, which was shown anticipating its dismantling. It could be rather conveyed with the help of – and in the extent availed by – what post-modernist and (post-)feminist critiques have not yet deconstructed: "in-between-the-lines," the margin, the trace, the gynema.

Gynesis and Deconstruction as Life-affirmation of the Characters with Lack of Identity

As Jardine suggests, what is "in-between-the-lines" is availed by practicing criticism as gynesis and announces itself as a reading effect which disturbs the phallogocentrism of patriarchy. At the same time, we expect this reading effect to have the character of what Derrida has called an 'event', which would leave its 'trace' on behalf of the deconstructive criticism. For, pointing to the 'lack of identity' of a character does not by itself amount to an affirmation of this 'lack of identity'. In our critical perspective, this 'event', gynema, or trace is the *life-asserting denouement of the novel for the characters with lack of identity*.

Not only Pearl, but also Hester was able to survive under the burden of the scarlet letter "A" – a symbol imposed on her by the patriarchal culture. Holding off herself up and against that symbol meaning "adulteress," she gave the letter "A" new connotations such as "able," or "angel". Within our critical perspective, we can see the scarlet letter "A" as meaning also "alive," "assertion," and "affirmation," because Hester shows her capacity to affirm and assert herself – throughout her life, on behalf of her life, on behalf of life – by substituting the repressing patriarchal signification without limit. We can also see it as meaning "Arthur," not only as its literal sense, and not only as a symbol of the deconstructed patriarchal discourse epitomized by the dead Dimmesdale, but also as a symbol of substituted meanings that uphold Arthur's life – he may be dead as patriarchal discourse, but the alive Hester, the woman, is his viable alternative, his being alive. Indeed, she was the one who brought him back to life, even as he thought he was "irrevocably doomed,"[188] by 'buoying him up with her own energy' to give him meaning and will to live:

> "Thou art crushed under this seven years' weight of misery," replied Hester, fervently resolved to buoy him up with her own energy. "But thou shalt leave it all behind thee! It shall not cumber thy steps, as thou treadest along the forest-path; neither shalt thou freight the ship with it, if thou prefer

[188] Ibid., p. 158.

> to cross the sea. Leave this wreck and ruin here where it hath happened! Meddle no more with it! Begin all anew! Hast thou exhausted possibility in the failure of this one trial? Not so! The future is yet full of trial and success. There is happiness to be enjoyed! There is good to be done! Exchange this false life of thine for a true one. Be, if thy spirit summon thee to such a mission, the teacher and apostle of the red men. Or, - as is more thy nature, - be a scholar and a sage among the wisest and the most renowned of the cultivated world. Preach! Write! Act! Do any thing, save to lie down and die! Give up this name of Arthur Dimmesdale, and make thyself another, and a high one, such as thou canst wear without fear or shame. Why shouldst thou tarry so much as one other day in the torments that have so gnawed into thy life!- that have made thee feeble to will and to do!- that will leave thee powerless even to repent! Up, and away!"[189]

Fueled with the woman's vital power, Arthur is back to life thanks to his 'angel':

> "Do I feel joy again?" ... "Methought the germ of it was dead in me! 0 Hester, thou art my better angel! I seem to have flung myself – sick, sin-stained, and sorrow-blackened – down upon these forest-leaves, and to have risen up all made anew, and with new powers to glorify Him that hath been merciful! This is already the better life! Why did we not find it sooner?"[190]

Thus, paradoxical as it may seem at first, in our critical perspective Dimmesdale survives, too. For, his presumed identity too is a subject to substitutions. He is dead as a symbol of the patriarchal culture, but with his death – the deconstruction of the public discourse – he outlived this discourse and is alive as a "symbol" of the life-affirming deconstructive discourse. Here "symbol" is in quotation marks, since in the deconstructed discourse the structures of symbolism are actually set apart, dismantled, de-logocentered, and thus without symbolic identity in the modern sense of the term. As a "symbol," he now signifies as a trace, gynema or "woman-in-effect."

In our critical perspective, the most compelling survival is Hester's. We deem it so, because with all her hardships and doubts about the meaning of life, she quietly but relentlessly affirms life, in all her doings, in all her circumstances. Reading through Hawthorne's biases and insights – which left us wondering, indeed authentically so, whether he was a feminist or sexist, both, or none, before we realized that he has no fixed identity, either – we find that her natural philosophical searches did not deter her from getting the better of life. Her aspirations for meaning and the meaning of 'woman', did not leave her at the logocentric dead end of discourse, never broke her will to live, no matter how her thought swung:

> Indeed, the same dark question often rose into her mind, with reference to the whole race of womanhood. Was existence worth accepting, even to the happiest among them? As concerned her own individual existence, she had long ago decided in the negative, and dismissed the point as settled. A tendency to speculation, though it may keep woman quiet, as it does man, yet makes her sad. She discerns, it may be, such a hopeless task before her. As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew. Then, the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified, before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position. Finally, all other difficulties being obviated, woman cannot take advantage of these preliminary reforms, until she herself shall have undergone a still mightier change; in which, perhaps, the ethereal essence, wherein she has her truest

[189] Ibid., pp. 156-157.
[190] Ibid., p. 159.

> life, will be found to have evaporated. A woman never overcomes these problems by any exercise of thought. They are not to be solved, or only in one way. If her heart chance to come uppermost, they vanish.[191]

While Hawthorne's biases here are to be watched for, drawing on his claim to authenticity, we find useful insights that could help uphold the sense of 'woman' in our perspective. Hester's thought went over the meaning of life and the status of her gender but did not leave her stuck into a powerless desperation, as the one Chillingworth displayed at the deconstructive discourse of Dimmesdale. The need of change, which Hawthorne surmises and nails into his terms, is something that she lives. He has a sense of 'the ethereal essence, wherein she has her truest life', as well as that it 'will be found to have evaporated', but this sense could become affirmative only in terms of a deconstruction and gynesis, as in his own discourse it can still be seen as charged with patriarchal bias. A change of the perspectives thus impels itself. That 'a woman never overcomes these problems by any exercise of thought', in our critical perspective can only mean that the socio-cultural sense of 'woman' evades any viable phallogocentric reduction; likewise, that 'problems are not to be solved, or only in one way', for us can only mean that we will not seek for their solutions in a logocentric operation; and finally, that 'if her heart chance to come uppermost, they vanish', for us can only mean that gynesis and deconstruction of discourse become necessary when discourse impedes life.

In our reading, Hester's survival emulates the thinking that resists phallogocentrism. She survives despite the latter's tumultuous intervention in her life, despite all the threats it unleashed for her and her child, despite her acute sense of lack of meaning of her life. No calamities were able to break her immunity. Calamity only strengthened her immunity to a live-asserting autoimmunity. The same applies for Pearl as well, unlike Mistress Hibbins and Roger Chillingworth, who were victims of their own autoimmunity, of the defense mechanisms that kept them alive until they did only to put them to death. Dimmesdale is a special case due to his dual discursive signification. On one hand, as a symbol of the patriarchal discourse, he dies from the intervention of life into that discourse due to a lack of immunity, viz., power to resist death; one other hand, as joining in the deconstruction of the same discourse he upholds life achieving in his renewed motivation for life, as well as in the alive and happy Pearl, a life-affirming autoimmunity.

Thus, by upholding herself (indeed her own self) against the interventions of the phallogocentric culture to the point of a life-affirmative autoimmunity, Hester reappears – if the words would allow it in our literary tracing – literally as "woman-in-effect." For the becoming literary of the literal is tracing, tracing the literal in the literary, tracing it as a trace, which in gynesis is "woman-in-effect"; that is, a literary, and indeed a literal literary. But how she did it? What is her secret? Does she have one?

She accepted her fate under the burden of the scarlet letter "A," and she just worked. Not letting faulted thinking sink her life, she was able to come out on top of it continually as a doer. That is, she, the woman, was able to constantly substitute her imposed identity, to uphold

[191] Ibid., p. 134.

herself, and to survive by her doings.[192] In this regard, Hawthorne's authentic insights could not help acknowledging that she became a "destined prophetess."[193] And this is why she returned – the woman returned, as she was destined to return, as prophetess. It was the gesture of her life that brought her back, which is also her prophetic gesture. Wise, helpful, "giving advice in all matters, especially those of the heart,"[194] she appears again in the community. Her prophecy is that "of her firm belief, ... at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven's own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness."[195] Hawthorne himself, in his quest for authenticity, could not help forming a very suggestive idea for the mission of the woman, and although his patriarchal bias did not let him see Hester as a possible performer of this mission, *she* is the one who inspires him to proclaim,

> The angel and apostle of the coming revelation must be a woman, indeed, but lofty, pure, and beautiful; and wise, moreover, not through dusky grief, but the ethereal medium of joy; and showing how sacred love should make us happy, by the truest test of a life successful to such an end![196]

Indeed, 'woman' will be at the heart of the 'future revelation' – she will bring 'happiness' through 'love' emulated 'by the truest test of a life successful to such an end'. It is remarkable, though, that frequently as Hawthorne speaks about 'love' throughout the novel, his essential sense of it 'sacred'. Whereas he appears to associate love between people with 'passion' claiming that "hatred and love" are "two passions" that "seem essentially the same."[197] Thus, he sees the encounter of Hester and Arthur in the forest as "their sad and passionate talk,"[198] claiming that her "passionate love has brought the man to ruin."[199] Indeed, although they both decided on leaving the colony together, we did not witness any confession of feelings toward each other there apart from some hints done by Hester. Hawthorne thus did not see Hester's return as related to her love for Arthur, but rather as related to 'sacred' love:

> Here had been her sin; here, her sorrow; and here was yet to be her penitence. She had returned, therefore, and resumed, – of her will, for not the sternest magistrate of that iron period would have imposed it, – resumed the symbol of which we have related so dark a tale.[200]

Actually Hawthorne advances a straight Puritan notion of love, in which sexuality is only a means for reproduction of the human kind and thus its pleasure "should not be made an end in

[192] There is a very characteristic notion for the predestination in the Protestant ethics, identified by Max Weber. Unlike in Catholicism, the duty of the protestant citizen is to serve God on their work place; that is, in the real life, rather than in church or monastery. See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons (New York & London: Routledge Classics, 2001); cf. *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016).
[193] Ibid., p. 201.
[194] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 43,
[195] Ibid., p. 201.
[196] Ibid., p. 201.
[197] Ibid., pp. 185, 199.
[198] Ibid., p. 185.
[199] Ibid., p. 153.
[200] Ibid., p. 200.

itself."[201] The straightforward implication of this notion of sexuality is that, while masculine *jouissance* can be accepted as necessary for the good purpose, feminine *jouissance* is in principle not acceptable, except if it just happened. Thus, if feelings of love between woman and man appear in their reproductive relations, for Hawthorne, they would fall into the realm of "sinful passion."[202]

In the perspective of gynesis and deconstruction, however, Hester's return merges into a different reading, not least because of the novel's (often neglected) subtitle – "A Romance," which attests to Hawthorne's 'authenticity' despite his – often logocentrically derailed – valuative confusions. She, the woman, returned where Dimmesdale, the man, with whom she had committed the 'sin' of *love*, had died. She returned because this love 'defined' her life, was impending in her life, and kept it going affirmatively to its very end. Her love was the true 'symbol' of her life – the true 'denotation' of the scarlet letter "A" in the deconstructed discourse of the patriarchy. She still wears the scarlet letter but now it conveys many other connotations in the public discourse, which the "woman-in-effect" makes "never stable" and dully deconstructs. Thus, she survives in 'the truest test of life'.

The symbol of the phallogocentric discourse may be still on her, but its putative meaning in that discourse has been affirmatively deconstructed. She does not manifest herself in this discourse; she manifests herself 'in-effect', in her doings (including in her demonstrated sexuality by which she affirmed herself in a sexual difference). That she wears the letter "A" only shows that it is always around her, like 'the lines' of the deconstructed phallogocentric discourse. And yet, the "woman-in-effect" is in "between-the-lines"; her dwelling is in "between-the-lines."

Now she returned to her man who is in the lines as deconstructed discourse. Actually, in her struggle with the oppressive patriarchal culture, the woman, in her opposition to man, was coming closer and closer in reaching to "her man," indeed – even as she distanced herself from him. Dimmesdale is her man, Chillingworth is her former husband**.**

In the end, she found her place next to her man. She found him in death. "It was near that old and sunken grave, yet with a space between, as if the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle. Yet one tombstone served for both."[203] That 'man' and 'woman' 'had no right to mingle', Hawthorne's 'authentic' narrative had to put inevitably in suspension – in an 'as if'; for they do need to mingle in love to affirm life. Indeed, her man was waiting for her in death, but it was by the injunction of life; it was life that made their reunion inevitable, to affirm love in death, life in death, love in life, and life in love. He was waiting for her amidst the deconstructed discourse of the patriarchy, in the gynema which occasions a different reunion of the 'lines' and 'between-the-lines', a closer reunion, a reunion of life in love that lets them be what they are, as each of them, and as both:

> All around, there were monuments carved with armorial bearings; and on this simple slab of slate – as the curious investigator may still discern, and perplex himself with the purport – there appeared the semblance of an engraved escutcheon. It bore a device, a herald's wording of which might serve

[201] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, pp. 105, 233-235; cf. *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, SS. 145-147.
[202] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 201.
[203] Ibid., p. 201.

> for a motto and brief description of our now concluded legend; so sombre is it, and relieved only by one ever-glowing point of light gloomier than the shadow: –
>
> "ON A FIELD, SABLE, THE LETTER A, GULES."[204]

We reach to the margin of our reading, where its gynema must leave its trace. The tombstone, in its presence, is rather a symbol of the death of the patriarchal discourse, where it joins in Hawthorne's biased authenticity and nostalgic grief, and a "symbol" (only in quotation marks) of the alive and life-asserting "woman-in-effect" in the eternity of time.

[204] Ibid., p. 201.

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Wittgenstein, Tagore, and Lalon

'ETHICS AND AESTHETICS ARE ONE' (T6.421): EARLY WITTGENSTEIN AND RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Priyambada Sarkar

Abstract

In this paper, I would like to offer a non-resolute interpretation of the remark "Ethics and Aesthetics are the same' (T6.421) through the lens of the ideas of Wittgenstein's favorite poet Rabindranath Tagore. The paper will be divided into three main sections. In the first section, I will analyze Tractatus' paragraph 6.421 from the perspective of early Wittgenstein, in the second section, I will focus on Tagore's aesthetics, and in the final section, I will aim to show that Wittgenstein's view of 'Ethics and Aesthetics being one and the same thing' has its counterpart in the philosophy of Tagore.

The fragmentary, dense, and cryptic paragraphs of Ludwig Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* have posed serious problems to the interpreter right from its publication. The discussion of ethics and aesthetics 'being one and the same' is confined to a mere bracketed portion of one paragraph.[1] Regarding this, Paul Engelmann, Wittgenstein's closest confidante, commented rightly: "I guess that the statement of the *Tractatus* 'Ethics and Aesthetics are one' is one of the most frequently misunderstood propositions of the book."[2]

In this paper, I would like to offer a non-resolute interpretation[3] of this remark through the lens of the ideas of Wittgenstein's favorite poet Rabindranath Tagore. At this point it is

[1]Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974 (1921)). Hereafter it will be referred as *Tractatus* and the reference to paragraph number will be preceded by T (T6.421).

[2] Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein with a Memoir*, translated by L. Furtüller (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), p. 143.

[3]According to resolute interpreters, Wittgenstein did not want to convey ineffable metaphysical truths via the nonsensical utterances of the *Tractatus*. My interpretation of the *Tractatus* in this endeavor is not resolute as I feel resolute interpreters have not given due importance to what the author himself had suggested in his letters to Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Von Ficker. Wittgenstein candidly expressed himself by saying that the main thrust of the book is to distinguish between what can be said and what cannot. (Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* [New York: The Free Press, 1990], p. 164). Again, at the same time, he passionately believed that

worth mentioning that there was a "Tagore mania"[4] in Germany during the 1920's, and that reportedly during the meetings of the Vienna Circle Wittgenstein preferred reading Tagore's poems to discussing *Tractatus* with the logical positivists. Along with his student Smythies, Wittgenstein even translated a portion of Tagore's favorite mystical play *The King of the Dark Chamber*. Rudolf Haller offers a list of poets and writers from Germany and elsewhere "who may have contributed to his understanding," which include Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, Matthius Claudius, Edward Moricke, as well as "Russian writers (especially Dostoevsky and Tolstoy) and *the famous Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore.*"[5]

The paper attempting to interpret the remark from the perspective of the ideas of Tagore will be divided into three main sections. In the first section, I will analyze *Tractatus*' paragraph 6.421from the perspective of early Wittgenstein; in the second section, I will focus on Tagore's aesthetics; and in the final section, I will aim to show that Wittgenstein's statement of 'Ethics and Aesthetics being one' has its counterpart in the philosophy of Tagore as well.

I

Aesthetics in the *Tractatus*:

Seemingly, ethics and aesthetics are two mutually exclusive discourses on the normative plane. Usually ethics deals with actions being evaluated as good or bad, whereas aesthetics deals with contemplation of an object as being beautiful or pleasant. Aesthetic awareness is rarely forced upon us, whereas we cannot avoid ethical considerations even if we want to. So why did Wittgenstein think that they are the same?

There is one reference where Wittgenstein provides us with a clue of how to interpret this *sameness*. In "A Lecture on Ethics" delivered in 1929, he says:

> Now I am going to use the term Ethics in a slightly wider sense, in a sense in fact which includes what I believe to be the most essential part of what is generally called Aesthetics.[6]

Here he is explicit that the two subjects are not identical, as the definition of ethics will include only a part of aesthetics – that might be 'the most essential part', but still it is not the whole of it. Hence, he is not obliterating the basic distinction between the two subjects but pointing to some fundamental points of their affinities and interdependencies. But again why would Wittgenstein affirm that they are one? What are the connections between them? From his various remarks one can infer that the connections lie: **i)** in their being values, hence being inexpressible, **ii)** in their being related to viewing '*sub specie aeterni*'; **iii)** in their being the

"what we cannot talk about is most important." (Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein with a Memoir*, p. 97).

[4] Martin Kampchen, *Rabindranāth Tagore and Germany* (Calcutta: Max Mueller Bhavan,1991), p. 12.

[5] Rudolf Haller, "Wittgenstein: Poetry and Literature," in Wolfgang Huemer and Marc-Oliver Schuster (Eds.), *Writing the Austrian Traditions: Relations between Philosophy and Literature* (Edmonton, Alberta: Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies, 2003), pp. 41-42 (italics mine).

[6] Ludwig Wittgenstein, "A Lecture on Ethics, *The Philosophical Review, Vol.* 74 (1), 1965, p. 4.

'right view of the world'; **iv)** in their being linked to happiness and finally; **v)** in their being 'the miracle', 'the wonder that the world exists'.

i) Ethics and Aesthetics being values, hence being inexpressible

First of all, ethics and aesthetics are the same in the sense that both these discourses are inexpressible in sensible language as far as the criteria of expressibility in the *Tractatus* is concerned. According to the theory of language and meaning of the *Tractatus,* a proposition is sensible and expressible in words if and only if it pictures a particular state of affair of the world. As abstract and normative disciplines, the content of these two discourses go beyond the scope of pictorial representations. They lie outside the boundaries of scientific language; hence they are inexpressible in sensible language and they should be passed over in silence.

ii) Ethics and Aesthetics being related to viewing 'sub specie aeterni'

There is another thing that is common to ethics and aesthetics. Wittgenstein says, "The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis* and the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis.* This is the connection between art and ethics."[7] Viewing *sub specie aeterni* thus provides the link between these two disciplines. Now what is this 'Viewing *sub specie aeterni*?'. In *Culture and Value*, we find Wittgenstein elucidating:

> ... it seems to me that there is a way of capturing the world *sub specie aeterni*…. it is as though [thought] flies above the world and leaves it as it is – observing it from above, in flight.[8]

Explaining 'viewing sub specie aeterni' in terms of 'viewing from above in flight' might remind us that Wittgenstein was an aeronautical engineer at the beginning of his career. It provides us also with an insight that such viewing leaves everything in the world 'as it is'. It cannot bring about any change in the facts or events of the world. And when you see from above, everything seems to be on the same level. Looking at the world from the flight, from above, also suggests a sense of detachment. Such viewing with detachment comes as a necessary step for Wittgenstein to lead an ethical life, a happy life.[9] I'll come back to this point later.

Wittgenstein elucidates that when one views an object from eternity, that object becomes the whole world. Wittgenstein clarifies, "The thing seen *sub- specie aeternitatis* is the thing seen together with the whole logical space."[10] Logical space, for early Wittgenstein refers to the world of possibilities; hence, when he asserts that the object is seen not ***in*** the logical space but ***with*** the whole logical space, he means that one sees the object not as a possibility in the world. As "The possibility of its occurring in states of affairs is the form of an object,"[11] this object viewed from eternity becomes different from the objects and facts, the totality of which

[7] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, edited by G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961), p. 83.
[8] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, edited by G.H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, translated by Peter Winch (The University of Chicago Press, 1984; Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), p. 5.
[9] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-16*, p. 81.
[10] Ibid., p. 83.
[11] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 2.041.

constitutes the world. Now what exactly did he mean by 'together with the whole logical space'? He explains it with the example of a stove:

> As a thing among things, each thing is equally insignificant: as a world, each one equally significant. If I have been contemplating the stove, and then am told: but now all you know is the stove, my result does indeed seem trivial. For this represents the matter as if I had studied the stove as one among the many things in the world. But if I was contemplating the stove, *it* was my world, and everything else colorless by contrast with it.[12]

Here he is explicit that the particular object, (here the stove) if conceived as an object among other objects (that is, that a stove is different from a hot plate, used as an instrument for cooking etc.) is insignificant as it is only a fact among other facts. It is a trivial fact, which is not valuable. It becomes valuable when it is viewed from a different perspective, from the perspective of eternity. Not only that, it also gives rise to "the mystical feeling of the world as a limited whole."[13] Now, what exactly is this viewing from eternity? This viewing from eternity is not viewing from inside; rather, it is viewing from outside: "The usual way of looking at things sees objects as it were from the midst of them, the view *sub specie aeternitatis* from outside."[14] Viewing from eternity is thus,

> a transformation in the way of seeing, therefore there corresponds a transformation of the object seen, a transformation described in terms of addition of sense. This addition seems to come about because the observer, so to speak, absorbs himself in the object, in such a way that the object, though it be ordinary and habitual, ceases to be an insignificant thing among things and becomes his world.[15]

Moreover, logical space in *Tractatus* indicates the domain of possibilities, those which are actual, constitute the world. The world is also equivalent to reality, which consists of both positive and negative states of affairs, that is, it comprises the whole logical space. Hence, if the object viewed *sub specie aeterni* is viewed together with the whole logical space then the implication is that it constitutes the whole world.

Interestingly, for Wittgenstein, viewing in this manner also leads one to view the world ethically. Wittgenstein explicitly connects ethics with the meaning of life when he attempts to define ethics by a number of synonymous expressions. In *A lecture on Ethics* he writes, "Ethics is the enquiry into the meaning of life, or into what makes life worth living."[16] Furthermore, for him, the good life is happy life and harmony is the criterion of happy life, which is also the only right life.[17] The question that pops up here is How can we secure such good/happy life? Wittgenstein gives a clue : "How can man be happy at all, since he cannot ward off the misery

[12] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-16*, p. 83.
[13] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.45.
[14] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-16*, p. 83.
[15] Gabriele Tomasi,. "Wittgenstein, the Artistic Way of Seeing, and the Sense of the World," *Kulturen: Streit-Analyse-Dialog - Cultures: Conflict-Analysis-Dialogue*, edited by Georg Gasser, Christian Kanzian, Edmund Runggaldier (Kirchberg am Wechsel: ALWS, 2006), p. 353;
http://wittgensteinrepository.org/ojs/index.php/agora-alws/issue/view/18
[16] Ludwig Wittgenstein, "A lecture on Ethics," p. 4.
[17] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-16*, p. 78.

of this world? Through the life of knowledge….The life of knowledge is the life that is happy in spite of the misery of the world. The only life that is happy is the life that can renounce the amenities of the world."[18] It is through the attitude of detachment/renunciation, that one can change one's unhappy world to a happy one. How does one acquire this quality? For Wittgenstein, one can practice the act of renunciation only when one adopts a particular perspective. And this perspective consists in viewing the world *sub specie aeterni*, that is, viewing the world as a limited whole from eternity. We have noted earlier that viewing from above or eternity suggests a sense of detachment. It is through this sense that viewing 'sub specie aeterni' connects ethics and aesthetics together.

Moreover, Wittgenstein points out that viewing *sub-specie-aeterni* is actually contemplating:

> The contemplation of the world sub specie aeterni is its contemplation as a limited whole. The feeling that the world is a limited whole is the mystical feeling.[19]

It is only through contemplation that the object (in the example, the stove) becomes 'the whole world for me'. This happens in the case of aesthetics ('the work of art is the object seen sub specie aeternitatis') and also in ethics (in good life, the world is viewed aesthetically – 'Good life is the world seen sub specie aeterni').[20] Thus the distinction between art and good life, between aesthetics and ethics merges here. Both become one. This is common in "traditional accounts of aesthetic contemplation where it is typically one in which the whole of consciousness is inhabited by the object contemplated."[21]

Wittgenstein elucidates this point ('the work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*') clearly in *Culture and Value* by referring to the distinction between someone performing some unremarkable activity in ordinary life, and seeing these same mundane things done on stage in theatre. In this example, Wittgenstein is not imagining a sequence of a play but merely the framing of such activity by the conventions of theatre. He says, "we should be observing something more wonderful than anything a playwright could arrange to be acted or spoken on the stage: life itself. But we do see this every day without its making the slightest impression on us! True enough, but we do not see it from that point of view."[22] ("A work of art," he goes on to say, "forces us to see *in the right perspective but in the absence of art, the object is just a fragment of nature like any other.*" [23]

iii) Ethics and Aesthetics as providing 'the right view of the world'

[18] Ibid., p. 81.
[19] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by C. K. Ogden (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 6.45.
[20] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-16*, p. 83.
[21] Nieli Russell, *Wittgenstein: From Mysticism to Ordinary Language – A study of Viennese Positivism and the Thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein* (New York: State University of New York Press. 1987), p.71.
[22] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 4.
[23] Ibid., p. 4 (italics mine).

Now, what is this 'right perspective' or 'right viewing'? Wittgenstein is not very explicit. He queries in an entry in *Notebooks1914-16*: "Is the essence of the artistic way of looking at things that it looks at the world with a happy eye?"[24] What does the phrase 'happy eye' connote here? Does only artistic way of looking at things can bring about relevant changes in one's attitude to the world? We find a clue again in the *Notebooks* where he says: "The world is *given* me, i.e. my will enters into the world completely from outside as into something that is already there."[25] So it is my will which penetrating into the world makes it my world, be it good or evil by an exercise of a good or evil willing. Viewing the world *sub specie aeterni* is thus connected with the exercise of good will. Wittgenstein makes connection between this viewing and good life explicit when he says: "Good life is the world viewed sub specie aeterni."[26]

Thus, one's viewing the world from eternity and one's exercise of will provides one with happy eyes and makes 'the world' his happy world. Aesthetic perception thus is a shift away from the everyday relationship with what is perceived, so that the object is seen and known in a way which is at once more vivid and more detached than in the everyday relationship. We are to think of the ethical as also sharing this attitude.[27] This, for early Wittgenstein, was 'the right perspective'; he describes the ideal toward which he aims to lead his readers at the end of the *Tractatus*:

> My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must surmount these propositions; then he *sees the world rightly*.[28]

For early Wittgenstein, only the artist can present an individual object in such a way that it appears to us as a work of art. We already quoted him saying that "A work of art forces us to see in the right perspective but in the absence of art, the object is just a fragment of nature like any other."[29] Wittgenstein claims that a work of art compels us to see things in the right perspective. Art can turn an object that is a mere 'piece of nature' into an object that is worth contemplating. It seems that by using the word 'rightly' as an adverb to 'seeing the world', Wittgenstein did not mean logical or propositional rightness or correctness. Rather, he probably intended to talk about ethical/aesthetical perspective of seeing the world as a limited whole. Here the word 'rightly' is used in an aesthetic sense, as when someone says that a musical note is on its right place when it is in harmony with previous notes. It is in this sense that seeing the world rightly as a harmonious whole is also 'seeing it with a happy eye'.

iv) Ethics and Aesthetics as being linked to happiness

[24] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-16*, p. 86.
[25] Ibid., p. 74.
[26] Ibid., p. 83.
[27] Diane Collinson, "Ethics and Aesthetics are One," *British Journal of Aesthetics* Vol. 25(3) (1985), pp. 266–72.
[28] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.54.
[29] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 4 (italics mine).

An important question troubles us at this point: Why art should always be confined to 'happy eye'? What about the artistic expression of the ugly, the terrible, and 'the tragic'? Wittgenstein somehow seems to anticipate this question and in the entries of the *Notebooks 1914-16* he says:

> For there is certainly something in the conception that the end of art is the beautiful. And the beautiful is what makes us happy.[30]

Here Wittgenstein is connecting the idea of art with that of beauty. The question that arises here is How is art connected with the beautiful? The beautiful in art cannot be in what is depicted or presented, for ugly and painful things are often the subject matter of art: it seems that Wittgenstein here is using the word 'beautiful' in the sense that it incorporates both good and evil, beautiful and ugly. This becomes obvious when we see that according to Wittgenstein, "If seen with detachment… an ordinary scene looks at the same time *unheimlich* and *wunderbar*," (that is, uncanny and wonderful).[31]

It is quite possible that Wittgenstein's thought here seems to have a continuity with the idea of beauty as something beyond mere material possession and as something that transcends loss or worldly interests. Wittgenstein's notion of beauty seems to come from the notion of harmony. Work of art constructs a perspective from which many different and even conflicting elements can be brought into some unified and harmonious whole.[32] This harmonious view of the world and life comes from viewing the world as a limited whole, as understood in the *Tractatus*. It contributes to a good ethical life, thus to the merging of ethical and aesthetical viewpoints once again.

But for early Wittgenstein, this cannot be expressed in sensible terms to anyone. As he puts it to Waismann:

> If I needed a theory in order to explain to another the essence of the ethical (*and also of aesthetical*), the ethical would have no value at all.[33]

This means that any attempt to theorize ethics or aesthetics, for Wittgenstein, will be 'to run up against the boundaries of language'. And yet, one can live an ethical life simply by having an ethical/aesthetical attitude towards the world. In Wittgenstein's own life, most indicative in this regard were the years in the 1920s, which he spent as a teacher in lower Austria. Those were also years of an aesthetical commitment which inspired him to design a modernistic house in Vienna for his sister.

v) Ethics and Aesthetics being connected with 'the wonder that the world exists'

[30] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-16*, p. 86.
[31] Gabriele Tomasi, "Wittgenstein on Life, Art, and the "Right Perspective," in Josef Rothhaupt und Wilhelm Vossenkuhl (Eds.), *Kulturen und Werte: Wittgensteins "Kringel-Buch" als Initialtext* (Berlin/ Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), p. 363.
[32] Carolyn Wilde, "Ethics and Aesthetics Are One," in Peter B. Lewis (Ed.), *Wittgenstein, Aesthetics and Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 174.
[33] Friedrich Waismann, *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1979), p. 116-117.

Finally comes the proposition 'the miracle is that the world exists', which serves as paradigmatic example of both ethics and aesthetics. It shows the underlying connection between ethics and aesthetics, whereas the peculiarity of the experience it conveys (I wonder that the world exists!) is that it falls into the domain of the mystical, the ineffable. It is the mystical experience of the world as a whole where the subject feels as merging oneself with that world. For Wittgenstein, this is an experience par excellence and mystical, which cannot be put into words.

The discussion of the above five points reveals that the connecting link between ethical and aesthetical discourses is 'viewing the world *sub specie aeterni.* This is a viewing of the world taken from outside, which is thus connected with the sense of the world. Thus the sense of the world as relevant to ethics also lies "outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case." For all that happens and is the case is accidental. What makes it non-accidental cannot lie within the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental.[34] Thus both ethics and aesthetics are transcendental and work as 'conditions of the world'.[35]

Such a view of the world differs from what can be seen from any factual or scientific viewpoint, for the facts themselves are within the world. It is also for the same reason that such 'viewing from eternity' can never be expressed in terms of scientific language. In this way, factual representation functions as a cage and ethics, and aesthetics can be taken as attempts to run against the boundaries of the cage. But in their attempts to transcend these boundaries, they show themselves and make themselves understood. What this shows is that factual or propositional representation is limited. There are points of view, which are not factual representations, which are not fragmentary or partial, but which can offer an overview of the world as a whole. It is interesting to note here that Wittgenstein connects this kind of viewing of the world with 'viewing with a happy eye' claiming that 'the beautiful is what makes happy'.[36] The experience of value arises from such wholeness, from the perceived harmony between the individual and the world.[37] This experience of unity is what being happy means.[38] Viewing from the viewpoint of eternity is not a perceiving of the object in terms of causality or an orientation toward a certain end. What Wittgenstein achieves with this differentiation is to show the difference between the question of human value and the scientific questions.[39]

We will show that Tagore also takes such a stance on the way an object is viewed from the point of view of aesthetics. For him, a rose is beautiful when one feels the unity of a rose coinciding with the unity of the universe, a feeling which takes us beyond temporality. This is a unity that tunes up the inner unity of oneself along with the unity of the universe.

II

[34] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.41.
[35] Ibid., 6.421.
[36] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-16,* p. 86.
[37] Julian Friedland, "Wittgenstein and the Metaphysics of Ethical Value," *Ethic@ - An International Journal for Moral Philosophy*, Florianópolis, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2006), p. 101.
[38] Ibid., p. 92.
[39] B. R Tilghman, *Wittgenstein, Ethics and Aesthetics: The View from Eternity* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 44.

Rabindranath Tagore and Aesthetics

Tagore's aesthetics and philosophy are intertwined with each other as 'the touch of aesthetic inspiration' pervades not only his poems and songs but also his worldview and his approach to the fundamental issues of life and thought. It is thus fair to say that "aesthetics is the dough with which his metaphysics and other writings are baked and cooked."[40] Still, it is very difficult to have a logical, succinct, and structured account of his aesthetics and philosophy. He himself has acknowledged that such a goal is bound to elude us:

> I am that poet
> who is a dream-like being moving about stealthily,
> and who is unable to make myself understood.[41]

This is further complicated by the fact that his approach to art, literature, and paintings in his later years underwent a fundamental change from that of earlier ones, provoking an enigmatic confusion over his tenets on aesthetics among his interpreters. Thus, before identifying his points in common with Wittgenstein, I will briefly discuss Tagore's early and later aesthetics.

Aesthetics in Tagore's Early Works

For Tagore, the uniqueness of the human being in this world consists in the fact that they can be an artist. Because of their aesthetic faculty and expression, a human is distinguished from other things and beings in the universe. Almost all of Tagore's deliberations on the relationship between the human being and the world reflect his aesthetic discernment. This becomes evident when he conveys:

> When we experience anything aesthetically, we do not experience only that object. A good poem confers dignity on land, sea and sky, on the whole of the existence.[42]

For him, all works of creation such as music, dance, painting, and literature reveal rhythmic forms and that is what is common between human and God. This is what binds God and human together in creating this universe 'as a work of Art'. Tagore's approach to Art seems to be unique because he believes that the world of reality belongs to Art. In order to grasp what he means by reality, truth, and the truth of Art, one will have to analyze how Tagore views the human being in relation to nature.

According to Tagore, a human has three aspects of being. First is their physical being, who tills the soil, gathers food, does everything for their material being, and roams around unquestioningly in the domain of facts. Second is their intellectual being, who wants to find out reason and law behind the facts. Apart from these aspects, there is yet another one, a personal human: "This personal man is found in the region where we are free from all necessity – above the needs, both of the body and mind – above the expedient and useful. It is the highest in man

[40] V. S. Naravane, "Tagorene Aesthetics Concepts of Harmony and Personality," in *Rabindranāth Tagore in Perspective: A Bunch of Essays* (Calcutta: Viśva Bhārati, 1989), p. 2.
[41] Narasingha P. Sil, "Rabindranath Tagore's Aesthetics Revisited," in *Rabindra Miscellany*, 2015, p. 36, available at: https://www.parabaas.com/rabindranath/articles/Rabindra%20Miscellany.pdf (accessed on 7 April 2020).
[42] Abu Sayeed Ayyub, *Poetry and Truth* (Kolkata: Dey's Publishing, 1973), p. 119.

– this personal man."[43] In this world of the personal human being, Art takes place. Tagore elucidates that where there is beauty in flowers, sweetness in fruits, where there is compassion for other living beings, where there is a feeling of surrendering oneself to the Great (*bhūmā*), we feel ourselves as being in an eternal personal relation with the universe. We call it 'real', as in reality truth is personal.

Tagore treated the ultimate truth as "the Truth of relationship, the Truth of harmony in the Universe, the fundamental principle of creation."[44] By means of creativity, this personality of the human being transcends the abstraction of the factual domain and triumphs over the limitations of logical reasoning. The reality of the world thus does not belong to the physical human or the intellectual human with logical reasoning. Rather, the world becomes real in the domain of the personal where one feels one's infinity, where one is divine. One can be conscious of personality in its narrower sense, which begins with the feeling of separateness from the world. Tagore elucidates this with the delight of a miser who in their aspirations to make more money strikes upon the unity or oneness of the world. A rich person distinguishes themselves as a wealthy being from the rest of the world; but the unity of a rose, of a piece of art, a poem is consistent with the unity of the world. The latter are the messengers of the One, the Infinite, and the Eternal. Art for its part expresses the delight of this unity of the finite and the infinite in the human being.

The artist creates their reality, which is more important than the factual reality of scientists. About this creation of reality, Tagore is of the opinion that one can modulate the nature-human-divine interrelationships through one's creative faculty and can make truth one's own. Truth can be *real*, only when it is personal. This truth is beautiful. Beauty for Tagore is "born of man's desire to fraternize with the outer world of life and nature."[45] Such a conception of beauty is different from the ordinary conception of beauty; it is based on the philosophy of discipline and restraint. Tagore argues, "When man has the power to see things detached from self-interest and insistent claims of the lust of the senses, then he sees that what is unpleasant to us is not necessarily unbeautiful, but has its beauty in truth."[46] Tagore says, "The day when I first realized this truth, I remembered Keats's words, 'truth is beauty, beauty truth.'"[47] Now, Tagore assimilated this 'beauty truth' with goodness – "Which is really good is both useful and beautiful."[48] For Tagore, "Beauty cannot be the aim of art and literature unless it is good. In

[43] Rabindranath Tagore, *Personality: Lectures Delivered in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), p. 12.
[44] Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man Being the Hibbert Lectures for 1930* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931), p. 100.
[45] Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Writings on Literature and Language: Rabindranath Tagore*, edited by Sisir Kumār Das and Sukanta Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 51.
[46] Rabindranath Tagore, "Sense of Beauty," *Angel of Surplus: Some Essays and Addresses on Aesthetics,* edited by Sisir Kumār Ghose (Calcutta: Viśva Bhārati, 1978), p. 53.
[47] Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Writings on Literature and Language,* p. 37.
[48] Ibid., p. 37.

goodness also we discover that wealth, that surplus[49] which is commensurate with the whole world."[50]

Moreover, for Tagore, when we are intensely aware of the equation of truth, beauty, and goodness, we are aware of ourselves and the harmony of our souls with the outside universe. It gives us joy as aesthetic experience (*Ānanda*). To elucidate this, one can take the example of a rose. One feels happy (pure aesthetic joy) when one sees a rose; one sees the beauty of harmony in its color, smell, and contour, that is, in the form of a flower. "The final meaning of delight which one finds in a rose can never be in the roundness of its petals, just as the final meaning of joy of music cannot be in a phonograph record."[51] In Tagore's opinion, the essence of the creative person is their capacity to feel and also to make others feel joy as aesthetic experience (*Ānanda*). On the one hand, we have the artist who expresses their inner *bhāva* (sentiment) in the art object. On the other, the creative process finds fulfillment only when *sahṛday*a *rasika* (a sensitive spectator who can connect with the performance with emotion) appreciates it, feels the inner *rasa* (emotion of aesthetic pleasure that develops from *bhāva*) within, and experiences *Ānanda*. In this sense, Tagore believes that human feelings are the most important emotional forces, which transmute things into our living structures. The human being looks at the world and absorbs it with emotions of love, hatred, wonder, fear, pleasure, pain, and so on. In Tagore's own words,

> Our emotions are the gastric juices which transform this world of appearance into the more intimate world of sentiments. On the other hand this outer world has its own juices, having their various qualities which excite our emotional activities. This is called in our Sanskrit rhetoric *rasa* which signifies outer juices having their response in the inner juices of our emotions.[52]

Hence, the things that arouse our emotions arouse our feelings for our own selves. Then, we feel the longing to express ourselves for the sake of expression. Art originates from such longing and belongs to the domain of 'surplus'.[53]

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[49] The notion of surplus is the central notion in the philosophy of Tagore. He elucidates it in the following way: "Like animals, human beings also have hunger, thirst, and bodily cravings, but what makes man different from animals is that apart from these bodily cravings, human beings crave for completely different things. Animals are necessarily bounded by their needs and necessities, they cannot go beyond them. Animals possess knowledge but that knowledge is employed for useful purposes, such as how to build nests, how to jump on prey, how to avoid danger, and so on. But human beings also have knowledge, which they often employ to fulfill their needs in life, but they can go far beyond and declare that I am acquiring knowledge just for the sake of knowledge and not for anything else. Here they differ fundamentally from animals.

Animals possess certain altruistic tendencies such as parenting and taking interest in herd and hive. Humans also know that they have to be good because their goodness is necessary for their race, yet they go far beyond that. They can afford to say that goodness is for the sake of goodness. Animals also have emotions, which they use for self-preservation." (Priyambada Sarkar, *Language, Limits and beyond: Early Wittgenstein and Rabindranath Tagore* (Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 38-39). "Man has a fund of excess emotional energy that does not get satisfied with simple preservation. It seeks an outlet in creation of art, literature, music and dance. For man's civilization is built upon their surplus." (Tagore, *Personality: Lectures Delivered in America*, p. 11).

[50] Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Writings on Literature and Language*, p. 172.

[51] Amiya Chakravarty, *A Tagore Reader* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1966), p. 88.

[52] Rabindranath Tagore, *Personality: Lectures Delivered in America*, pp. 14-15.

[53] Ibid., p. 20.

Aesthetics in Tagore's Later Works

Quite in contrast with his aesthetics in his early works, the later poems and paintings of Tagore often seem to betray the sense of conflict, discord, and dissonance at the heart of existence. In a letter from March 1930,[54] Tagore explained candidly that in earlier years his inspiration for creation, constituting the centre of his life and the world, came from the outside world. But later in life, when " … he entered this passionate desire to paint and to draw. … The movement was no more inwards from outside but outwards from inside"[55] One gets an inkling of such changes much earlier in the poems of *Balākā*,[56] where the poet celebrates humanist ethos and also salutes youthful love, beauty, and restlessness. Next, we detect *Palātakā*,[57] which expresses the "poet's concern with the multiple mundane trials and tribulations, and the weal and woes of human life, that is a part of universal life."[58] During the last 15 years of his life, he came into contact with younger modern poets of Bengal, who were pioneering a modernist movement that unhesitatingly depicted the weight of sin and sorrow, sexuality, evil, and the complexity of intellectual experiences. He often critiqued this modernism by identifying the modern with the crude and the trivial. Yet, one does not fail to notice the distinctive features of modernism in his own writings of this period. He writes about the trivial in *Nabajātak* (1940);[59] and poems composed in these years (from *Punasca* [*Postscript*, 1932][60] to *Śeṣlekhā* [*Last Writings*, 1941][61]) seem to reveal his encounter with the real world:

> I'm familiar with the road to the real world.
> No fancy reality could be found there.
> There the terrific and the terrible walk hand in hand.[62]

In *Śeṣlekhā*, we find expressions of his own personal tussle, uncertainties, and lack of knowledge of being and self. At the end of the day, he confessed that he has no answer for the questions that bothered him throughout his life, and of which he thought he had answers in his early life. Much agony in his personal life, and much 'hurts and pain' out of the chaos and crisis in the outside world had made him realize that 'Truth is hard'. Truth is not only hard but also 'terrible', which seems to be in dissonance with 'the aesthetics of harmony' in his early works. Sisir Kumār Ghosh, a noted Tagore critic writes, "Full of dramatic discords, through alternate rhythms of intensity and exhaustion, the poems unfold a history of a conflict, long and carefully concealed at the heart of Rabindrean imagination."[63] This is evident also in his paintings drawn during the last phase of his life. It is no wonder that critics describe his "gnawed battered twisted

[54] Rabindranath Tagore, *Rabindra Rachanabali*, Vol. 12 (Calcutta: Viśva Bhārati, 1961), pp. 93-94.
[55] Ibid., p. 94.
[56] Rabindranath Tagore, *Balākā* (in Bengali) (Calcutta: Indian Publishing House, 1916).
[57] Rabindranath Tagore, *The Fugitive* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921).
[58] Sil, "Rabindranath Tagore's Aesthetics Revisited," p. 42.
[59] Rabindranath Tagore, *Nabajatak* (Bengali book of poems) (Kolkata: Viśva Bhārati Granthalay, 1940).
[60] Rabindranath Tagore, *Punasca* (Kolkata: Viśva Bhārati Granthalay, 1932).
[61] Rabindranath Tagore, *Sesh Lekha* (Bengali book of poems) (Kolkata: Viśva Bhārati Granthalay, 1941).
[62] Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Poems of Rabindranath Tagore*, edited by William Radice (Delhi: Penguin, 1990), p. 68.
[63] Sisir Kumar Ghose, *The Later Poems of Tagore* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Ltd., 1989), p. viii.

and phantasmagorical images born out of deletions as expressions of his suppressed unconscious."[64] Dyson and Adhikari traced the peculiarities of Tagore's (around 2,500) paintings to his deficiency of color vision. However, the last writings and paintings thus force us to look at our 'sage–poet' (*ṛṣi kavi*) in a different manner. Here, one notices that "this Tagore does not console us like the poet but places us in a land of uncertainty."[65]

However, I think that if one looks closely at his poems, novels, dramas, and paintings during the 1930s, one would not fail to notice that although his creative works look at the ordinary, at the crude, harsh reality, still he is not oblivious to the glory of the beautiful. It is true that his last days are full of symptoms of resentments and perturbations. But that is not final. He never deviates from his central aesthetics and philosophy as he writes only a few months before his death:

> I have seen the light of the eternal
> Behind the illusion of calamity.
> Truth's joyous form is imaged in this dust.[66]

This is indicative that he was able to see 'the light of the eternal' and the harmony of truth and joy as aesthetic experience even in his very last months. Not only that, he was even hopeful that the Supreme Human Being will appear in this world. In this phase, one can notice his inner tensions between his central aesthetic philosophy and the new ideas of modernism. Sometimes new ideas occupy for him the central place; but as he is firmly rooted in a harmonious picture of the whole, it never goes fully out of sight. Because of this, he can visualize the *leelā* (a spontaneous purposeless self-manifestation) of divine dance, where his individual self merges in the flow of the life of truth, where he sees the peace of the ever-constant and 'joyous form of truth'. His uncertainty regarding the contingency and crudeness of the mundane is contradicted by his image of merging himself into the festival of the infinite, the eternal.[67] He thus realizes that truth can be cruel but it can be also loved, and it can make free those who love it. There is the beautiful even in the terrible, throughout history and the world. In his later work, Tagore has described the terrible and the beautiful walking hand in hand. It is true that Tagore portrays his feelings of distress at the sight of the harshness and crudeness of reality in some poems of his later years; but he claims at the same time an absolute certainty in 'the bright eternity behind the mist of danger'. He does not intend to offer 'a radically new ontology', as he still finds strength from his inner light:

> He carries to his treasure-house
> His final reward.
> He who could put up with your deceit receives from you the right
> To everlasting peace.[68]

[64] Sovon Som, *Tagore's Paintings: Versification in Line* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2011), p. 25.
[65] Pabitra Sarkar, "Foreword," in Sovon Som, *Tagore's Paintings: Versifi cation in Line*, p. 3.
[66] Amiya Chakravarty, *A Tagore Reader* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1966), p. 72.
[67] Rabindranath Tagore, *Prantik* (Kolkata: Viśva Bhārati Granthalay, 1937), pp. 23-24.
[68] Amiya Chakravarty, *A Tagore Reader*, pp. 373-374.

III

Tagore and Wittgenstein: Convergence of Ideas on Aesthetics

Based on the elucidation of ideas on aesthetics of the two thinkers discussed above, one can portray the obvious divergences in the approaches of the poet and the philosopher. The poet will be reluctant to view aesthetics as nonsensical, as aesthetics helps him to approach the 'real' in his life; whereas the philosopher will be happy to delineate it as an attempt to express the inexpressible. Yet, in spite of their natural divergences, there are few important points of convergence where their views concur, not least because Wittgenstein's remark 'Ethics and Aesthetics being one' has its counterpart in the philosophy of Tagore.

For Tagore, beauty exceeds what is necessary. That is why we recognize it as wealth. He believed that beauty cannot be the aim of art and literature unless it is good. Goodness has made beauty more than something to be seen with the eye.[69] As Tagore says:

> Whatever is beneficent is in deepest union with the whole world, in secret harmony with the mind of all humanity. When we see this beautiful accord of the true and the beneficent, the beauty of truth no longer eludes our perception. Compassion is beautiful; so are forgiveness and love. … *The image of beauty is the fullest manifestation of the good and the image of the good the consummate self of beauty.*[70]

This harmony of the Good and the Beautiful, ethics and aesthetics, cannot be represented by factual scientific language. For, they are the inexpressible. Tagore says it in his lectures delivered in America in 1917,

> Facts are like wine cups that carry it [the truth], they are hidden by it, it [the Truth that Good is beautiful] overflows them. It is infinite in its suggestions; it is extravagant in its words. It is personal, therefore beyond science.[71]

According to Tagore, science is concerned with facts which are stateable in scientific language, whereas this merging of the good and the beautiful is beyond scientific language. Wittgenstein uses similar analogy in his lecture on ethics, delivered in 1929, where he says,

> Our words will only express facts; as a teacup will only hold a teacup full of water, even if I were to pour out a gallon over it.[72]

Thus, both Tagore and Wittgenstein agree that words in our everyday language are incapable of expressing the higher truth; that is, that higher truth cannot be put into words.

There is also another important point of convergence. For both of them, viewing from eternity is what connects ethics and aesthetics. In line with Wittgenstein, Tagore says "When we look at a rose and find it beautiful, it becomes the whole world. Its unity of form, color,

[69] Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Writings on Literature and Language: Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 173.
[70] Ibid., p. 172 (italics mine).
[71] Rabindranath Tagore, *Personality: Lectures Delivered in America*, p. 34.
[72] Ludwig Wittgenstein, "A lecture on Ethics," p. 6.

texture, and smell coincides with the unity of the universe, and thus it takes us beyond temporality. This unity aligns itself with the inner unity of oneself along with the unity of the universe."[73]

Beauty for Tagore is a fundamental concept akin to that of being, surplus, and harmony, and this concept is most important in his idea of aesthetics. For Tagore, the poet is not a devotee of truth for the sake of truth, or of goodness for the sake of goodness. Rather, he is a devotee of truth and goodness as they are in themselves beautiful. And because of their beauty, the poet got attracted to them. Tagore elucidates this with the example of a blade of grass. A lay person who is indifferent to nature gets no pleasure from the blade of grass. It is a trifle matter to them. He is not interested. But a botanist finds pleasure even from a blade of grass as they know the importance of grass in the domain of plants. Similarly, an aesthetician knows how to view a blade of grass even from the point of view of spirituality, can feel themselves and the world in that particular blade of grass and finds ecstasies in it.[74]

From Tagore's account, it follows that from the point of view of the scientist the truth of a blade of grass is important, but only as representative of a class. But to the aesthetician, a blade of grass is important not because it belongs to a class having such and such properties, not because it has some utility, but because it becomes the whole world. It comes to the fore and everything else goes to the background. When we look at a blade of grass aesthetically, the cover of its 'everydayness', that is, its being in particular spatio-temporal framework, gets removed. The aesthetician discovers a deep harmony in the beautiful object and feels happy from the core of their heart.[75] This harmony transcends all discords, all conflicts. For Tagore, truth, beauty, and harmony are interchangeable terms. The artist through creative synthesis extends themselves over the whole world and feels the union with the world in them. Tagore elucidates: I exist and everything else exists. There is this union of the two in my existence.[76] This harmony, this being with the whole world, transcend the boundaries of ordinary discourse and somehow make themselves understood by means of the suggestiveness of language in poems, music, and other art forms.

Tagore elucidates the typically mystical experience of the union of oneself with the world, which he had in his early years. Regarding this experience, he says in his Hibbert lectures:

> When I was 18, a sudden spring breeze of religious experience for the first time came to my life and passed away leaving in my memory a direct message of my spiritual reality. One day while I stood watching at early dawn the sun sending out its ray from behind the trees, I suddenly felt as if some ancient mist had in a moment lifted from my sight, and the morning light on the face of the world revealed an inner radiance of joy. The invisible screen of the common place was removed from all things and all men and their ultimate significance was intensified in my mind.[77]

[73] Rabindranath Tagore, *Rabindra Rachanabali*, Vol. 14 (Kolkata: Paschimbanga Sarkar, 1986), p. 388.
[74] Rabindranath Tagore, *Rabindra Rachanabali*, Vol. 12, p. 6.
[75] Sachindranath Ganguly, *Rabindra Darshan* (Śāntiniketan: Viśva Bhārati, 1968), p. 86.
[76] Rabindranath Tagore, *Rabindra Rachanabali*, Vol. 12, p. 352.
[77] Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1953), pp. 93-94.

One notices similar insight in a poem where he speaks of the wonderful experience of the whole world embracing his heart: "I don't know how my heart unfolded and embraced the whole world today."[78] Tagore believes that "poets reveal the benign to the world in its ineffably beauteous form. The truly benign serves our need and it is beautiful: that is, it has an unaccountable attraction that surpasses its use."[79] "Only the true artist can comprehend the secret of the visible world and the joy of revealing it."[80]

Thus, for both Wittgenstein and Tagore, words are incapable of expressing values that incorporate truth, beauty, and goodness. But this gives rise to the typical Tractarian paradoxical situation: If words are incapable of expressing values such as truth, beauty, and goodness, then what purpose does this discourse on ethical and aesthetical values serve? Although from the point of view of the *Tractatus*, it might appear nonsensical, yet one can get over this paradoxicality by referring to the Tractatrian notion of 'logical clarification of thoughts'.[81] Hence, this discourse has a point: it points to a harmonized, value-laden, poetic universe of a poet and a philosopher. It thus clarifies human attempts to run against the boundaries of language, which, though fruitless, still deserve our deep respect and admiration.

[78] Rabindranath Tagore, "Prabhāt Utsav, Prabhāt Sangīt," in *Rabindra Rachanāvali*, Vol. 1. (Kolkata: Paschimbnga Sarkar, 1980), p. 71 (trans. mine).
[79] Rabindranath Tagore*, Selected Writings on Literature and Language: Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 172.
[80] Rabindranath Tagore, *On Art and Aesthetics: A Selection of Lectures, Essays & Letters*, edited by Prithwish Neogy (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1961), p. 108.
[81] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.112.

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Translation and Commentary

THE SONGS OF LALON FAKIR

Lalon Fakir

Selection, translation from Bengali, and commentary
by
Sayed Muddashir Hossain

"Oh, my caste is being ruined! Oh, my caste is being ruined,"[1]
Say people, but I find it really strange!
I see rather that people are not interested in the right path!
When I tell them to follow it, they say many excuses!
When you came to this world what was your "Caste?!"
And after coming to this world what "Caste" you have taken?
And think about this,
What will be your caste when you will leave this life?
"Brahmins, Chandala, Leather Workers, Shoe Makers,
They all clean themselves with the same water,
But you still say they look uncouth and untasteful just because of the caste?
But The Death will not excuse anyone!"
If in secret someone eats food given by a whore,
What harm does it do to the religion?
Lalon asks what actually "Caste" is?
This illusion is never resolved!

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[1] http://www.lalongeeti.com/jatgelo/. Other representative publications of LalonFakir's works include: *Collection Of Lalon's Works*, edited by Dr. Abul Ahsan Chowdhury (Dhaka: Pathak Shamabesh, 2014) (in Bengali), cf. লালনসমগ্র ডক্টর আবুল আহসান চৌধুরী (পাঠক সমাবেশ); *Lalon Fakir and His Songs*, edited by Onnodashankor Roy (Dhaka: Kobi, 2017) (in Bengali), cf. লালন ফকির ও তাঁর গান অন্নদাশঙ্কর রায় (কবি প্রকাশনী); *Lalon's Songs and Texts*, edited by Sudhin Dash (Dhaka: Merit Fair Publications, 2017) (in Bengali), cf. লালনগীতি ও স্বরলিপি সুধীন দাশ মেরিট ফেয়ার প্রকাশন

All people ask Lalon what is his caste?[2]
In return Lalon asks how does caste looks like?
I have never seen it in my life!
If you do circumcision, you become Muslim!
But for women what is the law?!
If you wear at your naked chest the holy thread then you are a male Brahmin,
But how should I recognize a female Brahmin?!
Hindu people use Mala (a rosary) and Muslims use Tasbih (also rosary)
And they are the same thing!
Yet you say that just the name makes them different!
When you first come to this world or when you leave this world,
Where is your sign of your case?
In this whole world everyone talks about caste!
They tell story about it,
But Lalon says, I have drowned my caste in the river!

***

In the cage, an unknown bird comes and goes![3]
I do not know how it happens,
But if I could have known I would have caught the bird and kept it in the cage!
There are eight chambers and nine doors to this cage,
And each of them separated by slits.
And upon this cage or room there are more buildings,
And on the top floor there is a beautiful dance floor!
Just because I am lucky, the bird stays in the cage,
Otherwise, it would have left and flown to the forest!
But you must remember the cage is made out of raw bamboos and really weak!
And Lalon cries and says,
"Soon the cage will be dropped and opened!"

***

Very near to my House there is an unknown city,[4]
And there lives a neighbor.
But I have never seen that neighbor!
There is endless water in the village,
And it has no beginning nor end!

[2] http://www.lalongeeti.com/shoblokekoy/
[3] http://www.lalongeeti.com/khacharvitor/
[4] http://www.lalongeeti.com/barirkache/

My mind desires to see the neighbor,
But how can I go to that village?
I do not know how I should describe this neighbor!
This neighbor does not have any head, shoulders or hands!
This neighbor floats sometimes in vacuum,
And sometimes in the house!
If this neighbor would touch me,
All of my agonizing pain would go away!
Lalon and this neighbor live in the same place,
But alas! At the same time millions of miles away!

***

When can I be together with the person of my mind!?[5]
I look forward towards this like a thirsty bird,
But all I see is a dark moon!
I want to be the footman of this person,
But my bad luck!
That does not happen!
Just like thunder hides in the clouds,
I am a blind who cannot find the true face of that person!
But when I can remember that face in my mind,
I fear no shame!
Lalon Fakir ponder and says,
The ones who love only they know!

***

If you worship humanity, then you will become a golden person,[6]
Without humans you will lose all of your riches.
The story of a human is like a vine that adorns a big tree
You should know about it and only then you can understand your true self.
Even if you are a poor vagabond, yet you cultivate humanity,
You will get the blessing of life.
Without humans you will be lost in nothingness.
Lalon says that if you worship humanity, you can get the ultimate redemption.

***

[5] http://www.lalongeeti.com/milonhobe/
[6] http://www.lalongeeti.com/manushvojle/

Everyone says "Human, Human!"[7]
But which race does this Human has?
Everyone tries to take Human to their race and convince them,
But I have tried to look into the origin of those races and found only Humans there!
A very mindless game they are playing,
Making groups and groups,
I do not know how to divide this Human,
Apparently, everyone can do it very easily!
But what I see is this,
When they chant the farewell, they chant for the dead people,
They become all equal.
I have looked into three different people to understand the reason of this division,
But I have seen that they all are the same one thing!
I find this business very troublesome and confusing!

***

Those who find Humanity to be true,[8]
Do they care about other views?
Holy Mounds of Soil or Holy Wooden Pictures,
Or God or Goddess, who can tell the future!
That person does not care about all these,
Because they have found the real thing!
They will not be fooled by any sweet talk,
Because they know the true thing!
Those who have weak knowledge,
Or the weakness of the heart to accept Humanity,
They are easy to be fooled!
That's why Lalon wanders around,
And does not get stable in one position.

***

[7] http://www.lalongeeti.com/manushmanush/
[8] http://www.lalongeeti.com/manushtotto/

Lalon Fakir – The Poet-Philosopher

To truly admire and grasp the cultural importance of the works of Lalon Fakir we have to understand the socio-cultural context of his time. He was born circa 17th October 1774 in Jashore, today's Bangladesh. At that time the whole Indian subcontinent was together under British rule and the Hindu caste system was maintained.

There were main four castes Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, as well as those called Dalits, who did not belong to any caste. The castes were determined by the Hindu mythology according to which the people were created from a certain part of the god Brahma's body. The Brahmins were created from the head, thus being the most intelligent of all people, who have to take care of the work related to priesthood and communication with gods. The Kshatriyas were created from the arm, and thus they have to do the heavy lifting and muscle work, which qualified them to be the rulers and the warriors. Brahmins and Kshatriyas were considered higher castes.

Vaishyas were created from the thigh. Here, we need to note that traditionally anything related to leg was not considered good on the Indian subcontinent. For instance, one should not kick a book or make feet high in the presence of a respectable person. With this in mind, Vaishyas were the second worst caste in this system; they were farmers, traders etc. For their part, Shudras were created from the feet and were considered the worst of all castes. They were the poorest of all as well. It is also notable that the caste hierarchy is indicative of the socio-economic hierarchy of the traditional Indian society, which was thus sanctioned with the help of religion.

In practice, caste division was largely exclusive. A Brahmin would not pass under a shadow cast by a Shudra and sometimes Vaishya, for the view is that this makes the Brahmin unclean and then they will need to take a bath again. Likewise, cross caste marriage was unthinkable. The Dalits got the worst of the deal. They were not even considered proper human. The caste people would not eat anything offered by them or sometimes would not even talk to them. The Dalits were basically people who did the "dirty jobs" in the society, such as anything that has to do with cleaning. Also, since Hindus believe in the cycle of rebirth, they used it to justify the perceived social injustice of the caste structure. They would just maintain that in another life they have done something really bad, angering the gods, and that is why now they are reborn under such bad conditions in this life.

Lalon was born in a Hindu family. It is uncertain in which caste he was born, but the way in which his life unfolded clearly left its mark upon him. It is said that his family was making a pilgrimage towards the temple of Jagannath, when Lalon was infected with Smallpox. At that time smallpox was considered very deadly and someone infected with this disease would have been directly abandoned. Thus, Lalon was also abandoned by the River Kaliganga, and was possibly floated on the river with a Vela, a boat-like structure made out of Banana trees. Then, a Muslim family found him and took care of him. The father of that family was most likely called Malam Shah and his wife was Matijan. According to the legend, they found Laon in a Vela that had stopped by their village Cheuriya. They offered him the love of a family

member, as if he were their own son. Later on, he founded a musical group inspired by Siraj Sain. It is also said that Lalon lost sight of one eye due to the small pox.

It appears that growing up with two families has given Lalon a certain sense of rebirth, which has uniquely reflected in his poetic philosophical thought. Here is an extract of one of these songs:

> Hindu people use Mala (a rosary) and Muslims use Tasbih (also rosary)[9]
> And they are the same thing!
> Yet you say that just the name makes them different!

We can clarify here that Malas are rosaries, which Religious Hindus count on when reciting holy chants. Muslims also recite their holy chants while counting on bids, but they call it Tasbih. Here Lalon is pointing to the fact that both Hindu and Muslims perform very much the same ritual but they call it by different name. He was often asked what his religion was, but he refused to answer that because he did not think he had a concept of religion. He was born in a Hindu family which later on abandoned him. Then, he was taken care of by a Muslim family by the time he became an adult. As a result, he appears to have lost his sense of religion, which made him ask rhetorically "What religion do you have when you come to this world and when you leave it!" This is a rather simple but very deep question. When a baby is born into this world, they do not have any mark of religion. Only later on one would take – most typically – the religion of one's family. Likewise, when one dies, one is dead as other people are dead. These are essentially arguments by which Lalon dispels the difference between religions.

The theme of death will always be an important focus in his philosophy. He uses death as a kind of "Grand Leveler," who drags down everyone to the same level. And he says it rather simple,

> "Brahmins, Chandala, Leather Workers, Shoe Makers,
> They all clean themselves with the same water,
> But you still say they look uncouth and untasteful just because of the caste?
> But The Death will not excuse anyone!"

Lalon was primarily a song writer and a Baul. Bauls are people who are basically hermits, but rather than professing religion they cultivate spirituality or philosophy through their songs. Lalon never wrote his philosophy in a formal way. The songs we have from him have been handed down orally by his followers, and only sometimes written down.

As Lalon left his new family with his singing group, he travelled from village to village begging for food, offering to sing songs in return. During that time people started to call him "Fakir," which means beggar. People started noticing him and he started attracting followers. Lalon would take everyone in his band regardless of their caste and without discrimination. There were also female members in his group, which at one point created a controversy. It is said that a prostitute took safe refuge in his group, which became a reason for the inhabitants of a village to refuse them entry to it – and by some accounts – to violently attack them. This particular incident has been addressed in one of his songs:

[9] All block quotations in this commentary are taken from the above translations.

If in secret someone eats food given by a whore,
What harm does it do to the religion?
Lalon asks what actually "Caste" is?
This illusion is never resolved!

The fact that Lalon was born in Hindu family and tradition but later on grew up in a Muslim family has most certainly played a part in his attitude towards the caste system and religious differences. Muslims were out of the castes, but for Lalon this in no way made them any worse than Hindu. And apparently nothing in his experience in the two traditions convinced him that the existent caste class division is to be supported. This has left a clear and significant footprint in his philosophy. Here is what he says about caste division:

All people ask Lalon what is his caste?
In return Lalon asks how does caste looks like?
I have never seen it in my life!
If you do circumcision, you become Muslim!
But for women what is the law?!

Circumcision is a common practice among Muslims, which produces a permanent sign of their religious identity. Here, in raising the issue regarding female Muslims, Lalon also shows his concern for the other sex. At that time, women were not treated as equal in both Hindu and Muslim societies. For instance, in the Hindu society, if the husband of a woman dies, she must also die, going to the firepit along with him. Another example is that Brahmin males wear a holy thread called Paita indicating their social status, but this rule did not apply to Brahmin women. That is why Lalon asks how one can know whether a Brahmin woman belongs to that caste.

At the time, while preaching this essentially secular philosophy, Lalon and his followers faced numerous difficulties and were banned from many places. At last, they received the patronage of the Tagore family (from which descends the famous Bengali Poet Rabindranath Tagore), who were Jamindar (Landowners and regional rulers). Thus, Lalon and his followers made a permanent settlement in Cheuriya, Kushtia, today's Bangladesh, where they lived like in a school practicing the philosophy which they wrote and sang in songs.

Lalon was also a metaphorical spiritual thinker, whose songs were at times hard to understand. For instance, he sings,

In the cage, an unknown bird comes and goes!
I do not know how it happens,
But if I could have known I would have caught the bird and kept it in the cage!
There are eight chambers and nine doors to this cage,
And each of them separated by slits.
And upon this cage or room there are more buildings,
And on the top floor there is a beautiful dance floor!
Just because I am lucky, the bird stays in the cage,
Otherwise, it would have left and flown to the forest!
But you must remember the cage is made out of raw bamboos and really weak!
And Lalon cries and says,
"Soon the cage will be dropped and opened!"

Lalon's interpreters believe that here the bird alludes to the heart as he points to the uncertainty of life. The heart beats and goes out, just as our life is uncertain and can end at any moment. Thus, we should be really content that our life stays within us at all, hoping that it reaches the beautiful dance floor which is an allusion to the highest form of humanity one can achieve. The way to achieve that is to go above and beyond the cage, which is base and traps the life. One has to transcend its levels and go beyond to find the best of oneself.

Lalon was also aware of the challenges standing on one's way to knowing one's own self. He says,

Very near to my House there is an unknown city,
And there lives a neighbor.
But I have never seen that neighbor!
There is endless water in the village,
And it has no beginning nor end!

In this song, the neighbor can be associated with one's true self. Lalon thus says that he does not have any idea about his own true self, that he is desperate to know it, and that he cannot attain this valuable knowledge. Apparently, he believes that his true self lives very close to himself, and yet he also feels that they live far apart from each other. He further on says that he is agonizing in pain and that he is certain that if he can know his true self, then all of his pain will go away. Alas, he realizes that he cannot do it; that is, cannot know his true self, and finds this really hard to bear.

Perhaps the key to this his stance can be found in the turning events of his life. When he was separated from his own family and placed on a boat floating the river, he was practically sent to the unknown. This was a common practice at the time for people with incurable diseases. Rivers were considered a way towards the gods and it was hoped that the gods would cure such unfortunate people and bring them a new life. The kind of rebirth Lalon experienced subsequently in his newly adopted family may have left him feeling the core of his identity shaken, thus prompting him, like many other mystics, to search for his own "true" identity.

This peculiar urge to search for his own self can be detected also in his songs as well. For instance,

When can I be together with the person of my mind!?
I look forward towards this like a thirsty bird,
But all I see is a dark moon!
I want to be the footman of this person,
But my bad luck!
That does not happen!
Just like thunder hides in the clouds,
I am a blind who cannot find the true face of that person!
But when I can remember that face in my mind,
I fear no shame!
Lalon Fakir ponder and says,
The ones who love only they know!

This song has been interpreted as a love song, and it seems very much so. But one can find in it the search for his true self that lives inside his mind. He knows how it looks like but cannot really reach it, this leaving him desperate again.

In his later years, Lalon lived in Akhra (settlement of Bauls), during which time Rabindranath Tagore's elder brother, Jyotirindranath Tagore, visited and interviewed him. Lalon was asked questions about his life, his past, and his philosophy. One of these questions was, "Don't you worry about the religion and afterlife?" Lalon answered, "I am a very small human being! For me this life is everything! I am not very intelligent and I cannot think about those big things like after life and God! I just want to think about what I have here now!"[10]

Lalon died on 17th October 1890 aged 118 years. His tomb is still there in the middle of the settlement he established himself. To this day his legacy goes on. His songs have been passed down orally through his followers. He has influenced a number of Bengali thinkers. He lived a very simple life, seeking for the truth, and calling for a society united under one core value of "humanity." He passionately spoke against the caste system and any form of divisioning in the human society. He wanted to unite people and encourage them to seek their true selves. His songs are sometimes hard to understand but one can find there some clear messages which one can embrace and move forward. He was living in a difficult time but he managed to challenge the socially exclusive status quo of his time by singing songs of equality. Keeping in mind that this man never received any formal education, his songs are a proof that one can search for and obtain core insights about the value of humanity by questioning and endeavoring to know one's very own self. Below is a sketch of him made by Jyotirindranath Tagore during the time of the above-mentioned interview.[11]

[10] Sunil Gangapadhyay, *The Person of My Mind* (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2008) (in Bengali); cf. মনের মানুষ সুনীল গঙ্গোপাধ্যায় আনন্দ পাবলিশার্স.

[11]Source/Photographer, Indian National Museum (বাংলা: ভারতীয় জাতীয় জাদুঘর).

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