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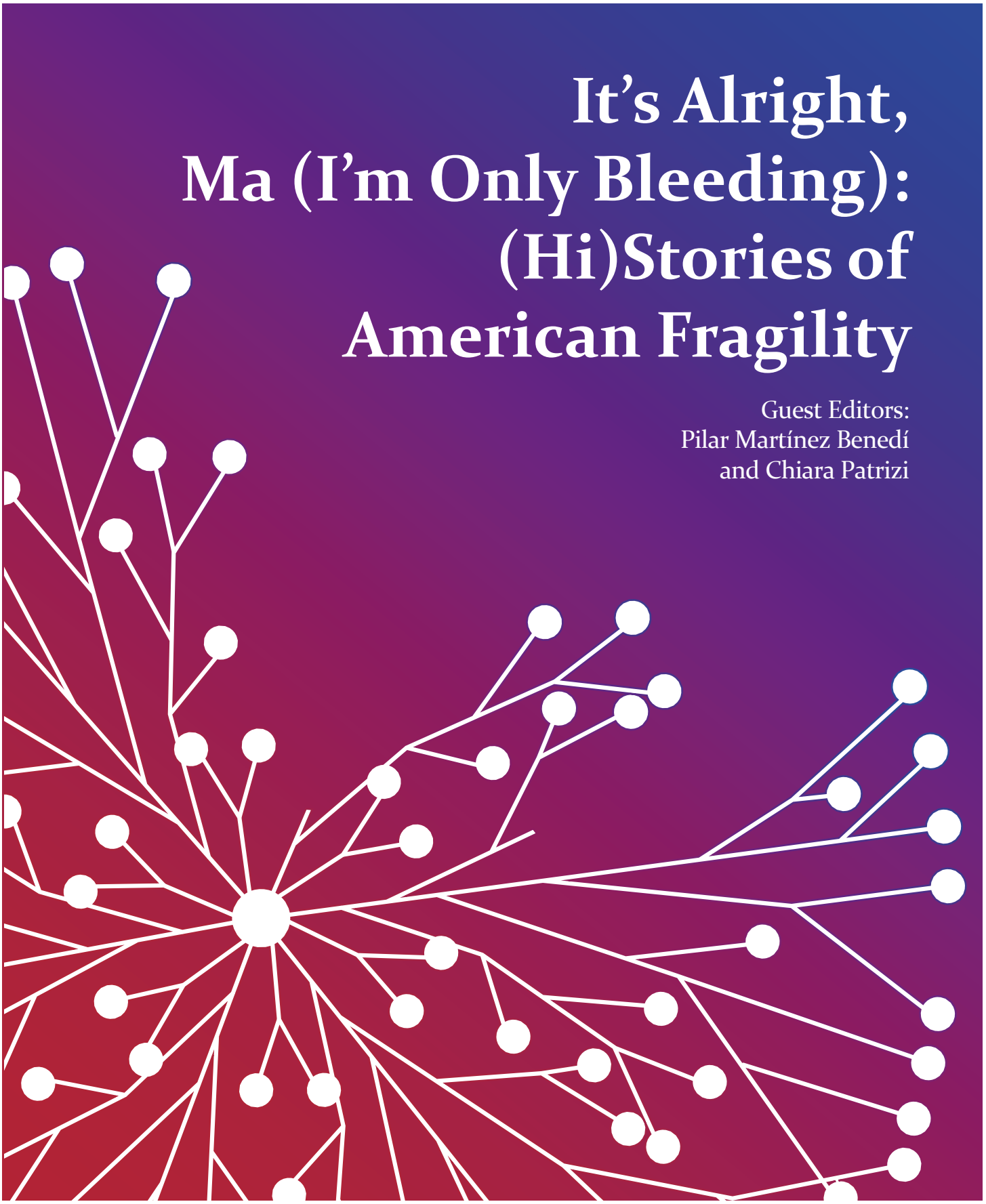
It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding): (Hi)Stories of American Fragility

Guest Editors:
Pilar Martínez Benedí
and Chiara Patrizi



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FOREWORD

ROOF[1]

Ralph James Savarese
Grinnell College, Iowa

One Nation under God, indivisible…

As if under could protect us.
As if under were just small harms and huzzah.
As if under could return the years
For a blouse less fitting, less frumpy.
Now, where is that gift receipt?
As if under were some coal in a stocking,
A minor dig at your brother.
Did he really vote for Trump?
Did he really travel to Washington?
As if loved ones never went roof, then chimney.
As if under let you make out
Like a band-aid, not like a Banshee.
Your eyes are red from keening.
Hell—let us go there in a heartbasket.

[1] Ralph James Savarese is the author of *When This is Over. Pandemic Poems* (2020)–a collection of poems he wrote during the first Covid-19 lockdown in the Spring 2020. "Roof" is a previously unpublished poem. As editors, we are grateful to Savarese for letting us publish it for the first time.

Let us hurry to the cough-in theatre.

OkCOVID:

A new dating app for schemers.

As if one were a number that could hold us

Or scold us when necessary.

As if hunters climbed up into dear stands

And surgeons spoke kindly

To their scalpels.

Politics—beware this bloodborne disease.

As if under said bridge, said troll,

Said to a tee.

As if hospitals made snow for skiing

And love were a Black Diamond.

Holy Mary, Mother of White,

A brother is dying.

As if to bury were to be.

As if ava were ave and *lanche* were *launch*—

His bed's a bead.

Under means over, not yet, not yet, please!

As if a house, your house, suddenly

asked how.

Under—are there any takers?

Winner of the Herman Melville Society's Hennig Cohen Prize, **Ralph James Savarese** is the author of two books of prose, including *See It Feelingly: Classic Novels, Autistic Readers, and the Schooling of a No-Good English Professor* (Duke UP 2018), and three books of poetry, including *When This Is Over* (Ice Cube Press 2020). He is also the co-editor of three collections, including the first on the concept of neurodiversity. A fourth co-edited collection, T*he Futures of Neurodiversity*, is forthcoming with the MLA. With Pilar Martínez Benedí, he is writing a monograph, under contract with Bloomsbury Academic, titled *Neurological Melville: Modeling Interdisciplinary Research in the Humanities and Sciences*. In 2012-2013, he was a fellow at Duke University's Institute for Brain Sciences. He teaches at Grinnell College in Iowa.

BEYOND RESILIENCE: RECLAIMING "THE GLINTS OF EMOTIONS UNDER EMERGENCIES"

Pilar Martínez Benedí
University of L'Aquila

Chiara Patrizi
University of Bologna/University of Trieste

The restrictive measures taken in the late Winter of 2020 against Covid-19 confined many citizens worldwide, as Ralph Savarese's poem intimates, "under one roof." Stringing together wild metaphors, the poem punningly evokes many of the major concerns we experienced during the pandemic (anxiety, fragility, medicalization, loss), even as it puts pressure on what for many is its most controversial and oppressive restriction. Covid lockdowns are more readily associated with isolation and social distancing—"no contact outside your bubble!"—but here Savarese centers what, in the preface to *When This Is Over* (2020), his collection of 'pandemic poems,' he calls the "pressure of proximity" (xiii). Such proximity is first and foremost spatial: Yes, we were isolated, but also forced, together, into sharing a common, often "smallish[,] living room" (xiv). In this literal sense, Savarese's "Roof" refers, of course, to the household, but it also wryly alludes to that "*one* Nation"—that paternalistic political power, that is, bent on providing protection to its most vulnerable citizens, while at the same time enacting neoliberal policies of care that end up making the individual responsible for their own well-being. Nonetheless, the poem insistently yet subtly asks, can one roof (domestic or public) really protect us? Is the household (or, the Nation) really a safe space?

The roof can also be read figuratively, and the proximity as spiritual or psychological. In this sense, being under one roof stands for being in the same boat, as it were, and the poem ostensibly chronicles a commonly shared tragedy—that looming catastrophe or "hell" to which we all go together, in a "*heart*basket," as Savarese playfully

puts it. Yet, what about all the personal tragedies—the "small harms" and "minor digs," the political bickering, the lonelinesses and lost years—the poem touches upon? The significance of proximity thus expands and proliferates—under one roof all of us had to come into close contact or intimacy with our own vulnerabilities (both shared and unique); under one roof, the space between the domestic and the public sphere, between the personal and the communal, collapses.

In the aftermath of the first wave of the pandemic, US novelist Jesmyn Ward similarly delved into the implications of such collapse or proximity, creating a narrative of loss and mourning that explores how individual and global tragedies may intersect and overlap. In "On Witness and Respair," she intertwines the events of the global health crisis with those of the protests following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, as both unfolded around her own grief for the death of her beloved husband. To be clear, our interest in these (lyrical) meditations on the pandemic rests not on the health crisis itself but rather, to use Savarese's (2020) words again, on the "sense of urgency" (xiii) that the pandemic brought about—the imperative, that is, to tend to personal affectivities, sufferings, debilities that often remain subdued in times of global catastrophe, overpowered by the more pressing (so the official narrative goes) communal ailings. In Ward and Savarese, as well as in the activists of the BLM movement, we recognize an unabashed readiness to embrace vulnerability and fragility as instruments of testimony, action, resistance—a shared consciousness through which "to amplify the voices of the dead who sing to [us]" (Ward 2020). Indeed, since the personal can be political in powerful ways, in a society which enforces, either directly or indirectly, not only the right to kill certain citizens, but also the "right to maim" (Puar 2016), debility may represent a political stance, and vulnerability "one of the conditions of the very possibility of resistance" (Butler et al. 2016, 1).

An unprecedented global traumatic event, the Covid-19 pandemic turned the spotlight on human physical and psychological fragility. And human fragility seems to be crucial to fully grasp phenomena like the rekindling of the Black Lives Matter movement and its expansion worldwide, in alliance with other movements that denounce the oppression of peoples of color all around the globe; the invasion of and

War in Ukraine and its political and socio-economic implications; the impact of climate related natural disasters (droughts, heatwaves, floodings)—all present-day global tragedies that point to the personal suffering beneath. By putting vulnerability, debility, fragility at the center of this special issue, however, we do not wish to view them as merely negative conditions or affects—we do not wish to use a syntax of pity. Our main interest is indeed to consider their generative potential: how may the debilitating, draining effects of adversity turn into strength, resilience, and respair (the return to hope after a period of despair)? How may they foster action, resistance, pride? May we think about vulnerability in a way that refuses victimhood and pity and reclaims agency? Here, however, we run the risk of falling back into ableist narratives of self-improvement and rehabilitation—the return to an accepted definition of health and well-being. May we consider vulnerability generative *in itself*, without it fostering resilience or strength—can we, in other words, move beyond the neoliberal infatuation with resilience and find ways to embrace fragility without stigma or pathologization? To reclaim fragility not as the emblem of a status of inferiority with regard to an assumed "normalcy"—something to be overcome and/or put aside in order to fit in the best of all possible worlds—offers the possibility to see it as a condition that has a creative value of its own. This perspective opens up a different approach to fragility, one that is much needed in a society founded on individualism and on the isolation and the stigmatization of those considered "weak." The dimension that most characterizes us as living beings is perhaps our finiteness, and fragility in this sense constitutes a founding element of consciousness, one that implies an unexpectedly subversive awareness of both the self and community, which can fuel social change in times of despair—but not only.

The contributions in this special issue work together to draw a map of US fragility that is both thematic, as Laura de la Parra puts forward in her contribution to this issue, as well as conceptual, as suggested by Austin James Bailey's analysis of *The Souls of Black Folk*. Our contributors look at different variations of fragility in different contexts and geographies: the (medicalized) depression and loneliness fostered by neoliberal practices of care; the woundedness (both symbolic and material) of the female

experience in, by, across the Border; the apparently irresolvable conflict between mutual care and support, and normative masculinity in the military; the imposed (and misrecognized or misrepresented) fragility of black life by a hegemonic public discourse that perpetuates mainstream racial imaginaries as it silences black speech. But fragility emerges also as the very condition of thinking of and expressing the affective flows undergirding that same fragility, debility, vulnerability. The fragility or precariousness, that is, of any discourse that aspires to grasp what can only be described as ungraspable—those corporeal sensations, gut reactions, unparsed emotions that "are felt but defy clear articulation," to borrow from Bailey, and which constitute our primal relation with the world. While Bailey's essay revolves quite explicitly around this question, most of our contributors, if less explicitly, also grapple with that conceptual or structural fragility while thinking about the many forms fragility may take: how to effectively address this affective dimension in a cultural terrain where the distinction between mind and body, between rationality and affectivity, still seems to hold?

In her essay, de la Parra focuses on the precarious bodies of US society and on the way in which Claudia Rankine's lyrical 'I' demands recognition for those othered and stigmatized subjects who are excluded even from a national grief, that of 9/11, that should have created a community under the same tragedy. According to de la Parra, Rankine's interest in the most fragile components of society in a historical moment of national fragility illuminates the possibility to acknowledge the human condition as essentially vulnerable and, perhaps exactly because of this, open to change—economic, political, social, and ultimately communal. Similarly writing about being in/at the margins of US society, Cristina Martín Hernández's "Reclaiming Wounds: Personal Narratives and Collective Memory in Norma Elía Cantú's Autobiographical Writing" reads Cantú's poetry and her "fictional autobioethnography" together as a conversation about women's autobiographical writing and Chicana feminist subjectivity in the borderlands. In Cantú, Hernández sees the border as both a site of vulnerability and a site of empowerment, a wound that opens on and encompasses both communal and personal grief.

Michael D'Addario continues the conversation by looking at fragility and un/care from within the very institutions that make the United States and focusing on vulnerability and 'warrior ethos' among US soldiers and veterans. In "Soldiers Home: Post-Traumatic Stress, Warrior Masculinity, and the (Re)Framing of Care," D'Addario turns to three literary works—Ernest Hemingway's "Soldier's Home" (1925), George Saunders's "Home" (2011), and Toni Morrison's *Home* (2012)—and reads them through the lens of Whitman's *Drum Taps* and the studies on PTSD in veterans. All these works, D'Addario argues, interrogate the very essence of "normative masculinity," calling for a change that may enable a different way of providing and receiving care, one that does not equal vulnerability with weakness. Meili Steele's "Discursive Incarceration: Black Fragility in a Divided Public Sphere" also deals with what can be called institutional normalcy, but brings the focus on how this form of control affects US' highly-racialized society in a way that prevents radical change. Taking Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me* (2015) as literary examples of the encounters between black and dominant public spheres, Steele argues that black people have historically been forced to cope with an hegemonic public sphere whose rhetoric of formal equality is no less violent than the physical attacks of other branches of the institutions in enforcing subjugation and dismissing fragility.

Austin J. Bailey and Thomas J. Ferraro join the conversation by intertwining the public and private in two different historical contexts, both emblematic of the way in which US society deals with the politics of crisis and vulnerability. Bailey's "'Gothic' Ontology and Vital Affect in *The Souls of Black Folk*" provides a reading of W. E. B. Du Bois through William James's radical empiricism that brings the embodied and affective dimensions of race into critical focus, thus highlighting the various manifestations of fragmentation, precariousness, and ontological fragility that Du Bois's text deploys and often subverts when addressing racial crisis. Ferraro's "It's G-d's Bloody Rule, Ma" explores the Judaic martyrology in E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*, a dimension that sheds light on the novel's public-as-private narrative of vulnerability and suffering by involving the readers as witnesses of the unfolding implications of Daniel's "trouble breathing."

The contributors of this special issue of *JAm It!* explore the creative, generative possibilities of private fragilities in the US present and past. Either as a sign of suffering and grief, or as a valiant fight against adversity, and ultimately as the very measure of our relation with existence, encompassing all that is beyond our control in both the outer and the inner world, vulnerability in its many facets emerges as a fundamental component of the human condition. A component that acquires even more prominence in moments of public or communal grief. Writing after having witnessed the horrors of the Civil War first-hand as a war nurse, Walt Whitman privileged precisely this kind of intimate fragility of "American young and middle aged men," as they "face death," and "stand personal anguish and sickness" over the "political interests" involved in the war. "As, in the glints of emotions under emergencies, and the indirect traits and asides in Plutarch," he wrote, "we get far profounder clues to the antique world than all its more formal history" (Whitman 1982, 778). By paying attention to the "minor scenes and interiors" (ibid.) of everyday American fragilities, our authors are contributing to finding new ways through which, contrary to what the American bard thought, the real war *will* get in the books.

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Pilar Martínez Benedí has taught at the University of Turin and at the University of L'Aquila. Her first book, *The Insuperability of Sensation. Indagini letterarie tra mente, corpo e affect, on literature and embodied cognition*, was published in 2018. Her work has appeared or will appear in *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, *Ácoma*, *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies*, *Textual Practice*, *African American Review*, the Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Herman Melville, *Ahab Unbound: Melville and the Materialist Turn*, and the Oxford Handbook to Walt Whitman. She is now working, with Ralph James Savarese, on a monograph on "Neurological" Melville. Email address: mariapilar.martinezbenedi@univaq.it

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LONELINESS, GRIEF, AND THE (UN)CARING STATE: COLLECTIVE AILMENTS IN CLAUDIA RANKINE'S *DON'T LET ME BE LONELY: AN AMERICAN LYRIC*[1]

Laura de la Parra Fernández
Complutense University of Madrid

ABSTRACT

This essay analyzes Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* (2004) from the perspective of "ugly feelings" (Ngai 2005), such as disavowed mourning (Butler 2004) or loneliness, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Following Judith Butler's contention about the hindered possibility for community in the recognition of US national vulnerability, I will argue that Rankine's work underscores the disparities in public recognition of grief and private care for Othered subjects' pain in contemporary American society. In particular, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* displays a series of physical and mental collective ailments in US citizens, such as medicalized depression, as Rankine attempts to bear witness to the institutionalized injustice and erasure of the violence exerted upon America's precarious bodies. The text enacts a form of recognition, only if temporary, through the fragmented use of the narrative/lyric 'I,' performatively demanding action from the reader.

Keywords: Claudia Rankine; 9/11; neoliberalism; lyric essay; affect theory

INTRODUCTION

In *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* (2004), Claudia Rankine explores what American citizenship means after 9/11. Mediated by loneliness, grief, and racism, depression is presented as a pervasive illness throughout the country, as the narrator recounts the lack of trust and recognition that she encounters in others in the atomized neoliberal state. In her essays on 9/11 and US citizenship, Judith Butler (2004) conceptualizes vulnerability as "an ethical encounter" with the Other (43), for it is an intrinsic human experience. For Butler, vulnerability is rooted in the realization that "we can be injured, that others can be injured, that we are subject to death at the whim of another, all reasons for both fear and grief" (xii). Vulnerability also brings about the

[1] This research is part of the project "Gender and Pathography from a Transnational Perspective" (PID2020-113330-GBI00), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (10.13039/501100011033).

idea that some lives are more grievable than others, and thus, some lives are more livable than others (Butler 2004, 30-1). Therefore, in a situation of generalized grief and mourning, it is not always the case that a collective sense of belonging and new notions of care emerge; rather, exclusionary and violent structures may be reinforced.

This essay analyzes how Rankine posits collective depression and a generalized feeling of affective, social, and political detachment as a result of the precarity of life in America. As will be explored, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* criticizes neoliberal healthcare practices, particularly the lack of mental health provision, and structural racism, calling for a collective recognition of grief. Engaging aesthetically with negative affect, as Sianne Ngai (2005) argues in *Ugly Feelings*, may be politically productive, for it lays bare "a general state of obstructed agency" (3), both individual and collective. Indeed, a resistance to ambivalent attachments to the "good life," or to what Lauren Berlant (2011) has termed "cruel optimism," may foster alternative ways of imagining belonging and the community, or, at least, resituating the narrator's agency by putting the subject's vulnerability at the center. In this paper I will argue how, by refusing a return to a sort of "good life" from the past, Rankine's lyric essay opens up a space for "reimagining the possibility of community on the basis of vulnerability and loss" (Butler 2004, 20), letting go of monolithic experiences of Americanness and mourning, whilst aiming to speak from the individual to the collective through the multimedia lyric essay form.

A COLLECTIVE DISEASE: THE POLITICS OF (UN)CARING

As Richard Gray argues (2011), what the 9/11 attacks brought about in the United States was not only the generalized feeling of crisis and loss of innocence, as it had happened with previous major events such as the Civil War (2-3), but also the new fear that America itself "was no longer secure and, to that extent, no longer home" (5), disregarding the fact that it was already not home for some. According to Butler (2004), the 9/11 attacks unveiled an unprecedented vulnerability in the nation, as the common condition of the potential to be injured is what defines us as humans (xii). However, the big-scale event of individual and national injury and grief, rather than providing a space

to rethink and imagine ways of belonging to a "global community," turned to state-legitimized violence as a form of retribution (Butler 2004, xi).

The failure of mourning caused by retributive violence as an attempt of "getting through the crisis" has left "an open wound, a gap or emptiness in the psychic life of the nation" (Gray 2001, 9). Further, it also failed to acknowledge previous and new forms of erasure of the grief of certain individuals, such as racialized Others, who were "deemed dangerous" in the light of the attacks (Butler 2004, 78), or even lives whose vulnerability was never recognized in the first place, and whose injury could, therefore, not be grieved (43). Butler's conception of life as ultimately defined by vulnerability, thus, radically challenges the neoliberal governmentality of the self-regulated individual, who becomes an "entrepreneurial actor[ ] in every sphere of life" (Brown 2005, 42). Neoliberal configurations of a rather individualistic and self-managed approach in all realms of everyday life set forth a politics of uncaring, whereby every individual is supposed to fend for oneself. If individuals fail to do so, they become a failure, undeserving of care from the state, for if health can be performed, its failure can also be deemed a moral failure (Brown and Baker 2013, 32). The ill citizen, then, must rely on personal support networks which, as Rankine poses, are fragile and temporary.

In particular, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* focuses on the unrecognized pain and everyday violence exerted upon racialized bodies, to the point where this violence translates into "physiological and psychological" damage (Dobbs 2020, 168) that could lead to understanding racism and systemic injustice as "a public health issue" (173).[2] As the narrator explains, ever since she could remember, she has been presented with an image in the media that equated black with death: "The years went by and people only died in television—if they weren't Black, they were wearing black or were terminally ill" (Rankine 2004, 5). The conflation between black and terminally ill lives underlines their being read as somehow expendable, following Butler (2004), "always already lost, or, rather, they never 'were'" (33). This account of sick and wasted bodies—including the

[2] As Kevin Quashie (2021) points out, "black humanity"—and aliveness—"has to be argued over and again" (2), as black life is repeatedly conjoined with images of death.

narrator's—exposes a social investment in white American pain and grief, disregarding longstanding forms of intra-national exclusion and injury. This results in what Angela Hume (2016) equates with Berlant's "slow death" (87): a slow wearing of racialized bodies through institutional malpractices, health inequalities, and medical negligence "that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence" (Berlant 2007, 754). That is, lived experience is historically and materially grounded in unequal specters of recognition, sovereignty, and the right to care in the national space.

Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* enacts a retrieval of disavowed mourning as fabricated in public discourses, addressing how the community has failed its most precarious subjects. By making use of the narrative/lyric 'I,'[3] Rankine recounts apparently disconnected events of individual mourning and grief in the aftermath of 9/11, pointing at the violence that was already taking place within the US before and after the attacks, especially against racialized citizens. The fact that their lives were not grievable essentially counters the epitomizing American optimism: "sadness lives in the recognition that a life can not matter" (Rankine 2004, 23). As Rebecca Macmillan asserts (2017), sadness in the text becomes "a feeling or mode of understanding that literally resides in the physical body" (191). Acting as a sort of epistemology, depression, an ailment that affects numerous subjects populating the text, including the speaker, also functions as a political tool to foster social change. As Ann Cvetkovich (2012) has argued, depression, though it may be considered ordinary in contemporary neoliberal society, "is relevant not just to queer politics; it also pertains to the politics of race in the wake of the incomplete projects of civil rights and decolonization. … A depressive antisociality can accompany an insistence that the past is not over yet" (7). In other words, depression, understood as a source of knowledge about the surrounding reality, can become a tool for imagining a different future and propelling change, insofar as it does

[3] I will use 'narrative/lyric 'I" interchangeably because I consider *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* a lyric essay, a hybrid genre whose name was coined by John D'Agata and Deborah Tall in the Fall 1997 *Seneca Review* issue. It refers to a combination of media and literary devices whereby the text combines elements from poetry and non-fictional prose, such as quotations, images, use of verse, etc. Although her work is often labeled as "poetry," Rankine's text can be argued to fall into this category that accounts better for the hybrid nature of her writing. Reed (2014), instead, has approached the text as what he terms "a postlyric poem" (108).

not yearn for an idealized past, as state-approved forms of grieving may turn to. In this sense, Rankine (2015) herself has elsewhere advocated for public forms of mourning that counter hegemonic discourses. For instance, she has posited the Black Lives Matter movement (para. 11) as a way to reimagine community, belonging, and the national space by mobilizing negative affects.

Don't Let Me Be Lonely is a multimodal lyric essay that combines stories of people close to the narrator, along with cut-ups from pieces of news and adverts on TV, and other real-life documents such as X-ray, drug labels, and billboards. This way, Rankine aims to highlight how material conditions and public discourses of belonging are legitimized through media, and how they inform subject-formation, our collective, and material understanding of reality. This "archival poetics," as Macmillan (2017) has described Rankine's writing, calls for "the cultivation of awareness to structural conditions and awareness to how these conditions are recorded and passed on" (176). That is, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* provides different materials for the reader to engage with and reflect upon their way of relating to others. As will be explained in the following sections, it is through these textual interactions that social change can be put forth, although whether the performativity of the text is effective or not is left open on a hopeful note at the end.

Although Rankine has claimed that the categorization of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* as a lyric essay was due to "the marketing process," her notion of the lyric as "the intimate" (quoted in Macmillan 2017, 197) reveals how the lyric essay connects traditionally public aspects of the essay with a more intimate notion of the private self in the lyric. This 'public lyric' acknowledges both the historical and the emotional dimensions of the subject's coming into being. As Amy Bonnaffons (2016) explains, the combination of the terms 'lyric' and 'essay' suggests "the notion that a poem's speaker can transcend the boundaries of the poet's actual, historical self," even allowing for the "choral plurality" that a 'lyric I' may entail (para. 4.2). Further, as Jonathan Culler affirms, the ritualistic dimension of the lyric "positions the reader as the speaker" (2015, 24), exchanging and destabilizing the categories of speaker and addressee. Rankine's lyric 'I,' grounded in national US space, explores its own emergence through

relationality and its shortcomings. Like Rankine's 2014 renowned work *Citizen*, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* bears the subtitle "An American Lyric." Both foster an account beyond the self, implying a sort of national lyric in the Whitmanesque tradition.[4] However, as Hume (2016) affirms, this subtitle also "invokes a contested genre history" (104), where what it means to be an American citizen is questioned and examined, contesting hegemonic narratives. In fact, both texts end up "exposing the interrelation and co-constitution of race and environment" (ibid.). In other words, they shed light on how subjectivity emerges from an embodied relation between unequal individuals, where certain modes of subjectivity are more recognized than others. As the narrator ironically highlights, the seemingly liberating narrative of American individualism has become monolithic, entrapping, a form of surveillance in itself: "Now it is the twenty-first century and either you are with us or you are against us. Where is your flag?" (Rankine 2004, 91). Thus, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* undoes an idealized idea of community, belonging and the "good life," which may in turn "posit alternative forms of community," given that "the ways such saying of 'I' marks at once the precondition for belonging—it must be spoken in a necessarily shared language—and the impossibility of that belonging because belonging individuates, separates the speaker from the 'we'" (Reed 2014, 110). That is, American community as imagined by Whitman, for instance, is rendered impossible, as Rankine's struggles to articulate a coherent 'I' demonstrate: "Is 'I' even me or am 'I' a gearshift to get from one sentence to the next? Should we say we? Is the voice not various if I take responsibility for it? What does my subject mean to me?" (Rankine 2004, 54). The 'I,' then, is not part of a subjective 'we,' but rather part of a so-called body politic, which in Rankine's speaker is sick from the disconnection between its parts, sick from loneliness. How, then, do we account for the 'we,' how can we even imagine this 'we' if there is not such a thing? How do we account for the pain of others if there are no public discourses to articulate the pain of the self?

[4] Antonella Francini (2015) links Rankine's *American lyrics* to the inheritance of great American poets such as Walt Whitman or Williams Carlos Williams, establishing a connection between *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* and *Citizen* (178). Andrew Gorin (2019) also argues in favor of reading the two texts as part of a wider, post-confessional take on American citizenship and American poetry (98).

Rankine's method consists of juxtaposing mixed media, such as news, footnotes that expand upon the news stories, proofs or *realia* from stories close to the narrator, and the narrative thread of the I itself. This "archival poetics" (Macmillan 2017, 176) unveils and accounts for the "implications of how combinations of words and images construct the world, taking in the virtual and material nature of contemporary existence as well as questioning the commercial and political image-texts that constitute reality for most people" (Kimberley 2011, 777). The addition of such material documents, as in the case of her deceased friends—the mammogram of a friend who died after a delayed diagnosis of breast cancer (Rankine 2004, 8) and the chalkboard from a friend who died from Alzheimer's disease and who wrote, "This is the most miserable time of my life," after being moved to a care home (17)—bear witness to the voices whose grief was never acknowledged during their lifetime. The speaker curates, as it were, her own way of *producing* media through literature, "refract[ing] the lyric 'now' into a more capacious time rooted in language's mediality" (Reed 2014, 118), and also opens up a public space to grieve. That is, the pieces from real life are situated next to mediated stories and writing in verse in order to attempt to understand—or not—how we make sense of reality. Reality, in sum, is always already mediated, and the text "call[s] us into new forms of association" (Reed 2014, 121) and recognition of the Other.

The stories collected throughout the different lyric fragments try to provide an answer to the question "Why do people waste away?" (Rankine 2004, 11). By collecting seemingly disconnected pains and giving voice to individual ailments in the backdrop of 9/11, together with the narrative 'I''s medicalized depression, the text brings to the fore the uncaring nature of the neoliberal state in the early 2000s, which aims for citizens' functional productivity, rather than collective care, even to the point where life is endangered. For instance, the text recounts the late breast cancer diagnosis of one of the narrator's friends, as the narrative 'I' confronts for-profit healthcare as one of the hazards of precarious life in the US: "The lump was misdiagnosed a year earlier. Can we say she might have lived had her doctor not screwed up? If yes—when does her death actually occur?" (9). Who is to be held responsible for caring for the life of the Other in such an atomized society that relies on individual self-management? As Hume (2016)

affirms, Rankine's "wasting body" is "made sick under capitalism and the state, while simultaneously being regarded as surplus by these same structures" (79). Thus, institutions not only do not help patients, but Rankine's account involves a pervasive sense of loneliness, one where suicide helplines and anti-depressant ads target TV viewers late at night, aware of their loneliness (Rankine 2004, 7). Even the narrator's management of her depression by the doctors is presented in economic terms: "I was switched from Prozac to fluoxetine. Prozac's patent is up, and now that the generic brand, fluoxetine, is available, the insurance company will only cover that, my editors say casually" (53). The narrator herself is medicalized, the solution found in a society that wants to keep productive citizens running in the most optimized way without questioning its power dynamics, and where structural injustices become health problems that in turn stigmatize and pathologize precarious bodies (Dobbs 2020, 73).

Rankine's engagement with depression as a public and collective feeling thus denounces the "crisis of care" (Fraser 2016, 99) in contemporary US society, whereby care has become commodified and unaffordable in many cases, endangering social reproduction. Without support networks—usually comprised by women—willing to care for others for free, many are devoid of care provision, becoming especially vulnerable if illness precludes paid work. Though there are small acts of companionship and care in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, such as the narrator's husband checking in on her late at night (63), or the narrator visiting her depressed friend (42), the text highlights that loneliness is the most pervasive ailment in contemporary America—a result of a lack of care is what eventually brings about death, portrayed as a sort of death-in-life state as well as an omen: "You'd let me be lonely?/ I thought I was dead" (16). Circumventing loneliness can, then, become a first step to solve the crisis of care, by prompting a recognition of the suffering of the Other: "Then all life is a form of waiting, but it is the waiting of loneliness. One waits to recognize the other, to see the other as one sees the self" (Rankine 2004, 120). But not caring is also a form of harm: the text emphasizes Butler's contention that "we are not only constituted by our relations but also dispossessed by them as well" (Rankine 2004, 24). Unrecognized vulnerability, thus, also prompts a politics of uncaring, but caring cannot be imposed upon the subject: it

must be reworked, reclaimed, and enacted. As I will show in the next section, this task is attempted through what Cvetkovich (2012) calls "performative writing" (15): a writing that explores the conditions that lead to collective depression and that can foster, or at least stand in proximity to imagining the possibility of change by working around the lyric 'I''s private sadness as a site of knowledge.

BODIES OF FEELING: THE LYRIC 'I'

My contention is that *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* aims to reinstate, or, at least, to lay bare the structures that preclude a politics of caring by deconstructing the narrative/lyric 'I,' showing "how images and objects have begun to stand in for aspects of what we are" (Kimberley 2011, 786). In her essay "The First Person in the Twenty-First Century," Claudia Rankine (2001) explains that language is grounded in lived experience (132). Thus, her writing aims to bridge bodily experience with "the languaged self" (ibid.). This self, however, needs to be "investigated," dismantled, and questioned, for, otherwise, "[n]ot to investigate subjectivity is to reinforce cultural stereotypes, erasing the compromises and assertions that compress the languaged self. All assertions of the self have consequences of meaning greater than the typographical space and 'I' inhabits." (Rankine 2001, 133). For Rankine, the use of the 'I' carries with it a responsibility, that of understanding where that 'I' is speaking from, and deconstructing it: the "languaged self, then, in order to keep itself human, in order to cohere, has to fragment." (132). Rankine then undoes the 'I' as an authoritative element, and, instead, turns her writing into an investigation of how this 'I' comes to be: the assumed private lyric of an 'I' is made public. This 'I,' therefore, does not aim to speak for others—not even for itself. Rather, it aims to understand how subjectivity becomes a site for enunciation and entrapment at once: "In truth, no one exists behind the languaged self. I myself am nothing, though *feeling* everything. It is this nothingness that tries to cement itself into a singular subject position" (Rankine 2001, 134; emphasis added). If the languaged self is constructed, it is done so through feelings and affects that arise from material experience and configure its understanding: the languaged self is at once historical and emotional. By undoing these automatic assumptions about reality and the self, the lyric

'I' challenges the readers to take responsibility in understanding the grounded determinants of their subjectivity, so that awareness may arise in their relation to others, including seemingly private feelings and emotions.

The lyric 'I' of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* mentions that she is writing a book on the liver (Rankine 2004, 54). The liver, thought in medieval medicine to constitute the seat where passions were fabricated (Hendrie 2021, para. 4), serves as a starting point for the lyric 'I' to search for a common origin of feelings. Affects and feelings construe attachments that shape the social space. As Sara Ahmed (2004) has argued, feelings "*do things* . . . they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space" (119). That is, feelings become affects by attaching themselves to bodies in one way or another, constituting markers of political and social meaning. The narrator suggests that looking at feelings—her own and others'—may provide further insight into the reality of bodily experience, and thus, of political experience: "it finally occurs to me that feelings fill the gaps created by the indirectness of experience" (Rankine 2004, 89). Following the metaphor of the body politic, hence, American society is posited as suffering from collective loneliness, from a sense of disembodiment and unbelonging, which, in turn, causes all sorts of physical and mental illnesses. Private ailing is, therefore, public and collective. In a picture of the human body, the narrator connects the liver and the stomach to a great US-shaped organ. This points directly to American society's collective ailment—the fact that the liver of the US may not be processing emotions. The liver, as "the largest organ next to the soul, which looms large though it is hidden" (Rankine 2004, 54), embodies the ability to understand and search for the Other's soul as well as for the narrator's.

But reaching and understanding the Other's difficult emotions, or "ugly feelings," in Sianne Ngai's words (2005), is not an easy task. Our current contemporary culture refuses to recognize feelings such as sadness, believing instead that the pain of others can be easily erased by changing a TV channel: "Sad is one of those words that has given up its life for our country, it's been a martyr for the American dream, it's been neutralized, co-opted by our culture to suggest a tinge of discomfort that lasts the time it takes for this and then for that to happen, the time it takes to change a channel. But

sadness is real because it once meant something real" (Rankine 2004, 108). Recognizing others' pain entails more than superficially glancing at the news: sadness takes material form and is embodied by those suffering from it. This is why the text provides endnotes to the news stories, expanding upon historical events and injustices, and emphasizing "the discrepancies between this form of literary assemblage and the contained format of TV news media, promoting the former as an antidote for the failings of the latter" (Macmillan 2011, 175). Rankine's use of the television as a media for collective communication sheds light on the trivialization of certain experiences, and on the impossibility of going beyond a homogenized discourse that reaches people. As signaled by the images of a TV with white noise at the start of every fragment, mediated accounts of suffering may actually provoke disconnection and desensitization, not only from seemingly distant incidents, but also from our most immediate, everyday reality.

The effects of monolithic rendering of events and the lack of a public account and recognition of grief are subverted by the fragmented layout of the lyric essay as deployed by Rankine. The text directly demands both physical and intellectual engagement from readers in the construction of meaning, as Macmillan (2017) explains:

> readers may engage with *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* by regularly flipping between the full pages and the endnotes to see whether a note accompanies and extends the poetry, or they may wait until the end of their reading to take in the additional information—likely needing to go back and carefully match up the latter material with the former. Either way, readers end up gaining perspective on their own habits of focus and information management. (186)

Thus, readers may be invited to research the stories presented by themselves (Welch 2015, 134), to respond to and challenge racial injustice, either in real life or at least in the stories they see on TV, by piecing together the different stories presented by the narrator. Of course, this performative aspect of the text may fail if readers choose not to engage with it. Despite the hope that it may happen, the narrator is also aware of the possibility of failure, as will be later explained. As Rankine (2015) affirms in an article for the *New York Times*, public grieving may be disregarded, and the showcasing of a suffering body may even be reified and used as a cautionary tale, but the making of private experiences public also implies resistance and a demand for recognition (para.

14). Speaking about Black Lives Matter, Rankine claims that "[n]ational mourning . . . is a mode of intervention and interruption that might itself be assimilated into the category of public annoyance. This is altogether possible; but also possible is the recognition that it's a lack of feeling for another that is our problem. *Grief, then, for these deceased others might align some of us, for the first time, with the living*" (para. 23; emphasis added). Public mourning may be political insofar as it inquires on the conditions that sustain the aforementioned "slow death" and may incite change and new forms of connection. As Tana Jean Welch (2015) explains, the blank space in between the fragments in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* "allows for meditative analysis—one might even use the space for jotting reflective notes. There is no channel to switch, no link to click, no cable news ticker floating across the bottom of the page" (130). The text's uncomfortable interruptions engage the reader in meaning-making, by compelling them to turn the page, decide to look deeper or even write their thoughts on the page, or give up reading altogether. The fragmentary nature of the text does not allow for comfort or distraction, while at the same time its blank spaces provide the reader time to digest each fragment.

Following the performative quality of Rankine's lyric essay, the lyric 'I' enacts this recognition of others' pain herself, by juxtaposing the narrator's and her friends' diseases, medical negligence, and loneliness with institutional violence and racial inequality. Further, the narrator reacts to the countless news about racial violence, showing what seeing the pain of other people provokes in her: "Sometimes I look into someone's face and I must brace myself—the blow on its way" (Rankine 2014, 56). This looking into an Other's face, however, is mediated by the TV, as the poetic voice acknowledges how much harder it is to look and recognize someone in real life: "if I catch someone's eye, I quickly look away . . . In real life the looking away is the apology, despite the fact that when I look away I almost always feel guilty" (Rankine 2004, 98). Looking at the Other, in real life, proves too difficult, for it brings about guilt—the guilt of not wanting to see someone else's grief and pain because they demand action from oneself. Unlike TV channels that can be chosen, tailored, changed for comfort, seeing a

person in pain from a close distance demands our involvement, going beyond "the paradox of spectating," which results "into a shirking of responsibility" (Welch 2015, 132).

The fragmented discourse of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* resists a linear reading while indirectly demanding action from the reader: associations between texts and stories must be made, gaps need to be filled in by the reader. The complex structure of the text may at once produce alienation—if a reader chooses not to engage, or not to react emotionally or physically—while it attempts to find a way to connect with the Other. By means of its reflexive structure, the reader sees the narrator watch and react to an Other's pain. It is precisely this constructed artificiality of the encounter with the Other that brings the narrator back to realize her own materiality, which may, in turn, be mirrored in the reader.[5] For example, when reading a piece of news about AIDS activism in South Africa, where President Mbeki had long denied antiretrovirals before five million people became infected with the virus, the narrator says:

> My body relaxes. My shoulders fall back. I had not known that my distress at Mbeki's previous position against distribution of the drugs had physically lodged itself like a virus within me . . .
> It is not possible to communicate how useless, how much like a skin-sack of uselessness I felt . . . One observes, one recognizes without being recognized. One opens the paper. One turns on the television. Nothing changes. My distress grows into nothing. Thou art nothing.
> Such distress moved in with my muscle and bone. Its entrance by necessity slowly translated my already grief into a tremendously exhausted hope. The translation occurred unconsciously, perhaps occurred simply because I am alive. The translation occurs as a form of life. Then life, which seems so full of waiting, awakes suddenly into a life of hope. (Rankine 2004, 117-18)

Hence, this encounter is physical, embodied, and signals how the subject is changed by this interaction through a recognition of the Other's pain: embodied emotion becomes a site for knowledge and recognition, at the very least an "annoyance"—as Rankine referred to BLM protests—that the reader must work through. However, the encounter is also brief: the lyric 'I' explains that her TV is always on because she cannot sleep

[5] See Rita Felski's theory of recognition as a form of epistemology in literature (2008).

(Rankine 2004, 29). The TV cannot listen to or reply to the speaker, and she is left to her own musings. For instance, watching a commercial of antidepressants, the words "Your life is waiting" appear on the screen. In the text, an image of a TV screen with those words is inserted, doubling the speaker's discourse. The narrator comments to herself, "I wonder, for what, for what does it wait? For life I guess" (ibid.). Later, the narrator will turn the slogan around: "Then all life is a form of waiting" (120), where waiting stands for loneliness, for the lack of recognition of someone else's life. The commercial's catchphrase keeps "staring back" at the narrator until she falls asleep (29), mirroring the way the text may be seen by readers—the response cannot be taken for granted. At the same time, the text does not give away neat, simple messages like TV commercials trying to sell their products, but demands the active involvement of the reader to make sense of the different texts, media, and discourses intertwined. As Rankine (2001) has asserted, "responsibility on the page is what makes use of the first-person social. It recognizes that we are always being broken into (visually and invisibly) by history, memory, current events, the phone, e-mail, a kiss, calls for nature, whatever" (132). Thus, Rankine's text investigates experience and subjectivity as grounded in the material self of everyday experience.

In order to understand how we come into subjectivity—i.e., how the 'I' becomes a different 'I'—, the text foregrounds the pivotal difference between looking at or away from the Other in the making of the subject. In fact, the lack of responsibility toward one another is what makes the subjects of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* sick: the act of looking away means I will not be looked at in turn. The lyric 'I' delves into the 9/11 terrorist attacks, pondering on how someone who stops fearing death and therefore caring for their own life, does not care about other people's lives. In a collective sense, responsibility and accountability for oneself and for others are what may heal a sick community: "The minute you stop fearing death you are no longer controlled by governments and councils. In a sense, you are no longer accountable to life. The relationships embedded between the 'I' and the 'we' unhinge and lose all sense of responsibility. That 'you,' functioning as other, now exists beyond our notions of civil and social space" (Rankine 2004, 84). Looking away is a form of uncaring, by

unburdening the subject's social responsibility. Consequently, not caring for others also implies letting one's own life go, to inhabit a feeling of loneliness that is posited as a state close to death: "I felt it too./ The loneliness?/ I let it happen./ By feeling?/ By not not feeling./ That's too much…/ Like dying?/ Maybe, or death is second./ Second to what?/ To loneliness./ Define loneliness" (Rankine 2004, 58). This idea is repeated throughout the text, like a refrain, probing onto the reader's ability to react in order to avoid their own death in life, as well as the narrator's. Death in life entails a complete disavowal of life, a non-recognition of the Other and, subsequently, an erasure of the self. This is further emphasized by the verse form of the idea, which is presented as a sort of internal dialogue, but can also be read as an exchange between interlocutors, if the reader wishes to be hopeful—it is not possible to know. The hope of this encounter with the Other is encapsulated in the writing, where the borders between a possible interlocutor and the lyric 'I' are blurred: "Or maybe hoping is the same as waiting. It can be futile/ Waiting for what?/ For a life to begin./ I am here./ And I am still lonely" (119). The 'I' cannot exist without the 'you.' Yet, the text also posits that an encounter where historically grounded forms of institutional violence are overlooked will not provide an end to the speaker's "slow death" in this encounter and, therefore, to collective depression.

THE (IM)POSSIBILITY OF AN ENCOUNTER

Even if an encounter with the Other cannot be fully accounted for in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* through its purposely mediated accounts, the trace of this encounter can be retrieved through Rankine's writing. The sharing of other people's stories, the sharing of grief and how subjects are shaped by it, performs an ethical encounter with the Other who listens and who is affected by this listening. As Butler argues (2004), when a subject tells a story, "the very 'I' is called into question by its relation to the Other, a relation that does not precisely reduce me to speechlessness, but does nevertheless clutter my speech with signs of its undoing" (23). That is, the very speaking 'I,' as well as the listening Other, are undone in this encounter of the recognition of vulnerability. This encounter, as we see, is fragile, precarious, afforded only in glimpses and "glitches" and

deferred approximations: "sadness is real because it once meant something real" (Rankine 2004, 108). The signified is substituted by the signifier in the text, emptied of meaning so that the act of uttering it can become meaningful again. But the reader is meant to look for the meaning of this "realness" themselves, in an act of hope, or, perhaps, of cruel optimism.

Don't Let Me Be Lonely engages with what Berlant (2011) has termed "cruel optimism," for, Rankine considers, "it talks back to the unreadable or unbearable encounter . . . [Berlant] offer[s] pathways to consider, sidestep, and groove into disruption" (Rankine 2014a, para. 23). That is, realizing that what one desires is what is actually hurting may become liberating, showing or creating diverting paths that might have gone unnoticed before. Rankine herself has acknowledged her interest in the term "cruel optimism" in an interview with Berlant (Rankine 2014, para. 23). Cruel optimism can be defined as desiring something that in fact prevents achieving the very ideal that the subject desires (Berlant 2011, 1). In this sense, the text desires the encounter with the Other even if it acknowledges its impossibility, and thus dwells in liminal spaces that open up this encounter. As Rita Bode and Kristin J. Jacobson (2018) explain, the concept of liminality goes back to Arnold van Gennep's anthropological research on "ritual patterns that societies commonly invoke to identify the process of transitions" (3). The "in-between" stage in a rite of passage, once the subject has departed from the original state and before the transition has been fully completed, is called the liminal state. Later, Victor Turner applied Gennep's idea of the liminal space to "societal and communal shifts" (ibid.). Rankine's textual strategies that demand the reader's involvement are invested in the search for liminal moments of encounter that linger between abandoning cruel optimism and holding onto it. These liminal moments of encounter can propel new ways to account for the Other's illness, pain and grief, and thus elucidate other forms of belonging and caring. In another interview, Rankine (2104b) has posited citizenship and belonging as the forms of investment that hurt her the most: "In *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant talks about things that we're invested in, despite the fact that they are not good for us and place us in a non-sovereign relationship to our own lives. And I thought, on a certain level, that thing that I am invested in that is

hurting me would be this country" (para. 17). Indeed, authors such as Andrew Gorin (2019) posit the difficulty of Rankine's text as a mimesis of the sort of "noise" that the experiences of racialized subjects are taken for, being misunderstood and not listened to (124). Still, Rankine affirms that she still believes in the possibility to connect and belong: "You want to belong, you want to be here. In interactions with others you're constantly waiting to see that they recognize that you're a human being . . . you're constantly waiting for the moment when you will be *seen*. As an equal. As just another person. As another *first* person" (Rankine 2014b, para. 58; emphasis added): the fragmented yet enunciated first person in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* that creates a thread through the fragments of the poem, and becomes therefore, the means for connection in disconnection.

According to Butler (2004), in recognizing an Other, the subject also emerges as an 'I'—thus positing the paradox of the impossible "we". Further, this moment of recognition also entails realizing the limits of the self, and the ways in which selves are collectively bound to each other, as Butler argues: "I cannot muster the 'we' except by finding the way in which I am tied to you" (49). As Reed has suggested (2004), Rankine's use of the lyric 'I' seeks "to break the common sense link between poetry as personal and group expression without claiming some reified notion of the 'universal'" (97). The encounters with the Other, along with the notion of the subject, are grounded in "the precarious space and time—the ambiguous 'here'" (Reed 2014, 118) reproduced in the billboard of the last pages (Rankine 2004, 130). This "here" is the "here" of the performative text, which ends when the reader stops reading, and the lack of a linear conception of time creates an effect of disconnection in the text, thereby erasing the possibility to imagine a future in a narrative sense. As Rankine explains (2014b), a linear narrative creates the sense of progression in temporality, although in real life, "[i]t's disappointing to find out that the past is the present is the future. Nobody wants that. And yet, that's what it is" (para. 46). If there is no past or future with which to fix the present, the text indefinitely lingers on the present moment, as a sort of waiting, a waiting for an Other, for change that preempts the repetition of the same events that have turned the present into a sort of impasse: "Then all life is a form of waiting, but it

is the waiting of loneliness. One waits to recognize the other, to see the other as one sees the self" (Rankine 2004, 120). This awaited encounter with the Other—temporary, fragile, longed for but unexpected—lacks simplified expectations or projections of what the encounter must look like or what it must turn into. For instance, the narrator recounts a story told by a friend about the cousin of an Auschwitz survivor, who recognizes another for having the same tattoo as her cousin (Rankine 2004, 99). There is a great element of chance in this encounter, starting from the age difference of the narrator's friend and the old woman with the tattoo, to finding each other in a city as big as LA. Though the meaning of the tattoo is mistaken by the narrator's friend—it represents the function of the prisoner, not the name of the camp, which makes the recognition even more casual—recognition is prompted in a liminal state of paying attention to the other:

> What my friend wanted to communicate to me about that conversation was that "Frieda Berger and I had defied history in order to have it. She was supposed to be dead, and I was supposed to have never been born. And we both lived, and found each other in LA, and she was able to tell me this detail about the letter A. A detail that allows me to begin to be true to her life as precisely as it is lived. (Ibid.)

This encounter seems to imply that recognition relies on looking at another person for long enough so as to acknowledge their existence. That is, the encounter encompasses bearing witness to another's life. The narrator explains that she finds it hard to do this in real life because looking at would entail to be looked at. This may explain the elusive quality of the text: "I never feel as if I can say, Look, look at me again so that I can see you, so that I can acknowledge that I have seen you, so that I can see you" (Rankine 2004, 98). The impossibility to look at an Other, which translates into the lack of recognition of "ugly feelings" (Ngai 2005), such as grief, anger, or sadness in contemporary US culture, reflects the fragmentary nature of the book. Ironically, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* attempts to perform a recognition of fragmented experiences of grief, even if only to acknowledge that full recognition is not possible or fully realized at this time. The recognition of the condition of vulnerability might not be possible because it is threatening. For instance, when the speaker dials a suicide helpline seen on a TV ad

late at night, the encounter is presented as failed: "Do you feel like killing yourself? the man on the other end of the receiver asks. You tell him, I feel like I am already dead. When he makes no response you add, I am in death's position" (Rankine 2004, 7). The condition of grief and the sharing thereof may imply the undoing of the self (Butler 2004, 30), but it is not necessarily followed by a recognition of an Other. In this encounter, the script appears to be mediated and fixed, hailed by economic interest and not by the sincere desire of listening. It is the operator's job, after all, and going off the script would require the operator to recognize his or her own vulnerability, besides that of the caller. Therefore, the act of communication fails. Recognition of an Other's grief cannot be mediated by economic interest, despite the narrator's surprise at her father's death when "no grieving service is available" (Rankine 2004, 122) and dreams about having someone mourn her father for her instead. Pain cannot be bought or sold, only shared. However, Butler (2004) explains that recognition is an act when the self and the Other come undone:

> When we recognize another, or when we ask for recognition for ourselves, we are not asking for an Other to see us as we are, as we already are, as we have always been, as we were constituted prior to the encounter itself. Instead, in the asking, in the petition, we have already become something new, since we are constituted by virtue of the address, a need and desire for the Other that takes place in language in the broadest sense, one without which we could not be. To ask for recognition, or to offer it, is precisely not to ask for recognition for what one already is. (44)

Therefore, recognition brings about unforeseeable change in the self and in the Other. By extension, a public recognition and sharing of grief may transform society into new forms of caring and belonging. For instance, the encounter between the cousin of the Auschwitz survivor and the other survivor meant changing her idea of what the tattoo meant. The encounter between the narrator and the grief stories from the news affects her in a bodily way. Thus, these encounters allow for transformation, of the self and the Other, into new ways of subjectivity. Through Rankine's utterly performative text the reader is asked to look at the mediated accounts of pain—both a bodily and a detached experience, for it is perhaps the closest that language can come to it. As the narrator

asserts, "I tried to fit language into the shape of usefulness" (Rankine 2004, 129). This means that, in the same way that the Auschwitz tattoo did not "stand for location, but it stands for function" (Rankine 2004, 99), the stories told in the text also stands for function, not for location, in what Reed (2014) has defined as a sort of citation mechanism where meaning is displaced (117). In one of the final poems, Rankine offers the possibility of hope in recognizing the Other in the here and now—which she extends to the poem. Quoting Paul Celan, the narrator equates a poem and a handshake: "The handshake is our decided ritual of both asserting (I am here) and handing over (here) a self to another. Hence the poem is that—Here. I am here. This conflation of the solidity of presence with the offering of this same presence perhaps has everything to do with being alive" (Rankine 2004, 130). A handshake, like Rankine's performative lyric essay, needs to be embodied, and can only be experienced momentarily, liminally, in the "here" only referenced in the photograph of a billboard in the last page. This uncertain sharing of grief may provide a way of illuminating new forms of caring by acknowledging the human condition of vulnerability.

CONCLUSION

In *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, the displacement of a coherent, unified subject and the narrator's giving in to the lack of a linear structure may be read as an opening towards new possibilities and forms of living and writing about lived experience. The text bears witness to conversations held in breaks and fragments, to the search for intelligibility in unintelligibility, to a speaker trying to listen without knowing if there is a way out of the loneliness of the subject and the overarching loneliness that is making neoliberal America sick. Through undoing and unmasking the conditions that take part in the making of the narrative/lyric 'I' as a subject, Rankine unveils how structural inequalities hinder the recognition of said vulnerability, giving way to a deadly politics of uncaring that cannot heal the nation. In this sense, the text enacts the desire of an encounter with the Other while it acknowledges its impossibility, and thus dwells in the liminal spaces open for this encounter, in a here and now that may or may not overlap. However, as Kevin Quashie (2021) affirms in his discussion on a politics of black

aliveness—that is, one that celebrates and fosters black life through relation—"the focus is on one's preparedness for encounter rather than on the encounter itself" (21). In *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* the encounter cannot yet be grasped, while at the same time it is acknowledged that it involves change, and that it will not happen as expected.

Thus, by giving up the coherence of a single, cohesive narrative of the self, and refusing fixed expectations, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* rejects what Lauren Berlant (2011) has termed "cruel optimism," as mediated by discourses of "the good life". The text recognizes that a sustained encounter or that full recognition is not possible yet, ultimately giving up reified accounts of experience and opening up the possibility of a new becoming in the desired encounter. The text itself resists a single interpretation or a single authoritative voice, and rather demands involvement from the reader in bearing witness to the voices of the different stories presented: "We must both be here in this world in this life in this place indicating the presence of" (Rankine 2004, 131). Therefore, bodily presence and attention, like the attention that the text demands from the reader to make sense of it, may become the only ways for recognition. Quashie's "preparedness" in Rankine's text may be read as an awareness of where our subjectivity emerges, then handing it over to an Other, realizing our own vulnerability, and waiting—optimistically, perhaps cruelly—to be transformed in the here and now.

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RECLAIMING WOUNDS: PERSONAL NARRATIVES AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN NORMA ELÍA CANTÚ'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING

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ABSTRACT

Norma Cantú problematizes the dimensions of the autobiographical genre by placing her writing at the border between two nations. Border life-writing is constructed as collective, creative, and, above all, wounded by the colonial and Western experience. Far from exhibiting rage or mere nostalgia, Cantú employs memory and historical inscription as means to empower otherwise forgotten and colonized bodies and subjectivities. In so doing, she sets out new modalities of self-representation that aim at re-membering the racialized and gendered bodies on both sides of the border. Through a display of border crossings and historical recollections, Cantú ultimately exhorts readers to delve into the border wound as though it were a threshold into subjectivity. In analyzing three of her works, *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* ([1995] 2015), *Cabañuelas, A Novel* (2019a), and *Meditación Fronteriza: Poems of Love, Life, and Labor* (2019b), this essay seeks to establish bonds between Cantú's autobiographical writing and feminist theories of *mestizaje* (Anzaldúa [1987] 2012), performative self-representation and *autobiographics* (Gilmore 1994), and borders' fungibility (Brady 2002), among others, that will problematize and push the autobiographical genre to its very limits.

Keywords: borders; autobiography; Chicana/o literature; women writers; Norma E. Cantú.

INTRODUCTION

For many, navigating fragilities and daily suffering has become the way of the world, or rather, the way they survive. Invisible, silent, and transient as some wounds may seem, their trace lasts as long as memory abides. Thus, historical traumas and social woes remain pending and unresolved for those whose voices have been doubly co-opted by alienation and violence. In this light, subaltern voices, to use Spivak's (1988) term, have never ceased to reclaim and restate an ever-unfolding space of resistance.[1] Some authors, such as Gloria Anzaldúa ([1987] 2012), have already identified the existence of a specific trauma in border inhabitants by describing the border as "an open wound" in

[1] Even though Spivak did heighten the impossibility of the subaltern to speak, in using the term, I argue that these voices, formerly removed from public discourse, have defied the difficulties imposed on them by means of subverting traditional identity politics.

their lives (3), a metaphor that elicits a sense of self that is born and nurtured by precariousness and pain. The border wound ultimately inscribes a type of vulnerability that does not disempower women's subjectivities located in the border, but rather that gives way to acts of resistance by "developing new modes of collective agency" based on "interdependency and public action" (Butler et al. 2016, 7). Ambiguous and disruptive as they might be, borders have been conceptualized as both sites of separation and of contact.[2] The US-Mexico border itself has generated modalities of violence that target the fragilities of its inhabitants and border crossers. Authors such as Norma E. Cantú, along with many Chicanx authors, envision this wound as a third space, to use Homi K. Bhabha's term, and as a new site of enunciation.[3] That is to say, the wound is conceived as a threshold into a particular subjectivity, which, in the case of border writing, is also specifically attached to place and time. However, in the intersection of wounds and border experiences, this article reads the border wound as a marker of historical injury (Ahmed 2014, 173) that might heal through acts of vulnerability, exposure and listening (200). This is evident in the case of Cantú's autobiographical writings, for most of them are located in the border region between Mexico and the United States. As she narrates different crossings, Cantú urges the reader to delve into memory, to write in order to re-member one's body and history.[4] In so doing, the author crisscrosses the dimensions of the autobiographical genre, of history and memory, fictionality and factuality, photograph and text, life and death. Likewise, the autobiographical subject becomes an agent of memory that looks at the present and blends it with the mythical and the historical as a way of coping with a sense of fragility and constant displacement.

This article focuses on Norma E. Cantú's autobiographical writing as expressed in three works: *Canícula: Snapshots from a Girlhood en la Frontera* ([1995] 2015), *Cabañuelas, A Novel* (2019a), and *Meditación Fronteriza: Poems of Love, Life, and Labor*

[2] See Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* (1991): 33-40.
[3] Bhabha's sense of thirdness is here ascribed to the debunking of binomial structures regarding culture, language, or identity.
[4] I emphasize the intersection of memory and writing through an act of re-membering, that is, the importance of assembling otherwise fragmented and displaced experiences.

(2019b). It looks at this literary production from the perspective of Gloria Anzaldúa's *frontera* and *mestiza* consciousness and Mary Pat Brady's borders' fungibility. Along with these major critical concepts, feminist theories of contemporary subjectivities, such as Rosi Braidotti's notion of nomadism and Leigh Gilmore's performative *autobiographics*, amongst others, will illuminate the analysis of autobiographical narratives. This article aims at contributing to the large scholarship on contemporary Chicanx autobiographies by constellating Cantú's prose and poetry together in the analysis of her feminist border subjectivity. Drawing from a lack of contemporary readings of Cantú's latest works other than *Canícula*, this contribution does not prioritize her major memoir and therefore it sheds light on the author's compilation of poems and other new pieces of fiction. In so doing, I argue that Cantú's autobiographical voice permeates most of her creative—and even non-creative—writing from different perspectives, registers, and genres. All in all, Cantú's poems, texts, and photographs intertwine in these works as a way of producing a multivocal testimony of liminality and upheaval. Together, these modes of representation create a new site of enunciation that requires a relocation of the speaking voice to the ambivalent and unfixed space of the border. This movement creates an intersectional, constant crossing of borders of diverse kinds as it maps out the main routes for inscribing the self as wounded but also as immersed in a healing process (Ahmed 2014; Butler 2016). Thus, personal memories and experiences will play a key role in dismantling hegemonic parameters of self-representation by embracing a fragmentary, divergent, and fluid conceptualization of the self.

In the first section, I attend to a broader disclosure of contemporary theories that support a feminist take on autobiography and that are either problematized or sustained by a particular reading of Norma E. Cantú's prose and poems. In the second section, this article hints at a reading of the performative autobiographical in Cantú's three works and how they are conflated with an interest in new modes of feminist self-representation. The border wound, as it emerges from violence and resistance, will be approached with a transversal reading of *Canícula* and *Cabañuelas*, alongside with a

deeper analysis of and a comparison with the poems and meditation in *Meditación Fronteriza*.

CANTÚ AND THE PROBLEMATIZATION OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL GENRE: A FEMINIST APPROACH TO SELF-REPRESENTATION

As one of the authors that defies the Western prospect of autobiographical narratives, Norma E. Cantú (2013), a *Tejana* born and raised at the US-Mexico border, places the autobiographical genre within the boundaries of what she calls "life-writing" (310). When defining it, Cantú acknowledges the exclusionary nature of traditional theoretical approaches to autobiographical writing, which leave aside theories of self-representation other than the Western and, to an extent, the European.[5] Given the ambivalence of the genre, contemporary autobiographical narratives such as Cantú's navigate the unsettling waters of traditional autobiographical tropes without ever adhering to a totalizing terminology or to unifying theories of self-representation. Small wonder, then, that the autobiographical has become the cultural and political arena for the emergence of epistemological defiance and creative experimentation. As contemporary writers dismantle hegemonic mechanisms of self-representation, they perform a decentralization of "the master narrative of the 'sovereign self'" (Smith and Watson 2001, 3) as mainly white, male, and Western, in favor of inclusive, hybrid and divergent subjectivities. Further, these contemporary subjectivities reject and emancipate themselves from those individualistic, monolithic, and static views on the self as celebrated by Western narratives. As a result, women's autobiographical writing has played a key role in mapping new forms of inscribing the self in creative, divergent, and collective ways (Smith and Watson, 1998, 4, 27).

I argue that women's writing may perform what Mary Pat Brady (2000) terms 'fungibility' in relation to border gnosis, meaning "the ability to slip outside of the

[5] See Rosi Braidotti's (2011) take on 'Europeanness' as a paradigm for this hegemonic sovereignty that enhances "passing itself off as the norm, the desirable center, confining all 'others' to the position of periphery" (34).

material and metaphorical and also to lay hold to both" (178).[6] That is to say that these narratives may, at one time, ascribe to the materiality of the subject's experiential knowledge in the world and, at another, generate a metaphorical, discursive space that problematizes self-representation. I adhere to the fungibility of Cantú's autobiographical writing as it heightens the potentiality of shifting between the material and the metaphorical dimensions, and other opposite categories, of the autobiographical experience. Fraught with such fungible nature, women's autobiographical writing withdraws from an essentialist view of the matter while it is grounded in a positive "sexual difference" (Smith and Watson 1998, 16; Braidotti 2011, 38). Border's fungibility, then, deflates the Anglo and androcentric, patriarchal representation of agency prompted not only in Eurocentric literary traditions of autobiography but also in those cultivated in the US-Mexico borderlands (Cucher 2018, 92). Unlike the historical trends of self-representation in Mexican American autobiography, these contemporary autobiographies mainly written by women on the border ensure new ways of escaping oblivion and mainstream fetishizations. In this regard, notions of women's bodies as nomadic and embodied subjects, as opposed to the disembodied male subject or the sedentary logocentric, prove equally fungible elements in their role as factors of resistance to cultural and epistemological assimilation.[7] The emplacement of Chicana literature in terms of genre, however, is often bound to border epistemology and, to some extent, to its fungibility, since "the border paradigm has defined the boundaries of writing and experience" (Velasco 2004, 313). In light of this reasoning, border epistemology provides women's autobiographies—Chicana autobiographies in particular—with a space to perform self-

[6] I apply here the notion of fungibility understood as the capacity of borders to function both—and not exclusively—as metaphorical and material locations. This fungibility, I argue, might be adjusted to other potential and fungible conceptualizations such as women's autobiographical writing.

[7] The material counterpart of this border fungibility is understood through the intersection of feminist approaches to women's bodies and subjectivities. Braidotti's theory of a 'nomadic body' (2011) aligns with Brady's fungibility inasmuch as women's subjectivities are permeated with the "capacity to be both grounded and to flow and thus to transcend" multiple categories (25), which also adds to the particular autobiographical subjectification of Cantú's experience as Chicana.

representation through formal, generic subversions, without ever leaving aside the real, physical, and historical location these experiences are grounded in (Cucher 2018, 93).

The autobiographical subject in women's autobiographies is thus decentered, embodied (Eakin 1999, 36-7), relational (Smith and Watson 1998, 8-10), divergent (Anzaldúa [1987] 2012, 101) and nomadic (Braidotti 2011, 25),[8] and it ultimately destabilizes phallogocentric symbolic authority. In order to evince the fault lines in mapping the new autobiographical arena, it becomes necessary to understand and interrogate the symbolic system of self-representation deployed by contemporary subjectivities. Interestingly, border women writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa or Norma E. Cantú do face the "dismemberment of the body" by outperforming the phallogocentric symbolic order and creating new "systems of signification" (Alarcón 1996, 52). The autobiographical becomes a performative project that defies traditional cognitive approaches to self-representation and relies instead on performative and transformative symbols. In this regard, Gilmore's study of performative autobiographical mechanisms (1994, 1998, 2001) gives access to the notion of "autobiographics," and describes them as "elements that instead [of traditional autobiographical plots] mark a location in a text where self-invention, self-discovery, and self-representation emerge within the technologies of autobiography," thus stressing "interruptions and eruptions, with resistance and contradictions as strategies of self-representation" (Gilmore 1998, 184). Therefore, autobiographical content might be present in literary works that are not considered autobiographical at first, as it is the case for Cantú's latest works. Thus far, Gilmore's term aptly addresses the need to further research on new forms of autobiographical writing, and seems particularly suitable to explore contemporary Chicanx autobiographical writing. Indeed, part and parcel of conducting the analysis of autobiographics—by which readers conceptualize and relocate the subject position as a woman and as an abject in historical terms—

[8] I adhere to Braidotti's (2011) nomadic project as akin to this analysis on women's subjectivities insofar as "[n]omadic consciousness is a form of political resistance to hegemonic, fixed, unitary, and exclusionary views of subjectivity" (58).

implies that critical theories must comply with a reformulation of autobiographical elements that lays bare mechanisms of identity formation. In other words, to explore the use of autobiographics in Cantú's writings contributes to a better understanding of how writing and self-representation shape identity.

Cantú's autobiographical work enlarges, thus, a feminist approach that attends to theories of *mestizaje*, fluidity, and community. Her narratives merge opposite categories, such as the personal/private, the collective/public, so as to lay out alternative border (hi)stories. This is what justifies her preference for the term 'life-writing,' since it "allows for an expansion that includes blended genre works, transgeneric works, and testimonio" (Cantú 2013, 311), enhancing a fluid modality of telling that encompasses many genres at once. Ascribed to the literary expectations of academic and creative writing, Cantú performs, as Anzaldúa does, a literary *mestizaje* which aligns with Gilmore's autobiographics in that it (a) draws attention to the mechanisms behind self-representation, and (b) works as a performative transgression and as an act of resistance within self-representation (Saldívar-Hull 2000, 70). Far from the historical implications of *mestizaje* as a way of controlling and undermining certain narratives, contemporary Chicana autobiographers defy the semiotics of self-representation by resisting assimilation and producing "another signifying system" (Alarcón 1996, 53). In this regard, Cantú engages in Anzaldúa's *mestiza* project by conflating her writing with a radical epistemological subversion to "the language of Man: the fetishized, false universal mode of Western humanism" (Braidotti 2011, 66).[9] Ultimately, the contemporary autobiographical terrain becomes a discursive space that surpasses formerly restrictive textual categories, thus opening the writing space to a fluid and transversal mode of self-representation.

[9] The *mestiza* project, originally born as a feminist discourse of resistance to hegemonic discourses and systemic violence (Anzaldúa [1987] 2012, 43), propels alternative reconfigurations of women's subjectivities from a space of cultural resistance (43, 99) as it encourages cultural and political transgressions.

CANTÚ AND FICTIONAL AUTOBIOETHNOGRAPHY

Cantú (2013) coined the term 'fictional autobioethnography,' mostly referring to her groundbreaking work *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* (2015), first published in 1995, as "a blend of autobiographic research to describe the mix of life and ethnographic research in a literary genre" (312). Such hybridity in form and in content is the point of departure of *Canícula*, a coming-of-age story of a girl called Azucena/Nena Cantú that explores the multiple intersections and (trans)formations at the US-Mexico border. *Canícula* inaugurates Cantú's autobioethnographic project, which, I argue, also comprises *Cabañuelas, A Novel* (2019a), and *Meditación Fronteriza: Poems of Love, Life, and Labor* (2019b) insofar as they present elements that are reminiscent of Chicana autobiographical subjectivity. In these works, the autobiographical narrative emerges from experiential epistemologies and collective knowledge, combining personal narratives, self-formation, and folk-knowledge (Cantú 2013, 310). Her narratives focus on the deployment of both personal and collective (hi)stories and add to Chicana autobiographical formulas "as a discourse of identity that challenges dualistic notions of the personal and the communal" (Velasco 2016, xi). The author explores the writing of the self into history by means of a series of autobiographical elements that play a performative and transformative role in cultural affirmation. These elements, which I identify as autobiographics, are part of Cantú's autobioethnographical voice and frame stories that are not culturally authorized because they do not fit in the dominant, hegemonic paradigms of traditional practices (Gilmore 1994, 26). What Cantú attempts in inscribing a border subjectivity into the autobiographical is to subvert the statism of identity categories and to give way to spaces and moments of reconciliation and imagination, which are fostered by acts of listening and remembrance (Ahmed 2014, 200). To do so, Cantú posits the border as a site of enunciation, thus colliding with other mainstream narratives, mainly coming from the US media. So much so that the autobiographical arena becomes central when inscribing Chicanas' bodies and histories not only as an act of resistance but as a way of configuring "the space of social demands" (Velasco 2004, 314) and "social protest" (Herrera-Sobek 2017, x).

Cantú's wide interest on life-writing neatly points to a preoccupation with the continuity of Chicana modes of self-representation. In this vein, her autobioethnographical project opens the way to self-representation as a cultural artifact, feminist modalities for the telling of the self, and the historical and cultural reality of border life and communities. Withal, Cantú's writing proves subversive as it works as a fungible source of experience and representation, that is, the autobiographical space becomes 'a political arena,' as understood by Bhabha, whereby stasis and unity are debunked in favor of a hybrid reconceptualization of cultural symbols.[10] Consequently, a sense of memory or cultural memory results from a subjectivity that is at the same time grounded in personal, material experience but also attached to the ethnographic research in which memory inscription is framed.[11] Autobiographical writing, thus, emerges from a situated knowledge" (Haraway in Braidotti 2011, 65), which refers to the idea that "[a]ll knowledge is situated, that is to say, partial" (Braidotti 2011, 40). Cantú (2007) constantly refers to a sense of situated epistemology as an unavoidable and constituent element of her experience of the world, since "[a]ll this is shaped by where [she] first learned to be in the world, on the border" (235). Her perception of the world is traversed then by her personal experience situated on the border. Despite such a strong reliance on being 'situated,' the fungible and nomadic vein ascribed to contemporary subjectivities prompts not "a fluidity without borders, but rather an acute awareness of the nonfixity of boundaries" (Braidotti 2011, 66). To understand it in the context of Cantú's *tejana-ness* or border experience, it is worth noting that her sense of 'situated knowledge' advances transposition and *transfronterizo* experiences.[12] In other words, border epistemology is carried *within*

[10] I adhere to the notion of third space, where "the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, historicized, and read anew" (Bhabha 1994, 208).

[11] See Hirsch and Smith 2002, cultural memory.

[12] Cantú (2007) expresses her *tejana-ness* as nondependent—or not entirely—on location albeit simultaneously inscribed on a 'situated knowledge,' what in her words means, "I have been a *tejana*, while in Europe, Madrid, Vietnam, Nebraska, and California. *No importa*, it doesn't matter, the border is with me; my *tejana-ness* is who I am. That semitropical land of South Texas shaped me as much as the DNA I inherited from my parents, their parents, and the many generations back, *mis antepasados*" (234; italics in the original).

oneself regardless of location. No sense of loss or exile might be then imposed on the mobile nature of some border subjectivities, nor fixity nor unity should be prescribed to identity politics and self-representation. As the following section illustrates, for some, crossings—in the movable and fluid aspect of traversing spaces—stand as performative acts of self-formation and self-affirmation that at the same time unveil the mechanisms generating the border wound. A contemporary subjectivity emerging from border mobility is then "grounded in but not limited to geographic space," and works within self-representation as "an organizing metaphor for Chicanas living in multiple worlds and multiple cultures" (Saldívar-Hull 2000, 67). Here, Cantú's autobioethnographical voice aims at dismantling binary systems of representation and violence. It enacts a discursive space for creative remembrance, a site from where the self is enunciated and read through the lens of a situated knowledge. As a result, the border becomes a site of enunciation for the self and history, thus eliciting "the possibility of building, based on this [border] cultural paradigm, an organic and systematic methodology for studying autobiography" (Velasco 2004, 315). In sum, this situated epistemology is what propels new and feminist modes of self-representation that do not ascribe to fixed, already-set identities.

CANTÚ'S *AUTOBIOGRAPHICS*: ARTICULATING THE BORDER WOUND

> All borders remain spaces of conflict, of violence; indeed, my border is a wound. But all over the world the wounds bleed, migrants flee the violence of war, military violence, flee drug cartel violence, the violence of poverty, of woman hating, of racism, of intolerance. All over the world those who can work work for a borderless world, a violence-free world. They dream an end to violence, dream of the tranquility of an accepting world. Dream the fulfillment of equality for all. Imagine, and it shall be so. Believe that it will be so. (Cantú 2019b, 129)

Rather than being exclusively ascribed to just one theory of cultural fluidity and liminality, the reading this essay proposes is keen on multiple and interdisciplinary approaches to autobiography and border epistemology. Albeit trite, the figuration of the border as a wound pivots most of the interpretations on Chicanx contemporary autobiographies. However, this notion of fissure works twofold in a similar way to

borders' fungibility: Cantú's autobiographics help inscribe the border wound both symbolically and in material terms. Firstly, a wound might be articulated as a corporeal fissure and as an open gate to a particular subjectivity. Further, the inscription of the border wound opens the gate for the reader to elucidate and become aware of the insights of border experiences, while it simultaneously provokes a reaction of distancing and abjection against hegemonic power relations. The disclosure of such a wound underlines the mechanisms that construct the crossing of borders as a transgression of social order, thus releasing a whole patrolling system regarding othered subjects. However, this metaphorical endeavor ought not to be understood as an appropriation of one's identity, but the material exposure of a "historical injury" (Ahmed 2014, 173).[13] Secondly, the border wound reports the politics of exclusion and unveils the injuries and pain within spatial and temporal dimensions. Anzaldúa, as Cantú does, envisions this wound as the continuity of historical violence that is marked by silencing, displacement, and criminalization of nonhegemonic narratives.

The way the border wound is articulated in Cantú's autobiographical writing is made visible when considering the autobiographics at work in most of her narratives. These autobiographics work as agents of memory and self-representation, therefore disclosing what otherwise was rendered invisible and amnesic. Other than giving emphasis to the author's implication in the narrative, these autobiographics, understood by Gilmore as 'irruptions' in the text, help readers fathom the multiple layers of Chicana self-representation (Gutiérrez y Muhs 2017, 9), as well as women's historical inscription. I attend in the subsequent subsections to these irruptions, these autobiographics, as they emerge from spatiality. These performative elements shed light on how spatial metaphors permeate the liminality of Chicana subjectivity and its imbrication with power relations and violence by highlighting connections between the material and ontological aspects of Cantú's autobiographical voice. In accordance with

[13] On the idea of the wound and its relationship with identity, I agree with Ahmed (2014) that the fetishization of the wound might problematize and even obliterate "a history of 'getting hurt' or injured," however, the response to that ought not to forget the wound as a marker of historical injury (32, 173).

Gilmore's (1994) standpoint, the autobiographics of border spaces bring attention to "not what autobiography *is* but what it *does*" (39; emphasis mine).

RITUALS OF MEMORY: *CANÍCULA* AND *CABAÑUELAS*

Not surprisingly, Cantú's autobiographical writings construct the self as decentralized, communal, and in transition. To do so, she articulates her narrative as crossed by various and at times oppositional codes that result in her particular autobiographics: text and photograph in *Canícula*, but also fact and fiction in both *Canícula* and its sequel, *Cabañuelas*.[14] Certainly, *Canícula*—which presents a narrative of self-formation located geographically and epistemologically at the border—holds a central position in almost every analysis on Cantú's writing due to its confluence of photograph and text and the subsequent problematization of traditional mechanisms of self-representation. Its autobiographics flesh out not only Cantú's family history or past, as it is not an interpretation of significant events or experiences as traditionally understood, but rather they stand for a reconfiguration of the autobiographical mode as cognitive and performative, and most of all, transformative (Gilmore 1998, 188). Indeed, recent studies suggest that the period of girlhood presented in *Canícula* resonates with the quality of Chicana literature to disclose "discursive spaces where this materiality is very well rendered" (Fernández-García 2020, 5). The aspects of life-hood presented in *Canícula* speak to the fictional autobioethnographical voice of its author insofar as commonplaces and everyday experience become pivotal. Such endeavors conflate Chicana subjectivity with an interest in the 'quotidian,' which is contemporarily read as "a mode of feminist representation" (Cucher 2018, 93), and that I identify as part of Cantú's autobiographics. Further, queries about the subjectification of Chicana experience to the material location of the border are argued in this article as in response

[14] Both novels belong to Cantú's *Border Trilogy*. The first novel of this trilogy is the unpublished *Papeles de Mujer*, followed by *Canícula* and *Cabañuelas*. *Canícula* follows the coming-of-age story of Azucena/Nena Cantú, as she grows up in the border region between Texas and Mexico, and between her two families at both sides of the border.

to Gilmore's (1994) notion of the autobiographical subject as "produced not by experience," or not only, "but by autobiography" (25).

As one of the major elements of Cantú's narrative, the dialectics of photograph and text partakes of a feminist approach to Chicana self-representation by focusing on the incorporation of women's racialized bodies in the contested frame of fictional realities and cultural memory. With that in mind, it is worth looking at the photograph as a material source of a fixed and spatial version of history, while the text reflects a rather metaphorical, ambivalent and temporal quality of the border experience. Such confluence dwells between the memorializing and mythmaking of family stories and the ethnographer's imagination, which creates links between the past and the present. History is then made from memory and constructed through autobiographics, thus leading to a dialogic mode within the autobiographical act.[15] In this regard, a conversation between Nena, the protagonist, and her grandmother, *Mamagrande*—between the former's imagination and the latter's storytelling, but also between photograph and text—encompasses both history-making and collective, cultural memory (Cantú [1995] 2015, 20-1).[16] *Mamagrande*, along with Nena's older—and mostly women—relatives, tells Nena about the familial border experiences, about crossings and *cuentos*, saints and myths, and ultimately, she applies older, ancient *remedios*—literally and symbolically—to Nena's actual wounds, thus exposing their current consequences in space and time. Further, this traditional knowledge and personal mythmaking are retrieved not so much in a nostalgic way but as a subversive gesture against colonial wounds and disruption, reclaiming cultural resistance within transmission and vulnerability.

Canícula's retrospective view counts on an active exposure to the precarity of life on the border, as well as to the displacement and harm resulting from constrictive autobiographical formulas. Indeed, Cantú's narrative builds on a space of vulnerability,

[15] In light of this, Velasco (2004) adds that "[t]he link, then, between literary construction and history in autobiography is memory" (332).
[16] "Mamagrande tells me stories of crossing the river 'en wayín'—and I imagine a covered wagon like in the movies—she pregnant with my dad" (Cantú [1995] 2015, 20).

which is understood in Judith Butler's (2016) words as "a deliberate exposure to power," (22) since it unveils a material demonstration of loss and pain as a way of autobiographically expressing a collective mourning. In "Tino," a chapter that revolves around the death of Nena's brother in the Vietnam war, the effect that creates the idea of Tino being alive in the photograph coincides with the revelation of Tino's fatal death in the narrative sequence (Cantú [1995] 2015, 16-7). This memory that incorporates both the death and the life of Tino's body, integrates the personal and the historical wound(s) in the narrative, a wound that does not entirely nor exclusively belong to Nena's family, but one that alludes to a Mexican American history of war, displacement, and suffering. In so doing, the historical scope is relocated within a personal, collective space by means of autobiographics.

What autobiography does for history is to keep memory alive and in constant transition. *Cabañuelas, A Novel* shares with *Canícula* the dialectics of photograph and text but differs from its prequel in that it presents itself as a novel.[17] Cantú (2019a) places the protagonist, Nena, in a crucial reminiscent subject position as "a folklorist studying fiestas, a student of life—after all, isn't life a series of fiestas" (3), which advances the problematization of her work as a testimony and as an investigation both in terms of content and form. *Cabañuelas*'s autobiographics emerge, nonetheless, in the intersection between ethnographic work and the material experience provided by the autobiographical account. Nena's way of arranging and interpreting ethnographic and historical data within the boundaries of personal relationships and experiences releases a new subject position based on feminist subjectivities and interconnectivity, a process of healing that is achieved through the act of listening to others (Ahmed 2014, 200-1). In *Cabañuelas*, Cantú (2019a) inaugurates a new set of cultural relations appointed as *transfronterizo* experience, evincing the "intersection of time and space and the development of cultural artifacts that help communities live and hope" (107). Thus, the movable nature of border epistemology is performed in Cantú's novel by placing the

[17] The novel follows Nena as a grown-up woman who is awarded a scholarship to do research in Spain. The opportunity allows her to find connections between Spanish *fiestas* and South Texas' festivities.

Chicana subjectivity in a location fraught with colonial memory and contested power relations. By being placed in between Indian and Spanish roots, Nena cannot completely detach herself from the land of colonizers nor from her *Tejana-ness*. Her love for her homeland is key to understanding Nena's *mestiza* and crisscrossed position as an ethnographer and as an autobiographical subject since her self-consciousness is early ascribed to her national identity: "[s]he is one with the land… not just visceral but with conciencia, with full consciousness … Her south Texas home resides in her as she resides in it" (3). This sense of belonging is based on contradictions, for culture is presented as both home and incarceration, meaning "a culture that protects and shelters" but also "circumscribes and limits" (5). The process of Nena's identity formation is, at one time, committed with her cultural background as *Tejana* and as historically colonized, and, at another, not willing to resist cultural integration. Thus far, it is her promise to come back to her family and borderlands which reveals a pondering about vulnerability and cultural resistance in the face of historical blending and oblivion.

Nena impersonates a woman autobiographer whose main aim in Spain is "to reconnect with her past" and "to learn" (158). Her role as an ethnographer may amount to that of the autobiographer in that she records against loss and change, for she is "aware that she is witnessing a tradition that is in flux" (40). In this way, Nena embodies a silent witness "that expands the confessional 'I'" (Velasco 2016, 32), an agent of memory that looks at the present moment and transforms it into history. To consider this ethnographic role in a new light, the author's emphasis on embodied subjectivities and relatedness is noteworthy, because "[l]ike a good ethnographer, she absorbs it all, allows them [locals] to speak as she *listens*, soaking it all up and asking questions to elicit the more complete story" (2019a, 160; emphasis mine). In a similar vein to *Canícula*, historical and cultural recollection is constructed collectively and in a dialogic relationship between past and present. Thus, when she cannot find answers, Nena imagines the lives of these people as she consciously reconstructs their (hi)story, that is to say, "what is not yet visible propels the autobiographer into a textuality of invention as well as documentation" (Gilmore 1994, 27). Seen in this way, Nena does not only witness performances of cultural memory and historical tradition (Hirsch and Smith

2002, 7), but rather, she reconstructs the (hi)stories of a community upon a restoration of national and family myths. Fiction then occupies an important position within the autobiographical account, though the latter is mostly problematized due to the incorporation of factual elements, such as photographs. However, it is Nena's involvement both at a personal and professional level that highly problematizes the autobiographical. *Cabañuelas*'s autobiographics are intrinsically tied to the focalization of the point of view—historical yet fictional and personal—as well as the form in which the (hi)stories unfold as a self-reflexive technique regarding the nature of history and recollection. The autobiographical is, thus, constructed mainly by these self-conscious autobiographics. Nena becomes an embodied and vulnerable subject as she reclaims the wounds of a colonial heritage and exposes herself to the coloniality of power relations. She ultimately embodies the *mestiza*, and her body becomes the site of collision of her *transfronterizo*, border roots.

All in all, the protagonist in *Canícula* and *Cabañuelas* is situated both inside and outside the autobiographical process, thus heightening the fungible nature of cultural memory. By cultural memory I adhere to Hirsch and Smith's (2002) distinction between historical archives and those of cultural memory, the latter described as "the product of fragmentary personal and collective experiences articulated through the technologies and media that shape even as they transmit memory" (5). This idea of memorializing through personal and collective experiences resonates with this essay's argument insofar as it construes a counternarrative to hegemonic narratives or historical records, thus restoring those stories otherwise inaccessible and silenced. What is more, Hirsch and Smith (2002) articulate these acts of memory as released from traditional modes of accessing the past and self-knowledge (11), and envision the intersection of feminist theories and memory since "both presuppose that the present is defined by a past that is constructed and contested" (12). I argue, then, that the fungibility of the autobiographical body and voice in *Cabañuelas* and *Canícula* might be the result of the narrator's capability to navigate and embody the material and symbolic attachments to her borderlands in a *fronterizo* (*Canícula*), and *transfronterizo* (*Cabañuelas*) context.

WOUNDED BODIES: *MEDITACIÓN FRONTERIZA*

In her poems and meditations, Cantú pursues the historical re-enactment of national, racial, and patriarchal violence against "women's brown bodies" (Cantú 2019b, 51). In so doing, Cantú aims at reclaiming wounds within cultural, collective memory. Quotidian violence, vulnerability, acts of resistance, and the impossibility of *becoming* are some of the many themes that populate Cantú's autobiographical writing. In a similar vein to *Cabañuelas*, Cantú's poetry has been considerably removed from the autobiographical analysis of Chicana production. It is not that her poems and meditations are articulated as part of self-narration but, I argue, the constellation of border experiences found in this compilation reasonably adheres to the cultural memory here discussed.

By means of its diverse autobiographics, *Meditación Fronteriza* initiates a process of self-restoration and border memorializing that integrates the personal and the collective while at the same time giving way to a cyclical and creative (trans)formation. These poems and meditations work as the means to fashion a materialist approach to Chicanx experience from a feminist scope (Saldívar-Hull 2000, 78). While these poems integrate the multiplicity of Chicana experiences by displaying personal and historical events, Cantú's meditations ponder over the experience of crossing the border and how it is traversed by various factors, such as destination, race, gender, class, etc. In sum, Cantú's autobiographical voice incorporates into the social, collective memory a wound that is currently active as well as traceable through the cultural and historical continuum. In giving solace to the victims and survivors of yet unresolved conflicts, Cantú's border cogitation proposes a counternarrative based on acts of remembering and resistance.[18] Configured as the focal point of colonial and postcolonial violence, the 'women's brown bodies' Cantú refers to unfold as the autobiographical subjects, amongst others, of Chicana self-representation and life narratives. These poems unveil the hegemonic structure of power relations by which the 'nonunitary sel[ves]' or

[18] This aptly illuminates what Brady terms border amnesia (2000, 174; 2002, 60), which explains how "[t]he border functions through strategic forgetting and remembering, for the border system's economy encourages a violent amnesia, erasing cultures, identities, and differences, while simultaneously producing subjectivities, differences, and cultures in terms of itself" (2002, 60).

"divergent individual[s], living in borderlines" (Lionnet 1989, 18) are displaced and excluded, and which perpetuates the centralization of power as violence. Hence, the wounded, colonized bodies that are exposed in Cantú's three works come into being as material and mnemonic bearers of asymmetrical power relations and systemic violence emerging from the geopolitical border. Drawing on the analysis of Cantú's *Meditación Fronteriza*, the following subsections explore how Cantú's autobiographics voice border wounds and denounce violence from multiple perspectives, such as spatial, political, and epistemological.

BORDER REALITY AND CULTURAL RESISTANCE

Unlike other autobiographical narratives that conceal a desire for social homogenization and unity, the speaker in Cantú's poems in *Meditación Fronteriza* does not resort to Manicheism or rage, but, rather, she does recognize the fault lines of the 'becoming' scheme, that is, the social incorporation of who is considered alien to the country. Those rifts will mainly point at the impossibility of overcoming the gap imposed by the binomial formula of the Self and the Other (Lionnet 1989, 9). Hence, a convergence within identity formation is considered an impossible aspiration for the subaltern, who can scarcely attain empowerment within hegemonic power relations.[19] Not surprisingly, violence becomes inevitable as well as the constituent mechanism of the dualistic representation *I – You*, *We – They*.

By taking notice of such disparity, the struggle for becoming within Cantú's autobiographics relies on the static assumption of the self (Lionnet 1989, 16, 18) and the criminalization and capitalization of border crossings. In contrast, a new sense of self is foreshadowed as incomplete and in constant state of transition, thus using the metaphor of crossing as "constructed in opposition to the notion of silencing" (Velasco 2004, 323-24). The border is read as a performative and discursive space that shifts

[19] This impossibility is made evident in the lines, "our lips learned to shape yet another language / … and [yet] they whipped us / … lynched us / because we were not them" (Cantú 2019b, 27).

violently depending on direction, social status, and other identity markers, thus producing a series of "material and symbolic effects upon those who cross and those who are not allowed to" (Sánchez-Palencia 2021, 15; my translation). Whereas 'difference' constrains the self when it is set 'between' cultures, Braidotti (2011) points out to a "difference *within* the same culture, namely, within every self" (34; emphasis in original). To illustrate it, the speaker in the poem "Trying to Be," a woman who is reflecting upon border crossing, senses an unsettling estrangement towards her former self, the one she was before crossing the border/river (Cantú 2019b, 20-1) and which no longer 'is.' In crossing the river, mobility is performed in terms of economic transformation or transition—the 'dreamed, utopian arrival'—by which, once arrived on the other side, these crossers' status would have changed or uplifted (Brady 2000, 178). When this movement across nation states, languages and cultures occurs, self-making is affected by the subsequent instability of crossings and its social consequences. However, the speaker goes beyond the disavowal of violence and shifting social, cultural, and economic status implied in crossing the border. In other words, Cantú acknowledges power relations, dependency, and subalternity when such a transformation needs to be endorsed by others, "[w]e will be who we are / *if they let us*" (Cantú 2019b, II, 20; emphasis mine). The author figures the disposal of agency as subjected to hegemonic validation, the latter being unattainable due to asymmetrical power relations in self-making and identity politics. Therefore, the autobiographical form disrupts the politics of identity emancipation and resorts to framing the peripheral nature of the subject position.

The productiveness or unproductiveness of these border crossings in terms of self-making, hegemonic validation or identity politics is also connected with collective memory and self-restoration**.** An afterthought on the scene mentioned above would evince the idea of crossing as a performative element of identity formation since it undertakes a transformation in myriad ways. More recently, Sánchez-Palencia (2021) has explored the performative vein of the border experience as it is ascribed to corporeal practices of displacement, containment, and surveillance (15). The conceptualization of the border as a transforming site aligns with the idea posited by Brady when advancing

the non-productive status of borders as "static object[s]: wall, fence, riverbed" (2000, 174). In Brady's opinion, this stasis is opposed to the actual productiveness that emerges from cultural transference and transversal mobilities (175). It is no surprise, then, that border crossings are configured as autobiographics implying transformation, fluidity, and *mestizaje*, but also as nomadic spaces that envision the subject as well as space as "movable diversity" (Braidotti 2011, 41).[20] Thus far, self-representation becomes both self-restorative and retrospective as referring to what is lost and is object of cultural, collective longing, namely, in the poem analyzed, "*she* who remained in the river" (Cantú 2019b, 22; emphasis mine).

The autobiographics in *Meditación Fronteriza* are deeply intertwined with space and the materiality of borders, which are constantly rewritten in order to conflate the autobiographical account with social and political meaning. Indeed, autobiographics mark a location in Cantú's poems and meditations that heightens the autobiographical by "seeing and feeling space as performative and participatory, that is, by refusing a too-rigid binary between the material and the discursive" (Brady 2002, 10). It is in her meditations that Cantú revolves around her *realidad fronteriza* as it is ascribed to a collective mode of living as well as to a space of transit.[21] By means of representing diverse collectiveness, untotalizing experiences and generic dwelling, this border reality is traversed by a sense of fluidity, liminality, and heterogeneity that advances the multiple layers of border experiences so as not to prioritize one. It stands for a constituent element of body, memory, and, ultimately, the sense of self of some border inhabitants "[s]í, esta realidad nos forja y nos hace lo que somos" (Cantú 2019b, 125).[22] When locating herself by the border, the speaker in Cantú's (2019b) first meditation navigates the waters of her 'situated knowledge' by experiencing contradiction: she is neither "atrapada," nor "situada," nor "desplegada," nor "estacionada," nor "parqueada"

[20] I tentatively connect the border with nomadic consciousness not in traditional terms, but in the way Braidotti explores nomadism, that is, a form of subverting static assumptions of the self, language and nation.
[21] By 'meditations' I refer to the three last prose writings in *Meditación Fronteriza*, namely "Meditación Fronteriza I, 2000," "Meditación Fronteriza II, 2005," and "Meditación Fronteriza III, 2015" (Cantú 2019b, 125-29).
[22] "[y]es, this reality does forge us and shapes who we are" (Cantú 2019b, 125; my translation).

(125).[23] Indeed, she is neither of these things, yet aware of the substantial implication. Unable to specify her situatedness within the border, the speaker dwells in the spatial images of border reality.

Once the semiotics of space fail at being coherent with this new 'situated reality,' the material aspect of border reality is reappropriated by means of a discursive interpolation which unveils the autobiographics of border spaces and works through images of the river, the border queue, and the desert. While in *Canícula*, the river is a material delimitation between two homelands, Mexico and Texas, and crossed by a bridge (Cantú [1995] 2015, 6); the river in *Meditación Fronteriza* is a performative site of social (trans)formation. As a natural element that proves uncontainable and unfathomable, the river echoes the situated self by the border since it is "siempre y nunca el mismo" (Cantú 2019b, 125).[24] This fluidity of the natural stream speaks to a broader sense of the border as a site of constant transformation and displacement. The material landscape of a natural border is conflated with the historical and social implication of geopolitical borders. This does not only resonate with the actual, national borderlines between Mexico and US, but it introduces the discursive and performative potentiality of space within the realm of autobiographics. In its fluidity, the river is reminiscent of contemporary theories of the borders that foreshadow not the loss but the displacement and/or mobility of borders (Martins 2007, 150). Thus, by fostering such prospects, Cantú's meditation on border reality aptly aligns with nonunitary epistemologies and the weaving of third elements that break dualistic systems of representation.

Unlike unifying strands of *fronteriza* consciousness, Cantú (2019b) acknowledges the diversity and heterogeneity at work in the experience of border reality by locating herself in the material and social location of the border queue, "estoy haciendo cola para cruzar calmadamente, tranquila … y legal no como los que se arriesgan con coyotes o a

[23] An approximation to these terms in English might be: "trapped," "situated," "displayed," "stationed," "parked." The two last terms might refer to the Spanish and Spanglish forms of "parked."
[24] "always and never the same" (Cantú 2019b, 125; my translation).

solas, no como los que vuelan como pájaros sin fronteras" (125).[25] It is in the liminal and passive nature of a border queue that the border's multiple intersections are elucidated. Cantú's position within the border queue is not amnesic nor totalizing, but read as a tentative open and, in Foucault's term, heterotopian space.[26] The interstitial space is here traversed by a myriad of intersections regarding race, sexuality, gender, class, etc. In picturing the border queue as both static and mobile, with its multiplicity of directions and crossers, Cantú unfolds a space of cohabitation and intersubjectivity that questions the US synecdoche of these national borderlands (Brady 2002, 61). Cantú interacts with the formulas of (self-)representation as though she were reinscribing a diversity of bodies and experiences through spatial production. Following this, the border crosser in Cantú's meditations is located in the limen of the border queue, and in her double contemplation she is able to evenly cross to one side or the other. It is not that the border crosser is homeless or seeking shelter, but rather, she performs a 'nomadic task' regarding "transitions and passages without predetermined destinations or lost homelands" (Braidotti 2011, 60). Cantú acknowledges this border site as simultaneously containing and producing difference. Her border crossing is read and stated as legal mobility since she is not an undocumented crosser adduced by *coyotes* or on her own, neither is she a natural nomad, a bird, whose perception renders borders invisible or transparent. That is why, in *Canícula*, when recalling her family's crossings, Nena establishes the complexity of this very same spatiality in terms of belonging, "in 1948 crossing meant coming home but not quite" (Cantú [1995] 2015, 3).

Along with the border queue, another metaphorical space, the desert, is introduced as a site of transition akin to the river image. Nonetheless, the desert becomes a container of loss and residual history. Baudrillard (1988) would claim that the essence of desertic spaces emerges "from their being, in their aridity, the negative of the earth's surface and of our civilized humors" (6). Moreover, the desertification of

[25] "I am standing in a queue, awaiting to cross in calm, still … and legal unlike those who put themselves at risk with *coyotes* or alone, unlike those who fly like birds without borders" (Cantú 2019b, 125; translation and italics mine).
[26] One of the principles of 'heterotopia,' as understood by Foucault (1986), is that it is "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several places, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (25).

spaces hinders the knowledge of the past at the same time that it perpetuates it in memory and silence, "a sliding of geological strata one upon the other giving out nothing but more than fossil murmur" (ibid.). For instance, in the poem "Border Tryptic," what is left in the desert remains in the collective memory and nurtures the border landscape and its historicity. Far from spatial emptiness, the desert is fraught with material debris of border transactions and mobilities, leaving aside patriarchal expectations of land's infertility. Objects such as lost pieces of clothing—"[a] shoe, a scarf, a thimble of faith"—are left behind in a space that becomes a memorial of national and gendered violence (Cantú 2019b, I, 29). Other scholars have envisioned this space as reminiscent of an open wound (Manzanas and Benito 2011, 137) from where the collisions of national and transnational power relations emerge. In other poems in *Meditación Fronteriza*, the desert turns into a hostile place that engenders violence and forgetting. It escapes the mechanisms of containment while it serves as a site of historical violence. In a way, and following scholar Patricia Price (2013), the space of the desert becomes a 'place,' that is, "a social production" (120).[27] Thus, the desert turns into a place of "historical injury" (Ahmed 2013, 173) that points to the bodily surface that has been fractured by national and gendered violence. Rather than being exposed and eventually healed, this brutality becomes normalized, localized, thus eliciting the material strata emerging from experiences of alienation in the context of a bordered world.

Bereft of reductive and monolithic abstractions that seal notions of stasis and wasteland, the image of the desert construes an interesting place in the imagination of these Chicana narratives. The apparent no-man's land and emptiness of the desert are no longer plausible as part of a space of historical and national brutality. Indeed, Cantú does not abide by the traditional and to some extent colonial and androcentric conceptualizations of space, but, in turn, she depicts a sort of 'countercartography' which dismantles the assumptions of a normative spatial narrative, thus giving way to

[27] Price distinguishes 'space' from 'place' in that "spaces *are* and places *are reproduced*," thus eliciting the idea that "[s]pace is thus made into place through human intervention" (2013, 120; emphasis in the original).

a complete re-imagination of spatial metaphors (Brady 2002, 6). These enunciations of the border wound find their foundational rubrics in the restoration of the pain and suffering the communities within the borderlands have gone through historically. Cantú's autobioethnographical voice, in particular, projects the subjectification of the women's border experience as she explores the spatial dimensions of border transitions. On its part, the river, whose water might be for some readers an adequate image of purification and rebirth, stands for a space of potential contamination. Such idea of contamination speaks to border fungibility insofar as it is attached to both the materiality of the river as a national and historical borderline as well as to the metaphorical cogitations drawn from the diverse symbology drawn around it. The border queue, however, exposes the heterogeneous aspect of a rite of passage and the multiplicity of social strata at work in such a particular state of mobility. Finally, the desert restores a site from where the historical injuries reverberate in the cultural memory of the author and of her borderlands.

VIOLENCE AND REMEMBRANCE

> The past is living rather than dead; the past lives in the very wounds that remain open in the present. (Ahmed 2014, 33)

Cantú's notion of border reality is rooted in the attempt to give historical and cultural context to border experiences by restoring and integrating communal life narratives as part of her autobiographics. In her works, the act of crossing a border, as we have seen, often involves violence and cultural assimilation. Likewise, these crossings have been conceptualized as "recognizing a set of historical narratives, of family memories, of vectors of various national fantasies that have an effect on identity and agency and on the formation of subjectivity" (Brady 2002, 52), so border crossers become privy to the many intersections of these mobilities. Indeed, for Cantú, crossing means revisiting and widening interdependence and family bonds, "cruzando de un lado a otro siempre me

lleva al pasado, a tantos cruces" (Cantú 2019b, 127),[28] although many times it equally implies venturing into dangerous places, both material and metaphorical. What is certain is that borders hold a central position in the negotiation of power relations since "[borders] never sit still, but rather shift with incredible violence" (Braidotti 2011, 31). In this vein, violence and alienation are key to understanding the arrangement of border experiences as a result of what Brady calls the abjection machine or the loss of America (Brady 2000, 172). In all, violence cannot be disentangled from the autobiographics of border reality, as it is expressed in this second meditation:

> La violencia se acuesta a dormir con la cotidianidad y se levanta tempranito. No sabemos de dónde viene ni a dónde va, pero sabemos que está siempre ahí, in our midst. En este mundo donde se encuentran muchos otros, solo los ángeles que andan desesperados y acongojados saben lo que yace en el corazón de quienes matan por matar. Y a los mismos ángeles se les cierra el mundo y no saben cómo responder. (Cantú 2019b, 127)

Violence, pain, and historical injuries are there to be found in Cantú's autobiographics, in the remembrance carried out in many of her poems. In these, a sense of fragility is ascribed to gendered and racialized bodies. The embodiment of these 'othered' subjects is done from multiple perspectives. Spectacles of violence within traditional celebrations are represented in the poems as a way of exploring the performative aspect of cultural violence. In like manner, the *fiestas* project in *Cabañuelas* explores celebrations as a performative ritual of cultural memory, whereby narratives of colonization and assimilation emerge from an interiorized set of asymmetrical power relations.

One of the primordial aspects of how this violence is denounced and brought to the front in Cantú's autobiographical writing is through the exposure of vulnerable, gendered, and racialized bodies. In the poem "She was a Bobolo Grandmother," the reader attends to colonial brutality as impressed on women's racialized bodies. After

[28] "[c]rossing from one side to the other takes me to the past, to so many crossroads" (Cantú 2019b, 127; my translation).

the display of violence and co-option that results in the rape and murder of a woman and her baby by Spanish colonizers, the Bobolo grandmother, after her daughter and grandchild have been killed, takes action by self-immolating in the "center of the town" (Cantú 2019b, 9). Whether this is conceived as a reaction to pain and suffering, it is the body of this woman that becomes the material container of violence and vulnerability at the same time that it performs an act of resistance by refusing to give in to cultural assimilation.[29] This idea of the body as performing resistance through the disclosure of its vulnerability is largely explored by Judith Butler (2016) in "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance" where she reflects on the intersection of bodily performance of vulnerability and acts of resistance (15). Notwithstanding the power of bodily surfaces to demonstrate vulnerability, the acts of resistance found in Cantú's poetic recollection are those attending to historical, often obliterated, acts of cultural affirmation and defiance. So much so that the case of the Bobolo grandmother is in Cantú's poems revisited as a way of elucidating a cultural memory that goes beyond the individual body of both author and protagonist, thus staging the autobiographical technologies of feminist self-representation.

The idea that there is no such a thing as a social body (Butler 2016, 15-6) complies with Ahmed's (2014) disapproval of the appropriation of the pain of others (32-5), thus eliciting the impossibility of univocal and unidirectional remembrance. As it is demonstrated in the collective remembrance in *Canícula*, whereby many members in the family and in the community partake of the autobiographical testimony, or in the ethnographic recollection of traditional stories and myths in *Cabañuelas*, the pain that assails individual bodies does not necessarily amount to a single one but rather to a collective (process of) remembrance (Hirsch and Smith 2002, 7). Cantú's feminist modes of autobiographical representation are those concerned not only with the act of telling but also with the act of receiving, witnessing, and retelling, since "[a]n act of telling and listening, performing and watching, it is, most important, an act of retelling … And it

[29] The poem goes as follows: "The others, her own people, / wanted her to succumb, / to give in. Pretend to believe in the foreign god" (Cantú 2019b, 9).

acknowledges the unavailability of the original experience and the fragmentary and mediated nature of the reconstruction" (Hirsch and Smith 2002, 9). The speaker in Cantú's poem becomes aware of the fact that Bobolo's story complies more than an individual mourning, that is, it unveils an experience of violence, a wounded body, whose story has added up to a communal history: "No markers honor her death / and no one knows her name, / but the historian chronicled her death, / and thereby she lives" (Cantú 2019b, 10). The author subverts colonizing, patriarchal obliteration of these (her)stories by exposing, from a witness position, the vulnerability and resistance of women's racialized and colonized bodies in the intersection of history and memory. Thus far, the act of listening as well as the act of exposing the damage are part of a counternarrative of vulnerability and resistance that work towards a sense of healing and restoration (Ahmed 2014, 200), which in turn implies less of forgetting and assimilation and more of listening and remembrance.

In the poem "Living in Dangerous Times," the author exhorts readers to call for action in the face of violent events (Cantú 2019b, I, 120). Not limited to a particular time, violence is interwoven with a historical continuum, which goes back to "[b]rown bodies hanging from trees" to "Vietnam" to "Aztlán" (Cantú 2019b, I, 120). It is worth noting how this systemic and systematic violence both conforms to the 'dangerous times' and demands in turn 'dangerous measures' or new forms of resistance, thus generating a cycle of precarity and fragilities enacted by border dynamics. Again, the precarity and fragilities of individual bodies are ascribed to their contextual imbrication in time and space (Hirsch and Smith 2002, 12, 'situatedness'), thus informing Cantú's autobiographical voice with a multivocality that does not fail to diminish or unify border patrolling of difference. Far from endlessly recreating the violent moment, Cantú attempts to break this cycle of co-option through acts of resistance of her own, such as writing, remembering, or mythmaking.[30] This is not exclusive of her poems, but also achieved in her novels *Canícula* when delving into the death of her brother Tino in the

[30] Saldívar-Hull (2000) would refer to these strategies as the "mestiza political hermeneutics" (66), while Lionnet (1989) highlights "a reaffirmation of life through the emancipatory potential of writing" (21).

Vietnam War and incorporating his body through photographs, and also in *Cabañuelas* whenever the politics of cultural imperialism work towards her displacement in Spain. The border wound is exposed and inscribed, then, through the act of writing, which is considered a revolutionary one (Cantú 2015, xxvi), as it enables the author to construct and deconstruct notions of selfhood as well as "making meaning out of experience, whatever it may be" (Anzaldúa 1987, 95). Withal, Cantú resorts to writing and memory in her works as a way to enunciate what has been forgotten and to expose and break with the same mechanisms that have contributed to such violent obliteration of historical and gendered injury.

Notwithstanding this, in articulating wounds, Cantú acknowledges the power of anonymity that perpetrators and victims of violence share within mass media and collective memory. While it seems indulgent with perpetrators, this quotidian violence leads victims and survivors to oblivion or forced amnesia. In the uncertainty of statistics, anonymous faces and names, there is a promulgation of impunity, mutism, and silence:

> Who are those on the evening news?
> The maimed? The killed? Who are those
> whose faces appear in the evening news?
> Whose names I don't and do recognize. (Cantú 2019b, III, 30-3)

The daily vision of death in the news and the naturalized exposure to violence of a public that seems anesthetized are at the core of an endless cycle of violence and trauma (Brady 2000, 171, 174). The poems unravel invisible warnings that expose 'border amnesia' and social abjection resulting from the institutionalization and normalization of racial and cultural crimes. Thus far, violence becomes a daily practice, for instance, in the constant patriarchal expectations imposed on border women in *Canícula*, or in the racial misrecognition and violence enacted by feminists in the 1980s Spain, as experienced by Nena in *Cabañuelas*. Here, trauma might partake in identity politics insofar as these historical injuries are so deeply interiorized as a continuity of what Saldívar (2012) terms

the "coloniality of power" (xi).[31] To illustrate it, Cantú's poetic voice introduces an account of a man who loses his wife and who must deal with the aftermath of violent events. The last section of the poem is framed as the materialization of this apparent yet not so aimless violence:

> He moans. Sollozando.
> She. My Wife. A statistic now.
> And I? De luto. No se que hacer.
> ¿Llorar? ¿Morir de dolor?
> *I* can only remember her.
> *I* will.
> *We* will remember her. (Cantú 2019b, IV, 122; emphasis mine)

The words of the man who has just lost his wife are fused with the words of the poet, not in a symbiotic relationship but in that of a multivocal problematization of the consequences of systemic and systematic violence. Thus, *I* turns into *we*—the ultimate transition from an individual mourning to a collective one. Solace and healing are rendered collective and representative—inclusive—of all of us. No appropriation of the pain of others, no means of fetishizing the border wound, or any wound, but, once again, a healing through exposure, as Ahmed (2014) explains, "[h]ealing does not cover over, but exposes the wound to others: *the recovery is a form of exposure*. The visibility produced by recognition is actually the visibility of the ordinary and normative or the visibility of what has been concealed under the sign of truth" (200; emphasis in the original). On her part, Cantú's 'remembering' stands out as the counternarrative against statistics, media indulgence, state impunity, and violence deployed as anonymous and naturalized. Moreover, cultural memory plays its part in developing Cantú's autobiographical voice as it is intersected with feminist modes of knowledge. That is, feminist scholars within the field of memory studies heighten the intersubjectivity and

[31] Saldívar (2012) frames this idea as follows: "when the formal colonial states ended through the wars of independence and what we today call decolonization, the coloniality of power did not end," what results in the contiguity of "the coloniality of power [which] was itself essential glue in the articulation, interpellation, and integration of the interstate system within the modern and colonial word-system" (xi).

collaborative role of remembrance since cultural memory includes both the historical object that is recollected along with the interpretation of those who recollect (Hirsch and Smith 2002, 9). As part of such counternarrative to hegemonic narratives of forgetting and power, for Braidotti, as well as for Cantú, there is an urgent need for "resisting assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self" (Braidotti 2011, 60). Inherent to the process of remembering, the poem aforementioned portends the historicization of what otherwise is made amnesic and uncertain through the lenses of patriarchal, androcentric representation. It claims border wounds and the exposure of injuries as a means to heal and restore symmetrical power relations and equity. Indeed, Cantú aptly navigates these new feminist modes of knowledge by refusing to settle in traditional and gendered autobiographical expectations since "[w]hat a culture remembers and what it chooses to forget are intricately bound up with issues of power and hegemony, and thus with gender" (Hirsch and Smith 2002, 6). Thus, autobiographical voices that congregate communal and ethnographic modalities of knowledge and produce a safe space for wounded bodies to heal are rendered indispensable in the arduous, contested effort of cultural remembrance.

CONCLUSION

Cantú's autobiographical writing interrogates these perspectives of self-representation and cultural memory, among others. The border epistemology enacted by her Chicana autobiographical voice enables a double conceptualization of liminal subjects and spaces as vulnerable, disobedient and under surveillance as well as creative and resistant. Critical theories that have supported the border's fungibility are coeval with notions of contemporary feminist subjectivity and memory, thus fostering divergent, transgeneric, and fluid patterns of self-representation in Chicana autobiographical writing. However, what has been set out by the feminist theories this essay draws on aims at pursuing the negotiation of autobiographical and self-representation parameters in an extensive, inclusive approach. Theories such as Anzadúa's *mestiza* feminism—a feminism of mythmaking and resistance—or Braidotti's nomadism—a feminist embodiment of mobile diversity—help us appraise new modalities of self-

representation and cultural memorialization that go beyond falsely essentialist and restrictive scopes attached to women's writing. By virtue of these new modes, Cantú embarks on a transversal project regarding border stories whose enclave is rather mobile and fluid. This author's proclivity contends a new form of autobiographical writing that defies racist and gendered bigotries and emphasizes in turn a regenerative and inclusive writing of the self.

The three works here analyzed resist and depart from the phallogocentric symbol. They integrate in turn text, image, and transpositions of all autobiographical and ethnographic elements at work, thus unfolding a space beyond border amnesia, systemic violence, and colonial memory. Cantú's autobiographical mechanisms are understood as performative, that is, as autobiographics, to use Gilmore's term, and help inscribe the brutalized, wounded body at the border into history. So much so that the author revels in the fragmented, discontinuous, and personal features ascribed to women's autobiographical writing without ever finding them restrictive. Nonetheless, her narratives go beyond traditional expectations by providing new modes of memorializing with an emphasis on women's agency and cultural transmission. Her autobiographical writing does not forge, then, border's history or brutalized and colonized bodies, but it somewhat explores border wounds at the same time that it uncovers their multiple fragilities. Through her turn of the autobiographical scheme, Cantú joins a type of feminist activism that is based on collaboration, resistance, remembrance, and healing. Thus far, her stories help to transform sites of struggle and exclusion into creative spaces of resistance, memory, and collaboration.

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SOLDIERS HOME: POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS, WARRIOR MASCULINITY, AND THE (RE)FRAMING OF CARE

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ABSTRACT

The United States military has long been considered a proving ground for masculinity and encourages servicemembers to adopt a warrior mindset of bravery and toughness at the expense of vulnerability. Such a mindset often proves troublesome for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as it dissuades them from seeking care in the form of therapy. This article argues that contemporary recommendations to attune therapy to embrace military masculinity in an attempt to make it more appealing to veterans are misguided. Ernest Hemingway's 1925 short story "Soldier's Home" dramatizes how an appeal to normative forms of masculinity as an entry point to post-combat healing risks a rejection of care entirely if this type of masculinity is ever questioned. The substitution of a care-receiving process by a masculinity-affirming process that he cannot accept leaves protagonist Harold Krebs with no choice but to refuse it and flee his hometown after returning from service in World War I. To demonstrate alternative possibilities, the article then examines George Saunders's "Home" (2013) and Toni Morrison's *Home* (2012) as texts that explore how interrogations of military masculinity itself can contribute to the healing process. In both texts, the protagonists realize that manhood means more than protection and violence, which engenders an acceptance of care. While neither text offers a complete resolution by its end, they both gesture towards the necessity of changing perceptions of manhood fostered by the military. To conclude, the article references Walt Whitman's *Memoranda During the War* as one historical precedent that demonstrates how certain types of vulnerability are acceptable and necessary, even during wartime.

Keywords: masculinity; wartime; Toni Morrison; Ernest Hemingway; Walt Whitman.

In the 1865 version of *Drum-Taps*, Walt Whitman includes a relatively short poem titled "The Veteran's Vision."[1] The speaker begins by sketching the domestic scene where he finds himself, with his "wife at [his] side slumbering," his infant child sleeping not far away, and the war "long over" (Whitman 1865, 55). As he "wake[s] from sleep," the veteran is overtaken by an intense flashback. This vision commands his senses as he "hear[s] the sounds of the different missiles," "see[s] the shells exploding," and

[1] "The Veteran's Vision" was added to the 1867 version of *Leaves of Grass*. Subsequently, it was retitled "The Artilleryman's Vision" and included in the "Drum-Taps" cluster of future versions of *Leaves*. Edits to the poem after its initial publication were minor.

"breathe[s] the suffocating smoke"—all while witnessing the cannon fire, rifle shots, cavalry charges, and chaos erupting around him (ibid.). Despite a "devilish exultation" that the veteran feels in response to the cannon fire, the vision is not sterilized or romanticized, as he sees "[t]he falling, dying" and "the wounded, dripping/and red" (56). The poem ends not with the veteran snapping out of his vision and back to the peace and comfort of his domestic life but with the veteran still inside of this flashback that "[pressed] upon [him]," leaving his fate ambiguous (55). Before World War I's 'shell-shock,' before World War II's 'combat fatigue,' and over 100 years before the term "Post-traumatic stress disorder" was first published in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (1980), Whitman recognized and explained how the conclusion of combat does not simply equate to a return to normalcy—in any sense—for the now-veteran.

The visions of Whitman's poem highlight an enduring issue that has persisted and possibly intensified as war has evolved over the past century-and-a-half. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs website (2022), between 11% and 20% of American veterans who served in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom have PTSD, while 12% of Gulf War veterans suffer from post-traumatic stress. For Vietnam Veterans, the percentage is estimated to be about 30. According to other studies, as many as 45% of "recently returning veterans meet the diagnostic criteria for PTSD" (Neilson et al. 2020, 579). For thousands upon thousands of individuals, the mind and the body become perpetual vessels of war even when removed from the literal battlefield.

Advocating therapy for veterans with PTSD and combat-induced mental distress seems like a clear and relatively simple solution to providing care for individuals who need it. After all, both prolonged exposure and cognitive processing therapy are "empirically supported" treatment methods for PTSD (Neilson et al. 2020, 580). The complication that prevents this clear and simple solution from being an easy solution is that veterans often balk at the proposal of therapy because it seemingly goes against the toughness, fearlessness, and stoicism required to serve in the military. This disconnect and the underlying gender expectations it stems from is where I seek to intervene.

In this article, I examine the intersections between masculinity, wartime, and care. After sketching what I refer to as the warrior ethos—a longstanding attitude of toughness, imperviousness, and domination fostered by the American military—I turn to contemporary studies that link this expression of manhood with PTSD and studies that suggest attuning therapy to embrace the warrior ethos worldview. I argue that Ernest Hemingway's 1925 short story "Soldier's Home" reveals the problems with a masculinity-centered approach to post-war decompression by dramatizing how a rejection of normative forms of manhood risks a wholesale rejection of care. Echoing the predicament Hemingway dramatizes, George Saunders and Toni Morrison acknowledge the failure of the warrior ethos in modifying care but also evoke an alternative solution. I contend that the protagonists of Saunders's "Home" (2011) and Morrison's *Home* (2012) interrogate military masculinity itself, positing that *it* is the component requiring change. As explored in each version of 'home,' the association between care-receiving and femininity, childhood, and weakness exacerbates the anxiety to receive care. Instead of reframing care to fit within the boundaries of 'acceptable' expressions of masculinity for the veteran, these protagonists experience moments of revelation that expose the myths of the warrior ethos. In these cases, recalibrating masculinity enables care which engenders the possibility for healing.

THE STRENGTH OF A WARRIOR

In *Bring Me Men: Military Masculinity and the Benign Façade of American Empire 1898-2001*, Aaron Belkin (2012) argues that military service became the "dominant paradigm for male authority" in the United States after the conclusion of the Spanish-American War (16). For individuals who want to "prove their manhood" (ibid.), military service allows them to demonstrate that "they [are] not 'sissies'" (Phillips 2006, 4). For individuals less aligned with traditional masculinity, the crucible of training and combat enables them to "attain masculine status" (Belkin 2012, 42). While Belkin orients his analysis at the turn of the 20th century, U.S. government and American culture at large have played on this association between the military and masculinity from the Civil War

up through the present to bolster recruitment efforts for various branches of the armed forces, justify political positions, or glorify the soldier at home.[2]

Much has been written about military masculinity and the military's celebration of "traditional masculine values" that includes a "hypermasculine" adherence to heterosexuality, physical fitness, and aggression as well as a distaste for "expressing emotion" and an aversion to "being *feminized*" (Richard and Molloy 2020, 687).[3] As noted by Hyunyoung Moon (2022), the Army "officially adopted the term 'warrior' as an ideal for its troops" in the early 2000s when it incorporated a set of principles called the "Warrior Ethos" into the "Soldier's Creed"—which must be memorized by all soldiers (181). The "Warrior Ethos" reads as follows: "I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat. I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade" (U.S. Army 2022). Moon argues that the Army's recruitment campaigns of 2018 and 2019—respectively titled "Warriors Wanted" and "What's Your Warrior?"—present true warriors as those who adhere to "the masculine soldier ideal" despite the Army's apparent attempt to expand the definition of who and what roles qualify one as a warrior (190). Furthermore, Moon asserts, "gender integration policies and broadened roles of women servicemembers" have done little to alter the "firmly planted" impression that "warrior" is synonymous with "masculine" (ibid.). Thus, I find the term warrior ethos fitting to describe the brand of masculinity lauded by the military. By promoting attitudes associated with masculinity/hypermasculinity, the military encourages a type of warrior mindset in those who serve that simultaneously encourages bravery, resiliency, and toughness and diminishes vulnerability.[4]

A critical reading of the four sentences that comprise the "Warrior Ethos" passage reveals military masculinity's deceptive complexity. The first sentence that

[2] For examples throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, see Eleanor L. Hannah's "From the Dance Floor to the Rifle Range: The Evolution of Manliness in the National Guards" (2007), Kristin L. Hoganson's *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (1998), Christina Jarvis's *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity during World War II* (2004), and Kathy J. Phillips's *Manipulating Masculinity: War and Gender in Modern British and American Literature* (2006).

[3] See Richard and Molloy's "An Examination of Emerging Adult Military Men: Masculinity and U.S. Military Climate" (2020).

[4] These values are all explicit or implicit pillars of the "Soldier's Creed."

demands soldiers put the mission first effectively extols a type of surrender by elevating an external, shared goal above an individual's needs, wants, preferences, and safety. The next two sentences repudiate surrender in refusing to quit or accept defeat; these sentences reflect the fearlessness and courage associated with military hypermasculinity. The final sentence gestures towards a notion of brotherhood, which is a type of caring. If we are to take the "Warrior Ethos" as the U.S. Army's working definition of qualities that make a warrior, commitments to service and fostering community appear integral. These values should come as no surprise, as depictions of servicemen throughout American history often focus on camaraderie—from *Drum Taps* (1865) to *Band of Brothers* (2001) and beyond. However, the line is drawn between these commitments and being weak/vulnerable. Thus, the problem with the version of military hypermasculinity that I refer to as the warrior ethos is *not* that it rejects all forms of caring. Rather, the issue rests in how it encourages an unflinching attitude of fortitude, strength, and mastery over the self.

While the warrior ethos may have merits in a combat situation, it results in a clear predicament when it comes to soldiers who require mental health care post-deployment, as the vulnerability and openness that therapy often requires are antithetical to the warrior mindset. A study by Matthew Jakupcak et al. (2014) found that "greater endorsement of emotional toughness [defined by responses to questions about how soldiers ought to express or refrain from expressing their problems and fears] was associated with increased likelihood for a positive screen for PTSD and depression" (102).[5] Furthermore, veterans who suffer from PTSD symptoms but believe in higher levels of emotional toughness "may be especially avoidant of" therapy that includes discussing events that involve feelings of vulnerability, helplessness, or fear (103). The authors of the study surmise that men who endorse "traditional male gender ideologies may be drawn to military service, in which endorsement of emotional toughness is further reinforced," which creates a self-perpetuating cycle (Jakupcak et al. 2014, 100).

[5] This is not to say that a belief in emotional toughness causes PTSD. Rather, emotional toughness can "exacerbate emotional distress and delay treatment-seeking for mental health concerns" (Jakupcak et. al 2014, 100).

Another 2014 study linked PTSD in the military with anticipated enacted stigma (AES)—"an individual's belief that others will react in a hostile or discriminatory manner if they seek help for psychological distress" (Blais et al. 2014, 116). This study found that "[h]igher AES was associated with lower likelihood of support seeking," while also noting that AES itself "may be related to military culture or male gender norms that equate vulnerability…with weakness" (118). Three years later, a study by Heath et al. (2017) examined the relation between restrictive emotionality (RE)—defined by J.M. O'Neil as "restrictions and fears about expressing one's feelings" (193)—and military servicemen who experience mental health concerns. With the hypothesis that a combination of masculinity and military culture (both of which promote RE) in a high-distress environment may create a "perfect storm" for help-seeking stigma (194), the authors found that "both RE and distress were uniquely associated with higher levels of [help-seeking] stigma in this sample of men who have served in the military. Thus, military men who may be in need of services may also be the most likely to experience stigma associated with seeking mental health service" (195).

Examined in conjunction with one another, these three studies demonstrate an alarming link between the warrior ethos and the hesitancy veterans experience when it comes to undergoing post-combat therapy. Veterans who endorse emotional toughness are more likely to screen positive for PTSD, and those who have a higher anticipated stigma of suffering from PTSD have a lower likelihood of seeking support. An even greater resistance to seeking support is found in individuals who fear expressing their emotions. All three studies note that normative versions of masculinity encourage traits and attitudes that negatively contribute to PTSD in veterans (i.e. toughness, AES, and RE), resulting in a vicious circle. The toughness endorsed and promoted by the military exacerbates PTSD symptoms, while the hesitancies to express emotions and vulnerabilities associated with traditional forms of masculinity and bolstered by the combat environment hamper support-seeking. Indeed, the military creates the perfect storm for individuals not only to develop PTSD but to keep their struggles to themselves.

To combat this bleak conclusion, some scholars and researchers have offered suggestions based on these and similar findings to make therapy for combat related mental afflictions more palatable for veterans by changing perception rather than changing the process. For example, Blais et al. (2014) advocate "[c]ampaigns promoting access to mental health care" that address "service members' perceptions that people will react negatively to them if they seek help," such as the slogan that "[i]t takes the strength and courage of a warrior to ask for help" (118). Shields et al. (2017) extend this argument by claiming that "veterans who experience lingering effects of trauma or other mental health challenges may begin to narrate their symptoms and any mental health diagnosis as 'failure' or weakness—a fall from masculine grace" (217). Based on themes found in an examination of 15 veterans' narratives about their engagements with mental health treatment post-deployment, the authors claim that the large-scale hesitancy in veterans to seek care for their mental afflictions is rooted in notions of how men should act rather than an aversion to the therapy itself, prompting three suggestions: altering language to make care more "culturally appropriate" for the warrior ethos, recasting therapy as "proof of compliance" to military masculinity, and denoting participants as active rather than "passive recipient[s] of care" (223). Through these suggestions, the authors of this study believe that veterans will be more willing to seek the help they need and find a type of care they can rationalize as acceptable.

A LIFE OF COMPLICATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

Recalibrating veteran therapy to account for and even encourage the warrior ethos may not be the best answer. Writing well before PTSD was a defined and named condition, Ernest Hemingway—a wounded veteran himself—dramatized the experience in a way that reveals several flaws with the coupling of reintegration into civilian life and traditional masculinity.[6] For the most part, Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925) focuses on the life of Nick Adams from childhood to his military service in WWI, culminating with

[6] Hemingway served as a Red Cross ambulance driver in Italy during World War I.

his process of making peace with his war experiences in "Big Two-Hearted River." Breaking away from the Adams saga, "Soldier's Home" offers a protagonist in Harold Krebs who faces the same problem with returning to civilian life but from a different perspective with different results. Upon return, Krebs is ignored. He "came back much too late" for the people in his Kansas home to care (Hemingway 1925, 69). Once Krebs "felt the need to talk" about his war experiences, "no one wanted to hear about it," including his parents (69). Instead of listening to their son, Krebs's parents believe that the best thing for him is to have "a definite aim in life" by getting married and starting a career like his peer Charley Simmons (75). Through this belief, they appeal to a normative masculinity as a way to assuage Harold's wartime baggage; they transform the care-receiving process into a masculinity-affirming process.

Through this setup, the text poses and explores three problems regarding achieving catharsis only through an adherence to traditional masculinity. First is that for Krebs to realize such an ideal at home, he must occupy a paradoxical space that requires childlike behavior. If he wants to go out in the evenings to meet young women, he needs his father's permission to use the family car. At the breakfast table, his mother talks to him like a child, reminding her "dear boy" (75) not to "muss up the paper" before his father gets a chance to read it (73). When she gets upset, Krebs refers to her as "Mummy" and says he will "try and be a good boy for [her]" (76). Essentially, Krebs must embrace infantilization to arrive at the form of manhood his parents seek. While scholars like Milton Cohen (2010) would argue that this paradox demonstrates the "lies…[and] game-playing rituals" endemic to Krebs's hometown—in contrast to the "remarkably 'positive'" and "uncomplicated" masculine pursuits afforded to Krebs by his combat experience (163)—the contradictions and mixed messages of masculinity are far from a civilian-exclusive issue for Krebs. He wrestled with them during his time overseas when he and his fellow soldiers oscillated between boasting about constantly needing a

woman and claiming "girls mean nothing" (Hemingway 1925, 71).[7] This contradiction begs the question about which is the more masculine position: needing a girl (signaling virility but also dependence on another) or not thinking about girls ever (signaling an independent stoicism but also an implied asexuality or homosexuality). Both at home and in the military, then, the path to being a real man remains murky and paradoxical. The second problem the story explores is how advocating a normative masculinity enables its unchallenged continuation. Krebs enjoys the solitude of reading and the dark of the pool hall—both of which point to a more private and contemplative life than that of the husband/careerman. Since this lifestyle deviates from the expected masculinity of young men in this town, Krebs's parents attempt to force him to 'become a man' through a process that can only be considered a distortion of care.[8] Mr. and Mrs. Krebs never attempt to understand their son's needs, for they continue to advocate a lifestyle for him that he is incapable of handling at the moment. Similarly, regarding the question of needing girls in the army, Krebs claims that "you did not have to think about it" because when you really needed a girl, you simply got one (72). In effect, any interrogation of what *actually* makes one a 'real man' is stifled because the decision-making process lies beyond the soldier and in the hands of the Army itself to determine what is normal—just like how Mr. and Mrs. Krebs determine that a job and a girlfriend are the best things for their son. Rather than interrogate this form of masculinity, using it as part of the healing process simply assumes that it is somehow natural as opposed to constructed and, perhaps, flawed.

Finally, Krebs's eventual fate demonstrates the consequences of hinging a post-combat return to normalcy on masculinity. Psychological recommendations assume that altering care to comply with the warrior ethos makes it palatable. What happens if that masculinity is questioned? In the story, Krebs does not simply accept the norms of

[7] Aaron Belkin (2012) makes a convincing argument that military masculinity, in both its formation and practice, is full of contradictions, mixed messages, and seemingly incompatible dualities, ultimately claiming that "the ideal of American military masculinity is premised on a simultaneous renunciation and embrace of the unmasculine" (33).
[8] According to Nel Noddings (1984), "Whatever the one-caring actually does is enhanced or diminished, made meaningful or meaningless, in the attitude conveyed to the cared-for" (61). Other care theorists like Joan Tronto take issue with this argument about care being a dyad but recognize that care, at its core, is about relationships.

masculinity that his parents, peers, and town advocate. Both his time in the army and his time at home as a veteran demonstrate for Krebs how masculinity is fraught with contradictions and no easy answers.[9] For someone who tries to "keep his life from being complicated" Krebs's understanding of manhood only gets more muddled as he is pushed to embrace it (76). Unable to reconcile masculinity and care, Krebs's only option is to flee, for the supposed solution simply breeds further confusion. If the 'acceptable' conduit for care is a questionable masculinity, a rejection of that masculinity risks an ensuing rejection of care.

RETURNING HOME: POSSIBILITIES FOR AN ALTERNATIVE SOLUTION

Where Hemingway dramatizes the complications of relying on normative forms of masculinity to assist in making peace with wartime experiences, George Saunders highlights the shortcomings and faults of the warrior ethos itself. In "Home," Saunders (2013) pits recently returned veteran Mike against a society that does not endorse or praise the warrior ethos, along with personal demons of memories of his actions during deployment in the Middle East, and his own combat-induced mental distress.[10] The plot consists of a string of episodes where Mike and his interpretation of masculinity are rendered impotent, culminating in Mike's recognition that he needs help and needs to change.

Part of Mike's conflict upon his return home is how he is disregarded by those who do not want to deal with him. The text employs repetition to great effect, and one of the most obvious repetitions is the phrase "Thank you for your service." Mike's mother's landlord (Saunders 2013, 180, 181), employees at an electronics store (184), the sheriff (189), and his brother-in-law Ryan's father (194) all thank Mike for his service. However, rather than coming off as a sincere expression of gratitude for the horrors and

[9] One of the story's most common motifs is the practice of lying. The construction of 'true' masculinity may be another lie present.

[10] "Home" was originally published in *The New Yorker* in 2011. It was later released in Saunders's *Tenth of December* collection in 2013.

suffering Mike endured, "the thanks comes across as shallow, disconnected," and patronizing (Richtel 2015). None of the individuals who thank Mike for his service show any interest in either him or his experiences; they simply use the phrase to address them and disregard them. Denied a voice, Mike symbolically embodies the childhood that he lived prior to serving in the military—the childhood in the same town, house, and circumstances he returns to after the war.

In addition to being disregarded by those he encounters, Mike realizes that he has been unmanned quite literally, as a new man has replaced him in all his relationships. Harris, his mother's latest boyfriend, continuously inserts himself into Mike's life as if he were a source of authority and wisdom. When Mike first returns home, Harris asks Mike's mother "How long's he staying?" as if Mike's presence both intrudes upon his property, and Mike himself is incapable of answering (Saunders 2013, 171). Multiple times, Harris asks Mike about "the worst thing [he] ever did" while serving because telling him about it would be "[g]ood for the soul" (191). Far from serving as a confidant, Harris functions as both a replacement father figure and an obstacle between Mike and his mother. Mike's most agonizing example of emasculation through dispossession, though, is his now ex-wife Joy and her new husband Evan, whose relationship developed while Mike was overseas. Evan has literally replaced Mike as the man of the house, preventing Mike from entering to visit his two children and now ex-wife. Though Mike served as a protector and provider prior to deployment, his return finds him as a son without a father, a husband without a wife, and a father without children.

Mike's version of masculinity—the more traditional, tough, military masculinity—seems to suffer the same displacement that Mike does. In some instances, it has been rendered powerless, such as when Mike attempts to intimidate his mother's landlord into letting her stay in the house through physical force; the landlord simply calls the sheriff and a moving company. Elsewhere in the text, a New Age, softer masculinity replaces any trace of traditional or military masculinity, such as the electronics store that features male employees bringing shoppers espresso and cookies as they browse (184). Mike's description of his encounter with Evan, though, epitomizes

the combination of traditional masculinity's displacement and neutering. When Evan tells Mike how difficult it was for him and Joy to acknowledge their feelings for each other while also acknowledging that Joy's then-current husband was serving in the military, Mike starts to feel "like a chump" (187). He equates it to "being held down by a bunch of guys so another guy could come over and put his New Age fist up [his] ass while explaining that having his fist up [Mike's] ass was far from his first choice and was actually making him feel conflicted" (187). In this situation, Evan renders Mike completely vulnerable and powerless by expressing his emotions and avoiding confrontation. Mike, the tough, violent veteran, has no response. He simply takes Evan's verbal fisting and leaves, accentuating how, back home, a sensitive masculinity subordinates military masculinity.

Though the world and relationships Mike returns to after his service consistently disarm the warrior ethos by resisting the toughness and dominance Mike attempts to impose, it is not the first time that this version of masculinity has failed him. Recalling a pond cleaning job he performed in high school, Mike relays that each time he brought his rake to the gunk, he ripped open the swollen bellies of dozens of tadpoles. When he tried to save them, he realized that doing so only "torture[d] them worse," yet he persisted because the only way to rationalize the unintended carnage "was to keep doing it, over and over" (200). He concludes his recollection and analysis by claiming, "Years later, at Al-Raz, it was a familiar feeling" (200). While Mike's dubious actions at Al-Raz that haunt his return home are never explicitly revealed, they lie in the space between the two poles of being a warrior: protecting those entrusted to you and destroying those opposed. Evidently, Mike initially sought to protect at Al-Raz, but this protection turned into violence that he normalized to himself by refusing to stop.

As a man and as a warrior, Mike consistently experiences mixed messages that leave him in a liminal space between how men should act and how far is too far. The fineness of the line is only emphasized by the military as a whole, as Mike both receives

a Silver Star and is court-martialed for his battlefield actions.[11] Further complicating things is how, despite the court-martial, Mike is "cleared … of that [charge]" (191). Like Krebs, Mike's understanding of masculinity is less of an anchor that he can grab ahold of in times of uncertainty and more of a confounding presence.

The story's conclusion indicates that this confounding presence of warrior masculinity is precisely what Mike needs to part with to address his struggles. As much as Mike wants to find fault in the New Age man, it proves difficult for him. His sister's husband Ryan is not a hitter like his mother initially believes, but an active, present, and sensitive father. Evan is not quite a "selfish-dick" (187), but a man who expresses his emotions and tries to mitigate conflict. Perhaps due to the influence of these other characters who are not as bad as Mike initially assumes or perhaps because Mike's life experiences have not quite brought him to a point of no return, he has a revelation in the story's closing paragraphs. Seemingly at a breaking point, Mike returns to Evan and Joy's house intending to make them and his two children "be sorry for what had happened to [him]" (201). When he sees that his mother, sister, Harris, Ryan, and Ryan's parents are there as well, "the coming disaster [expands] to include the deaths of all present" (201). However, something "[softens] in [him]" when he sees how weak his mother looks (ibid.). Upon witnessing her vulnerability, Mike's mindset changes from murderous rage to docility, and he recognizes that he needs these people, for they are his only chance to be brought back from the edge he nearly falls from. He realizes that he cannot heal on his own, and tenacity, dominance, and destruction will not solve anything.

Mike's seemingly abrupt change of heart at the end of the story is an epiphany, not a surrender. Recognizing his own caring impulse towards his mother, Mike creates a dichotomy between violence/dominance/power and empathetic care; the two impulses are juxtaposed with one another rather than synthesized in some sort of shoehorned fashion. For the first time, Mike resists embodying the 'tough-guy,' and, in

[11] According to the U.S. Department of Defense (2012), Silver Stars are awarded for "gallantry in action" either "against an enemy of the United States" or "in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force."

doing so, he sees its incompatibility with the path forward towards making peace with his haunting wartime experience. It is hard to imagine Mike becoming like Ryan or Evan, but it is not hard to imagine him shifting his hardline stance on masculinity in favor of relationality and openness—for both his own sake and for that of those around him. Mike's future may be ambiguous, but this culminating moment where he recognizes care, not toughness, as necessary offers the possibility for growth and healing.

HERE STANDS A MAN

Where Saunders's "Home" culminates with a recognition that the warrior ethos needs to change to accept relational forms of care rather than reject them, Toni Morrison's *Home* (2012) illustrates a complete journey from that ethos steeped in traditional masculinity to a caring alternative in its depiction of protagonist Frank Money's journey back to his hometown of Lotus, Georgia.[12] Like "Soldier's Home" and "Home," *Home* is a story where the returned veteran must reckon with the empty promises of traditional masculinity. Unlike these other texts, though, trauma around masculinity is much more important to Frank's growth, leading him to find and embrace a suitable form of care and a suitable interpretation of manhood.

The novella opens with Frank recalling a scene from his childhood where he and his sister Cee sneak into a fenced off field to watch several horses fighting with one another. As Frank repeats several times, the horses stick out in his memory for how they "stood like men," conveying his awe at their beauty and brutality (Morrison 2012, 3). As Frank and his sister begin to leave, they observe a group of white men pick up a dead black body from a wheelbarrow, throw it into a ditch, and hastily bury it. From the outset, the novel links masculinity and trauma for Frank. On a basic level, the fighting horses *stood* like men when they reared back on their hind legs. However, they stood

[12] Published in 2012 and set during the 1950s, *Home* functions as a bridge between "Soldier's Home" (published and set in post-WWI America) and "Home" (published and set in contemporary America).

like *men* because of their strength and power. The simile implies that, even at such a young age, Frank has a notion of what makes a man: authority, strength, brutality, dominance. The proximity of these two events seems to have a lasting impression; the "deep black" horse is the victor in the conflict with the rust-colored horse (4), but the black man, disgraced by the jabs of the spades pushing him into the ground, lacks any sort of power. While Frank does not know anything about the dead man at this point, the juxtaposition of the dead black man with the awesome, victorious black horse implies that survival, when it comes to blackness, requires traditional masculine strength.

It is worth noting that Frank's impression of masculinity does allow for a type of care from the very beginning. He believes that he must fill the role of protector for his sister, which he attempts to do as they both lie in the grass hiding from the group of men. Frank acts this way for Cee throughout the text from childhood (attacking a pervert watching her play baseball; teaching her which berries are poisonous; saving her from their grandmother Lenore's wrath) to adulthood (rescuing her from the eugenics experiments of Dr. Beau). While protection-as-care is not an illegitimate form of care work, Joan Tronto (2013) argues that men often benefit from a "protection pass" (72) that seemingly absolves them of any other caring duties that are interpreted as "more feminized" (79). Protection is "presumed to be individualistic" which detracts from relationality's importance to care work (94). Essentially, the protector role allows an individual to look out for another's best interest one-dimensionally without a reciprocal recognition of the other. When this type of care is yoked to masculinity, it reinforces notions of strength, toughness, and dominance, all of which deny empathy and openness.

The other set of traumas that affect Frank throughout the text occur during his military service in Korea, but, instead of shaping or reinforcing his interpretation of masculinity, these traumas interrogate it. The first two of these events revealed to readers are the deaths of Mike Durham and Abraham "Stuff" Stone, Frank's 'homeboys' from Lotus who also served in Korea. Frank's belief in the masculine protector role fails him in both cases. For Mike, Frank "fought off the birds" that sought to attack his

wounded friend and "held on to him, talked to him for an hour" to keep him awake (Morrison 2012, 103); regardless, "he died anyway" (103). For Stuff, Frank retrieved his severed arm blown off by enemy explosives and "stanched the blood" oozing from the remaining stump, but, like Mike, "[h]e died anyway" (103). Despite his best efforts, being the protector—the only type of man that Frank knows how to be—is not enough to save his homeboys.[13]

The third traumatic event that Frank experiences in Korea happens first chronologically, but Frank's shame causes him to lie about it to the narrator. Initially, Frank relays a story of a young girl who often scavenged for scraps near his post. He claims that one day, as his relief guard approached her, she touched his crotch and said something that sounded like "Yum-yum" (95). Horrified and possibly tempted, the guard shoots and kills her. Later, in a first-person account of his memory to the narrator, Frank comes clean. He admits, "*I shot the Korean girl in her face. I am the one she touched*" (133). In his confession, Frank also admits a crisis of masculinity prompted by his actions, questioning, "*How could I like myself, even be myself if I surrendered to that place where I unzip my fly and let her taste me right then and there?* [...] *What type of man is that?*" (134) [author's emphasis]. Just like his repression of the dead body in the novella's opening scene, Frank tries to dissociate himself from this memory and distract himself from having to face the truth of his actions. He admits that he emphasizes his grief about his friends' deaths as part of a coping mechanism to mask his shame for this incident, but doing so does not provide him any solace.

These three events in Korea instill in Frank an uncertainty regarding his interpretation of masculinity, for it fails him when put to the test. Just as significant in each case, though, is Frank's loss of control. With the deaths of his friends, no amount of protection or assistance can save their lives. With the young girl, his immediate instinct is to shoot her to snuff out temptation instead of restraining himself. According

[13] Clearly, Frank cares deeply for Mike and Stuff, and their deaths should not be construed as some sort of failure to care. Rather, the effects of their deaths on Frank and his eventual journey to come to peace with his war experiences emphasize that the problem with the warrior ethos is not an absence of care but a rejection of all forms of vulnerability.

to John Fox and Bob Pease (2012), trauma directly affects one's sense of masculinity precisely because it impacts one's sense of control. Initially, Frank spirals downward into alcoholism, recklessness, and a desire to reclaim his masculinity by rescuing Cee from Dr. Beau. However, Fox and Pease also argue that "[t]he experience of trauma is the regaining of this human wisdom of confronting the illusions of comprehensive mastery and of traditional masculinities" (28). If one can recognize that trauma-as-a-loss-of-control exposes a "failure in the model of manhood, and not in the man" (29), then that individual can use past traumatic experiences as points of growth and understanding. In *Home*, Frank mirrors this process. His journey throughout the text is about coming to peace with his past which ensues from his reinterpretation of masculinity and what it means to be a man.

Unlike Krebs or Mike, this journey to an alternative conception of manhood for Frank has an additional layer due to his status as a black man in 1950s America, for the traditional masculinity he endorses is, at its core, a "hegemonic white view of masculinity" (Harack 2016, 380). Throughout Frank's journey, his race impinges his ability to fully participate in American society and causes multiple roadblocks on his trip to Georgia, including being placed in a mental asylum and getting patted down by police officers. As Reverend John Locke tells Frank, even though Jim Crow is over, "[c]ustom is just as real as law and can be just as dangerous" (Morrison 2012, 19). Part of these dangers are internal as well, for Frank's status as a "traumatized black veteran is the epitome of the already fragmented black individual" (Ramírez 2016, 137). Part of Frank's quest, then, is to reach the wholeness of community that has the power to repair the fragmented self and reject the "model of rampant individualism" associated with the "white, hegemonic, male ideologies of progress" (Harack 2016, 372). These struggles highlight Frank's quest not just to understand what it means to be a man but what it means to be a black man.[14]

[14] For more on this racial quest, see Cucarella-Ramon (2017), "Any Man's Blues': Exposing the Crisis of African-American Masculinity in the Delusion of a Post-Racial United States in Toni Morrison's *Home*" and Harack (2016), "Shifting Masculinities and Evolving Feminine Power: Progressive Gender Roles in Toni Morrison's *Home*."

As a counter to the prejudice he faces, a consistent refrain on Frank's cross-country odyssey is the willingness of those whom he encounters to offer their assistance. In fact, "the sustenance and solidarity" of individuals with whom he has no prior relation prove invaluable to his otherwise "impossible" task of traveling from Seattle to Georgia (Ibarrola 2014, 115). From Jean Locke's sandwiches to Reverend Maynard's list of hotels in Chicago that will not reject a black man to Billy Watson's gifts of clothes and a place to stay, Frank witnesses the compassion of care and experiences the role of care-receiver. Just as significant as these caring acts are Frank's own opportunities to deviate from the role of violent protector. If opening himself to receive care is Frank's first step to changing his views of masculinity, his nonviolent interaction with Dr. Beau—who is guilty of performing eugenics experiments that bring Cee to the brink of death—functions as his second step. While "[t]houghts of violence…[rush] through Frank" (Morrison 2012, 109) as he prepares himself to retrieve Cee, he confronts the doctor with a "quiet, even serene, face" (111). With the help of Sarah, Cee's coworker and friend, Frank simply scoops up his sister with "[n]o harm" to anyone (112). Reflecting on the relative ease with which he accomplished his task, Frank feels that "not having to beat up the enemy to get what he wanted was somehow superior—sort of, well, smart" (114). While he still functions as the protector in Cee's rescue, the nonviolence of the situation is not lost on Frank as a completely valid way to operate.

Upon his arrival in Lotus with the severely wounded Cee, Frank experiences a type of care that runs completely counter to his belief in protection. Led by Ethel Fordham, the women of Lotus take Cee away from Frank and into their guardianship. Frank is excluded from the recovery process because the women "[believe] his maleness would worsen her condition" (119). Frank's only understanding of care is to protect others from harm. Yet, to recover from Dr. Beau's torture, Cee needs the care of "country women who loved mean" (121). This tough love begins by disregarding sympathy and "[handling] sickness as though it were an affront" (ibid.). As her wounds begin to heal, Cee is reintegrated into the community of women through embroidering and quilting. Finally, she is privy to "the demanding love of Ethel Fordham" which strengthens her to as full of a recovery as possible (125). This three-step process of poignant action,

community building, and love upends Frank's entire understanding of what it means to care for another. Despite Cee's permanent infertility due to the doctor's experiments, the country women save her life because they understand that protective care is not helpful in this situation. Cee's recovery as well as her newfound strength and self-assuredness due to the process prompt Frank to recalibrate his belief in the possibilities of care.

The culminating moment of Frank's inner journey is a marriage of masculinity and care proper that simultaneously allows him to make peace with a past trauma while also providing him the opportunity to move forward and heal from his war experiences. After over a decade of repressing his memory, Frank inquires about the burial he and his sister witnessed as children. The men of Lotus reveal that the building on the farm held "men-treated-like-dog fights"— one-on-one battles to death for sport (138). According to Fish Eye Anderson, ten to fifteen years prior a boy named Jerome came to Lotus after being forced to fight his own father with a switchblade in one such deathmatch where "[o]ne of them had to die or they both would [be killed]" (ibid.). While Jerome initially refused to strike, his father insisted, telling him, "Obey me, son, this one last time" (139). Suffering much anguish, Jerome then took his father's life to save his own. After hearing this story, Frank gathers some tools, a piece of wood, Cee, and the quilt she had been stitching. The two of them return to the field, dig up the skeleton of the man they saw buried years ago, bring the remains to the riverside, and give him a proper grave, burying him vertically under a bay tree. Frank labels the grave with a wooden marker that reads "Here Stands A Man" (145).

While neither Frank nor the narrator offer much commentary during this concluding episode to the novella, Frank's actions demonstrate a new understanding of care and masculinity that intertwines both. The bones that Frank buries are the remains of an individual who gave up his own life out of love for his son. He could not protect, so he gave himself completely for another. For these reasons, as Frank recognizes by the text's end, this individual is a man. Of course, this understanding of masculinity is very different from Frank's prevailing interpretation up until this point in the text. Similarly, though, Cee's recovery shows that there are different types of care from those assumed

by gendered expectations. Despite assumptions, having children is not the only type of care for women. Cee cannot bear children, but she can "know the truth, accept it, and keep on quilting," finding community in Lotus outside of an individual family unit (132). For Frank, being a strong, rough, violent protector is not the only valid type of care for men. While the horses in the opening scene stood *like* men, it was only by resemblance. Jerome's father *is* a man, and Frank recognizes it by the novella's end.

By altering his perception of masculinity and the possibilities for manhood, Frank can begin to make peace with his own war experiences that were crises of masculinity prompted by his belief in the warrior ethos. A masculinity that demands an individual always be in control, always hold a dominant position, never succumb to weakness, and not need anything from anyone is not a true masculinity because such demands are impossible to satisfy. Frank's new conception of masculinity by the text's end sets him on a path to be open with what he did in Korea and make peace. While the novella's ending does not depict all of Frank's problems as somehow 'solved,' it shows him burying his traumas—and that is a burying of coming-to-peace-with rather than a burying of repression. Open to other expressions of care and masculinity, Frank, alongside Cee, finally has an emotional and spiritual place that he can call home.

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE

Reframing care to fit into the warrior ethos by making it a masculine endeavor seems wrong. Such a process simply enables a belief in military hypermasculinity to persist even though care itself rejects that worldview and the association between military service and a tenacious manhood is a construct that clashes with reality. Still, advocates for recalibrating care in a way that accounts for the warrior ethos are partially right; perception needs to change in order for servicemembers to accept the care that they need. However, instead of changing the perception of care to that of a manly endeavor, we need to change the perception that different types of care have no place in the warrior ethos.

This suggestion is not a well-meaning yet utopic fantasy, but an embrace of an under-acknowledged pattern of wartime behavior that stretches back in American

history to at least the Civil War. In *Memoranda During the War*, Walt Whitman (1875) details his experiences serving as a nurse of sorts in and around Washington D.C. between 1862 and 1865. While Whitman understood the medical staff's prerogative to abandon the ostensible lost causes in the overcrowded hospital wards, he also recognized the injustice of letting young men die alone, "without the presence of kith or kin," and sought to serve in this capacity (Whitman 1875, 44). For certain wounded soldiers, this would mean giving "little gift, such as oranges, apples sweet crackers, figs," (11) or small sums of money "to raise their spirits, and show them that somebody cared for them, and practically felt a fatherly or brotherly interest in them" (64). For others, gifts were not able to warm their spirits that "hunger[ed] and thirst[ed] for affection" (54). In these cases, Whitman offered his time, serving as a friendly face and confidant, which often included "[writing] all sorts of letters" for these soldiers, "including love letters, very tender ones" (14). And, sometimes, it meant offering them a kiss—a final moment of intimacy, affection, and love—as they breathed their last breaths.

Whitman enabled *and* encouraged Civil War soldiers to embody intimacy, closeness, tenderness, and affection, opening their eyes to the possibilities of accepting care during their most vulnerable hours. While electing the caring function of nursing along with the sacrifices it requires and the mental turmoil it instills may be considered an alternative conception of masculinity during wartime, Whitman actively encouraged an 'unmasculine' response from the soldiers he cared for during his nursing tenure. In this symbiotic way—both from and towards Whitman—*Memoranda*'s content offers a concrete example of empathetic caring of men, between men in a purportedly hyper-masculinized context that does not allow for such expressions of tenderness. Caring practices and attitudes are by no means foreign to military service—recall the camaraderie encouraged by the "Warrior Ethos" passage itself. However, it is this specific version of caring that encourages openness and vulnerability that expressly combats the hypermasculine nature of the military which contributes to the widespread incompatibility of veterans and PTSD therapy.

With this historical precedent in mind, maybe encouraging a certain type of vulnerability in the military has benefits, especially when it comes to the disconnect in

veterans who must transform from independent beacons of strength to emotionally expressive communicators in order to make peace with traumas caused by their service. If the "Warrior Ethos" passage itself accounts for an acceptable type of surrender and actively encourages brotherhood amongst soldiers, such a foundation is already laid. The first steps to a solution simply require a shift of emphasis to the principles/values behind *these* aspects of warriorhood deemed not only tolerable but necessary.

The position I put forth in this article is less of an argument against certain psychological recommendations than it is an advocation for a different perspective in the hope that it does not get lost or forgotten. Ultimately, the goal for each side is to encourage help for veterans suffering alone, in silence. While the works by Hemingway, Saunders, and Morrison are fiction and may not be *evidence* that altering the warrior ethos is a viable solution, they contain the same *truth* Whitman observed during the most catastrophic war to ever take place on American soil: maybe a caregiver and a care-receiver can both be warriors as well, for warriors are still humans.

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DISCURSIVE INCARCERATION: BLACK FRAGILITY IN A DIVIDED PUBLIC SPHERE

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ABSTRACT

The expression of fragility has always been a difficult and complex matter for African Americans, for the discourse of mainstream media is set up to both sustain and misrecognize their fragility . Even though the black public sphere split off from the dominant public sphere after the Civil War to enable distinctive forms of expression, the "practiced habits" of which Coates speaks continued working within the structures of the dominant discourse. My essay will analyze the structure of America's indifference to fragility in six parts. In the first section, I will introduce a normative problematic that can track how the hegemonic public sphere uses the rhetoric of formal equality to subordinate and silence African Americans speech, while also opening a space for black speech to be heard rather than dismissed. Sections two and three examine the historical separation of the black public sphere from the dominant public sphere, tracing the silencing structures that haunt us today back to the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision of 1954, for this "progressive" decision provided a template for what can be said and cannot be said. The fourth section analyzes how Ralph Ellison thematizes and revises the encounter between the black and dominant public spheres. Sections five and six discuss the ways in which Ta-Nehisi Coates exposes the contemporary forms of these discursive structures that undermine progress toward equality and the resistance to such exposure in the media.

Keywords: fragility; social imaginary; race; public sphere; normativity.

> *The mettle that it takes to look away from the horror of our prison system, from police forces transformed into armies, from the long war against the black body, is not forged overnight. This is the practiced habit of jabbing out one's eyes and forgetting the work of one's hands. (Ta-Nehisi Coates,* Between the World and Me*)*

The expression of fragility has always been a difficult and complex matter for African Americans, for the discourse of mainstream media is set up to maintain their fragility by obscuring it through misdescriptions that disqualify any protest.[1] Even though the black public sphere split off from the dominant public sphere after the Civil

[1] I would like to thank the anonymous readers of this essay and the guest editors, Chiara Patrizi and Pilar Martínez Benedí, for their comments, which have helped me improve my argument. In addition, I would like to thank Laura Lane Steele for her thorough reading of my essay and her insightful suggestions.

War to enable distinctive forms of expression, these alternative forms were unable to revise the "practiced habits" of which Coates speaks. The result is that, today, the black public sphere exists alongside the dominant discourse, breaking through momentarily, as we saw in the widespread outrage at George Floyd's murder, only to be pushed away by backlash. Given this discursive landscape, how should we approach fragility? First, we need a normative problematic capable of tracking how the hegemonic public sphere uses the rhetoric of formal equality to subordinate and silence African American speech. Second, this problematic must also open a space for black speech to be heard rather than dismissed as "resurrecting the past," as politically invalid identity politics, or as an attack on "white people," phrases we often hear in response to Critical Race Theory and the 1619 Project, both of which attempt to introduce the relevance of longstanding, systemic racism into current discussions about public education.[2] In the first section of this essay, I introduce the problematic of social imaginaries in order to articulate the structures of "discursive incarceration" within the dominant collective imagination, whose historical shape is outlined in the second section. I then turn to the complex normative challenges to these structures articulated in the writings of Ralph Ellison, who thematizes the conflict between the mainstream and black public spheres, holding up for interrogation some of the structures on both sides of the divide. I then move to Coates's structural critique of the "post-racial" optimism following the election of Barack Obama. Written in the form of a letter to his son, Coates's *Between the World and Me* insists on the power of the mainstream racial imaginary to reinvent justifications that perpetuate the ongoing subordinating violence inflicted on black lives, violence that makes black lives extremely fragile, at the same time that it silences them.

[2] "Since January 2021, 41 states have introduced bills or taken other steps that would restrict teaching critical race theory or limit how teachers can discuss racism and sexism, according to an *Education Week* analysis. Fifteen states have imposed these bans and restrictions either through legislation or other avenues." https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/map-where-critical-race-theory-is-under-attack/2021/06.

THE LINGUISTIC POLITICS OF SOCIAL IMAGINARIES

When political philosophers and lay people conceive of democratic ideals, they often employ an idealized thought experiment that permits them to generate conceptual principles abstracted from the narratives and practices of any community. We can see these thought experiments in the work of John Rawls, the most influential American political philosopher of the twentieth century. Rawls (1971) developed a counterfactual ideal he calls the "original position" (17-22), in which the citizen is deprived of any knowledge of his/her intelligence, class, sex, etc., for the derivation of principles.[3] For the American public sphere, this conception of principle is concretized in the most consequential model for normative reasoning: the Supreme Court opinion. Since Rawls himself endorsed this form as a model, I will pay particular attention to the structures of discourse shaping some influential cases, as well as to the power of these structures to shape the collective imagination (Ferguson 1990).[4] By examining normativity through the problematic of the collective imagination, I can display the structures of legitimation of a particular society through time, structures that are occluded by an approach that sees normativity as the realization of principles and that animates this realization by a call to "live up to our principles."

As a point of departure, I will use Charles Taylor's hermeneutic formulation of the collective imagination as "social imaginaries" to inform my argument. "The social imaginary is not a set of ideas," Taylor declares, but rather, the imaginary forms the background that makes sense of "the practices of a society … Thus, the notion of a moral order goes beyond some proposed schedule of norms that ought to govern our mutual relations and/or political life …. The image of order carries not only a definition of what is right, but of the context in which it makes sense to strive for and hope to realize the

[3] See Carla Bagnoli's essay "Constructivism," in which she brings together many of these diverse thinkers––John Rawls, Christine Korsgaard, Onora O'Neill––under a common definition: "the view that the moral principles we ought to accept or follow are the ones that agents would agree to or endorse were they to engage in a hypothetical or idealized process of rational deliberation" (Bagnoli 2021). This line of thinking begins with Kant and continues through Habermas.

[4] Rawls (1993) says, "To check whether we are following the public reason we might ask: how would our argument strike us presented in the form of a Supreme Court opinion?" (254).

right" (Taylor 2004, 2, 8-9). The social imaginary concerns the ways "ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms but in images, stories, legends, etc. … The social imaginary is that common understanding which makes possible common practices and widely shared sense of legitimacy" (Taylor 2013, 308).[5] These imaginaries—made from fictional and nonfictional sources—form the background out of which we think and act but "which we do not entirely understand. To ascribe total personal responsibility to us for these is to want to leap out of the human condition" (Taylor 2007, 387). Taylor's argument for imaginaries thus has a transcendental and historical dimension. On the one hand, the transcendental dimension maintains that imaginaries, not concepts or categories alone, are the inescapable condition of thought that cannot be ignored or blocked out in the interest of rationality or clarity.[6] On the other hand, the historical dimension insists that the imaginaries are not timeless categories, but the outcome of historical conditions. Taylor uses the notion of the imaginary to show how the Western collective imagination made a transition from premodern religious and hierarchical macro structures to the ones that now shape Western modernity, such as the public sphere, the modern moral subject, secularity, and popular sovereignty. He does not develop how the imaginary is also the source of domination, resistance, and argument, though his problematic can be expanded to address these issues and bring literary discourse into political argument.[7] However, the importance of the imaginary does not reside in its nuanced treatment of the background alone, but also in the way it makes the utterances we find in novels, essays, letters, and films relevant to normative debate. In my view, normative argument is not focused on the application of a principle to a particular situation or text, but on the way a particular utterance engages the relevant imaginary. In the next two sections, I will characterize the relevant imaginary

[5] Imaginaries are the middle level of articulation, placed between the "explicit doctrines about society, the divine or the cosmos," and "embodied understanding" or "habitus" (Taylor 1999, 167).
[6] See Taylor's exchange with Robert Brandom (Taylor 2010, Brandom 2010) over whether we can reason without imaginaries. Taylor believes we cannot; Brandom thinks we can.
[7] I have developed the imaginary as a normative problematic that differs from Taylor's and shows how argument through the imaginary is possible. See Steele 2017.

background in the works of Ellison and Coates. The point of the historical background is not to inform readers about well-known discrete historical events and texts, but rather to show them how these are indicators of a structural "discursive incarceration" that makes African Americans fragile and vulnerable at the same time that it silences them. In the last two sections, I show how this structure is passed down not just to Ellison and his generation, but to Coates's (ours) as well.

DIVIDING THE PUBLIC SPHERE: WHITE DOMINATION AND BLACK CONTESTATION

From the time of the Civil War, the black public sphere has split from the mainstream public sphere. As David Blight (2001) observes: "In the half century after the war, as the sections reconciled, by and large, the races divided" (4). Civil War reunions ceremoniously reinforced what was going on in the discursive public sphere: white unity was celebrated, while the memory of slavery and African American voices was suppressed. We can see this in events such as the commemoration at Gettysburg in l913, at which soldiers from the Union and Confederate armies appeared without a single black soldier nor any mention of black people in President Woodrow Wilson's speech.[8] Black newspapers, on the other hand, denounced the event.[9] This attempt to canonize the memory of the Civil War as the story of how both sides fought gloriously and how a divided nation healed after 1865 was reinforced in the twentieth century by the enormously popular documentary by Ken Burns, *The Civil War*, which appeared in 1990 and was watched by 40 million viewers. As historian Leon Litwack (1997) says, "The most appalling and revealing shortcoming in Ken Burns's *The Civil War* is the way it chose to deal with the war's legacy … with every anniversary, with every reunion of aging

[8] See Michael Dawson's discussion of how the forced exclusion of blacks led to the establishment of a set of parallel institutions outside of the main venues of American civil society (Dawson 2012). There are, of course, other public spheres organized around ethnicity or gender in the United States—e.g., Latinx.

[9] The *Washington Bee*, a black Republican newspaper at the time, asked, "A Reunion of whom? Only those who fought for the preservation of the Union and extinction of human slavery" or those who 'fought to destroy the Union and perpetuate slavery, and who are now employing every artifice and argument known to deceit and sophistry to propagate a national sentiment in favor of their nefarious contention that emancipation, reconstruction and enfranchisement are a dismal failure" (cited Blight 2001, l0).

veterans, the war came to be depoliticize. … Memories on both sides turned toward a recounting of military exploits, towards patriotic sentimentalism. …" (134-35).[10]

The history of the separation of black and mainstream public spheres is too long a story to tell here. For my purposes, its most important feature is the codification of the imaginary framework of "separate but equal." This imaginary emerged and exercised its power even before the Founding, as historian Nicholas Guyatt (2016) has shown in *Bind Us Apart: How Enlightened Americans Invented Racial Segregation*—that is, long before the famous *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896. What made the imaginary structure so important was that it created a way for the concept of equality to cohabit with subordinating practices and imaginaries shaping the lives of African Americans, while "protecting" whites from grasping black self-understandings.[11] Even Justice Harlan's famous dissent—"in the eye of the law, there is no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens"—includes the reassurance to whites of their superiority: "The white race deems itself to be the dominant race in this country. And so it is" (*Plessy 1896*, 559). The language of the dominant group created a normative reality that black people were forced to recognize and, to some extent, internalize. The dominant language not only rationalized the anguish of African Americans as justified, it also made them doubt the reality of their own experience, a kind of gaslighting that ignored or justified their pain and enhanced their fragility. Despite their subordinate status, African Americans came up with coping strategies, including linguistic ones. These linguistic differences were sufficiently profound and structurally coordinated to generate a distinctive language.[12]

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[10] W. E. B. Dubois pushed back against the dominant memory in *Black Reconstruction* (1935), a work that was largely ignored by the mainstream media.

[11] As historians confirm, the case captured the understanding of the principles of equality and fairness of most Americans at the time. Harlan was proposing, as Reva Siegel (1996) points out, that "the nation could repudiate a regime of racial caste in the eyes of the law while continuing a regime of racial caste as a social fact" (229). This is the perfect rationalization—elites could maintain their practices of subordination while telling themselves that they were fulfilling the country's ideals.

[12] Two short citations from Bakhtin (1981) will clarify what I mean: "At any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present … (291). Thus, "every speaker "live(s) in several language systems" (295).

BROWN AND THE IMAGINARY OF SEPARATE BUT EQUAL

The *Brown* Court inherited the imaginary framework of "separate but equal," an American tradition since the Founding. This structure permitted the concept of equality to coexist with the subordinating practices and imaginaries shaping the lives of African Americans. *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) captured the understanding of the principles of equality and fairness of most Americans at the time (Rosen 2006, 54). I emphasize this point to push back against the claim that there was a "contradiction" between the principle of equality and the practices of the time—e.g., in Gunnar Myrdal's words (1995): "In principle the Negro problem was settled long ago; in practice the solution is not effectuated" (24). Myrdal falls into the trap of separating principle from the historical imaginary with which it is associated, as if a concept had a clear telos in the collective imaginary which we were "failing to realize." Principles are always understood with and through social imaginaries as a condition of their intelligibility. The only reason white people could talk about the principle of equality as an ideal was that they had found a way to reconcile it with their belief in black people's inferiority.[13]

The *Brown* Court understood well the limits imposed by the "separate but equal" imaginary of the time and hence how controversial their decision would be. Chief Justice Earl Warren gave explicit recommendations to the other Justices on the language of the decision: it "should be short, readable by the lay public, non-rhetorical, unemotional and, above all, nonaccusatory" (quoted in Kennedy 2011, 121).[14] Warren's directive can be seen as sound political advice; he did not want the Court to create more animosity from segregationists than necessary by demanding that they examine their past acts. But if we take a long view, we can read this instruction as a continuation of the "gag" order

[13] The belief in black inferiority—fostered by the scientific studies of the time--was widespread among abolitionists and was woven into the imaginaries on both sides of the slavery debate. Frederick Douglass (2018) understood that abolition of slavery did not, by itself, address the fundamental issue—the recognition of the full humanity of people of African descent (117-18).

[14] As Kennedy observes: "If all we knew about segregation was what is discernible from the face of that ruling, one could be forgiven for wondering what was so wrong about 'separate but equal'" (121). For "gag rules" during debates over slavery, see Stephen Holmes 1988.

about the discussion of slavery in Congress prior to the Civil War.[15] In other words, the political censorship on matters of race started long before *Brown* and continues to this day.

Although *Brown* overturned *Plessy* on the desegregation of schools—other forms of segregation remained in place—it used four rhetorical devices to create a new discursive landscape of subordination. One was the way social scientific evidence was gathered and used by the Court. *Brown*'s famous footnote 11 to Kenneth Clark's research, showing that adolescent black girls preferred white dolls to black ones, and to Gunnar Myrdal's An *American Dilemma,* supported the "damage hypothesis." This interpretation used the language of victimhood as the appropriate lenses for addressing race. While this language may have been effective in the short-run in breaking down legal segregation, it was also effective in reinforcing the languages of condescension and inequality (white people were not considered to be damaged by their own violence, of course). The white majority could treat blacks as an object of pity, an approach that did little to challenge their own self-understanding.[16] This disempowering condescension can be seen in the structure of many "progressive" literary works, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), in which black characters are depicted only from the point of view of whites, only as objects of pity, rather than as agents whose thought and words matter.

The second feature—found in the *Brown* decision and in Myrdal's famous study—was the oblivion of African American writings and institutions. Myrdal's work (1995) established a pattern of not just disregarding African American voices but of seeing their culture as "a distorted development, or a pathological condition, of the general American culture" (928-29). In this reading, black people were so deformed by the violence inflicted on them that they were incapable of creating a nourishing culture or recognizing their own best interests.

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[15] In May 1836, the House passed a resolution that automatically 'tabled' or postponed action on all petitions relating to slavery without hearing them. https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1800-1850/The-House-of-Representatives-instituted-the-%E2%80%9Cgag-rule%E2%80%9D/.

[16] See Darryl Scott 1997, which looks at the damage imagery used by both racists and antiracists.

The third feature of the hegemonic American imagination was interest convergence, whereby blacks gained social justice primarily when their interests converged with the interests of the white majority.[17] As is well-known, at the time of *Brown* the United States' racial practices were a source of embarrassment in the Cold War because they undermined America's image abroad.[18] These forces joined the first two elements previously mentioned to push the court and other elites to support desegregation without recognizing African Americans' autonomy or their voices. Interest convergence was not just a sociological phenomenon of domination; it became part of a discursive form that systematically silenced other forms of writing and living. [19]

The fourth feature was the way the American legal system blocked, and still blocks, out historical and structural questions. Earl Warren's instruction to the justices in *Brown* to be non-accusatory was turned into an interpretive principle in *Wygant v. Jackson Board of Education*. Justice Lewis Powell acknowledges the presence of longstanding systemic racism, only to dismiss it: "No one doubts that there has been serious discrimination in this country. As basis for imposing discriminatory legal remedies that work against innocent people, societal discrimination is insufficient and over-expansive. In absence of particularized findings [of discrimination], a court could uphold remedies that are ageless in their reach into the past and times in their ability to affect the future" (*Wygant* 1986, 276). Moreover, the Court recognizes only intentional acts by agents and their consequences.[20] Since this complex network of

[17] The classic article is Derrick Bell 1980,

[18] President Eisenhower said in a 1957 televised address that the Cold War struggle and international opinion compelled him to send federal troops to Little Rock: "At a time when we face grave situations abroad because *of* the hatred communism bears toward a system of government based on human rights, it would be difficult to exaggerate the harm that is being done to the prestige and influence, and indeed to the safety, of our nation and the world. Our enemies are gloating over this incident and using it everywhere to misrepresent our whole nation. We are portrayed as a violator of those standards of conduct which the peoples of the world united to proclaim in the Charter of the United Nations" (quoted in Osgood 2006, 134).

[19] As Robert Dahl says: "The policy views dominant on the Court are never for long out of line with the policy views dominant among the lawmaking majorities of the United States" (quoted in Rosen 2006, 6).

[20] As Riva Siegel (1998) says, "As Fifth Circuit reads Supreme Court case law, affirmative action can be employed for the purpose of remedying the 'present effects of past discrimination' but not for the purpose of 'remedying the present effects of societal discrimination'" [i.e. systemic]. Moreover, "the state's use of remedial racial classification is limited to rectifying the harm caused by a specific state actor." (43-4). In *Washington v. Davis*, decided in 1976, the US

imaginaries assumed hegemonic status in the public mind, we can see why no simple argument invoking a principle of equality or justice would be capable of creating awareness of patterns of subordination; the preliminary to any hope for change.

In the following section I will examine how Ralph Ellison challenged the above imaginaries—which he did not with a discursive argument focusing on principles in the manner of the courts or by using social scientific research. Instead, he took aim at the structures of the background structures that informed these disciplines and the public sphere.

RALPH ELLISON'S MOBILIZATION OF IMAGINARIES

Ellison is particularly relevant to my argument because he addresses directly the division between the languages of the mainstream public sphere and the languages of the African American community. Ellison brings into relief the transsubjective structures of the social imaginary, structures that cannot be narrowed to the prejudices of a group. Rather, they are constitutive of the world in which most whites and blacks lived at the time. As legal philosopher Catharine MacKinnon (1996) says, "Dominant narratives are not called stories. They are called reality" (235). Whites remain largely oblivious of these structures, while blacks remain painfully aware of them, and, at the same time, try to carve out an alternative space of existence.[21]

Moreover, Ellison saw that narratives were not only constituting reality, but also serving as normative justifications for black subordination, such as the narrative of D.W. Griffith's blockbuster film, *Birth of Nation:*

> The anti-Negro images of Hollywood films were (and are) acceptable because of the existence throughout the United States of an audience obsessed with an inner psychological need to view Negroes as less than men. Thus, psychologically and

Supreme Court ruled that laws or government policies that disproportionately harm Black people do not violate the Constitution's equal protection clause unless the plaintiff can show that a state actor *intended* to discriminate, and that this intention, in turn, caused a discriminatory result. Discriminatory intent is very difficult to prove.

[21] See Linda Martin Alcoff 2007 and Charles Mills 2007, who explore the epistemology of racial ignorance.

> ethically, these negative images constitute justifications for all these acts, legal, emotional, economic, and political, which we label Jim Crow." (Ellison 1995, 305)

Ellison's writings argue against the caricatures produced by Myrdal and other elites, who saw in black culture only a backward set of destructive practices that people should be glad to leave behind when they assimilate. In his review of Myrdal's *America Dilemma*, Ellison (1995) acknowledges that "Negro" culture has some undesirable features, but insists "[t]here is much of great value and richness, which because it has been secreted by living and has made their lives more meaningful, Negroes will not willingly disregard" (340).

Ellison implicitly addressed the risk of reinforcing Myrdal's "damage hypothesis" by focusing only on the misery of African American life. He cites this passage from Wright's *Black Boy*: "Whenever I thought of the essential bleakness of black life in America, I know that Negroes had never been allowed to catch the full spirit of Western civilization, that they lived somehow in it but not of it" (quoted in Ellison 1995, 166). He then comments that his "sense of Negro life was quite different," regretting "that Wright found the facile answers of Marxism before he learned to use literature as a means of discovering the forms of American Negro humanity" (Ellison 1995, 166, 167). Ellison wanted to foreground the creativity of African American culture in response to white oppression.

> For even as his life toughens the Negro, even as it brutalizes him, sensitizes him…it conditions him to deal with life and himself…. He is no mere product of his sociological predicament. He is a product of the interaction between his racial predicament, his individual will and the broader American cultural freedom in which he finds his ambiguous existence." (Ellison, 1995, 160)[22]

[22] Ellison (1995) says: "In *Native Son* Wright began with the ideological proposition that what whites think of the Negro's reality is more important than what Negroes themselves knew it to be" (114). I don't think it is fair to Wright's achievement to reduce his texts to a Marxist hermeneutics of suspicion, but the comment shows how deeply he contested Wright's presentation of African Americans' sense of reality.

For Ellison, neither white nor black culture can be affirmed in an unqualified way, for they are both damaged and imbricated in ways that go unnoticed: "What is needed in our country is not an exchange of pathologies but a change in the basis of society. This is a job which both Negroes and whites must perform together. In Negro culture there is much of value for America as a whole" (Ellison l995, 340). Indeed, Ellison insists that white culture has internalized without acknowledgement its borrowings from African American culture: "Whatever else the true American is, he is also somehow black" (583). Hence, American society needs neither mere integration of bodies into the same public spaces nor gathering statistics about inequality, but a transformation of the social imaginary into which whites and blacks are integrated. He takes on this project in his novel *Invisible Man* (1952).

In this text, Ellison has his young black protagonist inhabit different areas of the dominant imaginary so as to display the way it structures experience; however, he also needs a voice that can show how the protagonist becomes aware of these patterns and is able to revise them and "signify" on them, drawing on sources from African American folklore, T.S. Eliot, and others.[23] Ellison achieves this by having the protagonist himself tell the story retrospectively so that there will be two perspectives on which to draw: the perspective of the naïve self as it goes through the different parts of the imaginary, and the perspective of the narrating self, the self that has already been through the sequence of experiences. Thus, the novel can be read as a search for a site from which to tell the story.

In order to establish a distinctive separation between the two voices, Ellison (1981) begins with a long Prologue spoken by the mature experienced self before beginning his chronological account, in which the perspective of the younger self takes the lead. In the Prologue, the narrator tells a fable of recognition, in which he is attacked by someone who does not see him, but only the aggressor's own projection. This

[23] Henry Louis Gates traces this tradition of "signifying" in *The Signifying Monkey*. See also Ellison's essay (1995) on folklore "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke" (100-12).

initiates a drama of recognition, not just between Invisible Man and his different interlocutors, but between text and reader. In the first pages of the novel, we can read: "People refuse to see me . . . When they approach me, they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me" (3). The text deliberately disorients the reader, playing off the slave narrative, *Notes from Underground*, Richard Wright, and jazz traditions. The narrator's perplexing, taunting style makes the reader aware that his/her habitual orientation to the world will not work here and serves as a warning that readers will simply repeat the action of the assailant and commit a hermeneutic mugging of the text if they are not prepared to give up the assumption of a shared linguistic world and the identity that comes with it. During the course of his journey, the narrator has had to give up his own self-understanding, and it takes him the entire novel to learn that he is invisible. Readers should expect a similar wrenching experience, for the novel is not just speaking to them; it is speaking for them: "Who knows," says the narrator, "but that on lower frequencies I speak for you" (568).

In the first chapter, Ellison puts his character in a scene that brings out the brutality of the structure of recognition for the "good black boy." Invisible Man, valedictorian of his high school class, goes to get his diploma and a college scholarship from the white elite, but first he must fight blindfolded against other black men. While the narrator and the reader understand the degrading relationship between Invisible Man and his audience, the young self does not. "The harder we fought, the more threatening the men became. And yet, I had begun to worry about my speech again. How would it go? Would they recognize my ability?" (24). The free indirect discourse here captures the voice of the naïve young man as he seeks recognition from the powerful white men surrounding the boxing ring. The speech that the young man gives after the fight is taken verbatim from Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Exposition" Speech (1895), a speech that was a paradigm for black success, urging young men to accept the political and social status quo and do their best with what was given to them. At this point, Invisible Man sees no other path forward, and will continue to seek recognition from different authority figures, black and white.

Ellison (1981) describes the way he brings the reader into the imaginative structures that link the text and the world, and then excavates them: "I could not violate the reader's sense of reality, his sense of the way things were done, at least on the surface. My task would be to give him the surface and then try to take him into the internalities, take him below the level of racial structuring" (532). To do this, Ellison did not seek to represent historical events or people, but to draw out the structures of the imaginary that enable us to understand those particulars: "I didn't want to describe an existing Socialist or Communist or Marxist political group, primarily because it would have allowed the reader to escape confronting certain political patterns, patterns which still exist" (Ellison 1995, 538). Ellison claims that "[the writer's] task then is always to challenge the apparent forms of reality—that is, the fixed manners and values of the few—and to struggle with it until it reveals its mad, vari-implicated chaos, its false faces, and on until it surrenders its insight, its truth" (154). Ellison understood his novel as an argument, not just against Griffith and Myrdal, but also against black writers, such as Washington and Wright. As he says during his debate with Wright: "All novels of a given historical moment form an argument over the nature of reality and are, to an extent, criticisms of each other" (Ellison 1995, 165).[24] Despite his critique of American racism, Ellison remained optimistic about the possibilities for African Americans and American politics, and the election of Barack Obama in 2008 can be seen as a justification for such optimism. However, if we look at Obama's writings on race, we will see the structures of *Brown* holding him back, structures that Coates brings into stark relief.

[24] For his critique of Wright, see "The World and the Jug," (Ellison 1995, 155-88). He dramatizes this critique in the writing of his novel *Invisible Man,* whose title plays off Wright's *Black Boy* and *Native Son*. The standard reading of Ellison sees him as affirming American ideals and thus missing his understanding of normativity as structured into the world. For instance, Richard King (2004) says that Ellison "sounded much like Myrdal's American creed the 'moral imperative … implicit in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights' that stood at the center of the 'consciousness and conscience" in classic American writers" (294).

THE PERSISTENCE OF THE RACIAL IMAGINARY IN POST RACIAL AMERICA

After the election of Barack Obama, many people started to speak of a postracial America, of an America that had somehow put its racial struggles behind. However, if we look at the way Obama responded to criticism of his minister's rhetoric during the 2008 presidential campaign in his "A More Perfect Union" speech, we find a brilliant rhetorical performance that did not stray far from the limits of acceptability laid down by *Brown*. Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me* has been looked on as a direct reply to Obama's discussions of race, and it lays to rest any fantasy that America has become post racial[25] (of course, Coates is not seeking election to a powerful political position and therefore does not have the same strictures on his speech as would a prominent official). Coates makes this challenge not by a competing argument organized around principles of justice or equality; nor does he follow Ellison's model, for he does not believe, as Ellison does, in the power of language to transform American imaginaries. His goal is to demolish the idea that the United States has overcome its past and now treats the lives of African Americans equally. We can see this false triumphalism when people respond to the cry of "black lives matter" with "all lives matter," for they are simply repeating the legacy of *Brown* by offering an abstract normative principle while refusing to acknowledge the forceful normative structuring of American life.

Drawing on the model of James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, Coates's text is in the form of a letter to his son; a testimonial, in which he warns the young man about what to expect from society.[26] The dominant narrative for understanding the structure of American normative reality at any given moment of history is to think of it as part of a progressive narrative, in which "the basic ideals of America and American people are

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[25] See John Paul Rollert (2015), "Between the World and Me: Empathy is a Privilege." *The Atlantic*, September 28, 2015. http://www.the-american-interest.com/2015/10/10/reading-coates-thinking-obama/; and Jeremy Mayer, "Reading Coates, Thinking Obama," *The American Interest* 11, no. 2 (October 10, 2015) http://www.the-american-interest.com/2015/10/10/reading-coates-thinking-obama/, for the connection between Coates and Obama, who is never mentioned by name in *Between the World and Me*.

[26] Coates's clear connection to Baldwin has raised the question of whether Coates has yet attained a stature that merits such a comparison. See Michael Eric Dyson's essay for a discussion of the Baldwin-Coates connection. https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/07/james-baldwin-tanehisi-coates/399413/

good, even if Americans sometimes act unjustly" (Balkin 2001, 5). Such a view reduces American history to a series of acts that aspire to high ideals without quite achieving them. This account ignores the way American history can be read as the continuous reworking of the social imaginary, an imaginary that is both ontological and normative, an imaginary that *is* the realization of American ideals as understood by those controlling the dominant account. Coates (2015) tells his son: "The entire narrative of this country argues against the truth of who you are" (99).

To Coates, these structures are the tissues of rationalization encasing the subjectivity of a privileged group that he calls "the Dreamers," alluding to the subtitle of Obama's *The Audacity of Hope: Reclaiming the American Dream*, as well as to other versions of this dream. The dreamers are a self-contained community that does not think of itself as a community, but whose inhabitants live in a distinctive normative universe. Because their privilege, empowerment, and normative insularity are invisible to them, this universe is the site for pronouncements about "justice" and "equality" for society as a whole.

To capture the self-understanding of the Dreamers, Coates (2015) cites Solzhenitsyn's well-known remark that "to do evil a human being must first of all believe that what he's doing is good, or else that it's a well-considered act in conformity with natural law" (98). Coates then comments: "This is the foundation of the Dream—its adherents must not just believe in it but believe that it is just, believe that their possession of the dream is the natural result of grit, honor, and good works" (ibid.). He concludes this section with the quotation I used as an epigraph, in which he links the possession of the dream to the long-practiced indifference to the dispossession of black lives.

Constitutional principles cannot root out inequality, for it is woven into the language of the Dreamers' world. No thought experiment can lift a Dreamer out of this world, or bring an outsider in. A Dreamer cannot empathize with the kind of life Coates is describing because the Dreamer needs a new framework for understanding normativity so that the "facts" of a nondreamer's life can appear. Coates is not appealing to a politics of identity, but thematizing the ontological force of the reigning normative

order. Thus, when he speaks of police violence and of talk on sensitivity training, he is dismissive because such localizations of the problem miss the point. It is not individual police officers who commit the crimes, but the American people locked in the Dreamer imaginary:

> The truth is that the police reflect America in all of its will and fear, and whatever we might make of this country's criminal justice policy, it cannot be said that it was imposed by a repressive minority. The abuses that have followed from these policies—the sprawling carceral state, the random detentions of black people, the torture of suspects—are the product of democratic will. (79)

His language is at once descriptive and normative. Coates is being "realistic," but he is not presenting sociological facts and then arguing for why these facts indicate injustice. Rather, he is striking at the ontology that generates facts and norms and therefore opening a space for new historical and sociological questions that can follow up on his insights. He wants to make clear that the dominant collective imagination of most whites and many blacks provides a framework in which criminality is understood, a framework that is not shared by minorities. He calls this framework the product of "will," in order to insist on the collective intentionality at work here. Coates shows how the invocation of principles enables the Dreamers to assume that they have access to all the normatively relevant aspects of the world and to rationalizing their contented inaction.[27] That is why we need a normative problematic that does not simply assess facts currently available through the dominant imaginary, but one that can bring new normatively relevant facts into view. Instead of "realizing" or "correctly applying" a principle, we need to transition from one package of normative imaginaries to another.[28]

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[27] I have deliberately avoided the phrase "white supremacy" because it is ambiguous and provides more heat than light. I've addressed features of hegemonic discourse instead.

[28] This kind of argument was introduced by Hegel, but we can find a clear illustration of transitional arguments from one framework to another in Stanley Fish's Introduction to *Is There a Text in This Class* (1982). In this piece, he recounts his journey from New Critic (meaning in the object) to Reader Response Critic (meaning in the subject) to Interpretive Community critic (or Spirit, in Hegel's terminology).

TRANSITIONAL ARGUMENT AND TRANSSUBJECTIVE STRUCTURING

One of the key stumbling blocks to the understanding of the transitional argument on race has been the idea of transsubjective structures, for this notion does not fit easily into traditional ideas of normativity and agency. We can see three such reactions in response to the structural claims in Coates's book and in other research. In his review of Coates, Chatterton Williams (2015) notes: "It's not just black kids in tough neighborhoods who are hapless automatons" (l6). Williams is missing the point. Of course, people have agency, but what everyone has been overlooking are the structural properties of their world that shape that agency. Coates' text can reveal this truth not by fidelity to particularities, but by bringing into relief what is surreptitiously shaping our world.

A second common objection to Coates's argument is that his reading of history ignores the "good acts and actors" in American history. *The New York Times* columnist David Brooks (2015) says, "I think you distort American history. This country, like each person in it, is a mixture of glory and shame. There's a Lincoln for every Jefferson Davis and a Harlem Children's Zone for every K.K.K.—and usually vastly more than one. Violence is embedded in America, but it is not close to the totality of America" (Brooks). This is precisely the kind of reading that ignores structural domination through the imaginary by seeking to pull out isolated and idealized actions for a moral scorecard, as if these examples somehow refuted claims about the collective structures of meaning operant at the time.[29]

A third objection, what could be called the "Obama objection," minimizes the structural divisions among linguistic communities and proposes an empathetic leap between individuals. Defining it succinctly as a successful attempt to "stand in somebody else's shoes and see through their eyes," Obama (2006) regards empathy not as an exceptional gesture, but as an organizing principle for ethical behavior, and even a preferred way of being altogether (66). By cultivating our capacity for empathy, he

[29] Bret Stephens makes the same kind of argument against the 1619 Project.

says, we are forced beyond "our limited vision," making it possible to overcome what divides us, allowing us to "find common ground" even in the face of our sharpest disagreements. Obama makes empathy "the heart of my moral code" and "a guidepost for my politics" in *The Audacity of Hope* and in "A More Perfect Union" (66, 67). The model of empathy fits well with thinking of normativity as the application of constitutional principles since it is organized around equal respect and concern for atomistic individuals, an account that is unhinged from the language in which individuals are embedded. But individuals cannot leap out of these collective structures by simply exercising their imaginations. They must find a way to articulate some critical distance, an articulation that demands that they change who they are. Ellison's work provides a model for some of this critical work, since he shows how to argue through social imaginaries rather than through principles alone. However, an isolated literary work, like any individual utterance, may change some individual minds but will have difficulty changing social imaginaries, which are held in place by institutional inertia and the power and money that goes with it. It's hard to imagine that in our current political climate the American Congress would ever authorize a national interrogation of history, such as the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.[30] For some Americans, no such questioning is necessary because the racism of the past has already been "fixed" and hence has no relevance in the present. To say otherwise, in their view, is to play identity politics and demand special treatment. Nonetheless, the division of the American public sphere is no longer accepted as unchangeable, and people are confronting it from different disciplines. Writers, legal theorists, historians, philosophers, and sociologists are all taking on the complicity between formal equality and a dominating imaginary. Breaking down the protean forms of this relationship will not be easy but conceiving of normativity through the imaginary as well as principles gives us new ways to display, rather than occlude, the processes through which the meanings of the world are produced and justified.

[30] Andrew Valls 2003 and Martha Minow 1999.

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"GOTHIC" ONTOLOGY AND VITAL AFFECT IN *THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the affective and vitalist aspects of Du Bois's famous work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, by turning to William James's essay "A World of Pure Experience" as a methodological framework for understanding *Souls*. While most readings of *Souls* emphasize the unfolding of Black consciousness, or the mind, this essay brings the body into critical focus, specifically in tracing the ways in which Du Bois appeals to the environmental plasticity of bodies—their ability to affect and to be affected—as a creative textual means of addressing and redressing racial strife and crisis. *Souls* both diagnoses what I am calling a 'gothic' ontology of racial division (after James's use of the metaphor in characterizing his radical empiricist weltanschauung) and appeals to moments of vital affect which overspill and thus critically contest the postbellum United States's racially policed boundaries. Reading *Souls* in this fashion suggests the fragility of interracial and intraracial connection, which is always already threatened by continued fragmentation within the racially striated nexus of white supremacist modernity.

Keywords: James; Du Bois; ontology; affect; racism; radical empiricism.

INTRODUCTION: THE SHRUNKEN HEADS OF BORNEO

First published in *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods* in 1904, William James's essay, "A World of Pure Experience," sketches the broader outlines of his life's work: "For many years past my mind has been growing into a certain type of *Weltanschauung*. Rightly or wrongly, I have got to the point where I can hardly see things in any other pattern" (James 1987, 1159). Identifying his weltanschauung as "radical empiricism" (a label famously affixed in agonal opposition to neo-Hegelian philosophies of the Absolute circulating in James's time), he offers the following arresting analogy:

> *Prima facie*, if you should liken the universe of absolute idealism to an aquarium, a crystal globe in which goldfish are swimming, you would have to compare the [radical] empiricist universe to something more like one of those dried human heads with which the Dyaks of Borneo deck their lodges. The skull forms a solid nucleus; but innumerable feathers, leaves, strings, beads, and loose appendices

> of every description float and dangle from it, and save that they terminate in it, seem to have nothing to do with one another. Even so my experiences and yours float and dangle, terminating, it is true, in a nucleus of common perception, but for the most part out of sight and irrelevant and unimaginable to one another. (1162)

Here James outlines a pluralistic ontology in which being is neither wholly connected nor disconnected but reticulated with imperfect degrees of "intimacy" ranging from, as James phrases it, a bare "withness" (in which the terms of experience are more or less external to one another) to an intimate commonality in which being terminates in shared objects of perception and sympathy (1161-62).

James's shrunken head analogy complements his claim in *A Pluralistic Universe* that radical empiricism is a "gothic" ontology, one that is metaphysically as well as ethically opposed to philosophies of the Absolute: "As compared with all these rationalizing pictures, the pluralistic empiricism which I profess offers but a sorry appearance. It is a turbid, muddled, *gothic* sort of an affair, without a sweeping outline and with little pictorial nobility" (650; emphasis added). Unlike rationalism and classical empiricism, radical empiricism "is fair to both the unity and the disconnection," for it sees neither as metaphysically subordinate to the other (1162). James's philosophical system is "gothic" in the sense that it emphasizes disconnection as much as connection and refuses to imagine away the tragic facts of modern life: "Whether materialistically or spiritualistically minded, philosophers have always aimed at cleaning up the litter with which the world apparently is filled" (650).

As many readers are aware, radical empiricism marks James's late-career turn to speculative ontology. Whereas James first posits a phenomenological account of connective and conjunctive relations in works like *The Principles of Psychology* (i.e., a phenomenology in which transitions between nominatives and substantives require no "trans-empirical" support but are instead given immediately in the "concatenated or continuous structure" of experience) his radical empiricism extends this account to reality itself (826). For James, the real is comprised of fluctuating degrees of conjunction and disjunction (much like the contours of the shrunken heads of Borneo), and, importantly, is constituted by *flows and intensities of affective becoming*.

Indeed, it is this latter point that has gone largely unnoticed in critical commentaries on James. One exception is Alexander Livingston (2012), who asserts that in "A World of Pure Experience," James lays bare "empiricism's affective connection of self and world": "The assemblage of threads and lines 'with' the skull represents for James the ways that personality and impersonality lie as two extremes along a singular line of experience. Individual consciousness is connected to something impersonal but is not reducible to it" (Livingston). For James, concrete reality—which is neither decidedly subjective nor objective in its first appearance—overflows the conceptual and linguistic categories we use to anchor and navigate it. There is always something "more" to experience that reaches beyond the discursive-symbolic pathways we have carved out to hold it in place. For if what James calls "transitions" are immanent parts of nondualist experience, then being itself, as it becomes, is also vague and multiple. While indispensable, concepts (when exchanged for the complex multiplicity of reality itself) obscure being's affective flows and particulars: the multiple ways in which being-as-becoming leaks through the boundaries we designate for it. As James concludes: "Life is in the transitions as much as in the terms connected; often, indeed, it seems to be there more emphatically" (1181).

In what follows, I want to sound key terms and concepts from James's essay "A World of Pure Experience," using it as a methodological framework for reading W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, and tracing what I refer to as *Souls*'s gothic ontology.[1] I intend my use of the term "gothic" as a gesture both toward the intense social fragmentations of postemancipation America (a truly gothic affair in terms of the horrors of white supremacist terrorism, social depredation, and imposed segregation) as well as what I identify as Du Bois's attempt in *Souls* to navigate an inner and outer ontological landscape typified largely by disunity and disjunction yet palpated with the possibility for greater unity and connection.

[1] My use of the term 'ontology' refers to a vital and nonessentialist, rather than essentialist, conception of being.

Souls, I contend, not only lays bare such gothic contours of social fragmentation but sketches moments in which the vitality of affect overspills such fragmentations' ontological boundaries and rigidly policed borders. Indeed, *Souls* is unique among Du Bois's writing for its use of what we might call "somatic narration": a mode of (often autobiographical) narrative which prioritizes the body's spatiotemporal porousness: its ability to act as both receiver and transmitter of ontological difference. While most readings of *Souls* emphasize the unfolding of black consciousness, or the mind, this essay instead brings the body into critical focus by plumbing the ways Du Bois appeals to the environmental plasticity of bodies—their ability to affect and to be affected—as a creative textual means of addressing and redressing racial strife and crisis at the dawn of the twentieth century.[2]

As Ryan Schneider (2010) observes, "critics have shown minimal interest in the conceptualization and thematization of emotion in [Du Bois's] writings and are far more apt to focus (often exclusively) on his intellectual influences and achievements" (3). Exploring the neglected terrain of sentimental rhetorics in *Souls*, Melvin Rogers (2018) has similarly pointed to Du Bois's politics of democratic contestation, which appeals to and is grounded in his readers' "cognitive-affective dimension of judgment" (5). In league with such readings, yet different from them, I examine how *Souls* turns to flows of affect to transmit the strivings of black folk to its readers, as well as reveal how divisions—sometimes between selves and others; sometimes between the past and present—can be ruptured and transgressed, even as they also persist as part of modernity's enduring structure.

In turning to James's "A World of Pure Experience" to illuminate key moments and themes in *Souls*, I do not intend to subordinate Du Bois's thinking to James's. Rather, my aim is to open up interpretive resonances and pathways not otherwise accessible to both authors. James's analogical use of the Dyaks's shrunken head as a figure for his philosophical system is problematically pedagogical, particularly in its

[2] For a reading that traces the influence of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* on Du Boisian double consciousness, see Shamoon Zamir's *Dark Voices*; in particular, his chapter "Double Consciousness: Locating the Self."

casual appropriations of indigenous cultures and practices. James's purpose in mobilizing such an image is in part rhetorical. That is, he wants to position himself in a self-deprecating manner to gain sympathy with his audience: "the pluralistic empiricism which I profess offers but a sorry appearance" (650). Yet James's analogy is also consistent with his broader philosophical efforts to counter Western philosophy's hegemonic tendencies: its attempts to contain and restrict the heterogeneous and the multiple within its symbolic borders. James instead wants to reclaim the novel incompleteness of being: the ways in which being is underwritten by becoming. It is important to recognize, however, that for Du Bois, the gothic landscape of race relations during Reconstruction has very different stakes and implications. As Du Bois himself asserts (recalling his time at Harvard): "My attention from the first was focused on…the problem of the admission of my people into the freedom of democracy. This my school training touched but obliquely" (574).[3] For Du Bois, then, philosophy is not merely a theoretical inquiry into the nature of reality but rather a profound laboring to realize the freedoms of Black people amidst a socio-historical, material, and philosophical terrain of terror and profound unease.

Despite such differences, however, both rejected a view of being as either wholly disunited or wholly interrelated; and both understood the quintessentially fragile ontologies of connection at the turn of the century, where withness is never guaranteed to be synonymous with togetherness and often threatens further disjunction. It is this ontology James elaborates and Du Bois strives to inhabit from the point of view of the color line.[4] While my focus in this essay is primarily on Du Bois and James, I will occasionally make reference to related philosophers whom I see as relevant to the conversation—philosophers like Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze, as well as Ralph Waldo Emerson (who occupies a certain pride of place for both James and Du Bois). I

[3] While influenced by James, Du Bois, as Cornel West (1989) notes, "took a turn toward history and the social sciences"; borrowing a phrase from Fanon, West notes how Du Bois aligns himself, morally and intellectually, with "the wretched of the earth" (138-40).

[4] While James sees his pluralism as a desirable alternative to philosophies of the Absolute, Du Bois recognizes the naivety of such philosophies in the historical context of race relations.

reference these thinkers in my discussion both to enrich my analysis and to recontextualize Du Bois and James within what I take to be a broader radical empiricist way of thinking—an ontological orientation stretching beyond James (despite his invention of the term).

James and Du Bois are a familiar pairing in scholarship, primarily through the latter's adoption and reworking of the former's pragmatism.[5] Ross Posnock (1998), for instance, in *Color and Culture*, argues that much like James and John Dewey, Du Bois couples "historicist thinking" with "linguistic skepticism" (57-8). Similarly, Cornel West (1989) places Du Bois in pragmatism's genealogical pantheon for his having sidestepped "the Cartesian epistemological puzzles of modern philosophy" (140). While certainly influenced by pragmatism's epistemological orientations (i.e., its view of truth-as-transaction and the antifoundational nature of belief), the Du Bois of *Souls* is also engaged with and prioritizes vital modes of ontology, both in his investigations into the nature of race as a multiple and changing expression of being as becoming, and in his somatic perspectives on the body and its encircling fields of perception.[6]

Like James, Du Bois understood the importance of turning to the body—often the autobiographical body—to perform social analysis. As Richard Shusterman (2006) remarks (noting James's career-long emphasis on the somatic grounding of thought): "James not only deploys somatic introspection but argues that philosophers have been blind to the body's presence in thought and feeling because they have been

[5] Critics' identification of Du Bois with James's pragmatism is partly accounted for by the overwhelming tendency on the part of pragmatist historians, philosophers, and literary theorists to view James's radical empiricism as a subset of his pragmatism, rather than the other way around. James, however, indicates that pragmatism is merely a subset of his radical empiricism in numerous places, such as, for instance, in the preface to *The Meaning of Truth*. There, James asserts that pragmatism is an important step in realizing his larger philosophical system: "I am interested in another doctrine in philosophy to which I give the name of radical empiricism, and it seems to me that the establishment of the pragmatist theory of truth is a step of first-rate importance in making radical empiricism prevail" (826).

[6] While James's *Essays in Radical Empiricism* was not published until 1912, its contents were not wholly new to his thinking but rather stood as the culmination of his weltanschauung, which James had begun to construct as early as *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). It is not a leap to assert that the ideas comprising radical empiricism in its embryonic stage were the exact same ones James had shared with his students at the time in which Du Bois became one of his closest mentees. Yet as I have tried to suggest in this introduction, Du Bois does not so much repeat James's ideas as transfigure them. It might be more compelling to observe, then, that both thinkers operated in a similar intellectual environment and took up convergent perspectives, though for different purposes and toward different ends.

insufficiently skilled or attentive in somatic introspection" (9). In his 1904 review of *Souls*, Du Bois refers to the "subjective note that runs in each essay," as well as the "penumbra of vagueness" of the text's meaning ("Souls"). The latter phraseology is lifted directly from James and refers to the elusive residue of undeciphered meaning that accompanies immediate perception.[7] Du Bois here appropriates Jamesian terminology to signal *Souls*'s grounding in modes of affect. This fact about its narratological approach is what accounts for both the text's vagueness of meaning, as well as its profundities of revelation, which deliberately challenge (and necessarily encounter) the limits of the articulable. In this sense, *Souls*'s turn to affect—primarily through its grounding in somatic autobiographical narrative—works to excavate the ways in which, as Donovan Schaefer (2015) articulates, "private, local, or individual actions have ramifications for broader regimes of power" (8).

WORLDS OF BARE WITHNESS

The Souls of Black Folk is nothing if not a text that first and foremost responds to and captures a deep social crisis predicated on the failures of sympathetic knowing and cooperative cultural work, both within and between n races. As Du Bois (1986) asserts in "Of Our Spiritual Strivings": "This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture" (365). Set in the context of the missed opportunities, racial tragedies, and the collapsing democratic ideals of the postemancipation United States, it is a text in which—analogous to the world of pure experience depicted in James's essay—individuals as well as communities exist in relations of bare *withness* to one another. Such withnesses are sometimes the products of white supremacy's policing in the broadest sense (its carving out of civic space), while others have more to do with the cultural, intellectual, and imaginative inability to intimately know the other despite

[7] In "The Stream of Thought" from *The Principles of Psychology* (clearly Du Bois's source) James writes: "Every definite image in the mind is steeped and dyed in the free water that flows round it. With it goes the sense of its relations, near and remote, and the dying echo of whence it came to us, the dawning sense of whither it is to lead. The significance, the value, of the image is all in this halo or penumbra that surrounds and escorts it" (246).

shared or intersecting lifeworlds. The tragedy of the age, as Du Bois writes in "Of Alexander Crummell," is that "men know so little of men" (520).

One of the starker examples in *Souls* of such fragmentation is "Of the Coming of John." Its only fictional chapter, "Of the Coming of John" traces multiple failures of sympathetic knowing, denuding Southern white supremacy's brutally gothic segmentations: its violent policing of social, civic, intellectual, and aesthetic space. Themes concerning the bare withness of social relations between and among races anchors the narrative at its outset: "the black folk thought of one John, and he was black; and the white folk thought of another John, and he was white. And neither world thought the other world's thought, save with a vague unrest" (523). As critics have noted, "Of the Coming of John" is primarily occupied with the perils, pitfalls, and ultimate limitations of talented tenth leadership, as it seems to reflexively revise Du Bois's previously articulated "positivistic faith in the progressive amelioration of racial conflicts," by suggesting instead that "such a form of leadership might well-nigh be impossible to fulfill" (Lemke 2008, 37, 45).

The chapter explores such snares and contradictions through the character of John Jones, a would-be black intellectual and community activist. John experiences profound alienation upon his return to Altahama, Georgia after having been educated in the North. As Adalaine Holton observes (2010), "Though John returns with the desire to achieve positive change in his community, ironically, he finds upon his arrival that his new insights and perspectives have effectively distanced him from the very people he returns to help" (34). Despite the double tragedy of John's social alienation and his brutal lynching at the end of the story, the narrative gestures toward a subversive challenge to such ontological diremptions through the fugitivity of affect. In a moment of fragile connectivity, John's sister, Jennie, is deeply impressed and affected by the becoming intensity of John's melancholy: "She watched the flickering lights upon the sea, and said thoughtfully, 'I wish I was unhappy,—and—and,' putting both arms about his neck, 'I think I am, a little, John'" (530-31). Thus, despite John's inability to communicate "across differences in class, education, and experience" (Holton 2010, 33), his existential despair is also a site of animate productivity—a vital affect rendering

Jennie (who will most likely carry John's memory forward) radically porous to ontological difference.

I begin with this chapter from *Souls* to highlight and foreground the text's recursive themes of gothic fragmentation coupled with the vitality of affects, which often subvert, complicate, and overflow such fragmentations, even as those fragmentations and striations persist as part of modernity's enduring structure. This same theme permeates *Souls*'s introduction of its key tropes of the veil and double consciousness. In his 1897 address to the American Negro Academy, "The Conservation of Races," Du Bois poses what might be considered a greener iteration of double consciousness, specifically as it relates to the "warring" ideals of African and European identity: "What, after all, am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both? Or is it my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and be an American?" (821). Interestingly, however, when we turn to an examination of double consciousness as Du Bois revises and re-presents it in "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," we see that the ontological question grounding double consciousness ("What, after all, am I?") posed in "The Conservation of Races" has its origins in the radical permeability of the self.

In one of the most memorable autobiographical scenes in *Souls*, Du Bois recalls his first encounter with the veil as a child passing "rollicking boyhood" within the idyllic spaces of New England:

> I remember well when the shadow swept across me…In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put it into the boys' and girls' heads to buy gorgeous visiting cards—ten cents a package—and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card,—refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. (364)

Within the veil's onto-phenomenological presencing, the young Du Bois encounters a larger world, or matrix, of social-affective forces—forces that surge and circulate through bodies, decomposing and recomposing identities. In such a moment, the boundedness of the self is acutely affronted, since the affective powers constituting racial difference cut transversally across bodies, stratifying identities and social castes

(including, for that matter, the racialized identity of the tall newcomer). Du Bois's characterization of the veil recalls and critically revises Ralph Waldo Emerson's autobiographical account of transparent revelation. Just as Emerson (1983) depicts a permeable self affectively open to "the currents of Universal Being" (10), so too does Du Bois experience the immanent permeability of the self vis-à-vis the revelation of the white world beyond the veil and its vast recesses.

Shamoon Zamir has argued (along with others) that the primary intellectual antecedent for Du Boisian double consciousness is Hegel.[8] The drawing of the veil in *Souls*, according to Zamir, inaugurates double consciousness's postlapsarian fall into the world of race-based self-consciousness by giving rise to a historically mediated subjectivity analogous to what Hegel calls the "unhappy consciousness" (i.e., the self that strives to know itself in and through its contestations with the Other): "The Hegelian master-slave struggle is here refigured in terms of the operation of power within the subjecting gaze" (Zamir 1995, 139). What is typically elided in Hegelian readings of double consciousness, however, is the extent to which *Souls* roots double consciousness in the spatiotemporally plastic body. That is, Du Bois in *Souls* narrates double consciousness as the resulting formation of impersonally affective material forces that encircle, assemble, and thrust the subject into a nexus of shifting identity formations constitutive of racialized modernity, which manifests as an ongoing—as well as ever-productive—problematic. From this perspective, double consciousness has no clear dialectical solution but rather opens up a virtual field of imperfect solutions. As Todd May (2005) puts it in his discussion of Deleuze: "Problems become an open field in which a variety of solutions may take place. It is the problems rather than the solutions that are primary" (84).

[8] Hegelian readings of Du Bois are fairly commonplace in scholarship. See Joel Williamson's *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*. See also "W. E. B. Du Bois, Hegel, and the Staging of Alterity" by Winfried Siemerling from *Callaloo* 24 (1). More recently, Stephanie J. Shaw's *W. E. B. Du Bois and the Souls of Black Folk* (2013), reinterprets *Souls* as work that extends Hegel's world-historical teleology of Spirit to the Black diaspora.

Du Bois's revision of double consciousness in *Souls* (i.e., his reframing it in terms of a first-person phenomenological and autobiographical account) constitutes Du Bois's attempt not only to re-present double consciousness in terms more accessible to a wider readership but also to foreground a vitalist account of the self, one which more vividly specifies how racialized subjectivity is fundamentally underwritten by the self's plasticity within modernity's dynamically unstable and shifting matrix of relations.[9] In "Affect, Relationality and the 'Problem of Personality,'" Lisa Blackman (2008) considers why "William James's formulation of 'the problem of personality' is an important yet forgotten historical antecedent of contemporary work across social and cultural theory that is being described as 'vitalist'" (23). Pointing to the recent trend of "vitalist conceptions of life" emerging across multiple disciplines, Blackman identifies James as an important forerunner to a way of thinking about experience and subjectivity that is "marked by a dissolution of the boundaries between self and other" (23-4).

It is precisely such dissolution of the boundaries between self and other Du Bois's re-presentation of double consciousness and the presencing of the veil in *Souls* indicates. Subjectivity is thus the result of an affective play of difference. While the intimately related concepts of the veil and double consciousness are sources of profound suffering, fragmentation, and alienation for Du Bois, they are also, however, sources of vital-affective productivity, for both articulate the racially gothicized foundations and structures of postemancipation American life, just as they also produce what Du Bois

[9] I agree with Schneider's assessment that though double consciousness holds particular relevance to the Black intellectual or artisan, it is also "flexible enough to be read as applicable to the affective-cognitive status of all African Americans" (55). A far-reaching discussion of double consciousness is of course beyond the purposes of my discussion of Du Bois here. Yet it is worth mentioning that my reading of double consciousness complements those of critics like Colin Koopman and Alexander Livingston, who in their respective ways deemphasize double consciousness as more or less appropriated and repurposed from Hegel (i.e., double consciousness conceived as a negation of a negation demanding synthesis). Similar to what I'm mentioning here in the context of Deleuze, Koopman argues, for instance, that Du Bois's tragic political vision relies on the "category of the problematic," an analytic that dedialecticizes historical identity. See Koopman's "Contesting Injustice: Why Pragmatist Political Thought Needs Du Bois" from *Pragmatism and Justice*. See also Livingston's analysis of Du Bois in *Damn Great Empires! William James and the Politics of Pragmatism*. Similar to these critics, I tend to view double consciousness more as a site of complex multiplicity, for it articulates both the self's alienation *and* its prophetic/productive powers. It is, in other words, a difference that continues to difference.

calls "second sight": the ability to diagnose as well as imagine alternatives to the striations of white supremacy.

A vitalist conception of the self clears space for this possibility in that it redefines subjectivity according to its multiplicity and potentiality (as much as its internal divisions). Like Emerson, who gains insight into the flowings and becomings of being through the transparency of sympathetic intuition, Du Bois also gains awareness—specifically, insight into the imperialistic hypocrisies of the white world—through his early encounters with the veil—a point he recalls in *Dusk of Dawn:* "Had it not been for the race problem early thrust upon me and enveloping me, I should have probably been an unquestioning worshiper at the shrine of the social order and economic development into which I was born" (573). Double consciousness is thus underwritten by a radically relational subjectivity, even as that subjectivity often "goes unacknowledged" by the other (Schneider 2010, 68).

After the revelations of double consciousness, *Souls* goes on to represent a series of moments in which "personality and impersonality lie as two extremes along a singular line of experience" (Livingston 2012), and, on occasion, pass into one another beyond the boundaries against which they quiver. In recounting the rise and fall of the Freedmen's Bureau, "Of the Dawn of Freedom," for instance, locates a moment of missed opportunity in American history for cooperative action towards democratic ends—a moment wherein the possibility of forging desperately-needed reparative conjunctions amid severe racial disjunctions is squandered. As Stephanie J. Shaw (2013) puts it: "Through military policy, legislative enactments, *and* new government agencies, the federal government made freedpeople 'the ward of the nation.' But in the end, federal officials dismantled the Freedmen's Bureau [and] black people not only remained unfree but also unprotected" (20).

The chapter is bookended with one of Du Bois's most well-known aphorisms: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line" (372). The aphorism's cyclical temporality—its haunting synchrony, which overtakes historically progressive diachrony—suggests that the color line is a zeitgeist-defining problematic with global reach, since in its broadest dimensions the problem of the color line

concerns "the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (372). Indeed, as Paul Gilroy (1995) has shown, *Souls* marks "the first place where a diasporic, global perspective on the politics of racism and its overcoming interrupted the smooth flow of African-American exceptionalisms" (120).

Yet despite the budding global perspective threaded throughout *Souls*, "Of the Dawn of Freedom"'s primary focus is the Civil War and the events immediately following de facto emancipation. Specifically, the chapter provides a counter history to emancipation that emphasizes the intractability of the race problem and diagnoses white America's collective repression about the lasting consequences of slavery. The chapter's subversive and critical rewriting of history from the perspective of the emancipated refocuses national attention on how the material realities of race manifested novel sets of problems at the precise moment in which slavery came to an end and the country rushed to embrace more comforting narratives of reconciliation. As Du Bois shows, the majority of whites in the United States immediately eschewed, dismissed, and/or repressed the prospect of interracial cooperation during and after the war. This negligence, moreover, was clothed in the cultural myth (which notably persists today) that the Civil War was not about slavery: "however much they who marched South and North in 1861 may have fixed on the technical points of union and local autonomy as a shibboleth, all nevertheless knew, as we know, that the question of Negro slavery was the real cause of the conflict" (372). Such collective neglect and repression resulted in "half-hearted" attempts and "hasty" pieces of legislation to address the consequences of emancipation (376-77).

Du Bois thus sketches a world in which white and Black populations frequently occupy the same geographic and civic space yet one in which the reflexive attitudes and entrenched structures of white supremacy demand continued ontological disjunction. Yet, as Du Bois (1986) also suggests, such disjunctions are subject to novel flows of becoming that rupture and contest them:

> Three characteristic things one might have seen in Sherman's raid through Georgia, which threw the new situation into shadowy relief: the Conqueror, the

> Conquered, and the Negro. Some see all significance in the grim front of the destroyer, and some in the bitter sufferers of the Lost Cause. But to me neither soldier nor fugitive speaks with so deep a meaning as that dark human cloud that clung like remorse on the rear of those swift columns, swelling at times to half their size, almost engulfing and choking them. In vain were they ordered back, in vain were bridges hewn from beneath their feet; on they trudged and writhed and surged, until they rolled into Savannah, a starved and naked horde of tens of thousands. (376)

Using somatic narrative (i.e., a narrative style that foregrounds the body and its powers and movements), Du Bois's depiction of Sherman's raid suggests that the stratified racial boundaries imposed by white America become impossible to maintain due to a vital and impersonally affective excess which leaks beyond them (in this case, the biopolitical problem of the freedmen); thus, the "deeper question [of what to do with the freedmen] ever forced itself to the surface despite effort and disclaimer" (372). Du Bois's vivid account of Sherman's raid as a linear military regiment set in stark contrast to the vibrantly flowing corporality and fluid mobility of the freedmen, who surround and engulf Sherman like "a dark human cloud," figures both historically as a moment of novel becoming—one which posed unavoidable challenges to America's standing socio-political orders—and prophetically as the ongoing and unstable dynamic between a hegemonic white center and a subversive Black margin.

Tracing what she refers to as Deleuze's "nonorganismic" politics, contradistinct from Hegel's organismic conception of the state, Pheng Cheah (2013) writes that the "power over life [represented by Hegel's image of the ideal state as synonymous with the rationally organized state] discloses an internal limit to itself," that is, "a life that is more powerful than the life of the organism and that is the basis of organic life" (104). In other words, Cheah identifies (vis-à-vis her discussion of Deleuzian vs. Hegelian politics) a vitalism running deeper than and presupposing ideal/rational organization at the state level. The distinction between an organismic and nonorganismic politics is useful here in illuminating Du Bois's rewriting of emancipation in "Of the Dawn of Freedom," for the chapter's economy of imagery gestures toward the ethno-state's own internal limits. The problem of the color line for Du Bois ultimately possesses a vitality—

a productive power (here on display in the form of the swarming of emancipated bodies)—that defies its cultural and organizational statist repression.

Of course, the freedmen ultimately lost their initial legislative victories. Yet Du Bois's larger point is that despite white America's unwillingness to adequately address the many crises of race, the color line nonetheless persists as a vital (and virtual) problem—one that continually actualizes itself in unpredictable ways, deworlding the routines and mythological fantasies of the colonial white imaginary. To put this same concept in terms taken from James's analogy, the feathers and beads of experience dangling about the Dyak's head are bound to intersect at certain crucial points due to a deeper vitalism that ultimately disregards their temporary divisions.

THE NUCLEUS OF THE BODY

The landscape of race relations at the end of the nineteenth-century was not, in James's words, "an aquarium, or crystal globe in which goldfish are swimming," but rather "a quasi-chaos"—an unforgiving ecosystem of varying belief in which ideas, as James writes in "Hegel and His Method," must "buy off" their "rivals and enemies" by "compromising some part of [their] original pretensions" (670, 1171). Set in the context of intraracial contestation among turn-of-the-century Black leadership—in particular, the stranglehold of Booker T. Washington's political regime and the Tuskegee machine's silencing cultural effects—Du Bois in *Souls* advocates a *via media* of black self-culture, liberal education, and robust reform against accommodationism, on the one hand, and black revolutionary separatism on the other.[10]

Recognizing the turbulence of this ecosystem of belief, particularly in chapters like "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" and "Of the Wings of Atlanta," Du Bois takes up what might convincingly be characterized as a Jamesian pragmatist

10 This middle-path is most obvious in "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others": "One class is spiritually descended from Toussaint the Savior, through Gabriel, Vesey, and Turner, and they represent the attitude of revolt and revenge … And yet, by the irony of fate, nothing has more effectually made this programme seem hopeless than the recent course of the United States toward weaker and darker people in the West Indies, Hawaii, and the Philippines" (400).

epistemology vis-à-vis his repeated implication that the will to believe in Black moral and intellectual ideals, and thus pragmatically act upon such ideals, is a necessary precondition for seeing their ultimate verification as truth. Indeed, one of the governing tropes of *Souls* is its insistence—within the gothic landscape it navigates—that Black ideals are *real*, i.e., that they produce practical differences contingent upon their being believed in and acted upon. Du Bois thus feels that Washington's hyper-materialist program of Black uplift leads ultimately to further gothic fragmentation, just as the displacement of Black spirituality in the face of the new industrial order would stunt the Black community's prophetic powers, forfeiting the gifts of second sight (hence Du Bois's use of an Emersonian perfectionist tone in "Of the Wings of Atlanta"): "What if the Negro people be wooed from a strife for righteousness, from a love of knowing, to regard dollars as the be-all and end-all of life?" (419).

Yet, as I have already suggested, a strictly pragmatist reading of *Souls*, while crucial in charting the text's philosophical influences and orientations, does not adequately or fully account for its investments in ontology—specifically, the body as a productive site registering as well as subverting regimes of power, and the impersonal affective forces of time, space, and place which at turns reinforce as well as subvert those same regimes of power. Zamir (1995) has argued that though Du Bois finds affinity with James's unique grounding of philosophical thought in the somatic, nonetheless, a Jamesian reading of Du Bois's intellectual project is radically insufficient since for Zamir, James problematically turns consciousness "from a creative faculty [into] a passive faculty [by] receiving the world as experience" (157). For Du Bois, however, it is often the taking of the body and its affections as the locus for philosophical thought and radical critique which constitutes one of *Souls*'s primary sources of creative-intellectual agency. The body and its affections, for Du Bois, is radically relational, operating as a means of opening the self to the true complexities and predicaments of the world it inhabits by making, as Sara Ahmed (2006) articulates, those complex forces whirling around it "available within the bodily horizon" (2).

One crucial way *Souls* subverts Washington-style accommodationism is by drawing on the past as a vital, autonomous force. Concerning *Souls*'s historical context,

Kelly Wagers (2008) notes that "at the nineteenth century's close, most American historians were pronouncing…the scientific study of 'progress' as the way to discover universal historical laws and enact national reconciliation" (78). In "*The Souls of Black Folk*: Thought and Afterthought," Zamir (2008) similarly offers the stirring observation that "Du Bois's resistance to a naïve historical progressivism is intimately bound up with his deeply felt sense of the past as a living presence in the here and now" (13). Washington's accommodationist regime reinforced this notion of progress with an appreciable degree of psychical violence and cultural repression, for it demanded the Black community's wholesale embrace of capitalism's gothic fragmentations, specifically, its amputations of the past from the present.

In depicting the perceiving, feeling, and environmentally plastic body as a site for the dynamic reception of the past—the "nucleus of every man's experience," as James writes, being "the sense of his own body" (1171)—"Of the Meaning of Progress" poses ones of *Souls*'s most trenchant critiques of late nineteenth-century America's fetishization of progress, both within white America and the Tuskegee machine. The chapter opens by centering memory, which envelops the nucleus of the affected body-mind, as one of its governing tropes: "Young and happy … I shall not forget that summer, seventeen years ago … A picnic now and then, and a supper, and the rough world was softened by laughter and song. I remember how—But I wander" (405). The em dash after "how" is a subtle and easily overlooked example of what James's calls transitions: the affectively immanent and vaguely multiple parts of nondualist experience. (In this case, the memory and the remembering subject are equally real; neither is privileged over the other.) As the passage suggests, memory possesses a kind of autonomy of excess, for it floods and overwhelms the mind, disclosing the past as an irrepressible force.

While Du Bois recounts the fate of several local folk in the rural hills of Alexandria, Tennessee (where he taught while attending Fisk) the chapter's primary focus is on Josie, "a thin, homely girl of twenty, with a dark-brown face and thick, hard hair" (406). Du Bois pairs the Negro spiritual "My way's cloudy" with an epigraph taken from Fredrich von Schiller's 1801 tragedy *The Maid of Orleans*, a work loosely based on

Joan of Arc, which tells the story of Johanna, a character who, "because of circumstances beyond her control … must undergo a terrible struggle" (Waterman 1952, 231).

A saintly prophet of humble origins who suffers martyrdom, Johanna is Du Bois's literary proxy for Josie. Du Bois implicitly casts Josie as a member of the talented tenth *in nuce*: "First came Josie [into the schoolhouse] and her brothers and sisters. The longing to know, to be student in the great school at Nashville, hovered like a star above this child-woman amid her work and worry, and she studied doggedly" (407). This passage echoes Du Bois's previous assertion in "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" that throughout history, "the powers of single black men flash here and there like falling stars, and die sometimes before the world has rightly gauged their brightness" (365). Like the "living plant" that reaches skyward with its "roots still clinging in the mould," Josie represents the ideals of Goethean and Emersonian self-culture, yet wasted for African Americans due to white supremacy's cultural and material forces (485). We find at the end of the chapter that "Josie shivered and worked on…until [she] crept to her mother like a hurt child, and slept—and sleeps," a grammar of death deliberately blending the past with the present tense, thus evoking the past's ability to perpetually act in and on the present (411).

Though Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*) was not published until roughly ten years after *The Souls of Black Folk*, it is interesting to note that Du Bois narrates an experience that is appreciably Proustian in its understanding of the affective powers of memory. At the end of the chapter, he recounts what could be described as a moment of *memoire involontaire*: "I came by chance once more to the walls of Fisk University, to the halls of the chapel of melody. As I lingered there in the joy and pain of meeting old school-friends, there swept over me a sudden longing to pass again beyond the blue hill…to learn how life had gone with my school-children" (411). A highly recursive text, *Souls* here again uses the same language and imagery as it does when Du Bois describes the presencing of the veil, which "swept" across him in childhood. In this instance, however, it is the past which repeats and intrudes upon the present with an autonomy of vital affect (363).

"Of the Meaning of Progress"'s insistence upon the ontological reality of the past also draws compelling parallels to one of James's contemporaries, Henri Bergson—particularly, Bergson's 1896 work, *Matière et mémoire* (*Matter and Memory*), which, by James's own admission, greatly influenced and prefigured his radical empiricism. Given Bergson's overwhelming popularity in the United States, Du Bois was also very likely familiar with the former's ideas about memory. Keith Ansell-Pearson (2005) notes that in Bergson's conception of memory, "Memory becomes superfluous and devoid of actual interest. But it is precisely because of this lack of interest and suspension of need that it can reveal itself as a disruptive and creative power" (1119). Memory, for Bergson, is not merely the mechanical repetition of past perception but rather a vital and virtual co-presence with present perception. Memory lies dormant in the present due to the present's practical exigencies, yet it can upspring and rush into the present unpredictably. As Deleuze (1991) writes in *Bergsonism*, the profound result of the Bergsonian revolution is its realization that the past "would never be constituted if it did not coexist with the present whose past it is. The past and the present do not denote two successive moments, but two elements which coexist" (59).[11]

Du Bois, in "Of the Meaning of Progress," suggests a similar ontological/virtual co-presencing of past with present, for the chapter both ironizes and displaces what Wagers (2008) astutely dubs "progress' smooth logic" (94). "Of the Meaning of Progress" insists that the question of who remembers and of what is remembered is deeply moral, spiritual, and political. For Du Bois, the gothically fragmenting imperatives of

[11] In the midst of composing this essay, for instance, I took one of my regular walks through Central Park, where I came upon a plaque for Seneca Village. The name rang familiar but as I read the plaque, I suddenly realized that the land I was standing on was formerly a village of homes owned by African Americans during the first decades of the nineteenth century—land seized by the city in 1853 to build Central Park using eminent domain. According to the Central Park Conservancy's website: "Seneca Village allowed residents to live away from the more built-up sections of downtown Manhattan and escape the unhealthy conditions and racial discrimination they faced there." I use this little bit of autobiography (taking a cue from Du Bois) to illustrate that in this instance, the vitality and potency of the past had found itself coiled in the present, waiting to reassert itself. Granted, this is not the individual or subjective memory that Bergson typically refers to, but rather collective memory. Still, such collective memory possesses a vital and virtual co-presence with the present, such that it can autonomously intrude upon it in unexpected ways. In fact, one could say that such instances of memory radically decompose and recompose the individual subject by disclosing planes of meaning not otherwise available when perception is confined to the exigencies of action in the pure present.

nationalism demand traumas of collective forgetting. Yet it is the vitally of affect—specifically, the autonomy of the past as a virtual co-presence with the present—which subverts such forgetting. Du Bois's critique of culturally collective modes of amnesia and historical erasure due to the exigencies of utilitarian and capitalistic progressivism is not a discretely posed one but occurs throughout *Souls* as a trope vivifying the dogged persistence of the past and the importance of maintaining a robust and honest dialogue with it. *Souls* in fact will implicitly and recursively pose the open-ended question closing "Of the Meaning of Progress": "And all this life and love and strife and failure,—is it the twilight of nightfall or the flush of some faint-dawning day?" (414). Despite the chapter's clear skepticism, Du Bois offers no definitive resolution concerning progress. Progress is not a question of teleology or dialectical synthesis, but a locus of vital-affective indeterminacy. The chapter ends with the surrounding silence of the problem, inviting the reader to dwell in its enveloping and becoming intensity: "Thus sadly musing, I rode to Nashville in the Jim Crow car" (414).

"YOUR MEMORIAL HALL AND MINE"

Reaffirming radical empiricism's ontological nondualism—its rejection of transcendental egos, cogitos, or any other such philosophical chimeras—James asserts the following about Berkeleyan idealism:

> For the Berkeleyan school, ideas (the verbal equivalent of what I term experiences) are discontinuous. The content of each is wholly immanent, and there are no transitions with which they are consubstantial and through which their beings may unite. Your Memorial Hall and mine, even when both are percepts, are wholly out of connection with each other. Our lives are a congeries of solipsisms, out of which in strict logic only a God could compose a universe of discourse. No dynamic currents run between my objects and your objects. Never can our minds meet in the *same*. (1176)

Has James chosen Memorial Hall as his illustration of a shared or "conterminous" perception out of convenience merely? Perhaps. Yet he does feel that academic philosophy has by and large covered over something very basic about being: the body. Our worlds of immediate perception and becoming first and foremost surround the

body, comprising its vital affections. In subordinating or erasing the body altogether, philosophy has most traditionally privileged concepts, cognition, and representation. Radical empiricism, however, inverts this paradigm, centering the body and its surrounding fields, showing how consciousness is derived therein.

This is precisely the novel way in which James accounts for the question of how two minds can know one thing (without falling back on appeals to the transcendental subject):

> Why do I postulate your mind? Because I see your body acting in a certain way. Its gestures, facial movements, words and conduct generally, are 'expressive,' so I deem it actuated as my own is, by an inner life like mine…In that perceptual part of my universe which I call your body, your mind and my mind meet and may be called conterminous…For instance, your hand lays hold of one end of a rope and my hand lays hold of the other end. We pull against each other. Can our two hands be mutual objects in this experience, and the rope not be mutual also? (1176-77)

"Know," however, denotes cognition, and it seems that James is after what arrives before and/or in excess of the purely cognitive. James's point, of course, is that we can know the reality of other minds because we sense the living animacy of another's body as it mimics meaning back to ours. Yet James's language has implications beyond its obvious argument. His rope image suggests a multitude of alternating vibrational connections moving molecularly between bodies and selves—selves that leak into other selves: "If you alter an object in your world, put out a candle, for example, when I am present, *my* candle *ipso facto* goes out" (1177).

"Of the Sons of Master and Man" devotes concerted attention to what we might call—modifying James's phrasing slightly—the possibility of how two body-minds can share a common field or plane of becoming, and thus be "conterminous." Wagers (2008) remarks that "critics consider 'Of the Sons of Master and Man' less frequently than other chapters, although it perhaps most completely outlines the method of inconclusive 'contact' over 'wholesale arguments' Du Bois advances as a historiographic strategy" (94). The ambiguities, fragmentations, and incompletions of interracial and intraracial contact is of course one of *Souls*'s biggest subjects, and "Sons" sketches this broader

trope in miniature: "Indeed, the characteristic of our age is the contact of European civilization with the world's undeveloped peoples" (475). Here, Du Bois goes the furthest in outlining the gothic structure of the segregated South, generating a modal taxonomy of racial contact—physical proximity, economic and political relations, intellectual commerce, and sympathetic social contact—that remarkably parallels James's taxonomy of ascending degrees of intimacy within radical empiricism's mosaic ontology.

On the rhetorical level, "Sons" works to dispel the racist myth that white supremacy is the result of a hierarchy of innate racial characteristics rather than a set of historically contingent cultural-material formations. Du Bois, however, does endorse a revised Darwinian conception of race—revised in the sense that its criterion is not "survival of the fittest" but cultural, intellectual, and moral superiority: "It is, then, the strife of all honorable men of the twentieth century to see that in the future competition of races the survival of the fittest shall mean the triumph of the good, the beautiful, and the true" (475-6). Yet the primary crisis which the chapter addresses—from which others (such as political disenfranchisement and economic exploitation) emanate—is the gothic social organization of Southern segregation: the fact that it is "usually possible to draw in nearly every Southern community a physical color-line on the map, on the one side of which whites dwell and on the other Negroes" (477). "Sons" in many ways captures the paradoxical nature of Du Bois's political thought at this stage of his life, for it is at once radical in its critique of race relations (highlighting, for instance, the fundamentally racist role of policing, and white supremacy's carving up of civic space) and conservative in its romantic idealizations of the antebellum South's social hierarchies: "This is a vast change from the situation in the past, when, through a close contact of master and house-servant in the big house, one found the best of both races in close contact and sympathy" (477).

What I want to suggest, however, is that "Sons" performs much of its subversive textual work when it turns its attention to an examination of the affective currents passing through segregated Southern life—the ways in which body-minds can become conterminous and porous to one another at unexpected moments:

> Indeed, on the question of questions—the Negro problem—he hears so little that there almost seems to be a conspiracy of silence…But if he lingers long enough there comes the awakening…He realizes at last that silently, resistlessly, the world about flows by him in two great streams: they ripple on in the same sunshine, they approach and mingle their waters in seeming carelessness,—then they divide and flow wide apart. It is done quietly; no mistakes are made, or if one occurs, the swift arm of the law and of public opinion swings down for a moment, as when the other day a black man and a white woman were arrested for talking together on Whitehall Street in Atlanta. (488)

Du Bois's passage is compelling in that it sketches, from an embodied perspective, what it feels like to become with the flows and durational becomings of segregation (consistent with *Souls*'s broader style and textual strategy of somatic narration, i.e., Du Bois's emphasis on the body and its perceptual fields). Even more compelling, however, is Du Bois's subtle acknowledgment of the aleatory nature of affects, which ambulate and crystalize both toward racial-social stratification *and* subversive destratification.[12] Thus, it is the decided *unpredictability* of the crosscurrents of affective exchange between races (and genders) that demands ideological state intervention at the carceral level—intervention which enforces the subtler atmospheric strains of what Du Bois calls the "tremendous force of unwritten law" (489).

Du Bois's sketch of stochastic racial contact exemplifies what Deleuze and Guattari, in works like *A Thousand Plateaus*, trace as the distinction between the macropolitical and the micropolitical, or the molar and the molecular. As May (2005) notes, the macropolitical "concerns large political entities or institutions or historical forces" and is the domain of traditional liberal (and even Marxist) thought, whereas the micropolitical, or molecular, is interested in political analysis from the perspective of "the small elements that comprise our political lives" (126-7). As Peter Merriman (2019) puts it, "molar masses or bodies are 'punctual', highly organised, easily represented and expressed" whereas molecular movements "are vital, incessant, and unruly, operating

[12] It is important to stress that affects are not inherently subversive. As well-known affect theorists like Brian Massumi have shown, in many cases affects can work to serve reactionary political agendas (as Massumi discusses in the context of the rise of Ronald Reagon). Because affects have no determinate teleology, they pull us along and circulate through us in multiple, unpredictable ways.

below the threshold of perception and associated with becomings of innumerable kinds" (67). For Du Bois, the molecular flows constitutive of racial contact (or a lack thereof) are felt yet defy clear articulation: "It is, in fine, the atmosphere of the land, the thought and feeling, the thousand and one little actions which go to make up life" (487).

Such "thousand and one little actions" have the potential to unsettle the stratifications of racial identity and caste, just as they also act as so many impersonal forces shoring them up. In the same chapter, Du Bois emphasizes the importance of taking "a man by the hand" and looking "frankly into his eyes" to feel "his heart beating with red blood" (490). Here we might be led to ask if Du Bois problematically places undue faith in notions of universal liberal sympathy as a means of effecting social amelioration (490). Yet it is fairly apparent that Du Bois is aware of sympathetic identification's racial and historical mutability. As Susan Mizruchi (1999) points out, *Souls*'s account of anti-Black racism in "Of the Passing of the First-Born"—on display during Burghardt's funeral procession, when white passerby hurl the N-word at Du Bois and his family—underscores just how sympathy can function "as a means of differentiation and exclusion" (275).[13] Despite his awareness and acknowledgment of the racially gothic segmentations of sympathetic identification, Du Bois also thinks that interracial contact is important in a psychically and socially fragmented landscape. Like James, in his discussion of the conterminous possibilities of body-minds, Du Bois suggests that the porousness of body-minds is capable of transferring affective molecularities through contact that can, at times, leak through the grids of fixed racial differentiation and hierarchy.

[13] Du Bois's infant son, Burghardt, died of diphtheria in 1899. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. notes in his introduction to the Norton Critical Edition of *The Souls of Black Folk*, the child's parents, William and Nina, were "unable, in the child's critical hours, to find either a black physician to attend [their] dying son or a white physician in Atlanta who was willing to treat a black child" (xxx).

SOULS'S VITAL AFTERLIVES

In some sense, "Of the Sons of Master and Man" stands in synecdochal relation to the entirety of *Souls*, for its emphasis on affective molecularity suggests, in miniature, what *Souls* as a whole wishes to accomplish with its readers.[14] Recalling his 1904 review of *Souls*, Du Bois himself notes that by abandoning traditional argument in favor of an "intimate tone of self-revelation," he grants the reader "peculiar warrant in setting his judgment against mine, but at the same time some revelation of how the world looks to me cannot easily escape him" ("The Souls of Black Folk"). Interestingly, though Du Bois would go on in works like *Dusk of Dawn* and *Darkwater* to critique and revise his *Souls*-era views for being insufficiently attentive to the imbrications of racism and Western capitalism, he nonetheless seems to recognize, even at this early stage of his career, the long game he is playing, i.e., that the immediate cultural temperature would be such that his white readers would take a skeptical and/or condescending attitude toward his book while nonetheless retaining the unshakeability of its revelations—revelations that, in short, would hover like an obscure halo of unaddressed feeling and vague impress along the edges of the white intellect's defined nucleus and sharply articulated edges.

In a recent and important article on the publication history and reception of *The Souls of Black Folk*, print culture historian Lucas Dietrich (2017) tracks the text's "widespread review and discussion" (321). In particular, Dietrich seek to revise and complicate reception histories such as Herbert Aptheker's, which "functions on a binary axis of positive and negative reception," examining instead how "Du Bois's emotional appeal was often seen as a central feature of the text" (322). While this emotional appeal (primarily among Northern white readers) was a source of provocation, discussion, and, most often, sympathetic approbation (all of which boosted the text's sales), it was also the source of what Dietrich identifies as racial stereotyping. One example is a review of *Souls* published in *The Nation*, which "commends Du Bois's 'passion'" yet goes on to remark that the "'features of Du Bois's mind are negro features'" (322). Thus, "Du Bois's

[14] Koopman (2017) articulates something similar when he notes that the chapter's detailing of differing modes of social strife is a "signature theme" structuring "the entire book" (184).

efforts to appeal to a benevolent white audience *through* ethnographic writing and religious sympathy," Dietrich concludes, "were interpreted according to racist assumptions and stereotypes" (323).

Dietrich's conclusions seem undeniable and yet when one surveys the reception of *Souls* precisely as Dietrich does, one gains the distinct impression that the text's affective dimensions proliferate a certain contagiousness in spite of its white audience's varying modes of skepticism and/or ethnographically racist praise. Whereas Dietrich points to the failures of sympathy in overturning anti-Black stereotypes among many of *Souls*' white readers (its Black readers in contrast receiving the text by and large with enthusiasm absent of racist stereotyping), the text's historical reception nonetheless registers a vital dissonance between its cognitive and affective levels of meaning that Du Bois himself seemingly anticipates—inducing, that is, a kind of double consciousness in many of his white readers.

In this sense, both the textual work of *Souls*, and Du Bois's own perspective on that textual work, aligns with, and yet goes beyond, James's view on the powers of molecular change, as James hints at in the following 1899 letter sent to Sarah Wyman Whitman (a close friend and local artist):

> As for me, my bed is made: I am against bigness & greatness in all their forms; and with the invisible molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual, stealing in through the crannies of the world like so many soft rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, and yet rending the hardest monuments of man's pride, if you give them time.[15]

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[15] I am taking this quotation from Livingston's "Excited Subjects" but it can be found in the *The Correspondence of William James*, 8: 546. See Livingston, endnote 90.

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IT'S G-D'S BLOODY RULE, MA

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ABSTRACT

The title character of E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* (1971) is a graduate student in political history at Columbia University in the late '60s; he is also the son of fictional versions of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who were tried together for treason in 1951 and executed in 1953. The time present of the novel is 1967, when Daniel's long effort to relieve himself of the burden of memory is morphing into an obsession with figuring out guilt and thus distributing blame, for his own victimization as much as that of his parents. This essay argues that Daniel's "trouble breathing" is a function of the utter and un-vanquish-able co-determination of the public and the private, household and nation-state, the socialist dream of equity and the ethical obligations of Judaism. The interpretive strategies of Marx and Freud deliver superb insight into the over-wrought, over-determined family dramas of McCarthy-era Anti-Semitism and Jerry Rubin's radical New Left, but epistemological insight, even if it is as effectively domestic as it is socio-political, does not mean release from ontological suffocation, especially not for Daniel. Cultural *critique*, however informed in its modern secularity by Judaic origins, does not address all the matter in his heart. And it is Daniel's ultimate embrace of the fiercest dimension of Chosenness, his ancestral ethos of suffering, including his grandmother's bequeathing of the martyr's pursuit of justification, that paradoxically drains his anguish, his anger, and his viciousness—with the help, in the book's final spiraling turn between public and private, ethnos and ethos, of us readers who bear witness to the history written in Daniel's Book.

Keywords: Doctorow; Rosenbergs; Daniel; Judaism; New Left.

For Laura Wexler, Reva B. Siegel, and Priscilla Wald, prophets of humane intellect in our troubled times.

Atheism is wasted on the non-believer. (Richard Rodriguez, 2013)

THREE TITLES, DANIEL'S WAY

I can't decide on the title for this essay: it could be, "It's Not Alright, Ma; I'm Totally F—ked," which is how the fictionalized Rosenberg son, in E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* (1971), feels into his twenties, regarding the Soviet Communist involvements of his parents that landed them in the electric chair. Narrated by Daniel himself (switching from third-person reportorial to first-person confessional), the novel

proceeds on two timelines, one in the time present between Memorial Day and Christmas of 1967, the other in the late '40s and early '50s of his childhood, to explicate why and investigate how he came to be "fucked" even before he was born. Freud, that is, the interpretive power of psychological acuity, commands Daniel's interrogation of his parents' unorthodox child-raising, with Oedipal repercussions for sure, that cannot be understood unless placed *within* the political scene of Jewish utopianism *cum* American Anti-Semitism. As it turns out, the political scene of the Cold War is itself a "family drama" inviting Freudian interpretation: a horror-story generated by McCarthy and his Conservative Christian xenophobes but enacted, crucially and on *all* sides of his parents' case, by US Jews—in what is, arguably, a Jewish tradition. Freud, in recognition of the utter fragility of the most intense intimacy, is seen as tenor *and* vehicle of the Grandest of Global Schemes.

The title could also be, "It's Alright, Ma: You've *Only* Been Fried," which renders caustically the relative innocence of Daniel's parents and their confrères, who were at heart just socialist dreamers looking beyond genealogical and indeed historical loyalties in pursuit of a just and equitable world of safety and dignity for all. A graduate student in political history at Columbia University, Daniel articulates, in a recurrent dry tone that expresses and recurrently bursts into righteous anger, the incommensurable force of socio-economic domination that has produced the grotesque torture of sanctioned execution (the gore of the trope of "frying" galore) whenever and however useful to whatever empire or nation-state. This is, in short, Marxist cognizance turned bitter resignation, as Daniel comes to recognize that his own ability to act politically as an individual in the midst of late-1960s protest culture, despite the turn to media drama reminiscent of Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin ("Artie Sternlicht" in the novel), has been 100% preempted by the forces governing the history against which he means to protest. Another diagnostic win and prescriptive loss.

Consciously and deliberately, Daniel pursues from the start these two explanatory schemes: the psychological recognitions that were initiated by Freud and that we signify even when we reject much of his detail as Freudian (more diagnosis than prescription) and the economic recognitions that were initiated by Marx and that we

signify even when we reject much of the detail (much stronger demystification than praxis). Indeed, Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* offers as sharp, as deep, and as intense an entwining of public and private as to be found in American literature, wherein domestic drama occurs operatically in public, and public forces of the most invidious kind invade the private. And yet, this already hyper-focused interface between the political and the personal in *The Book of Daniel* is not limited to the twin interpretive regimes of Marx and Freud.[1] For there is a third explanatory scheme, one that also explicates the private as public, the public as private (family as political, political as family) but that has proven, it would seem, problematic, given its near total absence from the critical archive.

There was a burst of critical and academic interest in Doctorow in the 1970s and '80s. Reviewers of the first rank first debated Doctorow's historical veracity and political intent in direct terms: is Doctorow trying to exculpate the Rosenbergs in *The Book of Daniel*? Is the radicalism of the novel thereafter, *Ragtime* (1975), dangerously nostalgic or brilliantly revelatory?[2] But a scholarly cohort soon turned attention to Doctorow's experiments in postmodern narrative structure (*Loon Lake* in 1980 was taken to complete a trilogy) and thus to the varieties of post-structuralist history-telling obtaining therein.[3] Of course, Freud recurred in the abstractions of Jacques Lacan and Marx in the excavations of Foucault, with Derrida's extraction of Nietzsche encompassing both even as formal *critique* yielded quickly and necessarily to thematic investigation since the deployments of Freud and Marx in *The Book of Daniel* are Doctorow's own and, invoked by name, attributed to Daniel himself! Doctorow's strongest readers pursued the how, why, and what of fiction-conveyed revisionist

[1] In this essay, as in common academic usage, "Freud" is shorthand for "Freudianism," that is, psychological if not psychoanalytical approaches to the individual psyche but also to large-scale social forces thought to operate analogously; so too, "Marx" is shorthand for "Western Marxism," that is, approaches to capitalist society focused on the causal power of its economic relations, including the interpolation of individuals therein.

[2] See Epstein 1977; Green 1976; Kauffmann 1975; Stanley 1975. All of these writer-critics were then termed "Jewish public intellectuals."

[3] The chapter titles in Paul Levine's excellent little book on Doctorow—including "Politics and Imagination," "Fiction and Radicalism," "Fiction and History"—index the thematic issues that dominated the early criticism (Levine 1985, 5).

history—and the cultural politics thereof.[4] But in the 1990s, when the US academy turned to gender, race, and colonial subjectivity as *the* right and proper objects for critical inquiry (however much still overwhelmingly post-structuralist in ontology and epistemology), Doctorow scholarship became less conspicuous, particularly in the non-specialist journals.[5] In 2018, Mark Steven would ask: "How do we account for the critical neglect of Doctorow relative to his contemporaries?" (Steven 2018, 119).

By its very title *The Book of Daniel* points to a very specific form of critical myopia.[6] The original "Book of Daniel" is, after all, a repeatedly triumphant, though often phantasmagoric chapter of the Hebrew Bible—featuring a dream-interpreter in a barbarian court who has been charged by the Lord with keeping their colonized people together and alive! Yet, try to find in the critical archive for *The Book of Daniel* more than a passing mention of Jewish rites and beliefs, never mind of Scripture or Talmudic method or liturgical martyrology—or of G-d Himself.[7] Half a century after the novel's publication, it seems remarkable how little Doctorow scholars have responded to its religious concerns—because they have been acutely attentive to other matters and despite (perhaps even *because* of) the fact that the majority are of Jewish descent. But to pursue what the novel pursues is to engage an historical analytic of increasingly epistemological synthesis and, I believe, ontological force that Daniel himself increasingly recognizes and puts to work in his "Book"—Doctorow's own radical secularism notwithstanding. In short, it is time to let Daniel's fundamental Jewishness

[4] Exemplary explorations of Doctorow's postmodernism include: Carmichael 1993; Foley 1983; Harpham 1985; Johnson 1982; King 1988; Morris 1991; Reed 1992; and Stark 1975.

[5] Americanists publishing in Europe (Demark, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Hungary, England) and, indeed, in Latin America (Mexico at least) continue to be interested in Doctorow, including his later works, keeping political economy and social history in view. I also find intellectual camaraderie in the scattering of US-based scholar-critics who have worked on *The Book of Daniel* since the '90s, producing assiduous close readings (several for *Studies in the Novel*) that update Marxist historiography (including ideological critique via Louis Althusser and Sacvan Bercovitch) and Freudian social theory (trauma and affect theory via Cathy Caruth). See Derosa 2009; Gordon 2016; Kwon 2014; Morgenstern 2003; Rasmussen 2010; and Steven 2018.

[6] Professor Allen Guttman's lecture course on Jewish-American writers during my sophomore year at Amherst College in 1976 was, I am delighted to suggest, the initiating tutorial (along with a seminar on "Race and Ethnicity in the United States" taught by N. Gordon Levin, Jr.) for my career-long interest in the ethno-religious dimensions of literature and the arts.

[7] The English nomenclature of "G-d," vowel-less, postdates *The Book of Daniel*, but is deployed here in respect for contemporary Jewish practice and its persisting need to differentiate.

fully register, what we might even call—with all due respect to Flannery O'Connor and all due suspicion of her Christianity—its G-d-haunted habitus and pulse of heart.

The current view, in other words, needs to entail the long view. After all, the discursive formations we call Marx and Freud are relatively new. They compete for the explanatory upper hand, yes, but also make for strong allies in contemporary thought-containment, as Daniel well knows, since he himself sets the table for the interpretive operations of the novel. On the other hand, the religious hermeneutic dogging Daniel is ancient and may well, in the end, encompass the other two—despite the misleading assumption, built into the Freudianism and Marxism of mostly secular, nearly assimilated Western European Jews, that this third scheme had been superseded.[8] The operating assumption, in and around the US academy, from the late '60s through at least September 11th, derived from a predominantly radical and agnostic (often anti-religious) intelligentsia, was that the ethical concerns of Judaism had survived in US arts and criticism *only* in order to register common humanity, beyond the ethos of ethnos.[9] Yet, it was—it is!—the task of *The Book of Daniel* to identify and in elegant reversal of the universalizing impulse to reclaim that third mode, which is rooted in Torah and in the experience of the Jewish people, suffering with hope, suffering in hope, indeed suffering hope first to last.[10]

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[8] For the developing interplay between "Religion in Literary Studies" and "Literature in Religious Studies," see Tracy Fessenden's series of generous yet acute thought-pieces, which access the state-of-the-art and in doing so attend to the persisting resistance in the Americanist academy to vernacular theologies and devotions (even under the rallying cry of "the postsecular"): Fessenden 2007, Fessenden 2010, Fessenden 2012, Fessenden 2014, Fessenden 2016, and Fessenden 2021. For her own counter-example, which is a tour-de-force, see Fessenden 2018. Fessenden's accumulative bibliography constitutes a larger context and theorization for this essay than Doctorow criticism per se, as do the works cited in Ferraro 2020.

[9] Of course, Doctorow criticism notwithstanding, not all the American literary professorate of Jewish extraction have been secularists. It was in fact a couple of fellow travelers, Sara B. Blair and Jonathan Freedman, who helped (along with the Boyarin brothers) to initiate a distinguished trajectory of "new Jewish studies" addressing Jewish identity in ways not limited to the social determinants of race, gender, and class—to which this essay aspires to contribute, belatedly! Blair and Freedman 2004.

[10] I have been teaching *The Book of Daniel* since early in my career, but I stepped back from writing about the novel in the late 1990s when a *Narrative Society* panel on "religious approaches to the Jewish American novel" featured more panelists than attendees. Undergrads of many stripes (including future Ph.D. Jinan Joudeh) have shared my enthusiasm for the novel, and several graduate students learned in Judaica—Lisa Naomi Mulman, Amber Manning, and above all Matthew Biberman, who supplied texts in pointed affirmation of my intuitions—have proven indispensable to my thought and research. The current spur comes from the special issue call of Chiara Patrizi and Pilar Martínez Benedí, which got me (re)thinking about the Judaic entwinements of public and private. My gratitude

The dream of a universal condition of met human needs, from food and shelter to intimacy, dignity, and community, emerges profoundly (as with Marx, as with Freud) from Jewish ethics and vision. The Jewish subtext of thought and commitment runs deeper still, for the novel also understands, Daniel himself understands, that the angry refusal of G-d is itself a Jewish tradition—rekindled among Ashkenazi refugees by the felt abandonment entailed in the late 19th-century pogroms, then held fast through the first US generations of desperate poverty and stark anti-Semitism, then horrifically ratcheted up by the Holocaust and (though not Jewish-specific, because of planetary terror) the double "droppings" (as Daniel puts it) of the atomic bomb. The circumstances of socialist American Jews, as with the American Jewish experiment writ large only more so, offers no break toward a Christian regime of forgiveness, no license to forget, the utopian dreamwork notwithstanding. Why else would a novel that takes us from Memorial Day through Halloween to Christmas skip over both Easter *and* Passover? As Paul Robeson asks in the Hebrew-derived spiritual, "DIDN'T MY LORD DELIVER DANIEL?" (128).[11]

In recurrent passages evidently drawn from his dissertation, Daniel the professional intellectual identifies the political issues in play, which he sees as recurrently American and recurrently global, and he does almost from the start of the novel:

> Many historians have noted an interesting phenomenon in American life in the years immediately after a war. In the councils of government fierce partisanship replaces the necessary political coalitions of wartime. In the greater arena of social relations—business, labor, the community—violence rises, fear and recrimination dominate public discussion, passion prevails over reason. … Take World War I. … New immigration laws made racial distinctions and set stringent quotas. Jews were charged with international conspiracy and Catholics with trying to bring the Pope to America. (23, 25)

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subsequently to the anonymous readers at *JAm It!* for insisting on clarity if not concision, and to Beth A. Eastlick for helping with both.

[11] Parenthetical page references are to the longstanding paperback edition that replicates the original hardcover: E. L. Doctorow, *The Book of Daniel* (New York: Random House, 1971).

In this modeling, the forces of political economy are the great determinant, but the process works its way out in the United States through the parricidal impulse of Christian America, to scapegoat and indeed murder its father-faith, which is at once visited upon and enacted by the Isaacson family, as the Marxist construction of religion as false consciousness rationalizes his parents' disaffiliation from Judaism and thus filial confusion—Mom and Dad, or Grandma?—for Susan and especially Daniel.[12]

Doctorow names Daniel's father "Paul Isaacson," invoking both Abraham's foundational assent to sacrificing son Isaac to G-d's will and the tradition of filial dissent embodied by Paul the Apostle, who gave rise out of Judaism to Christianity. From threatened infanticide to de-facto patricide—and back again. In the novel, it is Paul himself who acknowledges that the Jewish-strengthened American legal system is putting on a "passion play" for their "Christian masters" (197). But it is not Christian martyrology—the one great Isaac-son-ian sacrifice of self that would forgive all and thus afford a relinquishing of Jewish orthopraxis and Jewish separateness—that ultimately governs Daniel's search for explanation and, more importantly, Daniel's embrace of testimony as a mode of religious—and thus socio-political—action. Whereas it is the sweet girl-child Susan who eventually kills herself in new-age despair, broken by the inability to find redress in the public sphere, it is the belligerent Daniel, otherwise vigilant in his contest against emasculation, who comes to see himself paradoxically as heir to his grandmother's fierce embrace of the Levitical mandate, to be the Chosen One of the Chosen Many. He is taxed to "justify," somehow, the most intimate suffering of

[12] It has been part of the intellectual fun of Doctorow criticism to identify the Marxist and Freudian thinkers upon whom Daniel as assembler-narrator draws, with particular emphasis, congruent with the emphasis here, on social theorists *combining* the two traditions. In a 1977 consideration of *The Book of Daniel*, Joseph Epstein spotted interpolations from "revisionist historians" (I don't think he meant the label as a compliment) including William Appleman Williams and David Horowitz. When Paul Levine interviewed Doctorow about "marry[ing] the insights of Freud with the insights of Marx," naming Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, and Walter Reich, Doctorow acknowledged the ambition and its controversies, reminding Levine that Reich was "excommunicated by both the Marxists and the Freudians." Ten years later, Sam B. Girgus, distinguished scholar of Jewish America and its media studies, added Christopher Lasch to the litany. I myself suspect the "new" cultural historians of Doctorow's own generation, especially the earliest essays of Michael Paul Rogin and Richard L. Slotkin. Epstein 1977, 88; Levine 1978, 48; Girgus 1988, 86.

the family by means of the very public acts that caused the most intense forms of said suffering. The dilemma, of course, is how?

The answer lies, paradoxically, in the electric-chair mandate of his mother regarding himself: "Let our death be his bar mitzvah" (299). At the time, Christians and other gentiles were prompted to interpret Rochelle's final words as a disgusted dismissal of the G-d of the Hebrews, but it is my conviction that Daniel has long felt his mother's injunction to be intended literally. He has come to comprehend his parents' martyrdom as Jews to be his own special election to Judaism. Over time, he has learned to see his vulnerability to the public eye, which he hates, as itself a special opportunity, not in contradistinction from but in concert with his (acceptance of) Jewish responsibility. As he disdains the conventions of narrative construction that enable his exploration, so Daniel despises the interpretive apparatus of lit-crit for its generic reductions. But he needs the reader to hear and adopt: he needs her genres (needs perhaps even her genes) in order to make sense of it all and redistribute the desperate matters in his heart (23). The only way forward is back, historical analysis as interrogation of the self, self-exposure as collective witness. Thus, by tracking Daniel to his Book's end, I should be able to confirm my third, encompassing title: "It's G-d's bloody rule, Ma; let your death be our readers' bar mitzvah."

TROUBLE BREATHING

There is a snippet of dialogue between young Daniel and the lawyer for their cause, Jacob Asher, that indexes a figural regime brutally redolent of the troubles at hand for Daniel and yet eerily resonant today—that is, in the wake of the snuffing-out of Black Lives That Mattered and of Elders Without Defense Against Covid. In the back story of the novel, at the time of trial, the boy Daniel complains about a bout of car sickness to the car's driver, defense attorney Jacob Asher, who may not quite get the full force of the avowal, though otherwise he is notably empathetic to all of the Isaacsons. For the adult Daniel, recounting in time present invokes the once-and-still-persisting fear of what he calls elsewhere, "death by suffocation" (254). What Daniel the analyst is after,

of course, is the impact of the treason verdict and electrocution of his parents upon his sister and himself, to the point of invoking the Nazi death chambers:

> "What?" said Asher.
> "The gas fumes. I want to open the window."
> "Fumes? There are no fumes."
> "Just a little." I was having trouble breathing. (238)

It is my job, then, to trace the trouble with Daniel's breathing and to explicate what he does, finally, to relieve it, however unavoidably reductive and, indeed, presumptuous as such a procedure must be.

Asher is impressive for his social insight if not his defense tactics, since he "understood how someone could for swear his Jewish heritage and take for his own the perfectionist dream of heaven on earth, and in spite of that, or perhaps because of it, still consider himself a Jew" (119). Asher's insight stops short of Daniel's implicit quandary: how might it be that under such circumstances the "secular" radical could not only *consider* himself a Jew but in thought and, especially, in action actually *be* one—and in more ways than the genealogical technicality of being born to a Jewish mother? John Clayton (1983) argues that the Jewishness at work in *The Book of Daniel* is that of radical *secularism*, adeptly harnessing Asher's insight into recognizing the Jewish roots of universalistic humanism: "The code of being Jewish can put so much pressure on one to be universally responsive to human suffering that in the absence of strong pressure to accept the religious doctrine, the code takes one beyond parochialism" (110). In effect, by taking self-conscious acceptance of *doctrine* as the litmus test for lived religion, Clayton secures the secularity of Jewish radical humanism for its subscribers—not just Paul and Rochelle, but also Daniel and Doctorow. But is that *all* there is to radical Jewishness? What if we honor the revelatory force of praxis over doctrine—worship as the precondition of belief, in lived experience as in official

corridors?[13] I wish to explore the full range of forces at work within the Isaacsons' experience, supernatural as well as biological and social, especially the metaphysical implications entailed in Daniel's (wrestling with) the suffering of his family. At the start of his book, Daniel asks with a raised voice, "WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH MY HEART?" Many times through, I feel compelled to figure out at last: what does G-D have to do with it?

Formally, my exploration responds to what I take to be the New Critical mode of narrative construction—visceral figuration, ubiquitous resonance, macro in micro, multiplex ambiguity yielding codeterminations, and rules of genre—underlying and indeed interlocking the flashy postmodern conceits. After all, Doctorow was trained as a Kenyon undergraduate in the New Criticism of the Southern Agrarians by none other than John Crowe Ransom (Fowler 1992). It was only after completing a draft of the novel according to the conventions of third-person realism that Doctorow, in frustrated anger at its claustrophobic insufficiency, flailed out at the text on his typewriter in Daniel's voice—and thus hit upon the revelatory idea of switching Daniel's narrative between third- and first-person, supplemented thereafter by interpolations in other registers. In the novel that resulted, the metaphoric regime of near suffocation climaxes as Daniel the bio-historian and auto-reporter is sorting out the extent of his parents' guilt, the limits of his ability to accomplish such sorting, and the resultant impact of that combination of known and unknowable. He comes to accept, finally, the always-already public-ness of his family's deepest intimacies and to entrust his bearing of witness on behalf of the Isaacson's horrific legacy to the readers of the Book he has made. It is then, and only then, embracing Jewish suffering and Judaic sacrifice, G-d's demands and human frailties, that Daniel is able to open up his lungs and clear those horrifically compromised air passages.

[13] "Worship as a precondition of belief" is a cornerstone of a critical interpretive procedure that attends inductively not to doctrine and official institutions but to what historians call "lived religion": the ethno-ideational determinants, operative effects (including affect), and felt metaphysics of individuals and groups of individuals who aren't exactly (in the Protestant formulation) true believers or (in the original Jewish sense) fully righteous (Ferraro 2020, 21-3).

"The novel as a sequence of analyses" appears as a phrase inserted as meta-commentary during the first of the three scenes constituting the triple climax of Daniel the character's investigation into what really happened (281). I say "triple" because Doctorow, or at least Daniel, thinks and writes in units of three, which I mean to honor by exegetically shadowing and, where I can, re-enacting at an analytical remove. I say "climax," the fallen sexual metaphor, because throughout the novel, in a calculated delay, Daniel has marshalled and somewhat reinflected its orgasmic connotation from a score of related forms of violent intimacy, from untimely teasing withdrawal during intercourse in pursuit of fiercer delivery (so illustrated with the young wife Phyllis) to the cruel coming of old ladies, whose "hearts make love to the world not gently" (credited to the dream visit of Daniel's maternal grandmother's) (70). Indeed, the leitmotif of "still being fucked" describes the force of the New Left upon the Isaacson offspring, who are put on display as poster children to leverage anti-Establishment furor, mere political playthings, such that "still being fucked" reaches back in its phenomenology of exploitation to the penetration of Old Left ideas and actions into the Isaacson household—the original deadly intercourse. Of course, the Jewishness of all this is the first thing repressed by Daniel's parents and thus the last thing available for Daniel to reclaim, though we see by mid-novel that he has been thinking about it, however metaphorically and self-pityingly gendered: "According to Evans, observers in New Zealand report that mosquitoes there land on the floating pupae of females, slit them open with their genitals, and mate with the females before they can emerge" (178). Fucked, as Daniel views it, identifying with the female pupae, before he was born, a primal brutality that is at first and last ethno-religious. "What is most monstrous," Daniel insists, "is sequence," especially when, under the ideology of American individualism, it preempts self-determination (245).

CLIMAX #1: AT TRIAL, THE PRIVATE FAITH OF A COMRADE

Climax #1, for simplicity's sake, focuses on the question of his parents' espionage, as told over the shoulder of his mother at the trial. Here the psychological dynamic, as it emerges within and then commands the political arena, is what Daniel the investigator

is principally after—the Freud of the family drama encompassing the Marx of class struggle, as it were. After a couple of years of imprisonment, his parents, Paul and Rochelle Isaacson, were tried together for spying on the United States for a foreign government. The physical evidence is astonishingly thin, but their elder friend Selig Mindish has turned state's witness—presumably under the threat of being charged himself for treason, which carries the death penalty, and which in Mindish's case is being used itself as an interrogation device. (The last point is made to Daniel by his foster father, Robert Lewin, who teaches law at Boston College and is the epitome of a liberal, highly educated, and committed Jewish American.) The boy Daniel was not there at the trial, of course. The adult Daniel, thesis-writer and history-hound, has held to the assumption that Mindish was the true betrayer—of the United States' nuclear integrity, of the innocent or at least minor involvements of his parents, and thus of Susan and himself; and he has also nursed the idea that there was another couple involved in the atomic espionage that Mindish is protecting and for whom, then, his parents are sacrificed.

What Daniel figures out, or decides he must internalize as true-enough, is that it was only at the trial that his mother realized that his father, Paul, had conspired with Mindish to be the fall guy, whatever unclear role he had also played in the spying itself. The scene of recognition is narrated from Rochelle's point of view:

> But before he [Mindish] said the words that put them in their graves he turned and looked for a moment at Rochelle, looking for one fraction of a second into her eyes with the same moronic smile dying on his face and the absurdly significant dental x-ray slide in his spatulate fingers; and in the little grey pig eyes of the dentist was the recognition she sought. A wry acknowledgment of this moment in the courtroom, in their lives, and she was stunned to read in it the message not of a betrayer … no not as betrayer begging forgiveness [*sic*], there was no appeal for forgiveness … he presented the private faith of a comrade, one to another, complicitors in self-sacrifice, one to another, and I cannot communicate beyond this but by now you must know why and what is happening. She saw the comrade's life of terrible regret, of sad determination, one to another, and the assumption of their shared knowledge, the sexuality of it. And then she turned to look at her husband. … And there swept over her now the horrifying conviction that Paul did not have to return this look of Mindish. That while she had been shielding him from her dread he had withheld from her his one crucial perception. And that

> what in this moment overwhelmed her was something her husband already knew in himself and for himself. (280-81)

Here is what Daniel sees his mother inferring: Without her permission, Paul has agreed—perhaps it was even his idea—to sacrifice himself to death by jury, thereby not only protecting more guilty parties, but leveraging what he sees as the self-evident injustice and ethnic scapegoating into a theater of protest against un-American practices and a future rallying call for socialist dissent. ("If Jesus had not been tried, if he had not been put to death, how would his teachings have endured?" [184].) What Paul did he did "alone," as Rochelle realizes, meaning without her consent or foreknowledge. Paul not only takes Rochelle with him to the grave of misguided if idealistic self-sacrifice, but in so doing he orphans their children and assigns to them un-addressable life-long ignominy, a perverse actualization of Abrahamic sacrifice that keeps on killing.

The public tragedy was one of self-defeating idealism, clearly enough, but it might also be said to have been subtended by its private component: Paul's determination to fall on the sword of the Third International's utopian dream has betrayed Rochelle in the most obscene way. For Rochelle in 1954, Paul betrays most foully the protectorate of the marriage and parenthood that proceeded out of blessed intimacy: that carnal consecration which beautifully consummated their gentle romance and shared social vision ("one warm night, with the stars shining and the blackberry bushes, and the crickets' fiddle and the frogs' jug band, they knew each other and it was good" [196]) and that issued, in all probability, in conceiving Daniel. For Daniel in 1967, then, the breakdown of his parents' marriage at the trial recasts the specter of his biological conception from his sense of its original grace, which was for a long time the foremost exception to the rule of his overdetermined victimization, to the inception of the rule itself: that he was "fucked" before birth by an Abrahamic "fucking" that was as Isaacson-specific as it would draw down the always-already recurrence of anti-Semitism at large. Neither inference nor implication will dissipate. There is, literally, no way out of the repercussions, that's the ultimate lesson of climax #1; or as Daniel himself once put it, more gently, "And all my life I have been trying to escape

from my relatives and I have been intricate in my run, but one way or another they are what you come upon around the corner, and the Lord G-d who is so frantic for recognition says you have to ask how they are and would they like something cool to drink, and what is it you can do for them this time" (30).

At this point in the novel, Daniel has resigned himself to a "killer" of an Oedipal recognition. The paternal figure of ever-protective fatherly love, the masculine figure of ever protective husband love, is destroyed. He suddenly sees his mother in ways that partly acquit her of the damage done to the Isaacson children and partly shares her pain of surprise betrayal—he gets in bed with her, emotionally speaking. In the full scope of father-to-son descent, realized and made real, Daniel's conviction that his father has betrayed all, especially himself, is not as over-the-top Oedipal-successful as I, in this formulation—which catches Daniel's anger as it peaks into cathartic combustion—assert. For Daniel likes also to think, however vicious the possibility, of last-minute reconciliation between his parents. In any event, the Oedipal dimensions of climax #1 paradoxically or at least dialectically throws him back onto his Paul-derived commitment, as a whip-smart Ivy-trained big-picture intellectual, to socio-historical analysis, the Church of Marx Scientist. To that extent he doesn't so much displace his father after all as fulfill him. Marxian analysis, updated and indeed made prescient, dominates climax #2, defeating for good Daniel's quest for a personal scapegoat, and thereby intensifying the Freudian dynamic of both the Isaacson household and the nation state.

In pursuit of the fiction he felt he needed to tell, Doctorow took significant liberties with the historical record of the Rosenbergs. In the late 1960s he had access to the trial transcript, contemporary newspaper accounts, and the work of historians, though no acknowledgments of such accompanied the publication of the novel. Both Rosenberg children were male. The man who, with his wife, ultimately adopted the two

boys was not a lawyer but rather the leftist teacher and leftie activist, Abel Meerepol.[14] Neither son died young, of their own hand or any other way. Despite recognizing the ultimate force of the novel, in which *Leviticus* incorporates Freud and Marx, it is still reasonable of my reader to ask, how right did Daniel get it, at least with regards to the involvement of the actual Rosenbergs in espionage?

Anna Sebba, the judicious recent biographer of Ethel Rosenberg, reports that, in the wake of the 1995 declassification and release of thousands of KGB transcripts, it is clear that Julius Rosenberg was conducting espionage on behalf of the Soviet Union, especially as a recruiter of other spies, including those who could provide details of the Atomic Research at Los Alamos. In the collective interrogation into Russian spying, which began under the auspices of "The Venona Project," Ethel is mentioned in only a single transcript of the Venona papers recording Julius' domestic circumstances: she evidently knew of her husband's espionage but was discounted as a potential Soviet recruit—despite being "sufficiently well developed politically)"—by her "delicate health." Sebba (2021) summarizes the criminal implications:

> Under US law, Ethel was not obliged to report Julius's illegal activities to the authorities. On the one hand, it was (and is) against the law to take affirmative actions to conceal a crime. Between these two legal principles, it is clear that Ethel and Julius's relation was so close that it is inconceivable she did not know and encourage his espionage for the Russians, which in the legal terms of 1951 made her complicit to a conspiracy. But was that a crime—let alone a crime punishable by death?
> One of the key ironies of the case is that the two co-heads of the Verona team hoped that Ethel would be spared. (225)

Certainly, then, Julius Rosenberg's espionage was an act of treason; Ethel's condoning of it an instance of conspiracy, possibly punishable but not on penalty of death. In Doctorow's fictionalization, the full degree of Paul Isaacson's involvement in obtaining nuclear secrets remains opaque. But it is not the spying per se but rather the

[14] Meerepol was a figure in his own right who under the name Lewis Allen had written "Strange Fruit," Billie Holiday's signature, utterly haunting evocation of racial lynching that might, in fact, have made a strong if controversial alternative title for *The Book of Daniel*—if the religious dimensions of the novel weren't so important.

determinedly sacrificial presentation of self at trial—resulting directly in his own death, Rochelle's death, and their children's orphanhood, lifelong confusion, and exploited ignominy—for which Daniel Isaacson holds his father responsible. So in Doctorow's version, or at least that of Daniel Isaacson, Paul Isaacson's treason is as much marital as it is political: a betrayal of the woman whose resistance to personal suffering was the *raison d'être* of an otherwise shared political vision, constituting in the end (for Daniel at least) a relative innocence and bloody victimization at the hands not only of the United States federal judiciary but also her partner-in-everything's unilateral and evidently secret decision to make the ultimate sacrifice, of self, wife, tribe—and progeny (32-3).

CLIMAX #2: IN ANAHEIM, BETWEEN BUCHENWALD AND BELSEN

In the run-up to Climax #2, Daniel flies to Los Angeles in late December to find the aged Selig Mindish, hoping to confirm that Mindish was the active sacrificial agent in the espionage, an idiot to the point of evil, while his father was merely the last-minute misguided fall guy, however voluntary. He readily finds Mindish's daughter Linda, his childhood friend, with whom he adopts the persona—for the last time, basically—of the righteous, indignant son looking for a scapegoat. After sniping at each other, he realizes that the violence of their mutual recrimination is, in effect, incestuous, which allows him to concede—for the first time—that there are convergent, mostly co-determinative domestic narratives: "I saw she was as locked into her family truths as we were locked in ours"; indeed, "I saw myself as having provided Linda the opportunity to say out loud the righteous complaint that this family had had in rehearsal for fifteen years." As with the Isaacson-Lewins, so with the Mindishes. "My heart was beating wildly. I found myself needing more air than I had" (291).

It is the intersection of the entwined family truths that Daniel tests at Disneyland, the original amusement park, in Anaheim California, which Daniel prefatorily characterizes as "a town somewhere between Buchenwald and Belsen" (285), meaning a place of captivity where Americans of all stripes and colors volunteer to be held in the anodyne of history-evacuated, Other-denying consumer fantasy. Daniel's

crack about Anaheim is prefatory because what immediately follows, setting the scene for meeting up with Mindish, is an extended riff on the functioning of Disneyland that is a tour-de-force of Western Marxist cultural analysis decades in advance of Baudrillard and Birmingham-School Cultural Studies. Daniel insists, correctly, that nostalgic white-washing on the scale of Disney, Inc., is a particularly virulent distillation of the Christian dispensation to be forgiven of sin and to be released from the obligation of memory, individually *and* collectively. Replacement of Deuteronomic law by the golden rule offered Jews release from Torah discipline upon conversion, tempting enough even without the ensuing cycles of negotiated peace followed by slaughter and Temple-burning. Two millennia of such tragic cycles have reinforced the Judaic injunction never to forget. As Daniel knows all too well, the Disney-esque sentimentalization of the past represses the defining violence of the nation-state—at once too tied to Christian ideology and not Christ-responsible enough—and in so doing suppresses the obligations to repair and redress, above all the mass destruction that is so manifestly American. The Tomorrowland of Total Forgetting, Disneyland, U.S.A. is where Daniel finds Selig Mindish, on Christmas Day 1967.

Of Mindish, Daniel is warned: "He's senile … There's nothing left up there" (292). And yet upon Daniel's approach, Mindish breaks out of his sustained dementia and recollects Daniel, to his daughter's utter astonishment. All the more disconcerting, then, that Mindish puts his lips to Daniel's forehead, embracing memory and person, in an act that the reader recognizes as reminiscent of the ritual through which Daniel's maternal grandmother has blessed him, only in this instance without strings attached and with his pet mispronunciation of "Danny":

> "Denny?"…
> "It's Denny?"
> For one moment of recognition he was restored to life. In wonder he raised his large, clumsy hand and touched the side of my face. He found the back of my neck and pulled me forward and leaned toward me and touched the top of my head with his palsied lips. (293)

Selig is the ghost of himself, available to Daniel and thus to certifiable history in avuncular fondness only, of all forms. Daniel cannot therefore fob off responsibility

from the Isaacsons to Mindishes, his best imagining and effort notwithstanding, which in his heart of hearts he has known all along: "IS IT SO TERRIBLE NOT TO KEEP THE MATTER IN MY HEART, TO GET THE MATTER OUT OF MY HEART, TO EMPTY MY HEART OF THIS MATTER? WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH MY HEART?" (17). Indeed, he has known all along that a "red line describes the progress of madness inherited through the heart," putatively "from Grandma's breast through [his] mama's and into [his] sister's," but the madness that really matters—to love the world not gently in G-d's mandate—has proceeded from grandmother to mother, from mother to son, and especially from grandmother to son, as his mother damn well knows, too (71).

CLIMAX #3: ON THE ELECTRIC CHAIR, SOMETHING PEOPLE DO TOGETHER

"What more is there to say? … I suppose you think I can't do the electrocution" (295-96). Whether electrocution was, for Daniel's estranged parents "a reconciliation in heat and love and terror," Daniel's conceit of the electrocution as "something people [do] together" applies to his own long delayed rendering of his parents' death, to be thrown into his readers' faces as into those of his parents themselves (282). The brutality of portraying his parents' execution, exploitation upon exploitation, as emotionally voyeuristic as it is exhibitionistic, and as masochistic to self as it is sadistic to them, has felt, literally, unimaginable. His narrative hand is stayed (the recurrent motif is of the phone ringing thus intervening in processes of torture and torturous self-revelation) until it has no choice. Electrocution turns out to be something Daniel must do especially with his mother—a dance in part, reflective of her last stand and dying wish, but also leveraged to Daniel's needs and emergent vision at year's end 1967.

Near the beginning of the book, in one of those astonishingly coy yet nasty asides, Daniel signals parenthetically his ultimate concern and why it is going to matter:

> Share and share alike, the cardinal point of justice for children driven home to them with vicious exactitude. (Do not strike, this is rhetorical but true. Only a son of Rochelle's could say this line. In our house there could be a laying on of words like lightning. Dispensed outrage, the smell of burning in the mouths of our mother and father. Once she said, "Let our death be his bar mitzvah.") (61)

The introductory phrase of this closing sentence, "once she said," appears to be as casual an invocation as the language affords, which may well be how a reader takes it the first time through. But with 20/20 hindsight we can hear that it comprehends three clamoring inflections: "once" as "sometime in our childhood," as per the occasion of siblings fighting over whatever goods are available, even the property of memory); "once" as "once upon a time," as a favored but putatively distanced story-moment in the book being composed; and "once" as "a single time only," because immediately thereafter its articulator was put to death with her husband ("the smell of burning in the mouths") by electric chair. Here is what the undergraduates love to flag as foreshadowing, though the high-school critical term underplays what occurs, as usual. For Daniel is going to restage his parents' federated death by electricity in an inexorably Isaacsonian way by taking it—"FRYING, a play in ten overt acts"—as the last-chance opportunity of his mother for "a laying on of words like lightning," its pun Daniel-intended: a yet-again fiery injunction that is not only the very-last-ever but the overarchingly inclusive, the close-to-comprehensive relay of mother to son (157, 61).

Consider now how the eventual delivery of the full context for the parenthetical passage, including its key line, occurs at and as the culmination of the book's most climactic paragraph. I have in mind the third and ultimate stretch of narrative in which, as the lever is about to be pulled, Rochelle cries out in resistance and in maternal rally, in a manner that the rabbi in attendance thought kind and politic to deny:

> A few minutes after my father's body had been removed on a stretcher, and the floor mopped, and the organic smell of his death masked in the ammoniac scent of the cleanser, my mother was led into the chamber. She wore her grey, shapeless prison dress and terry cloth slippers. She knew that my father was dead. On her face was a carefully composed ironic smile. She calmly gazed at each of the witnesses until he turned away. Some, seeing her glance nearing them, simply would not look at her. Then my mother's eyes lighted on the prison rabbi. It was the same man whose ministrations she had refused for the last forty-eight hours. "I will not have him here," she said. The rabbi in his tallis and yarmulke walked toward the door. Before he was gone my mother called after him: "Let my son be bar mitzvahed today. Let our death be his bar mitzvah." The rabbi said later he didn't hear this remark, her voice not in this moment at its strongest. (298)

Daniel's staging of the double electrocution, particularly the final words credited to his mother, is the culmination of his inquiry into the past that, paradoxically, reclaims terms for present and future. We are treated to an Oedipal charge, in which Daniel has determined that it was his father's starry-eyed death-wish that abandoned him to infamy, while he envisions his mother fighting the power—it takes a second round of pulling the lever to kill her—to her horrific end. So too, we are invited to a Marxian leveraging of Freud, that the ritual of disavowal is the discharging of war-inflated energy upon a projected enemy-in-our-midst, anti-Semitically, the postwar home front of the incipient Cold War. In this it has long been the temptation of Daniel to keep G-d and even Jewish identity beyond its mid-century association with American Communism out of the novel's agenda.

Rochelle's "Let our death be his bar mitzvah" may be simply sarcastic, the way an eight year-old boy understands intended meaning as strictly opposite to that named, that what G-d could there be worth acknowledging (and that's what Daniel tells us the Hebrew G-d most wants: recognition) given her public execution and the consignment of her orphaned son to the title of a lifetime, "son of traitors." Sarcasm is what the melodramatic black comedy would, on first reading, suggest: a final act of denying G-d and the Covenant.

But listen to that comedy. By pretending not to have heard Rochelle's final words, the unnamed prison rabbi attempts to dial down the apparent act of rejection and thus drain Christian disdain. Feigning deafness sends out the wrong message, confirms a misunderstanding and so backfires. Whereas the prison rabbi may well be equipped with a couple of traditional prayers, there are no last rites in Judaism; he does not possess any special powers to sanctify or absolve, indeed the afterlife (of which Jews are seriously doubtful, Judaism agnostic) is not even at issue. Sure enough, Rochelle has a few bones to pick with G-d, should He in fact have the decency to show up to this particular nasty heated-up Cold-War circus for which He, as always, is partly responsible.

Still, it is hard to think that Rochelle doesn't also mean "Let my son be bar mitzvahed today" literally—with an instinct and thus a mandate for its future

circulation, both public and private. "On one level, of course, her cry expresses her rejection of Judaism," John Clayton (1983) reminds us, "But beyond that rejection, it asserts a counter-ritual to bring her son to manhood, an initiation into the community of the oppressed" (110). Let me press further its Jewish implications: it is nearly impossible to think that Daniel doesn't understand his mother's final act as a passing-of-the-burden, a laying on of words as private as it is public, and in that convergence compoundingly literal. That is, as if, in my own emulative declaration: "On this day, this our young son, of my Jewish womb born, is made adult in the heart-exploding, cloak-rending way of lived Jewish reality—which is on the gruesome altar of never-ending sacrifice, the martyring not only of we his actual progenitors, who have been found guilty of treason and thus symbolically excommunicated by the nation-state, but that of our people throughout history, enslaved and exiled, pillaged and plagued, burned and gassed, often at the hands of the angry G-D—whose rebel offspring have turned into the mass-killers of religious imperialism." After all, the climax of what Rochelle says, what Daniel has long anticipated and now dramatizes, is phrased cunningly so resonantly and indeed so resoundingly, in the *singular*: "Let our *death* be his bar mitzvah," invoking parents-as-one and The-Jewish-People-as-One. Electro-fusion as something Jews are given the opportunity, hellish as it is, to do together.

What we hear, what Daniel has prepared us to hear, or rather to feel—in the burning intensity of the electric climax—is the formidable theology of Rochelle's mother, a vernacular turn on the discourse of Jewish suffering. In a key stretch of narrative constituting the second half of Book I, introduced by that first unidentified invocation of his mother's dying mandate, Daniel gives voice to his maternal grandmother directly, comments on his father's seeming dismissal of all theology and on his mother's seeming dismissal of her own mother's life, yet then recounts a "visit" to him by her in a dream, which segues into one of his notorious set-pieces that figuratively summons, thus summing up, the trajectory. Again, it's sharply, pointedly, poignantly sequenced.

As a child and yet again as an adult, Daniel can't get over his mother's reduction of her mother's suffering to a history lesson, that is, a history *only*: "Your grandma slaved

all her life. To end up with nothing" (69). Rochelle thereby denied the value of her mother's existence and by extension, then, that of herself and (given the ferocity always of Daniel's self-reference) her son. Daniel has had to tell himself, "Ignore the reverberations. Ignore them. Ignore" (69). But, for all his vaunted self-referencing, the figure at the center of Daniel's alienation from his mother's alienation from his grandmother is not ultimately himself, or at least not himself alone. It is G-d.

The clever conceit that delivers grandmother's voice, her actual voice presumably, is a letter to the Bintel Brief—the original "dear Abby" column of Abraham Cahan's *Jewish Daily Forward*, which in its heyday was the most read and circulated Yiddish language paper on earth. The letter from grandmother is long and evocative of tremendous suffering, rendered in English with Yiddish syntax, but which would have been written in Yiddish itself. The letter reaches its own climax with a doubled-over doubling back: a testament to G-d remaining "pure and shining over Hester Street" despite it all (for still there are schools, sugar cubes, and summer days) and a curse upon the G-d-refusing young. "But what I cannot forgive, Mr. Editor, is the thankless child who becomes ashamed of his mother and father, and forsakes their ways, and blasphemes and violates the Sabbath to be a modern American; and is attracted to Godless ideas in the street like a fly to paper. And who tells you to speak English" (66). It is of course Rochelle she means, and her deleterious marriage to Paul the Dedicated Forsaker.

It was Rochelle, after all, who threw off the Biblical name bestowed by her mother in favor of the name of a town in suburban Westchester County, doing so on the way to abandoning Judaic law in pursuit of "Godless ideas"—meaning an ideology not just agnostic or even atheistic but directly, politically antagonistic to felt spirit, never mind its institutions. In lock step, her husband's relentless Marxist preaching against religious belief took the Russian peasantry as its fundamental global example ("God was an instrument of the Czar") and Rochelle's own mother ("who grew up, of course, in the *shtetl* of a provincial Russian town, a Jew, but also a Russian peasant") as its local instance of impoverished irrationality, however implicitly: "a life committed to superstition could have no other end than madness, because madness was the disease

of fantasy and fantasy of God, or superstition, was itself madness" (69). Daniel tags this corollary on religion-driven madness with an apparent reminder to self, "my father always gives you more of an answer than you bargained for," but the actual reminder to self has been conducted offscreen, namely that the explanation Daniel had sought—wherefore comes Grandma's crazed intensity?—was, in fact, close to the one his father actually supplied, though of course in the pre-emptive arrogance of a post-religious ideologue rather than, say, the insecure wonder or affirming doubt of a fellow practitioner (69).

For G-d rejection, as in heart rejection, may have been the official operating procedure of Daniel's parents, but Daniel has known all along that his grandmother was a force to be reckoned with, not despite but because her "ignorant" suffering has yielded thought both sharp and prescient. In her dream visitation to Daniel, Grandma delivers a riposte to Judeo-Marxist G-d denial and an eloquent anticipation of her daughter's death-bed commandment:

> In any one day, it is possible to derive joy from your being and be nourished by it. In a filthy room with cold, broken windows and the clatter of your oppression in the streets, it is possible. And starving, with your teeth rotting in your mouth, and age like lead in your bones, and your eyes shattered with the horror of what you have seen—all together, and with the madness of your children thrown in, I call it God. And there is a traditional liturgy which is lovely in itself, but which reminds you too that others born and died know this feeling also. So I sing to myself in that language. And my curses are my love for them whom I curse for existing at the mercy of life and God, and for the dust they will allow themselves to become for having been born. And my complicity in their being, the fruit of my womb, that I could have tricked them this way outrages me. Unable to stay in their presence for my love of them which they do not understand, and my terrible fear of their blasphemy, and their tampering with all the deep, intricate solderings of the universe. Do you begin to understand? I am speaking of the only form of ecstasy allowed to old ladies. It begins with the fear of not being able to breathe. And they inherit that from me, too, as you do, that excess of passion that shimmering fullness of stored life which always marks the victim. What we have, too much life in each of us, is what the world hates most. We offend. We stink with life. Our hearts make love to the world not gently. We are brutal with life and our brutality is called suffering. We scream into our pillows when we come. (70)

Words from Grandma in the ear of Daniel's imagination. Ramped up by the wisdom and prejudices of age, the hearts of women who have experienced life's terror, like Grandma herself, "make love to the world not gently." Her primary object of atonement is, shockingly, for her complicity in birthing the young, whose G-D-given passion drives G-D denial itself—a peculiarly wicked paradox for those who accept the burden of Chosenness, Grandma most of all.

Grandma has no choice, so neither does Daniel: "I recogniz[e] in you the strength and innocence that will reclaim us all from defeat. That will exonerate our having lived and justify our suffering" (70). Note, for the record, the key verbs of martyred selection: to reclaim, not redeem; to exonerate, not forgive; and to justify, not extinguish. The text flirts with the specter of Christian martyrology, referenced as recently as the embrace of the phrase from the "Hail, Mary" ("Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus"), but Grandmother is the knowing devotee to the G-d of the Torah, and the terms there are of divine property, law, and rights—not of salvation, mercy, and the permission to relinquish.

Grandma is then heard to say, or rather, as Daniel switches registers once again (this time to '60s youth culture), is said to say: "You're fuckin' right, Dan. Just remember, though, this placing of the burden on the children is a family tradition. But only your crazy grandma had the grace to make a ritual of it. Ritual being an artful transfer of knowledge. And pennies being the sum of her life's value" (70-1). Daniel invokes grandma explaining herself in common tongue with, as always, sardonic resonance: a "family" practice that is at once individual ("to make a ritual of it" with the blessing of the penny) and collective (what else is Judaism if not the ritual transfer of the knowledge of G-d's demands?). Tradition as election, election to Tradition, with the pun on grace and the self-abnegation of a pennies-countable life in the United States of the Almighty Dollar. Grandma's terms here at once anticipate Rochelle's formula of dismissal ("to end up with nothing") yet are far from it (the blessedness of each penny and the use of the penny to commission grandson Daniel to the task of reclamation, exoneration, and justification), a double affect of ceaseless pain and commensurate resolve.

To hear Rochelle's last words as Daniel does, as less a resigned curse than a rallying demand, all we need do is to judge her imperative according to the theology it implies, a paradox once again. In common contemporary parlance, especially with the larger Western communities of which Jews are a vital part, the term "bar mitzvah" invokes the ritual of a boy reading Torah in public for the first time, to the appreciation of family, synagogue, and in the liberal West non-Jewish guests, often with festivities outstripping that of Christian Confirmation, to which it is frequently compared, even in respected dictionaries and encyclopedias. (And, of course, there is now a female equivalent, a "bat mitzvah," as there are, in the more progressive branches, Talmudic scholars and rabbis who are women.) But the historical use of the term refers to the boy himself at the moment he becomes eligible to read Torah and thus constitute one of the ten in a *minyan*—the quorum of ten males born to Jewish women who are at least 13 years of age requisite for congregational Jewish worship (Klein 1986, 37). The point then is that fate has decreed—nay, G-d has decreed—that Daniel is to be a Jew, technically and thereby fundamentally speaking. Bar mitzvahed as the surviving son of a Jewish woman, whether he chooses to undergo the collective ceremonial confirmation of Jewish self-affirmation, or not. To have his Jewishness confirmed, Daniel doesn't need to proclaim publicly that commitment to memory that is the soul of Judaism (affiliation requisite to devotion and vice versa) because in executing his parents (convicted of treason and thus de-nationalized whatever their convictions) the State has left him with no "escape," nowhere to go except historical acknowledgement and G-d-recognition. In the most minimal sense: as the son of a Jewish woman, he is to be bar mitzvahed at age 13 no matter what he thinks or does. And in the most profound sense: for Daniel is the literal and temperamental son of Rochelle, who for all her seeming denial of Judaism has waged its age-old battles against poverty and abjection, in their latest urban proletarian forms. And Daniel is the literal and intellectual son of Paul, who for all his pronounced suspicion of religious ideology has sacrificed himself and his family to that Jewish dream of security and dignity for all. Thus Daniel is the victim-heir of a fractured yet convergent parental unit, an ultimately united front at once cultural and political, who were destroyed willingly and unwillingly, in a gruesome ritual of symbolic

expulsion and bodily incineration that was—is, and until the Messiah is genuinely with us, will be—as Jew-making and Judaism-confirming as the Diaspora itself.

By his late twenties, through library research and reportorial probing, Daniel Isaacson Lewin has mastered the analytical arts of Political Economy and gathered all the evidence there is to gather, so that for all his self-denying self-recognizing disdain for analysis he in fact comprehends the compounded causes that have produced him (the effect of which is, in affect, himself) and the social history that subtends him. It is in that seemingly full understanding that he comes to realize—the female genealogy coming to the fore—that the Marx-Freud interpretive nexus is necessary but not sufficient. For in the sophistication of his knowledge at once historical and personal, Marx through Freud and Freud through Marx, he opens the door to the Cause behind the causes. As *Deuteronomy* phrases it: "The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the hearts of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, in order that thou mayest live" (*Deuteronomy* 30:6). Fair enough, until one ponders that final clause, which encodes a threat worthy of Don Corleone (especially for those who don't believe in an afterlife), which is practically the first thing in the entire book that the reflective Daniel reflects upon:

> Actually that's what God does in the Bible—like the girl says, he gets people. He takes care of them. He lays on this monumental justice. … God as a character in the Bible seems almost always concerned with the idea of his recognition by mankind. … Each age has by trial to achieve its recognition of Him—or to put it another way, every generation has to learn anew the lesson of His Existence. The drama in the Bible is always in the conflict of those who have learned with those who have not learned. (10)

So cometh the one lesson Daniel's obsessively pedagogical parents apparently forgot to relay. But, no worry, G-d was paying attention. As Daniel quips, "Each age has *by trial* to achieve its recognition of Him."

And every child. By age eight, Daniel Isaacson was already the seed of Isaac: the seeded subject of a special election, in the spiraling sacrifice of his parents, the family name, and the universalist vision of Judaism itself, and concomitantly in the preempting of agency both filial and political. In that recognition, Daniel accepts from his maternal

grandmother the call to justify their collective suffering and thereby brings to realization his mother's otherwise ambiguous proclamation—their death was my bar mitzvah!—in which Daniel is held by the Jewish memory of Covenant, held in the Covenant that is Jewish memory.

DANIEL'S THREE ENDINGS

May I remind you that Daniel Lewin, né Isaacson, thinks and writes in units of three—a trinitarian structuring of narrative, yes, but conveying thereby a multiplicity and overdetermination of interpretation evocative of Midrash. The final four pages of Daniel's Book, a.k.a. Doctorow's novel, is organized into "THREE ENDINGS," which are, by all rights, that is, by the lights of the Book as a whole, interrelated attestations of the after-affect and thus meaning of the tripartite climax—the analysis that is the narrative that has been so long in coming, for us as for Daniel.

BOOK'S END #1

In the first ending, entitled "THE HOUSE," Daniel visits the old neighborhood to peek in at the old house a week after returning from California, to discover the house full of black life, not that of the Isaacsons, which is to say not that of Jews anymore, technically speaking, though in contemporary Judaism African-Americans are often embraced as fellow sufferers and thus spiritual kin, as his parents made primary. Thus Daniel announces to no one in particular, except of course the reader: "I will do nothing. It's their house now" (299). For once, Daniel is being sensible, acting with common sense, eschewing despair and resentment, lasciviousness and disdain.

BOOK'S END #2

In the second ending, pronounced "THE FUNERAL," Daniel invokes his childhood experience of his parents' funeral only to segue without clear passage into an account of his sister's very recent funeral—"My sister is dead. She died of a failure of analysis"—which moves Daniel into surprising action given that he, in his mother's long-ago fashion, "has refused the company rabbi" (301). Ignorant of the Mourner's Kaddish,

Daniel stops the proceedings and runs to hire the "little old Jewish men, the kind who always come along for a fee to say the prayers the younger Jews don't know … prays for their newly dead, their recently dead, their long since dead" (301; also Klein 1986, 130-31). As Daniel quips, "It's a bonanza. Other shamuses come running, like pigeons, when they see the crowd. I accept each blessed one" (301-2).

What happens next, concluding the second of the three endings of Daniel's book, is affirmation staged as much in Daniel's language as in his behavior, a linguistic embrace of Jewish history, socialist family, and Judaic personhood: "My father and mother [the Lewins] go back to the car. The funeral director waits impatiently beside his shiny hearse. But I encourage the prayers, and when one is through I tell him *again*, this time for my mother and father. Isaacson. Pinchas. Rachele. Susele. For all of them. I hold my wife's hand. And I think I am going to be able to cry" (302). Rendering his birth parents' given names in an approximate transliteration of the Hebrew—his father is no longer Paul but Pinchas, his mother of course Rachele rather than Rochelle—the son of Rachele AND Pinchas takes his place thereby in the line of the great interpreter-protector, the Hebrew Bible's Daniel. In so doing he affirms historical identity and requisite gentleness, improvising an updated yet still very Jewish rite of mourning, tears rather than rending, that recognizes in the ongoing young (the absent figure of the baby boy is nonetheless entailed in the embrace of his wife Phyllis's hand) the life of those who have come before, of family and tribe (including the Lewins who adopted him and whom he identifies—without sarcasm at last—as "my parents," too). Acknowledging the ever-after of his parents' death, his mother's dying call to remember, Daniel ascends, finally, to quotidian civility, even kindness, which can go "hand in hand" (literally) with loving the world not gently; he justifies his father's martyrdom, his mother's double martyrdom, but also the suffering of Jews through history, or at least that of his grandmother, with the suffering to come, at least that will come through him. He has more Mourner's Kaddish to come—perhaps the traditional 11 months, certainly on the anniversary of his sister's death (Klein 1986, 135).

BOOK'S END #3

In the third ending, "THE LIBRARY," Daniel reclaims his temperamental facetiousness, yet his sardonic wit is this time, the last time, generous towards self and towards others, especially those caught in cycles of inclusive vision for justice, grotesquely unjust devastation, and justifying renewal. Call it, that is, the universalist work of Jewish perspective.

"For my third ending," Daniel tells the reader, "I had hoped to discuss some of the questions posed by this narrative" (302). As if he hadn't been doing so, in fierce concentration and spectacularly convergent allusion, for three hundred pages! Putatively writing his very last page in the Columbia library, coming full circle from the interrupted first paragraph of the book, Daniel is told to "move [his] ass out of the building" now by the cry of student radicalism: "Time to leave, man, they're closing the school down. … We're doin' it, we're bringing the whole motherfucking university to its knees!" (302). In response to the eager hope of the New Left, articulated as "Close the book, man, don't you know you're liberated?" Daniel flashes a wry smile (302). This smile is sardonic yet again. The joke is on him but not only on him; its laugh of self-recognition and G-d submission may be private, beyond the scope of the understanding of the young radical before him in 1968, but it is also, because of "Daniel's Book," a matter of public interest and readerly witness, even and especially in its darkest knowing. Daniel's smile transfers to us, in the call to memory, forgiveness, and the embrace of a special burden: for the events bringing Daniel's book to its end are, apparently, the Columbia protest riots of 1968, in stark remembrance when the book was published, but with us still today, especially among the professoriate. In the arson meant to take the university down, Lionel Trilling, among others, lost the repository of his life's work.

Who was Lionel Trilling, you ask? His critical renown was based on a half-dozen critical books, including the epochal *The Liberal Imagination*, another half-dozen volumes of essays and edited editions, not to mention a novel and a short story collection. Of profound note, Trilling was the first Jew to be tenured in Columbia's famed department of English and, with all due respect to Alfred Kazin and Irving Howe, the leading Jewish literary intellectual of his generation, with a capaciously modernist

and international comparativist perspective. He also was beloved, a mensch, making the great breakthrough of Jews into the English academy possible. That a Jewish-led student rally against "The Establishment" destroyed his archive and nearly broke his heart is an irony of Daniel-esque proportions. After all, Lionel was not only in his youth a frequent contributor to *The Menorah Journal*, the organ of Harvard University's Hillel, but also, in his maturity, to the *Partisan Review*—which was founded by the Communist Party of America.

SPECULATIVE NOTE TO MY READER; OR, DANIEL'S PRAYER

I want to return to Paul's recognition, in a letter written to Rochelle while in prison (and taken from the Rosenbergs' archive) that their trial is a "little passion play" conducted by Jews for their "Christian masters":

> Rochelle—Amazing the strong sense one gets of Judge Hirsh and Prosecutor Feuerman working together like a team. … Their collusion is quite shameless—they are like bricklayers methodically sealing us up….
> My darling have you noticed how many of the characters in this capitalist drama are Jews? The defendants, the defense lawyer, the prosecution, the major prosecution witness, the judge. We are putting on this little passion play for our Christian masters. In the concentration camps the Nazis made guards of certain Jews and gave them whips. In Jim Crow Harlem the worst cops are Negro. Feuerman in his freckles and flaming red hair, this graduate of St. John's, the arch assimilationist who represses the fact that he could never get a job with the phone company—Feuerman is so full of self-hatred. HE IS DETERMINED to purge us. Imperialism has many guises, and each is a measure of its desperation. (197)

Imperialism in its virulently anti-Semitic guise has been staged by Jews for Gentile masters before—or so the story goes.

On the one hand, it is my conviction that Doctorow wrote *The Book of Daniel* under the influence, in part, of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the great 1969 "rock opera" of Christ's Passion: the original London studio recording (in brown cover) with Murray Head, Ian Gillan, and Yvonne Elliman, please. (The subsequent stage plays or films feature too much anti-Semitism for my constitution, however true it is, viz., the wisdom of Borsht belt humor, that if Jews avoided all traces of anti-Semitism they would have nothing to read, beginning with Torah!) I suspect most of us in 1969 found the young

Weber's music involving, but it was Tim Rice's lyrics, loosely based on the Gospels of the New Testament yet infused with idiom and pulse from the New Left, that caught many ears. Rice's libretto, and Weber's scoring of it, emphasize three dimensions of The Passion that bear upon the late '60s with varying degrees of anachronism, and directly upon Doctorow's novel, especially its reconstruction of the early 1950s: 1) the position of Roman-occupied Canaan, with Herod in a squeezed position, not a dream interpreter like the Biblical Daniel but a puppet king, akin to the Jewish legal domination of the Isaacson tria1; 2) the role played by media manipulation, from Jewish revolutionaries and the conservative ruling class of colonial government and even the intellectual classes, now as then; and, in response to Christ's felt emasculation, 3) the erotic rivalry between the frightened Apostles and the solicitous Mary Magdalene over Jesus that epitomizes, in turn, his stream of self-pity—which is to say, again in semi-facetiousness, that Jesus is portrayed as an archetypical Jewish Mama's Boy (he didn't leave home until he was thirty, his mother thought he was G-d's gift, and his father demanded the impossible)—as for that matter is Judas. In sum, Rice's and Doctorow's emphases often converge, to the point where Daniel's anguish might be said to elucidate Christ's humanity, if not vice versa. But it is their *divergence* that I wish to make my final point, as it is, I think, Doctorow's ultimate concern.

Daniel does indeed share Christ's despairing acceptance of sacrificial election, especially in the terms of its Weber-Rice version. But *redemption* of all and *resurrection* of self, the resurrection of all and redemption of self, is *not* the achievement of Daniel's Book-long perspectival shift—any more than any other Christian formulation was the original telos. All he professed originally was the desire "to get the matter out of his heart" and thus, as he once thought, to be issued into ordinary life.[15] The matter that he wants out of his heart, understandably enough, is his resentment at the circumstances

[15] Daniel feels the weight of the cry for liberating protection, carried through the blood and the Isaacsonian mission—a liturgical plea for release from all imaginable suffering made explicit in the American upper classes of Lewins whether he attended services or not: "Our Father and our King, O remember thy mercy, and subdue they wrath; and extirpate the pestilence, sword, captivity, destruction, iniquity, plague, evil occurrence, and all manner of disease, obstruction, contention, and every species of affliction, evil decree, and causeless enmity, from us and from all the children of thy covenant" (*The Complete Festival Prayers: v.2. Service for the Day of Atonement* 1951).

of his childhood and anger at his fated role in his parents' execution and its after-effects (of his sister Susan, too) and hate for all those who made it possible, from the history of the Jewish people to the pogrom-driven immigrants, then Old Left to New Left, with his father at the end most accountable. The issue plaguing him is that of the Torah, his parents' atheism notwithstanding, whose YHWH demands not only whole-hearted acceptance of the Covenant but also righteous accountability and determined contrition. The Jewish word is, of course, *atonement*—for every sin of resistance, be it a matter of emotion or conduct—an admission so thorough it affirms the righteousness of whatever punishment G-D has deemed fit to visit upon self, clan, and peoplehood. Indeed, the instruction to love-and-obey could not be clearer, as concentrated in the most formidable of the divine threats in *Leviticus (1936)* 27-29: "27. And if ye will not for all this hearken unto Me, but walk contrarily unto me; and will not hearken unto Me; 28. Then I will walk contrary unto you in fury …; 29. And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat." Abraham's obedience may have been warranted, securing the original stilling of YHWH's hand without testing His capacity for merciful renegotiation, but the sacrificial altar will seem relatively tame, ritually abstract, should Abraham's children not honor the Covenant. As the rabbis find in the *Lamentations* Midrash: "The Holy One, blessed be He, overlooked idolatry, incest, and murder, but he did not overlook despising Torah …" (Neusner 1989, 14). Divine anger drives Grandma's terror-filled lament and hails Daniel's bitter uncertainness.

Yom Kippur, usually translated into English as "The Day of Atonement," consists of five lengthy prayer services (or four, depending on how you count the introduction at dusk on the evening preceding), framed these days as the injunction "to pray with the transgressors"—who are, of course, the congregation. The interlocked services feature extended and repeated works of confession that are at once private (sins recited by each member under his breath, tapping the heart) and collective (all doing so for an extended period at the same time, then in group acknowledgement), which is, I must underscore, in contradistinction to the Protestant pulse of publicized self-conviction that Daniel the auto-ethnographer both rues and, with deliberate re-inflection, practices. Although in the United States we are all half Protestant, it is, I believe, the

fiercely Judaic counter-pulse that Doctorow means us to hear: the implicit self-charges that are—in Daniel's case, if not also that of his parents—nearly as exhaustive as the typology of sins (truly impressive) in the traditional Yom Kippur service.

"You live for many years, certainly for as long as you can remember," Daniel explains to us regarding himself, "in a menacing state of unfinished business. The phone rings. You realize your intimacy with what you fear. … You are aroused to that purring eroticism that comes when you understand you're going to get away with something after all" (169). Until he realizes: NOT. In the following paragraph, Daniel drops an unadorned phrase, "the novel as private I," in which the pun on "private eye" refers to the self-interrogation of the book (169). Daniel, that "small criminal of perception," has turned the lecherous art of detection upon himself and is ready, by book's end, to own up to what he finds, the erotic discharge notwithstanding (31). In the indirect manner of his overall testimony, Daniel confesses under his breath to intimacy with what he has feared yet solicited and, of course, indulged. Yet, as with all the book's principal matters, the overdetermination of sought victimization has carried with it relished guilt and provoked contrition: not as much as the reader might like, perhaps, certainly not as much as the Lord would appreciate, but enough for Him in his mercy to work with—enacting that change of Daniel's heart, always already in waiting, whereby the call to martyrdom is transformed "from a curse into a blessing."[16]

But what business is that of *ours*, really? Daniel's first "note to the reader" is a veiled reference to the fundamental challenges of the book to come, with an invocation, at this early point seemingly facetious, of the part his consumer-critics are to play:

> A NOTE TO THE READER
> Reader, this is a note to you. If it seems to you elementary, if it seems after all this time elementary … If it *is* elementary and seems to you at this late date to be pathetically elementary, like picking up some torn bits of cloth and tearing them

[16] From the traditional Yom Kippur Service at mid-century, we come upon what we might name, in the resonance of its pointed appeal regarding the dreamwork of self-and-Israel, Daniel's Prayer: "And even thou wast pleased to turn the curse of Balam the son of Beor [enigmatic figure from *Numbers*], 'from a curse to a blessing,' be it also thy divine pleasure to convert all dreams concerning myself and all Israel, to a good end" (*Complete Festival Prayers* 1951, 107).

> again … If it is that elementary, then reader, I am reading you. And together we men rend our clothes in mourning. (54; ellipses in original)

We don't quite get it, most of us, the first time around. The reference to tearing torn clothes is to the mourning ritual (the poor bring clothes too worn to be repaired for the rending): it encapsulates Daniel's challenge to render his parents' execution in a compounded act of mourning (a propitiation "with words" as it says in a traditional liturgy) that catches up, catches out, and pulls in the reader. In pre-emptive anticipation, as much feigned as felt, Daniel sneers at what he assumes is the sneering assumption of the reader, that "after all this time" and "at this late date" what Daniel the Isaacson Boy needs finally to do is "pathetically elementary"—that is, to get over himself and his damnable history by mourning his parents' properly, even righteously. Of course the term "elementary" invokes Sherlock Holmes' habitual condescension to Dr. Watson, but it also sounds the word "elemental"—in that at this point, early in his book, Daniel has veiled the deepest of human sentiments, an admission of filial love, in what comes across as jaded thus disengaged sophistication. "I am reading you," he claims, "and together we may rend our clothes in mourning" (54).

Together? Sarcastic, perhaps, given the Biblical force of that concluding verb "to rend," but only at first. The stakes of Daniel's public-as-private, family-as-history narrative are raised in an un-Orthodox yet, I would argue, Jewish-informed, even Judaicizing way. Judaism rigorously accepts rigorous converts (spouses, beware!), but it does not proselytize. Indeed, it is understood as a form of graciousness that Jews do not wish their burdens upon Others, whom G-d has mercifully let be. But Daniel's Book nonetheless captures and to some extent tutors its readers, often against their will (who but another grad student could actually *like* Daniel?). We answer Daniel's call to witness, adapting to the central tenet of G-d-determined suffering and adopting the quest to justify the pain and anguish, that it might serve a greater good.[17] Thus, his

[17] The current practice of Reform and other Progressive forms of Judaism includes trans-ethnic empathy and, indeed, the Jewish obligation to bear (return) witness to martyrdom: "Now therefore we honour those of every race and continent who have been innocent victims of cruelty; whose fathers bled, whose children starved, and whose mothers endured the unendurable. They are mankind, brothers and sisters of us all, our companions in death and our partners

readers' absorption in Daniel's accounting becomes his form of symbolic, even political, action, a limited yet substantive agency. At the least, any individual reader's immersion brings memory and memorial home to Daniel, for Daniel, turning each of us into his personal confidante and public confessor; at the most, we find ourselves implicated in the sinning and its requisite contrition: Daniel's sins of course but also ours—as fellow travellers, national confreres, human bystanders—in the collectivity of Jewish sensibility and Judaic worship. For the readerly duration, at least, we join the congregation of remembrance, striking our hearts to the book-long beat of tacit confession and beseeched atonement.

After all, "It's G-d's bloody rule, Ma; let your death be our readers' bar mitzvah."

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in grief throughout the ages. We honor them and mourn them. May they never be forgotten, and may a better world grow from the soil of their suffering" (*Gate of Repentance* 3, 290).

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