iafor

Cover Image: Markus Spiske, Unsplash

Table of Contents

Introduction

Proliferating with the advent of digital publishing, a variety of journals have been providing expedient fora for academic discussions and debates that focus on every aspect of the arts and humanities. Their diverse features reveal the expanding boundaries that humanist analysis and inquiry have assumed as a response to the technological sea-change. In response to the new challenges, the *IAFOR Journal of Arts and Humanities* now accepts within its remit a wide range of research topics, including some that years ago might have been considered merely peripheral to its disciplinary province. For many publications, the mission has changed from the highly focused dissemination of research that is meaningful within the context of a given discipline, to that of providing a more extensive forum for the analysis, consideration and discussion of the fundamental aspects of culture.

Accordingly, this issue of the *IAFOR Journal of Arts and Humanities* includes the work of a variety of scholars with highly divergent research interests. Gloria Wiederkehr-Pollack's "The Philological Impact of Biblical Hebrew on the English Language" traces the possible origins of many western European words back to the Hebrew language. Paul Ziek and Mirjana Pantic analyse the market-driven interests that appropriated musician Kurt Cobain's legacy in "From Anti-hero to Commodity: The Legacy of Kurt Cobain". K. Neethu Tilakan reads the film *The Runner*, by the critically acclaimed Iranian Director Amir Naderi, in the context of the Iranian Revolution and of the Iran-Iraq war. Lily Halpert Zamir examines the "God, Where Art Thou?" theme in the literary works of Auschwitz survivors Ka-Tsetnik, Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel. Olubunmi Adekonojo, B. A. Ajiboye, and T. D. Adekonojo explore undergraduate students' awareness and usage of social media. Susan George's "Women in Film Time: Forty Years of the Alien series (1979–2019)" is an analysis of the portrayal of women and the feminine in the *Alien* series of Sci Fi films. C. F. Akpati studies the art and objectives of cartooning in "A Multimodal Discourse Study of some Online Campaign Cartoons of Nigeria's 2015 Presidential Election". Amrita S. Iyer studies the characteristics of "delogocentrism" in "A Shot in the Dark: Delogocentrism in Harold Pinter's The Dwarfs and Luigi Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author". Charles Alex Patrick examines the work of Nigerian author Akinwande Oluwole Babatunde Soyinka in "The Role of Anxiety and Anger in Wole Soyinka's *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known*. Debbie Walter surveys the role of the Latin phrase memento mori in art, reflecting on its function in her own artistic production, in "Memento mori: a positive and contemporary reflection through visual art on a life spent well".

My editor's essay "Three Pigs and Some Goats" rounds out an issue that, it is hoped, will appeal to a very diverse audience.

Alfonso J. García-Osuna
Editor
ijah@iafor.org

The Philological Impact of Biblical Hebrew on the English Language

Gloria Wiederkehr-Pollack
City University of New York, USA

Abstract

This study focuses on the extensive but unacknowledged influence of biblical Hebrew on Western languages, especially English**.** The critical argument herein is that biblical Hebrew has contributed towards molding the English language, enhancing it with added depth and complexity; it is hoped that this analysis will constitute an important contribution to diachronic linguistics. As a student of Hebrew and the Bible I have sought to detect the more precise and earlier source for words, expressions, and phrases that, rooted in the Bible, encompass inspiring historical, ideological, and philosophical concepts. In order to ensure accuracy and correctness, entries have been researched and substantiated with concordances, lexicons, the Koren Edition of The Jerusalem Bible, classical biblical commentaries and text analyses. Attention is also given to historical factors that have accounted for the influence of Hebrew on the Greek language, on the Latin language of Roman rule and on the languages of lands within the Roman Empire before and after the dispersion of the year 70. Samples of the findings are mostly arranged in categories that span our speech, ranging from the mundane to the sublime. The concluding section browses selected interrelated vocabulary of the Western languages and their corresponding biblical precedents.

Keywords: Hebrew diachronic linguistics, English, mobile, pan de molde, sphere, levitate, ruby, pizzazz, amazon, tannin, hail, migrant, tiara

Introduction

The aim of this study is to restore the recognition due to the Hebrew language for its philological contribution to Western languages, especially English. While the Hebrew Bible is generally recognized for its cultural and moral contribution to society, biblical Hebrew is not accorded commensurate credit. There are numerous words and expressions in English that appear to have connections to the Hebrew language, some of which can be called cognates. However, Greek and Latin are generally credited, although Hebrew preceded and contributed to the evolution of these languages.[1] True, the Land of Israel was only a province of the Greek Empire from 332-142 BCE, nevertheless there is a palpable influence of Hebrew on Greek, which in turn impacted the English language. Moreover, the fact that the Greek language had infiltrated and was spoken in the Land of Israel during the Second Temple Period as a result of Greek Rule reflects the natural reciprocity that caused Hebrew words to merge into the Greek language, and Greek words into Hebrew. Surprisingly, the Sages, although they were opposed to any infiltration of Hellenistic ideology, were tolerant of the Greek language because of its esthetic quality;[2] nor did they consider the language assimilatory. Indeed, Rabbi Judah the Prince, the first century Tanna and redactor of the Mishnah, put spoken Greek on a par with Hebrew, and Greek words were incorporated in his Mishnah.[3] It is also justifiable to assume that Hebrew had influenced the Latin language of Roman Rule that ensued from 53 BCE until the destruction of 70 AD as well as the languages of the countries of the Roman Empire to which the Judeans were exiled, as is evidenced by this study.

Based on Obadiah 1: 20, the Hebrew language may very well have impacted Western countries centuries before Greek and Roman rule, from the time of the exile of the Ten Tribes in 722 BCE and the exile of Judah in 586 BCE. According to Rashi and Abarbanel on this verse, the exiles were in France, Germany, and Spain from that time. Obadiah 1:20 states: "*And this exiled host of the children of Yisra'el [ve-galut haḥel mezeh] who are among the Kena'anim as far as Zarefat, and the exiles of Yerushalayim who are in Sefarad, shall occupy the cities of the Negev.*" Rashi claims that the *exiled* refers to "the exiled from the children of Israel that were from the Ten Tribes from the land of the *Kena'anim* until *Zarfat*," while *the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sefarad* refer to "those that are from the children of Judah that were exiled to *Sefard*." Rashi (1040-1105, leading commentator on the Bible and Talmud), Radak (Rabbi David Kimhi, 1160-1235, grammarian and exegete of Narbonne, Provence), and Abraham ibn Ezra (1089-1167, Spanish biblical commentator and philosopher) state that *Zarfat* is France, *Sefarad* is Spain, and the land of the *Kena'anim* is Germany. The Abarbanel (1437-1508; Spanish statesman, philosopher and leading biblical exegete) comments that England is not mentioned because it was originally part of France (*Zarefat*); and he interprets the word *haḥel* not as hosts from the root *h.y.l*, but as *first or beginning* from the root *t.ḥ.l.:* The implication is that these lands were inhabited by the early exiles of 722 BCE and 586 BCE and ipso facto were exposed to the Hebrew language from that early era.[4] That being said, I have detected

---

[1] Aviram, J. (1974). "... the Proto-Canaanite script was the source of all alphabetic scripts which later spread throughout the entire world. From this script the Proto-Arabic script branched off in the course of the 13th century BCE. ... The main offshoot of the Proto-Canaanite script, however, is the Phoenician, from which the (ancient) Hebrew and Aramaic as well as the Greek alphabets evolved."

[2] Goren, S. (1993).

[3] Reiss, M. (2001).

[4] Silverman, G. (1974). The movement known as British Israelism maintains that the people of the British Isles are genetically, racially, and linguistically the direct descendants of the exiled Ten Tribes. Although modern research has refuted these claims, British Israelite organizations have continued to be active. See Baer, Y. (1961).

what I believe is a considerable influence of biblical Hebrew on the English language, ranging from the mundane to the sublime. What follows are samples of my findings.

Words Derived from Letters of the Hebrew Alphabet

The evolution of alpha / alp from *aleph*; camel from *gimmel*/*gamal*; eye *from ayin* seems evident; the derivation of **cap** and **captain** from the letter *kaf* is less apparent but nevertheless tenable:

Cap reflects both the Hebrew letter *kaf* which is drawn as a curve and reflects that it is bent (*kafuf),* as well as its derivative word, *kaf,* which refers to a palm of a hand (*kaf yad*), the palm of a foot *(kaf regel),* the curved branch of the date palm tree (*kaf tamar*), a hip socket (*kaf yerekh*), or a spoon, – all of which are curved. The f and the p sounds are produced by the same letter, one with a *dagesh* (a dot) and the other without, and depending on the morphological structure of the word, they are interchangeable. In the plural, *kaf* becomes *kapot.*

The word *kippah* derives from the same root. In Modern Hebrew it is the term for skullcap. In Midrashic literature *kippah* refers to the domed arch of the heavens (*kippat harakia*). *Kippat* is the contracted form wherein the possessive pronoun is deleted, and the h of the noun becomes a t sound: *kippah of* becomes *kippat.* In the Bible the term *kippah* appears in Isaiah 9:13 and 9:15 in the context of kingship and rulership – *head and tail, palm top and rush [kippah v'agmon].* Rashi's explanation for *kippah* in the above verses, as well as that of the Targum and Radak, is "the term for kings and rulers". The reprimand of Elifaz (Job 15:32), in his contentious proof of the conspicuous suffering of the wicked, contains the contracted form with the possessive pronoun *shelo* [his] – *v'kippato l*o *ra'ananah* [*and his branch shall not be green*], *Kippato*, explains Rashi, is "the bending of his branches. All branches resemble a dome."

Cap and captain are ascribed to the Latin capit (head), which is basically *kippah shel = kippat* (the head/dome/branch of), which might conceivably be the earlier antecedent. The Italian capo, the Spanish cabeza, the French chapeau are likely derivatives of the word and letter, *kaf.*

The Tribal Names

Ruby
Aside from the relevance of the actual names of the twelve tribes, words that derive from these names have not been ascribed to their likely Hebrew source: **ruby, levitate, good** and **dean.** The association of ruby with Reuben relates to the fact that each tribe had a representative stone engraved on the breastplate of the High Priest (Ex. 28). Reuben's was the *odem,* which is a red stone, and in this case the stone's name is reflective of the name of tribe. The Spanish biblical commentator, Rabbeinu Ba<u>h</u>ya (1255–1340) states: "*Odem* is Reuben's stone, which is called rubin. Its color is red." [5]

Levitate
The concept of rising or causing to hover in the air, as in levitate, lever, or the French lever (to rise) may be associated with the Levites, the descendants of Levi who were chosen to serve in

---

[5] Rabbeinu Bahya (1981 ed.) on Exodus 28. According to Rabbeinu Bahya, each stone served a function and correlated to the merit of said tribe. Since Yisakhar was born because of the mandrakes that Reuben had picked, the ruby aids in conception, and *odem* is written without the *vav* to intimate conception of *adam* [man].

the desert Sanctuary and later in the Temple. Numbers 8 describes the dedication ceremony of the Levites to God and to the service of the Sanctuary that specifically included the lifting and the waving of the Levites three times before God (Nu. 8:11, 13,15).

Good

The meaning of Gad is good luck, a distinct source for the word good. When Leah's handmaiden, Zilpah, gave birth to Gad, Leah stated, (Gen.30:11), *ba gad [Fortune came and she called him Gad]*. Rashi comments "*Ba mazal tov*" [good luck came to me]. Targum Yonatan on Genesis 30:11 writes: "She saw that he will have good luck since he will be the first to obtain a portion in the Land ... and therefore she called him Gad."

Dean

Leah did not say why she called her daughter Dinah, but when Rachel's handmaiden, Bilhah, bore a son, Rachel named the child Dan because, as she stated, *Dananee Elokim [God judged me], and has also heard my voice, and He gave me a son*. (Gen. 30:7) Germanic origin is credited for dean/doyen and good; ruby and levitate/lever are assigned to Latin.

Food and Drink

Bread

The words for bread in French, Spanish, and Italian are much the same: pain in French, pan in Spanish, pane in Italian. It is conceivable that these hark back to the *Lehem Ha-Panim* [*the Showbread, or Bread of Display /Bread of Presence*], the twelve loaves of bread changed every Sabbath and eaten by the priests at the time of the desert Tabernacle and later in the Temple. *Lehem* is bread and *panim* means face. According to Rashi on Exodus 25:30, it was called *bread with faces* because the bread had faces (surfaces) in both directions towards the sides of the Tabernacle and the Temple; while according to Nahmanides and Abraham ibn Ezra, because it was *lefani tamid* [*it is before Me always*].[6] The peculiar addition of the phrase **de molde** in the Spanish pan de molde reinforces the likely derivation from *lehem ha-panim*, since special molds [*kearot*] were used to fit the shape of the bread, both an iron mold and a golden mold. The *Lehem Ha-Panim* was originally baked in the iron mold, then placed on the golden one until the next day, the Sabbath, when it was arranged on the table and the mold was removed.

Consider also the parallels between *pas*/piece; *s.a.d.*/ sustain or sate.; *hittah*/wheat. *Pas* [a portion or a morsel] may be the antecedent of our English word *piece*, combined often with the word bread or cake: *pas lehem* [a piece of bread] . Abraham, in Genesis 18:5, beseeches his guests, *And I will take pas lehem* [*a morsel of bread*] *v'saa'du libkhem* [*and comfort/ sate your hearts*]; in Judges 19:5, the concubine's father urges his son-in-law, *refresh your heart with a morsel of bread* [*sa'ad libkha pas lehem*]. The adage of Proverbs 17:1 prioritizes the *pas harevah [a dry morsel]* with quietness to a house of feasting and strife. Daniel and his friends preferred eating seeds (Dan. 1:13,15) instead of *pas bag ha-melekh* [*a portion of the king's food*]. King David's prayer (Ps. 72:16) asks for an era of plenty when a handful of corn [*pisas bar*] will grow and rustle atop mountains.[7]

---

[6] See also Exodus 35:13, TB Menahot 97a

[7] Metzudat Tziyyon, *Mikra'ot Gedolot* (1974) translates *pisas* as an increase, similar to *pasah* in Leviticus 13. See also Psalms 104:15 for the root *s.ad*. [*to sate/sustain*],*Lehem l'vav enosh yisad* [*bread will sustain the heart of man*].

Wheat

Wheat corresponds to *hittah,* the name applied to the two species of wheat grown in Israel. Hittah is the first of the seven species with which Israel is blessed (Deut. 8:8), but Germanic origin is assigned. Vine *[gefen]* and wine [*yayin*] are not attributed to the Bible. For that matter, neither is tannin (a key component in red wine and tea that lends astringency and dryness) identified with its namesake in the Bible, the poisonous *tannin* [crocodile or sea serpent] - the association of which we may find in Deuteronomy 32:33 [*hamat tanninim yaynam [their wine is the fierceness of tanninim]*.

Fruit

Fruit corresponds with *perot* [fruit, pl.]; the related word *porat* [fruitful and/or charming] corresponds to pretty. As noted, the p sound and the f sound are written with the same letter, and here the pronunciation becomes fricative with the insertion of a *dagesh kal (lene).*[8] Starting with Genesis 1:11 and antedating Middle English, *pri/ fri* [fruit, fruit of]and its variations abound in the Bible. Similarly, pretty is attributed to Old English and Dutch, but this too appears biblical, as in the classic blessing of Jacob to Joseph (Gen. 49:22): *Ben porat yosef, ben porat alei ayin ...*, timelessly appropriated by Jews of past and present. The Jerusalem Bible, based on Onkelos and Nahmanides, translates this verse as a comparison of Joseph to a fruitful bough by a well*: porat* as fruitful, and *ayin,* a well (*ayin* is synonymous for an eye or a well). Rashi translates *ben porat* as a son of charm or beauty that is projected on the eye [*ayin*] that beholds him; while the Kli Yakar (Rabbi Shlomo Efraim Luntshitz, Lublin, commentator, 16th-17th century) combines the two interpretations: *Porat* refers to fruitfulness and fertility. As such, he is *alei ayin*, he has the power to transcend the evil forces of the human eye.

In the animal kingdom, *teref* [an animal's food], with the connotation of specifically belonging and taken by the beast of prey, precedes the English **turf** (credited to Germanic origin from an Indo-European root) in the sense of someone's personal territory or sphere of activity. Earlier sources include Bil'am's (Num.23:24) comparison of Israel and its triumphs to the lion and its prey [*teref*]*: Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion...he shall not lie down until he eats of the prey* ['*ad yokhal teref*]*...* ; Isaiah's comparison of God's defense of Mt . Zion (Isa. 31:4) to the lion and the young lion roaring on its prey [*tarpo*]; Amos's analogy of the impossibility of evil unwilled by God befalling a city to the lion roaring if he has no prey (Am. 3:4): *Will a lion roar in the forest if he has no prey* [*v'teref ain lo*] *....shall evil befall a city and the Lord has not done it?* Broader in scope but nonetheless referring to one's own sphere is King David's praise of God (Ps. 111:5) for giving *food [teref] to those who fear him*, as God has promised.

Personal or Physical Attributes

Amazon/ *Amitz*

The Oxford English Dictionary claims that amazon derives from an "unknown foreign word." That unknown entity may be identified with the Hebrew root *a.m.tz* - to be strong or bold [*le'emotz*], and in the intensive *pi'el* verb action, to encourage or adopt [*le'ametz*] . The popular biblical phrase of encouragement (Deut: 31:7)*, hazak ve-ematz [Be strong and of good courage*] were Moses's words of support to Joshua who would lead the newborn nation into the Promised Land; Moses's farewell to Israel (Deut. 31:6) on the day of his demise urges the Israelites *Be strong and of good courage [hizku v'imtzu], fear not ....* Isaiah uses this term (Isa.

---

[8] While the *dagesh* forte doubles the pronunciation of the letter, the *dagesh kal,*(the lene dagesh) is inserted only in the letters *bait, gimmel, daled, kaf, pay, tav* either at the beginning of a word or syllable.

40:26) to describe the power of the Holy One over the celestial spheres: *Lift up your eye on high and behold who has created these things ...that brings our their host by number*, *because of the greatness of His might, [me-rov onim v'amitz koah].* His comforting prophecy (Isa. 41:10) stresses that God will strengthen his people: *for I am your God, I will strengthen you [imatztikha*]*, I will help you, I will uphold you ....* Deuteronomy 15:7 cautions, *If there be among you a poor man... you shall not harden [lo te'ametz] your heart,* and the Woman of Valor (Prov. 31:16), is endowed with strength of loins and arms: *She girds her loins with strength and she makes her arms strong [vateametz zroroteha].* Was the CEO of Amazon aware of these inspirational references? Perhaps.

Pizzazz

The Oxford English Dictionary tells us that Pizzazz is said to have been invented by Diana Vreeland, fashion editor of Harper's Bazaar, in the 1930's. Yet, *le-fazez* [to dance], from the root *p.z.z.*, describes King David dancing with the masses in celebration of the repossession of the Holy Ark from the Philistines. 2 Samuel 6:16 relates: *Saul's daughter looked through a window and saw king David dancing* [*mefazez*] *and leaping before the Lord....* The same root also connotes being covered in gold [*paz*], as Joseph is described in Genesis 49:2, *Vyafozu zroei yadav ...* [*and his arms were covered in gold*]. Indeed, the fashion editor's conception of pizzazz, knowingly or unknowingly, agreed with the connotation of glitter and dance of the Hebrew verb.[9] The lexicographers, perhaps unaware of Job 41:14, or, for that matter, the Jewish wedding ceremony[10], also place **ditzy** in the 1970's, with an unknown origin. Tipsy is placed in the sixteenth century, ignoring Psalm 119:70 and its description of the hearts of the *zaidim* [*the wicked*], covered like fat in stupidity [*Tafash ka-helev Lebam*].[10] Another epithet claimed to have an "unknown origin" is **hazy**, much similar to the Hebrew verb root *h.z.h.* [to dream, to be sleepy] and its noun*, hozeh,* as Isaiah 56:10 describes the incompetent leaders as *hozim, shokhvim, ohavim la-num* [*dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber*]. Even the term evil, despite its Hebrew equivalent with all its biblical references (e.g., Ps. 107:17, Prov. 12:15, Job 5:3) is attributed to Germanic origin.

Frumpy

The opposite of pizzazz is **frumpy**, and here the Oxford English Dictionary does not assign any origin. Both adjective and verb from the root *f.r.m* appear in Leviticus in three instances reflecting disheveled tattered clothing: Leviticus 13:45 commands that the clothes of the leper are to be *perumim* [*torn*]; Leviticus 21:10 forbids the High Priest to rend his clothes [*ubegadav lo yifrom*]; following the tragedy of the demise of Nadav and Avihu, Moses cautions Aaron's remaining sons, Elazar and Itamar*, ... neither rend your clothes* [*uvigdeikhem lo tifromu*]*, lest you die...* (Lev. 10:6).

Hail/Hayyil

The origin **of hail** is claimed to be Middle English: "from the obsolete adjective hail 'healthy'"(occurring in greetings and toasts...), from Old Norse heill, related to hale and whole.'" Perhaps a more accurate source is the Hebrew *hayyil* [strength or valor, also a soldier]. The Bible abounds in its references to *anshei hayyil* [*men of strength*] as in Genesis 47:6,

---

[9] Another biblical verb for dancing is the verb root *r.k.d.,* perhaps the origin of the term arcade, connoting dancing in a circle, similar to a bowed arch, rather than the 17th century French source to which it is attributed.

[10] In the Jewish wedding ceremony the couple is blessed with seven forms of happiness, one of which is *ditzah*. Although *ditzah* appears only once in the Bible, it appears in early sources, almost two millennia previous to the 1970's: Targum Isaiah XXXII,13 (second century), Targum Job III:22 (second century), Canticles Rabbah I,4 (no later than the eighth century). So too, *tipesh:* although found only once in the Bible, it appears in later Hebraic sources: TB Taanit 7:1, Sifre Deut. 309, Targum I Samuel xxvi:21.

gibborei hayyil, [*heroes of strength*], or as in I Sam. 14:52, *hayyil i*n the sense of successes and valor (Deut. 8:18) and praise, epitomized by the *eshet hayyil*, [*the woman of valor*] of Proverbs 31. *Hail* as a greeting is also found in the Bible (Ps. 84:8), specifically the blessing to go *mehayil el hayyil* [*from strength to strength*]. Here also, the salutations and acclamations in the lyrics of the United States Presidential Anthem (Hail to the Chief) agree with the biblical concepts of *hayyil*.

Migrant or Immigrant

Migrant or immigrant and its variations in Spanish, Italian, and French, although attributed to the Latin immigrare, nevertheless recalls the Hebrew *gur* [to dwell, sojourn, reside], vs. settling – for which the verb *y.sh.v.* is used.[11] Joseph's brothers tell Pharaoh (Gen. 47:4): *To sojourn* [*lagur*] *in the land we come...*; God promises Abraham (Gen. 17:8,) *I will give to you and to your seed after you, the land in which they sojourn* [*eretz megurekha*]; the same is promised to Isaac in Genesis 28:4. When Pharaoh asks Jacob his age, he sadly responds with the term **megurim,** *the days of the years of my sojourning [yemei shnei megurai] are one hundred and thirty years.* The enduring dichotomy between immigrant [*ger*] and native is encapsulated in the ruling of Numbers 9: one ordinance for both.

Mobile

The adjective for the ability to move was appropriately adopted by the Mobil Oil Corporation to signify travel and transportation. The identical word is found in Hebrew: *movil* [transporting, or moving, hauling, carrying] conjugated from the root *y.b.l* in the *hif'il* [causative] verb action. Ramban associates this verb with the naming of the Jubilee year, *yoveil,* described in Leviticus 25:8-12 in the sense of "sending forth": that *yoveil* indicates bringing everyone back to his possession and family*,* since property reverts to its original owner and slaves are freed. *Yoveil hee* means that it is a year *(hee*/she referring to year, which is a feminine noun) in which every man is transported back to his family and home. Ramban supports his view with biblical sources wherein this verb refers to conveying or bringing*,* including Isaiah 18:7*:* [*Yuval*] t*her*e *shall be brought a present unto the Eternal;* and Isaiah 30:25, *streams and [yivlei mayim] channels in which water is conveyed.*[12]

Words of Emotion

...Tzarah v'yagon emtza u've-shem Hashem ekra [...I found trouble and sorrow. Then I called upon the name of the Lord...]. Three of these six words of Psalms 116:3-4 have filtered into the English and Western vocabulary, demonstrating the extent to which the Bible has molded our language: *tzarah* / sorrow*; yagon /* agony; *ekra* / cry, from the root letters *k.r.a.* [call, read or cry out]. Nevertheless, sorrow is said to have a Germanic origin; Latin is credited with agony and with cry. The term, **calamity** is also attributed to Latin, despite its prominence in Psalms, the Prophets and Hagiographa. Psalms 44:16 reads, *My disgrace [kelimati] is before me all day. Kelimati* (i.e., calamity) is the possessive contraction of *kelimah sheli*;[13] so too in Psalms 69:20, *atah yadata herpati uvoshti u-khelimati [You know my reproach, and my shame, and*

---

[11] Rabbi Bahya ben Asher (1981 ed.) on Genesis 47:8 explains that although Pharaoh asked him*, how long are you living,* using the word *hayyim*, Jacob answered with the noun *megurim*, since the righteous consider themselves only as *gerim* [temporary sojourners] in this temporal world.

[12] See Ramban, in C. Chavel, tr. (1974) regarding his disagreement with Rashi, according to whom the fiftieth year is named *yoveil* – which literally means a ram's horn, on account of the blowing the horn of a ram (a shofar) to herald this year.

[13] In this contraction of the possessive pronoun and noun, the *hay* of the noun becomes a t*av* (t sound), and the letters *shin* and *lamed* (sh and l sounds) of *sheli* are deleted. *Kelimah sheli =kelimati =* calamity.

my dishonor]. Boshti, a contraction of *bosh sheli* (the shame of mine) from the root *bosh* [shame], is the likely forerunner for bash/bashful. Although Germanic origin is assigned for **answering**, we often find King David imploring God to answer him, as in Psalms 102:3, *b'yom ekra maher aneni* [in *the day when I call answer me speedily]. The root "to answer" [a.n.h.]* belongs to the verb group that ends in *hay,* which becomes an s/t in the infinitive and in the past tense, as in Exodus 32:18, *It is not a voice of those responding [anos]to strength, and it is not a voice responding [anos] to weakness.*

The word **wail** is more likely to have originated from Hebrew than Middle English or Norse. *Yelalah* is a wail, lament, or a howl [**yell**?] (Ezek. 21:7, Isa.16:7). *Hailil* means he wept/wailed. *Yelal yeshimon* (Deut. 32:10) is the howling of the wilderness. **Groan** corresponds to the biblical *garon* [a throat], as King David cries, *I am weary with my crying; my throat [gronie] is dry* (Ps. 69:4). Rage is in the Bible, in the verb root *r.g.z.* and its noun *rogez*, as in the prayer of Habakkuk (Hab. 3:2) beseeching God, *b'rogez rahem tizkor [in wrath, remember mercy].* Perhaps the most intense expression of emotion is silence *[demamah]:* the mute (dumb) silence of Aaron's reaction to the demise of his sons Nadav and Avihu (Lev.10:3), *Vayidom Aharon*, or the advice of Jeremiah to the bereft: *Let him sit alone and keep silence [ve-yidom].* We do find rejoicing [*gil*/glee*]* in the Bible, as in Psalms 2:11, *and rejoice [vegelu] with trembling* or Zechariah 9:9, *Rejoice greatly [gelee meod] the daughter of Zion.* None of these terms are attributed to Hebrew.

Expressions of Killing, Loss of Life, Violence, Curses

Adonee Moshe, k'la-em, was Joshua's reaction to the unwarranted prophecy of Eldad and Maidad in Numbers 28. Translations vary: My Lord, Moses, terminate them from this world; restrain them; or imprison them.[14] *K'laem* is a contraction of the objective pronoun them (*otam*) and the Hebrew root *k.l.a.* [to restrain or confine] and/or *k.l.h.* [to be destroyed entirely, perished, ended], approximating the English, to kill. See also Psalms 71:12, *Let them be confounded and consumed the enemies of my soul* [*yavoshu yikhlu sonei nafshee*]*,* or Jeremiah 4:27, ... *The whole land will be desolate, yet a full end [kalah] I will not make.*

The alleged unknown origin for the meaning of "peter" as gradually decreasing and fading points to the Hebrew root *p.t.r.* In the *nif'al* [passive] verb action it is used euphemistically for dying. In other verb constructions it assumes the meaning of dismissing, discharging, releasing. I Chronicles 9:33 speaks of the singers in the Temple who were *p'tirim* [*free from other duties*]; I Samuel 19:10 relates that David *slipped away from Saul's presence* [*va'yiftar mipnei Shaul*].[15]

Abort and abdicate are reflective of the Hebrew noun *avadon* [loss] from the root *a.b.d.* and the verb in its intensive form *abed* [to lose or destroy], prominent in the message of Ecclesiastes 3:6 that there is *A time to seek and a time to lose* [*l'abed*] ... The affinity of a **hearse** to Hebrew verb root *h.r.s.* [to destroy] and its noun *heres* [destruction] is obvious. The "unknown ultimate origin" of **rive** (tear, break) suggests the Hebrew *riv,* [a quarrel, conflict, or antagonism], also used in verbal form. Jeremiah 25:31 states ... *for the Lord has riv* [*controversy*] *with the nations...*; Psalms 55:10 claims*... for I have seen violence and strife [riv] in the city.* **Nudge**

---

[14] See Rashi, Siftei Hakhamim, and Onkelos on Numbers 11:28.

[15] Another meaning of the root *p.t.r.* is to open, which also connotes the idea of freeing and letting go, as *peter rehem* [the first born who opens the womb], and hence the name Peter. The usage of *p.t.r.* in the sense of opening is found in the Bible, as in Exodus 13:2,12,13,15; 34:19, Numbers 3:12,8:16, 18;15, I kings 6:18, 29,32. Proverbs 17:14, I Kings:18,29,32.

and noogie both mirror the dual meanings of the Hebrew root *n.g.a.* [to touch or to smite]. Such is God's message in Exodus 20:6 to Avimelekh: *... therefore I did not permit you to touch her* [*lingao eleha*]; or in the sense of plaguing or hurting in Exodus 12:1, *And God plagued [va-yenaga]Pharaoh with great plagues because of Saray.*

Slew (as in vast amount)/**Slay/Snipe:** In addition to the manna that the Israelites ate in the desert in the morning, the Bible describes the *slav* [quail] that they ate in the evening. Exodus 16:12-13 informs us *they covered the camp.* Numbers 11:31-32 describes the vast amount of the *slav* that initially descended into the desert *about a day's journey on this side and about a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp....* It is seems logical to attribute the word **slew** to the biblical *slav* rather than to mid nineteenth century Irish sluagh, especially since the *vov* is used for the *shuruk* (oo) vowel and without vocalization s*lav* can mistakenly be read as slew.

Numbers 11 also relates that God acquiesced to the complaints of the Israelites who lusted for meat but in His wrath God smote them with a deadly plague. Noteworthy is the etymological connection between **slew** (a vast amount) with its homonym **slew** (murdered), clarified by Numbers 11.

The verb **snipe**, to shoot or attack from a hiding place, although attributed to Scandinavian origin, suggests the biblical root *z.n.v.* (Deut. 25:17-19) with reference to the tactics of the ancient Amalekites and their unwarranted surprise attacks against the weakest amongst the fledgling nation that had just escaped bondage. *Zanav* [a tail] and its verb *[vayzanev]* connote the pursuit and destruction of the stragglers attacked from behind, also reflected in Joshua's command (Josh.10:19) to pursue the enemies and *smite the hindmost of them* [*v'zinavtem otam*].

As per curses, one may infer that the terms **to "put the kibosh on," damnify**, and the word **curse** evolved from the Bible: The unknown origin for the phrase "put the kibosh on" may be identified with the Hebrew verb root *k.b.h.* [to curse] in regard to the episode concerning Bilaam (Nu. 23:8,11) hired by Balak, King of Moab, to curse the Israelites: *V'kaboso lee mesham* [*And curse them for me from there*]. The word, curse, may be the actual Hebrew word *kares* [to cut off or to die prematurely by divine punishment], as in Leviticus 17:4,9. The Hebrew *dam* [blood] corresponds to the adverb damning, which suggests guilt, including the spilling of blood. The plural form, *damim*, refers to loss of blood and money, often owed for compensation, and corresponds with the English, **damnify**, to cause loss or damage. King David (Ps. 51:16) implores God: *Hatzileinee me-damim* [deliver me from blood guiltiness]. Cities of refuge were established (Deut. 19:10) to avoid spilling of *dam* [blood], so that *damim* [the guilt of more murder] not be incurred. Conversely, indemnify is to free from loss or damage, i.e., to free from *damim.*

Mystical Terminology

Sapphire is the Hebrew *sappir;* **sphere i**s the Hebrew *sefirah.* Although the Oxford English Dictionary relates sapphire to Old French, via Latin and Greek, Exodus 24:10 describes the Throne of God in appearance as a brilliant illuminating sapphire stone: "*... and under His feet was like a pavement of sapphire, like the essence of heaven in clarity*" (Ex. 24:10). Exodus 28:18 enumerates the *sappir* as one of the stones of the High Priest's breastplate. Isaiah prophesizes that God will lay the foundations of Israel with *sappirim* (Isa. 54:11), and Ezekiel

describes that *above the firmament... was the likeness of a throne* [*k'mereh even sappir*] *in appearance like a sapphire stone* (Ezek. 1:26).

In the Hebrew language the terms *sefirah* (singular) and *sefirot* (plural) occur in relation to the kabbalistic doctrine of the *Sefirot* [Spheres], discussed in the Zohar, in *The Bahir,*[16] and in *Sefer Yezirah*. As Gershom Scholem explains, *Sefirot* "denotes the ten stages of emanation that emerged from the *Ein Sof* and from the realm of God's manifestation in His various attributes. Every single *sefirah* [sphere] points to an aspect of God in His capacity as Creator, forming at the same time a whole world of divine light in the chain of being."[17] The term is derived or related to the word *sappir* [sapphire], especially with its association with the Divine Throne; to the biblical Hebrew root *safor* [to count], since the *Sefirot* allude to stages and to primordial numbers; to the biblical word *sefer* [book], as the *Sefirot* are associated with the linguistic elements of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet; or, according to *The Bahir,* that which expresses God's power and glory, from the verb *saper* [to tell].[18]

As sapphire is associated with the Throne of God, so are the terms **ma'on** and **aravot.** *Ma'on* [a dwelling] is in the Bible often in connection with the dwelling of God, as in Deuteronomy 26:15, *Look down from your holy habitation [me-meon kadshekha], from heaven, and bless your people, Yisrael....*; or Psalms 26:8, *God, I love the habitation [meon] of your house, and the place where you glory dwells...* The Talmud in Hagiga 12b teaches that *ma'on* is the fifth of the seven firmaments and *aravot* is the seventh, a mystical dwelling "in which there are Right and Judgment..., the souls of the righteous and the spirits and souls which are yet to be born, and dew wherewith the Holy One Blessed Be He will revive the dead [...] and the Throne of God." While a variety of origins is offered for **moon**, including Dutch, German, Indo-European, the Hebrew **ma'on** is excluded. Thus far, there has been no linguistic assignment for the origin of **arable** to the Hebrew *aravah/aravot,* neither to its mystical association [the seventh heaven] nor to its agricultural significance as a willow, one of the Four Species taken on the festival of Sukkot, specifically known to take root and to thrive very readily,[19] nor to its biblical association, *Sing to God, sing praises to his name, extol him who rides upon the aravot* (Ps. 68:5).

Medicine and Anatomy

The term **therapy,** previous to Greek**,** more likely originated from the Hebrew verb of healing *(r.f.a.)*, with its numerous biblical references, notably Jeremiah 8:22, *Is there no balm in Gil'ad, is there no physician [rofai] there*? or Moses's prayer for Miriam (Deut. 12:13), *Kel na rfa na lah [Heal her now O god, I pray thee]*. **Psoriasis** is akin to the Hebrew **tzaraat** [leprosy], its manifestations and treatment described at length in Leviticus. **Pasah** (Lev. 13:5,6) refers to the spreading of the infection and approximates the word **pus**, *...and the plague spread not [v'lo pasah]in his skin.* The term **cyst**, a sac or a pocket of fluid, corresponds to the biblical word for

---

[16]*The Bahir* is one of the oldest classical works of the Kabbalah, attributed by most Kabbalists to Rabbi Nehuniah ben Hakaneh, a tanna of the first century, and a leading kabbalist of the Land of Israel. According to Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, his teachings were preserved by the kabbalistic schools until the final redaction in the fourth century by the later sages of the Talmud, followed by oral transmission to only a small closed group, and its publication in 1176 by the Provence school of Kabbalists. Until the publication of *The Zohar* approximately in 1295, *The Bahir* was the most important kabbalistic text. The fourth section of *The Bahi*r contains the discussion of the *Sefirot*, which is the earliest source that deals with divine attributes, and it adopts the view of *Sefer Yezirah* that there are ten *sefirot* [spheres]. See *The Bahir,* Kaplan A., Ed. (1979).
[17] Scholem G. (1973)
[18] Scholem, G. (1974); Kaplan A. (1979).
[19] Pollack. G. (1997).

pocket [*kis*] prominent in Micah's rebuke of *kis avnei mirmah* [a bag of deceitful weights], in Micah 5:11-12. One would assume that the medical symbol of the caduceus would be associated with the brass snake [*nehash ha-nehoshet*] and its healing powers as recorded in Numbers 21.[20] Instead, Geek mythology is accredited.

Amah [the lower **arm**] is also the biblical term for a measurement (a cubit), the approximate length of the forearm, from the elbow to the middle finger. Referring to the daughter of Pharaoh when she rescued Moses from the river, Exodus 2:5 records: *Va'tishlah et amatah* (a contraction of *amah shelah*). Rashi and Onkelos maintain that the correct translation is that "she stretched out her **arm**," rejecting the alternative translation of sending her maid, synonymous with *amah*.

The Bible antedates medieval Latin with the verb root ***n.z.l.*** [the flowing of a liquid] that evolved into nose, nasal, nozzle; Devorah in her Song (Judg. 5:5) speaks of the mountains that melted [*nazlu*] at the time of the Revelation at Sinai; King David (Ps. 78:16), elaborates on God's miracles in the desert, including bringing *streams of water out of a rock* [*nozlim misela*].

To spout, to speak one's views or as a lip of a container, are both analogous to the Hebrew word *sfatayim* [lips, pl.]. The singular is *safah* [a language, a border, or the shore of body of water], as in *sfat yam* [the seashore]. *Sfat* is a possessive contraction of *safah shel*: hence *sfat* and spout are basically identical, especially since the f and p sounds are produced by the same letter. *Va'ani aral sfatayim:* Moses claims that Pharaoh would not heed his arguments (Ex. 6:12) because he is *of uncircumcised lips.* And Psalms 120:2 conveys the prayer to the Almighty to *deliver our souls from lying lips [me-s'fat sheker].* The Hebrew equivalent of **lick** [*l.h.kh*] also appears several times in the Bible as in 1 Kings 18:38, *And the fire of the Lord ... licked up [lihekkha] the water that was in the trench*, or Numbers 22:4.

The extent to which Hebrew has molded our language may be reflected in the word to **regulate**. Embedded within it is the Hebrew *regel,* a leg, also one of the three festivals that are pilgrimages to Jerusalem. As a verb, the intensive action is *le-ragel* [to spy], the reflexive is to habituate [*le-hitragel*], the causative action is *le-hargil* [to regulate]. So too, the Hebrew *ozen* [ear], with its functions of hearing and equilibrium, is embedded within the word **liaison.** A liaison weighs and balances, which is the exact meaning of the verb root *a.z.n.* in the intensive action, *le-azen*: In this capacity *Kohelet also taught the people knowledge, for he weighed [ezain] and sought out*...(Eccl.12:9).

Wealth, Clothing, Majesty

The biblical word fo**r treasure** is *otzar*, related to the verb *a.tz.r.*[to gather]. **Money**, may have originated in the verb root *m.n.h.* [to count] and the related noun, *manah* [portion]. Leviticus 7:33 describes the *manah* given to the priest, and Psalms 147:4 is in praise of the Lord who *counts* [*moneh*] *the number of the stars....* Within **conglomerate** is the Hebrew word ***golem*** [folding, or shapeless, amorphous matter], as in *Psalms 139*, [*Galmee*] *my unshaped flesh Your eye did see*. As the embryo is unshapedmatter, the conglomerate is a number of parts that are

---

[20] See Ramban (1974). In his commentary on Exodus 15:25 *Vayorehu Hashem eitz* [*And the Lord showed him a tree*] in reference to the miracle performed by Moses in sweetening the bitter waters. Ramban explains that the term *vayorehu* actually means "and God instructed him," whereas *va-yarehu* means God showed him. Thus God instructed him that he heals the bitter with the bitter. Such was the case with Elisha who cast something that spoils water (salt) into water that was spoiled in order to cure, which in essence was the miracle that he performedContemplating the brass snake was the method of healing; illness healed by the cause of illness.

put together to form a whole. The term *golem* per se became popularized in the 16th century by the narrative involving Rabbi Judah ben Bezalel of Prague and the *Golem* that he created to protect the Jews from persecution. The Oxford English Dictionary enters the word *golem* as a 19th century term borrowed from the Yiddish; yet it preceded Yiddish for about three thousand years.

Our English, **lavish** mirrors the Hebrew root *l.b.sh.* [to wear, to dress] and its noun form *levush* [dress, garment], often associated with luxurious dress. See Esther 6:8-11 regarding the *levush malkhut [royal apparel]* prepared for Mordekhai; Psalms 45:14 for the *levush* of the king's daughter embroidered with gold, Proverbs 31 for the dress of the Woman of Valor who wears fine linen and purple *[levushah shesh v'argaman]* and whose household is *clothed in scarlet [lavush shanim].* In his tribute to the Woman of Valor King Solomon also praises her enterprising ability and talents for design: ***Sadin** astah va'timkor...* [*She makes **garments** and sells them*]. Samson's prize for the winner of his riddle included thirty **sadinim** (Judg. 13:12,13*)*; Isaiah counts *sadinim* as part of the wardrobe of the Israelite woman (Isa.3:23) It appears that in biblical times *sadin* was an article of clothing, a more likely source for suit rather than the Latin sequi. **Tiara** is biblical: *Atarah* is a crown or diadem; from the verb root *a.t.r [to encompass, encircle with a diadem],* as in Proverbs 12:4, *a woman of valor is a crown [atere*t*] to her husband*. Song of Songs 3: 11 links *atarah* with one's wedding day: ...*behold King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the* day of *his wedding....[ba-atarah she-itrah lo imo]. Keren* is ray, a beam, or a horn. In its figurative sense of kingship, strength, and power it corresponds to **crown.** But as a verb it connotes radiating or shining. Thus Exodus 34 relates that ...*when Moses came down from the mount Sinai ... Moses knew not that the skin of his face shone....* [*ki karan or panav*], which recalls the offensive translation of the Vulgate that caused Michelangelo to portray Moses with actual horns. **Scepter** is rooted in *shevet*, literally a staff but generally referring to the scepter of royalty, as in Genesis 49:10, Psalms 45:7, or Isaiah 14:5. The Greek **skeptron** (to lean on) corresponds to the literal Hebrew meaning of staff, from which it had plausibly derived.

Schooling

School, école, scuola**,** escuela bespeak the Hebrew ***sekhel* [reason].** *Le-haskil* is to gain reason or understanding and also has the connotation of succeeding. Genesis 3:6 describes the forbidden fruit: *V'tov ha-etz le-haskil … [and a tree ...to make one wise]*; Deuteronomy 29:8 urges to keep the words of the covenant, *that you may succeed [taskilu] in all that you do;* Proverbs 3:4 advises the pursuit of kindness and truth, *so you shall find grace and good understanding [sekhel tov] in the eyes of God and man*. The opposite of the *maskil* is the **boor** [*ba'ar*]. King David (Ps. 33:22) laments his (temporary) inability to understand the good lot of the wicked, *And I am foolish [ba'ar] and ignorant*, lacking comprehension *like a beast before you*. He proclaims, *A brutish man [ba'ar] does not know*, nor does he understand the great works of God (Ps.92:7)**.**

The pervasiveness of the words **ami, amiable, amigo, amico, amicable** correlates with *am* [nation] and ***amie***, the contraction of ***am shelie*** [the nation of mine], connoting oneness and friendship. Amongst the numerous biblical references is in the description of the world previous to the Tower of Babel (Gen.11:6),[21] *Behold the people [am] is one, and they all have one language*; or Exodus 3:10, *And take my nation [amie] out of Egyp*t.

---

[21] The actual term babble is reflective of its probable biblical origin: punishment for the rebellion of that generation, as is stipulated in Genesis 11:10, *Therefore the name of it is called Babel because the Lord did confound [balal] the language of all earth.*

Lad or **child** may be rooted in the Hebrew *yeled [child]*. **Staff** has its counterpart in *tzava*, an army or a host, especially in reference to God, the Lord of the Hosts [*tzvaot*]. As a verb *tz.v.a.* refers to joining or following, or to follow in war, as in Isaiah 29:7,8.

 Savoire*,* to know in French, the noun **savant,** the Spanish verb **saber** and the Italian **sapere** (to know) recall the Hebrew verb *sover* [to inspect, expect, or to know]. In Psalms 119:116 King David beseeches God to uphold his promise that he may live: *and that I not be ashamed of my hope [me-sivrie];* Esther 9:1 celebrates the victory of Persian Jewry *on the day the enemies of the Jews **thought [sibru]** to have power over them.* Nehemiah reports that he viewed [*va-ehee sover*] the broken walls of Jerusalem(Neh. 2:13) - *sover* in the sense of viewing and inspecting. Later, in the Targum and Talmud this verb was used more popularly as a logical argument or reasoning, or a deduction, as in the term *sevara.*

 Tziyyon [Zion] is not excluded from the English language. Initially one would hardly notice the connection between scion and Zion other than the pronunciation. Scion relates to the concept of rooting, while Zion refers to Jerusalem or to the Land of Israel. Even so, the Bible attests that grafting and rooting are indeed in consonance with Zion/*Tziyyon* often compared to a tree of life (Prv. 3:18), as the *shoresh* [the source and root] of wisdom, of our world, and of our language. *... for out of Tziyyon shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem* (Isa. 2:3).

In the year 70 Rome destroyed the Second Temple and exiled the Judeans to all lands of the Roman Empire, including Italy, France, Germany, and Spain. The impact of Hebrew on the languages of these countries would be a natural consequence. Consider the following:

Macabre suggests a combination of the two Hebrew words *min hakeve*r [from the grave]. Indeed, the word **kever** [grave] and the verb **likbor** [to bury] resemble the English *cover*, or the French *couvrir*. (Note that the b and v sounds are produced by the same letter, and easily interchangeable). *Maison,* house in French, parallels the Hebrew **mazon** [food], while abode is a variation of **bayit**. *Morte,*death in French, approximates the Hebrew **mot** or **mavet**, and one must realize that the *vov* (the v sound, or, if used as a *holam melei*, the long o vowel) can easily be confused with the r sound of the *raish*. The French word **tort** parallels the Hebrew **ta'ut** [error], from the verb *t.a.h.*: here too, if the *vov* used for the oo vowel (the *shuruk*) is mistakenly read as an r, the result is tort. La tour, tower in French, was preceded before Greek and Latin by the Hebrew *tirah* (plural, *tiros*), referring to a palace or an encampment. Genesis 25:16 enumerates the sons of Yishmael by their names, towns, and *tirosam* [their encampments]. Ezekiel's prophecy (Ez. 25:4) against Ammon predicts that they will be occupied by the *men of the east who will set their palaces [tiroseihem]* within them. The French and English verb **to tour** and the Hebrew **tur** are actual cognates.

Ohr in Hebrew means light, often in the Bible, as early as Genesis 1:3, *And God said, [yehee ohr] let there be light;* the French aurore (dawn) and the English aura appear as derivatives. Air in French and English, the Italian aria, the Spanish aire, are composed of the *alef* and the *raish* sounds in **ohr**. Pore in English and French and poro in Spanish and Italian, as the actual English verb to bore, parallel the biblical Hebrew **bor** [an opening or a pit] as well as the verb to dig [*h.p.r.*]. The Hebrew **esh** [fire] is strikingly similar to ashes. The "unknown ultimate origin" of the word boot (bota in Spanish), is probably Hebrew: Although the noun as footwear is not biblical, the verb is: namely, the root *b.o.t.* [kicking and rebelling]. Moses in his farewell address (Deut.32:15) admonishes his nation, *But Yeshurun grew fat and kicked [va-yiv'at]*; and Eli is censured (I Sam.2:29), *Wherefore do you kick [tivatu] at my sacrifice...?*

The Hebrew word ***moom*** [blemish or mutilation] plausibly influenced the French *maime* and the English equivalent. For example, Leviticus 21:21 states: *No man...that has a [moom] a blemish may offer the offerings of the Lord.* Alimony, *alimenti* in Italian, and *alimenticia* in Spanish correspond to the Hebrew ***almanah*** [a widow]. *Miroir*, which is mirror in French, the English mirror, and the Spanish verb mirar (to look) parallel the Hebrew ***mar'eh*** [a vision or a mirror] from the Hebrew verb of seeing [*r.a.h.*]: Daniel *was astonished at the [mar'eh] vision that he saw (*Dan.8:27); the communication of Moses with God (Nu. 12:18*) was apparent and not in riddles [u'mareh v'lo behidot]*; the visions [*mar'ot*] of Ezekiel (Ez.43:3), whose were similar to those he saw on the River Kevar.

Halo, considered a derivative from the Latin and Greek *halos*, has its counterpart in the Bible: the biblical Hebrew root ***h.l.l.*** [shining], used also to connote glorifying or praising, possibly impacting the French *jolie* (pretty). We find that Job used this verb in reminiscing about the time previous to his afflictions (Job 29:2), when God's *candle shone upon my head [b'hilo nero alai];* also in his lengthy defense (Job 31:26) wherein he claims to have never attributed godliness to the sun ***kee yahel*** [*when it shone*]. So too Isaiah prophecies (Isa. 31:10) that on the day of the fall of Babylon *the stars of heaven and their constellations [lo yahelu oram] shall not give their light.* Related to the same root is the word ***hillulim***, which refers to words of praise and festivities (Lev. 19:24, Judges 9:27).

Interestingly, the negative term of ***hollelut*** [arrogance, folly] with its noun and verb variations *(hollel, hollelim*) also derives from this root. King David is envious of the prosperous lot of the *hollelim* (Ps. 73:3), and Kohelet ranks the *hollelim* with wickedness, folly, and foolishness (Eccl. 7:25). This may be the "uncertain origin" of **hallion**. Anyhow, the analogy is remarkable: Halo is to hallion as *hillulim* is to *hollelim*.
.

Stymie, similar in French and Italian, recalls the Hebrew *satum* [closed] and its verb *s.t.m* in Sfard pronunciation or *s.s.m* in Ashkenaz pronounciation. The origin of "open sesame," the magical phrase in "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" used to open a cave with a hidden treasure has been debated by scholars, but the obvious explanation eluded them. Psalms 51:8, may have directly inspired the author: ... *u-ba-sasum hakhmah todienee [...teach me wisdom in the inmost heart]*. **Scope**, or the Italian scopo, is the same as the verb to look, *sh.k.f.* For example, in Psalms 85:12 King David foresees the time when *righteousness is [nishkaf] seen from heaven;* in Genesis 19:28 Abraham *looked [va'yashkef] towards Sdom. Va'yahkef* [and he looked] is at times followed by the verb *va'yar* [and he saw], as in 2 Samuel 24:20.

The Spanish **mitigar**, and the English mitigate, plausibly derived from the Hebrew ***l'hamtik*** [to sweeten], to lessen severity. ***Matok*** is the adjective for sweet; and there exists the rabbinic concept of *hamtakat hadin* [lessening the severity of judgment]. Of the biblical references see, for example, Samson's riddle (Judg. 14:14): *Out of the eater came forth food, and out of the strong came forth sweetness [matok];* Proverbs 16:25: *Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweet [matok] to the soul and health to the bones.*

The French **adorer**, the Spanish **adorar**, and the English adore, to love and respect, conceivably derives from the Hebrew root ***h.d.r.*** The infinitive is ***le- hader*** [to honor, esteem, show deference]. The noun *hiddur* or *haddar* refers to splendor, beauty, and glory. Thus Exodus 23:3 commands, *v'dal lo tehedar be-rivo [neither shall you favor a poor man in his cause]* and Leviticus 19:32 instructs to honor *[v'hadarta]* an old person. Leviticus 23:40 commands to take the fruit of *the eitz hadar* [*the tree hadar*] as one of the Four Species taken

on the festival of Sukkot.[22] Nahmanides translates this to mean the fruit of *the tree of splendor.* Psalms 8:6 praises God for being *mindful of man, crowning him with honor and glory [v'khavod v'hadar t'atrehu].*

Un couple in French and the word couple in English (said to have derived from the French) corresponds to the biblical word *kefel*, [double], especially since the f and p sound in Hebrew are the same letter. See Job 41:5: *... who can come within his double bridl*e *[b'khefel risno me yavo]*? Reflective of the fact that the f and p sounds are the same letter in Hebrew (hardly distinguishable if a diacritical mark is not inserted) is the similarity also between the biblical word ***pesel*** [a carved image or sculpture] and **fossil** in English, fósil in Spanish, fossile in Italian and French. These most plausibly evolved from the Hebrew *pesel* in its connotation as a powerless, petrified molded form. See, for instance, Genesis 20:4, the second commandment, *... you shall not make for yourself any carved idol [pesel]*; or, Deut. 12:13, *...and you shall hew down the carvings of their gods [feselai elohaihem].*

The French **partir,** the Spanish **partir**, the Latin **partire**, and the English **to part** parallel the Hebrew root *p.r.d.*, the verb for dividing or separating. See Genesis 2:10 referring to the river in Eden: *And from thence it was parted [yipared] and branched into four streams.* Genesis 13 narrates the parting of Lot from Abraham, and this verb appears here three times: Genesis 13:9, *Hipared na me'alai [Separate yourself... from me]*; Genesis 13:11*, ...and they separated [va-yipardu] themselves one from the other*; Genesis 13;14, *And the Lord spoke to Abram after Lot separated from him [aharei hipared lot me'imo].*

The French **melée,** as the English melee, referring to a confused fight or crowd compares with the Hebrew verb root ***m.l.l.***, with its usage as stirring or crushing, and also in its context of Proverbs 6:13 wherein the wicked person is said to deliberately cause trouble by his crooked mouth, the winks of his eyes, the pointing of his fingers, and *the scraping of his feet [molel b'raglo].* It may also relate to the Hebrew *malei* [full or complete]. Of the many references, see, for instance, Genesis 6:13 which stipulates the justification for the flood *for the earth is filled [mal'ah] with violence,* and Isaiah's prediction (Isa. 11:9) for the messianic era ... for the *earth shall be full [ki emal'ah] of the knowledge of the Lord.*

The English word **salve***,* said to be of Germanic origin, or the word salvation, said to have derived from old French, as well as the Italian salvezza (salvation), the French salut, the Spanish salvación reflect the Hebrew word *shalvah* [tranquility and calmness], from the root *sh.l.v.* Since the s and sh sounds are the same letter, as are the v sound and the oo vowel (the *shuruk*), the two can easily be confused if read without vowel symbols. Moreover, in Hebrew grammar the past tense of this verb becomes *shalu* [they were tranquil]. And so, Jeremiah wants to know (Jeremiah 12:1) *Madua .... **shalu** kal bogdei vaged [why are they happy all that deal treacherously]?* King David in Psalms 122:6-7 prays for the peace and *shalvah [tranquility]* of Jerusalem: *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, those who love you **s**hall prosper [yishlayu ohavayikh]. Let there be peace within your walls, tranquility in your palaces [shalvah b'armenotayikh].*

Masque (Fr.), *maschera* (It.), *máscara* (Spa.), and the English **mask** were preceded by the Hebrew *mesekh* [curtain, screen, or covering], found repeatedly in Exodus referring to the covering of the ark and the curtains at the entrance of the Tabernacle and the court gate (Ex.

---

[22] The consensus amongst the commentators is that this is the citron tree.

35:12, 39:34,40,21; Num. 4:5). See also Ezekiel 28:13, [...] *every precious stone was your covering [mesukhatekh].*

The Spanish **seducir***,* the French **séduire***,* the Italian **sedurre***,* the English **seduce** were preceded by the Hebrew *l'stos* [stray or to be unfaithful]*,* as in Numbers 5 and the *Ishah Sotah.* And the English **mystery,** the French **mystère***,* the Italian **mistero** and the Spanish **misterio** were all preceded by the biblical Hebrew *mister* [secret]*,* based on the verb root *s.t.r.* [to hide]. See for example Psalms 10:9, wherein King David likens the wicked who prey on the poor to a lion who lies in wait *secretly [ba-mistar*], or the prophecy of Isaiah 45:3 concerning Cyrus, to whom God will give *treasures of darkness[matmunei mistarim].*

The French and English **antique,** the Italian **antico** and the Spanish **antiguo** as well as the Latin root ante were preceded by the Hebrew *atikim* in I Chronicles 4:22*: v'hadevarim atikim [and the records are ancient]*. Even the preposition **über** in German and **over** in English were preceded by and may have derived from the Hebrew *over*, which means going across, passing or traveling. Abraham is described in Genesis 14:13 as *Avraham Ha-Ivri* because he came to Canaan from across the Euphrates River*, me'ever lanahar*, and hence the name of the language.[23] ***Ever Hayarden*** refers to Trans-Jordan, the lands over, i.e., east of the Jordan River. *Pâques* (Fr., with the circumflex showing the absence of an s)*, Pascua* (Spa.), and *Pasqua* (It.) are all derived from the Hebrew ***Pesah*** [Passover]. These are all biblical Hebrew words that preceded Greek, Latin, French, German, Italian or Middle English. Hopefully recognition will be given to their true origin; which, is the actual meaning of etymology: allegedly from the Greek *etumo*s, meaning true, but really from the Hebrew ***emet,*** which is truth.

---

[23] See Rashi on Genesis 14;13.

References

Abrabanel, I. (1963 ed.) *Perush 'Al Ha-Torah. Sefer Obadiah.* Jerusalem: Elisha Press.

Aviram, J. (1974). The Hebrew Alphabet. In *Encyclopedia Judaica*. (Vol. 2, pp. 677–678) Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House.

Babylonian Talmud. Tractate Menahot 97a; Hagiga 12b.

Ben Asher, B. (1981 ed.) *Sefer Rabbeinu Bahya 'Al Ha-Torah*. (Vol. 1, section 1, pp. 147–148; section 2, p. 120). Jerusalem: Eshkol.

Baer, Y. (1992). *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*. Philadelphia. JPS.

Even Shoshan. A. (1982). *Concordanziyah Hadashah*. Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer

Goren, S. (1993) *Mo'adei Yisrael* (pp. 152–158) Tel Aviv: Chemed Books.

The Jerusalem Bible. (1992). Jerusalem: Koren.

Kaplan, A. Ed. (1979). *The Bahir.* New York: Samuel Weiser.

Koehler L. & Baumgartner W. (1958*). Lexicon In Veteris Testamenti Libros.* Leiden: Brill.

Mandelkern, S. (1967) *Veteris Testamenti Concordantiae*. Jerusalem: Schocken.

Mikraot Gedolot Torah. (1959). Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Rashi, Kli Yakar Onkelos, TargumYonatan. New York: Hevrat Tanakh.

Mikraot Gedolot. Nevi'im U-ketuvim. (1974). Rashi, Radak, Metzudot, Targum. New York: M. Press.

Moshenska. G. (2008). The Bible in stone: Pyramids, lost tribes, and alternative archeologies. *Public Archeology*, 7(1), pp. 5–16. https://doi.org/10.1179/175355307X243672

The Oxford Dictionary of English. (1995). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

The Oxford Dictionary of English. (2017). Oxford University Press. https://www.oed.com

Pollack. G. (1997). *The Jewish festivals in ancient, medieval and modern sources* (pp. 73–82) New York: Sepher Hermon Press.

Ramban. *Ramban* (*Nachmanides) Commentary on the Torah.* Exodus XV. (Vol. 2, pp. 211–214). C. Chavel, Trans. New York: Shilo

Ramban. *Ramban* (*Nachmanides) Commentary on the Torah.* Leviticus XXV (Vol. 3, pp. 436-450). C. Chavel, Trans. New York: Shilo

Reiss, M. (2001) *Pa'amei Mo'ed* (vol. 2, pp .402–420). Tel Aviv: Rehov Lilienblum.

Scholem. G. (1974). *Kabbalah.* Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House.

Scholem, G. (1974). Sefer Ha-Bahir. In *Encyclopedia Judaica*. (Vol. 4, pp. 96-102). Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House.

Scholem, G. (1973). Sefirot. *In Encyclopedia Judaica*. (Vol. 14, pp. 1104-1105). Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House.

Shapiro, F. (2015). *Christian Zionism: Navigating the Jewish-Christian Border*. Oregon: Cascade Books.

Silverman, G. (1974). British Israelites. In *Encyclopedia Judaica*. (Vol. 4, pages 1381-1382) Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House.

Wikipedia Contributor. British Israelism. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_ Israelism.

Corresponding author: Gloria Pollack
Email: Gloria.pollack@icloud.com

From Anti-hero to Commodity: The Legacy of Kurt Cobain

Paul Ziek, Pace University, USA
Mirjana Pantic, Pace University, USA

Abstract

April 8, 2019, marked the 25th anniversary of Kurt Cobain's death. Since his suicide, Cobain's image has been immortalized in a variety of ways: there are documentaries and popular press books dedicated to his life and death, there is a park in Aberdeen, Washington, named after him, his personal paintings are part of a traveling art show and his handwriting is available as a downloadable font. Moreover, dozens of retailers sell merchandise featuring him and his band, Nirvana. Although a large amount of academic literature has been written on Kurt Cobain and the music he created, there is still a gap: little to no work investigates his rise to celebrity status. To fill in the gap in academic knowledge, the current paper considers the legacy of Kurt Cobain at the silver anniversary of his death. It does so by utilizing a constitutive view of communication to explain how the narratives surrounding Kurt Cobain create both a rise in his fandom as well as the commodification of his reputation as an antihero.

Keywords: antihero, Cobain, grunge, Kurt Cobain, music, Nirvana, rock music

Introduction

In the summer of 2017, on a nondescript rack in the Paramus, New Jersey location of the popular American store Five Below, sat approximately a half dozen hats with the iconic Nirvana "smiley face" logo. The drooling, cross-out eyed logo was designed by Kurt Cobain for the 1991 release party of "Nevermind." That was the album that marked the entry of Nirvana and the grunge subculture into the mainstream (Kramer, 2016). Although the meaning of the logo is not entirely clear, it has become synonymous with the band in general and the lore of Cobain in particular. Some of the unsubstantiated theories behind the logo include it being an ode to the marquee of a now-defunct gentlemen's club in downtown Seattle, Cobain's artistic interpretation of Guns N' Roses' lead vocalist Axl Rose, and a representation of the symbol for "The Acid House." The conjecture behind the logo fits well with the narrative of Kurt Cobain: he was a complex individual, an artist that rejected the mainstream, and a musician that was reluctantly chosen as the "voice of Generation X."

April 8, 2019, marked the 25th anniversary of Cobain's death. Since his suicide, Cobain has become the quintessential celebrity in that the public's fascination with him exceeds both his talents as either artist or musician. Beyond the fact that Nirvana's music is played on alternative and classic rock stations around the world, Cobain's image has been immortalized in a variety of other ways: he has a park in Aberdeen, Washington, named after him, his personal paintings are part of a traveling art show, and his handwriting is available as a downloadable font. Moreover, dozens of retailers sell Nirvana and Cobain merchandise, including Target, 7/11 and ETSY, to name a few. Yet, of all these retailers, Five Below is the most interesting. As a publicly traded company, Five Below targets "the teen and pre-teen customer" by identifying and responding to mainstream styles and crazes; in essence, the retailer is promoting a band that last played decades before their customers were born as "trend-right" ("Five Below Partners With Charities to Give Back," 2018, para. 5).

Over the years, dozens of popular press books, magazine articles, documentaries and dramatized films have detailed Cobain's life. Some of the more popular topics involve conspiracies about his death, his impact on Generation X, and the issues surrounding his estate. Academics have also followed suit and written about a variety of subjects relative to Cobain. Although there has been a considerable amount of work on Cobain and the music he created, there is a gap in the literature: little to no work investigates the rise in Cobain's celebrity status. Academic literature on Cobain falls into two general areas: the meaning of his lyrics and examinations into the impact of his suicide. In addition, this work is predominantly cross-sectional in that very little exists within the past five years. In other words, no recent work has explored the current state of his celebrity and how it came to be. Even though the study of music has been around for decades, the study of individuals is a relatively new phenomenon. Therefore, the purpose of the current paper is to consider the legacy of Kurt Cobain in the year of the silver anniversary of his death.

Literature Review

There are two main threads of literature dedicated to Cobain. The first thread revolves around the lyrics he wrote and the music he created with Nirvana. Here, the arc of the literature is rooted in the academic fields of music, popular culture, media, and literature. The concepts and viewpoints covered in this first arc draw heavily on the imagery and performance style of his art. The second thread explores the impact of his death and suicide. This second thread takes a very different path to explore Cobain; this second thread had its origins the healthcare field and

is bent on health-related topics and practice relative to suicide. Both threads do well to cover the chosen topic but neither has significantly explored, or explained, the Cobain phenomenon, especially as it relates to the new millennium.

The Music and Lyrics of Kurt Cobain and Nirvana

For many, the lasting image of Cobain will always be one of him sitting on stage in torn jeans and ratty green cardigan leading Nirvana in a rendition of the "The Man Who Sold the World," aired on MTV's "Unplugged" in November of 1993. Soon after this performance, on April 8, 1994, Cobain committed suicide in the guesthouse of his suburban Seattle home. The importance of the MTV "Unplugged" performance cannot be overstated, especially when discussing the lyrics written or chosen by Cobain. Originally released by David Bowie in 1970, "The Man Who Sold the World" was easily the most popular point of the set. The song carries strong metaphors of the inner conflict between Bowie and his alter ego Ziggy Stardust. As Mazullo (2000) explains, Cobain's rendition of the 1970s-style progressive rock song serves as his reminder to the audience that the expressive nature of grunge was supremely rooted in images of the physical body, sexuality and identity. Although this moment was years after Nirvana began their meteoric rise, the performance of "The Man Who Sold the World" shows the distinctive principles that govern Cobain's own lyrics and the meaning behind his music.

Cobain, and consequently Nirvana, were part of the grunge movement. Simply explained, grunge is a form of music born in the mid-1980s in Seattle, Washington (Mazullo, 2000). The qualifier "grunge" was attached to bands from the Pacific Northwest that synthesized heavy metal and punk (Shevory, 1995). However, when given more thought, Horsfall (2013) argues that grunge music was a deviant genre of music. As Horsfall explains, like all forms of deviant music, grunge was focused on three main functions: social criticism, spreading news and as catharsis of outstanding events. Although there were dozens of popular grunge bands from this era, including Pearl Jam, Soundgarden, Screaming Trees, Alice in Chains, and Mother Love Bone, to name some, Nirvana was the paradigmatic grunge band because of Cobain's complex nature and the magnetism of his prose (Shevory, 1995).

As Fish (1995) explains, Cobain's lyrics reflect his view of the fragmentation of modernity. He used vivid metaphors revolving around the human form, bodily fluids, suicide, violence, sex, and drugs (Wood, 2011). These underlying narratives were a rallying call for Generation X and consequently a point of research among academics. According to Kahn (2000), Cobain's prose hones in on the anguish felt by Generation X – he portrayed their pain and fears, the tension they felt between private and personal space, and especially the angst revolving around the negative judgment Boomers and Greatest Generation individuals expressed about them, calling them superficial, lazy and amoral (i.e., Howe & Strauss, 1993). Although the melody always came first to Cobain, his choice of words showed originality, even when he was employing decades-old topics. For example, "All Apologies" was an act of both confession and contrition for his humanness because "all in all is all we are" (Cobain, 1993, track 12; Herbert, 2011).

The Death and Suicide of Kurt Cobain

Cobain's suicide was fodder for innumerable newspapers, magazines, and radio and television programs. The days and months subsequent to April 8 saw a host of journalists and reporters covering the death to the extent that Mazzerlla (1995) maintains that this coverage "perpetuated, solidified, and entrenched his position as generational icon" (p. 52). Perhaps

the most celebrated coverage given the event was Strauss' (1994) *Rolling Stone* article. The article traced back a month to an apparent suicide attempt in Rome and subsequently focused in on Cobain's final days. Strauss details the steps Cobain took leading up to April 8 and the grief and confusion that many felt after hearing the news. He further explains that the Seattle Crisis Clinic received roughly 100 more calls than usual, and there were a few instances of copycat suicides as well. The public's reaction to the news of Cobain's suicide provided fodder for the second dominant theme in the academic literature on Cobain: the one that analyzes how Kurt Cobain's suicide reverberated with the public.

Baume, Cantor, and Rolfe (1997) studied more than 300 sites that chronicled Cobain's life, death, and music; in many instances they found that the star's suicide note and death certificate had been posted. The availability of this material, coupled with the massive media coverage, is believed to lead to what Jobes, Berman, O'Carroll, Eastgard, and Knickmeyer (1996) refer to as the "Werther Effect." This is where the death of a celebrity has the potential to stimulate vulnerable youth to imitate. Luckily, studies did not prove the "Werther Effect" occurred. Martin and Koo (1997) examined the total rate of suicide in Australia in 1994 for people between 15 and 24 and found that the number of suicides was identical to the same time frame for the previous five years. Berman, Jobes, and O'Carroll (1998) collected data from King County, Washington, the suburb where Cobain lived, and found that there were actually fewer suicides in 1994 as compared to 1993. However, Jobes et al. explain that there was a significant increase in suicide calls following Kurt Cobain's death. Although the expectation is generally that suicides increase when a well-loved celebrity commits suicide, Jobs et al. hypothesized that the extensive media coverage, the particularly bloody method of suicide, and outreach interventions quelled copycat suicides.

The main avenues of research on Cobain do a good job in analyzing the many aspects of his life, work, and death. But the literature aims attention at the year of his death and shortly thereafter. Missing are explorations and explanations that would focus on the period of his rise to celebrity since 1994. His suicide at age 27 is part of American mythology. It is a story often told alongside those of Jim Morrison, Brian Jones, Jimi Hendricks, and Janis Joplin. Cobain's imprint, however, is more than a romanticized view of life in the fast lane or as member of the "27 Club." As Borchard (1998) stressed, unlike other "27 Club" musicians who supposedly died of an accidental drug overdose, Cobain's death was intentional, as he committed suicide. In addition to that, Cobain's image and likeness are certainly used more than any of the other members of the "27 Club," but there are no convincing explanations of why. In "Serve the Servants," a song from Nirvana's final studio album "In Utero," Cobain sings the lyrics: "Teenage angst has paid off well, Now I'm bored and old" (Cobain, 1993, track 1). It is true, Kurt would be 51 and Nirvana 32 in 2019, therefore, there needs to be a better understanding of why the public is still attracted to these "old" images and music.

Discussion

The simple explanation is that Cobain's celebrity has grown alongside both his, and Nirvana's, fandom. Fandom is a common feature in industrial societies and emerges from "the mass-produced and mass-distributed entertainment of certain performers, narratives or genres" (Fiske, 1992, p. 30). Obviously, Cobain will irrevocably be linked to Generation X (Mazullo, 2000), but the fact is that his iconic status has developed *beyond* one generation. Today, individuals of all ages have developed a deep affection and attachment to Cobain. Not only does Nirvana's music continue to play on the radio, and their albums continue to sell, but also the Internet and social media have significantly sustained their fandom. Beyond websites, over

the years there have been memes, Twitter trends, Facebook pages, and YouTube videos dedicated to Kurt Cobain. Since the movement of fandom online allows for an increasingly customizable "fannish" experience (i.e., Coppa, 2006), the demographics and psychographics of those attracted to the way Cobain challenged social structures reverberate beyond the youth of the 1990s. What this actually means is that the pathology of fandom relative to Cobain moved beyond a single demographic, which could crudely explain the growth in his celebrity over the past 25 years.

There is a deeper explanation behind the rise in Cobain's popularity over the decades, one that is a bit sinister. Over the years, Kurt Cobain has become a commodity. Marx (1906), who introduced the idea of the commodity in all its complexity, defined it as "an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another" (p. 41). In a certain way, commodification depicts the entire grunge subculture of which Cobain and the other musicians were a part. On the one hand, the way they dressed and the values they promoted through their performances and lyrics were anti-materialistic to their core. On the other hand, they were eager to embrace the fame and become successful musicians, which is evidently in contradiction inherent in the grunge movement (Kramer, 2016).

In other words, these commodities were paradoxical at their core. Cobain and his band were on the opposite side of the American mainstream music spectrum and were perceived among those who embraced their music as the embodiment of resistance (Mazullo, 2000). Furthermore, as a subcultural movement, grunge was non-materialistic, so the commodities that were based on it, as suggested above, were contrary to the movement's philosophy. This paradox was pertinent even during the time when Cobain was writing songs and producing music. However, it appeared to have gained energy after he committed suicide. Every aspect of the singer's life would find its place in the market. Some of the most vivid examples of the commodities that appeared after his death and further contributed to his celebrity, perhaps even against his own will, were diaries filled with reflections that preceded his suicide. Ironically, these diaries also contribute to the notion that there was a lack of general understanding regarding what the musician was dealing with as he was evolving into a rock star.

The diaries were published by Cobain's wife Courtney Love eight years after the grunge star took his own life (Thackray, 2015). In his autoethnography, Thackray, who was a chronologist of the development of the grunge movement and the rise of Nirvana, contends that Cobain would certainly not be willing to share his journals with others (p. 202). Thackray brought up such an assumption based on what he described as first-hand observations and the friendship he had with both Cobain and Love.

Having made its way into consumer culture, Cobain's name is used to sell diverse types of manufactured items. Inspired by Nirvana's song "Rape me," Borchard (1998) used the term "Raping Cobain" while explaining how the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas used the musician's image to convert what was left of his life into commodities. Borchard evaluated the items displayed in the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino as a "tragic farce," considering that they resemble what Cobain and the grunge movement were trying to combat. Cobain's suicide, according to the author, can be perceived "as a final, unequivocal statement of hurt and despair in which the artist regains final control of his art's meaning, a statement of purity" (p. 255).

The idea that today Cobain's image is a commodity is not new. Fish (1995) was the first to suggest that the tension between aesthetics and commodification is at the center of Cobain's celebrity status. As Fish explains, even though Cobain's lyrics and behavior were an attempt

to break away from the mainstream, he, and Nirvana, nevertheless became mainstream icons and celebrities. Borchard (1998) believes that Cobain's success could be his "biggest failure" considering that "the more people accepted his statements of alienation, the more alienated he became" (p. 255). In line with this, Bickerdike (2014) adds that Cobain's humanity has been replaced by easily replicated and distributed commodities bearing his image. However, as we contend, the rise in Cobain's iconic status over the past 25 years has everything to do with the celebration, and commodification, of his status as an anti-hero.

The popular press has often referred to Cobain as an antihero. At one time or another, *Time* (1997), *The Village Voice* (2005) and *Rolling Stone* (2012) have all regarded him as an antihero. The use of the antihero moniker is interesting since it presupposes that the individual discussed has an anti-establishment ethics that lacks many of the traditional hero characteristics – in short, they are the opposite of what Campbell (1949) outlines in the hero template, especially when considering their life's work and arc. Anti-heroes are imperfect, morally corrupt, they sometimes lack physical prowess and are more often than not social outcasts (Vaage, 2015). The antihero is not a new term or idea, as it has been around for millennia (Adams, 1976). Moreover, the persona of the antihero has been used in a variety of contexts. Mostly though, the antihero remained the fundamental feature of media and narratives that were narrowcast toward certain readers or viewers (e.g., Schafer, 1968; Simmons, 2008; Raney, Schmid, Niemann, & Ellensohn, 2009) such as those in the literary world. Hence, our deeper focus should be on examining his anti-hero image, as it could help us understand those important aspects of Cobain's rise in popularity that turned him into a commodity, despite the ideas conveyed by his music and the conceptual designs of his life philosophy.

However, one should not disregard the fact that, starting in the 1990s, there was a plethora of antiheroes that crossed over into the mainstream largely because the quality of the genre itself began to improve (Tokgöz, 2016). There are other explanations for this phenomenon: more so than ever, conventional audiences were not only exposed to antiheros but had also begun to support them in their quest (Vaage, 2016). Although the list is long, the most prominent antihero characters are Tim Burton's Batman, Fight Club's narrator/Tyler Durden, The Crow's Eric Draven and Spawn's Al Simmons. It was also during this time that stores began to carry more than just media relative to the antihero, but also all the associated merchandise that goes along with commodification: posters, hats, tee-shirts, lighters, mugs, etc. In fact, the 1990s was a watershed moment for antiheroes because soon after the decade ended there was an uptick in box office, television, DVD, comic and book sales associated with Tony Soprano, Patrick Bateman, James Howlett, Dexter Morgan, Walter White and even John Wick. Nowadays, Cobain's Funko Pop!, sits on shelves in dozens of F.Y.E. stores next to Deadpool, Rocket from Guardians of the Galaxy and Deadshot from Suicide Squad, to name just a few.

An outcome of this trend has been Cobain's commodification. We at once grew to become fascinated with how Cobain embodied not only the antihero but an antihero that was not associated with a comic, novel, movie or television program. Instead, Cobain was a rock star and the embodiment of a subcultural movement called grunge. He was a genuine person that personified all of the prototypical antihero traits - he was physically slight, opposed to macho masculinity, said he felt closer to the female side of the human being and yet was fascinated with guns (Muto, 1995). In his music, he conveyed anti-institutional messages that fixated on the complexities of life – especially those that revolved around the acute anxiety resulting from a white, heterosexual, masculine identity (Saint-Aubin, 2013). What further solidifies his anti-hero image is Kurt's rejection of his role as the voice of a generation. He based this rebuff on the argument that his songs were simply an artistic expression (Fish, 1995). The last thing he

wanted was to become the voice of Generation X. Interestingly, although his music was written and recorded 30 years ago, his lyrics still offer a valid criticism of the troubled society in which we live today (Horsfall, 2013; Kahn, 2000).

To further expand on the substance of this argument, we must talk about the centrality of communication. Communication is not just the expression of meaning, it is the act of meaning-making – it is the process by which celebrity is created and maintained (Ziek, 2016). In other words, communication is central to Cobain's prestige. Hence, his image as anti-hero was created through communicative acts. On the one hand, as fans of Cobain continue to follow and support him and his music, they are producing a joint reality in which he plays the principal role. There is an importance to Cobain that his fans have come to accept and make widely known through their interactions both online and offline. On the other hand, even the economic process relative to how his image has been co-opted is principally a communicative event (Cheney & Cloud, 2006). Although there is an assumption that commercialization is largely due to market-driven forces that are especially dominant in a consumer society like the United States, the underlying act of communication still plays an important role. The creation of a brand, or brand image, is about messages sent out (Whetten & Mackey, 2002). Whatever consumers know, and consequently buy, is the result of an organization's decision to offer a particular product and the narratives it generates around that product. As far as Kurt Cobain is concerned, as organizations continue to trade on his image as an anti-hero, consumers will consequently adopt this image as reality.

Conclusion

Many musicians from the 1990s can boast of anti-establishment, anti-institutional imagery including Rage Against the Machine, Green Day, Smashing Pumpkins, Soundgarden, etc. Yet none of these bands enjoy the fame attained by Cobain or Nirvana. None of the lead singers of the aforementioned bands find their images sold in stores to consumers from not only Generation X, but also from the Millennials generation and Generation XY. Indeed, this is because none of them have become part of the process whereby the United States commodifies its antiheroes. In late 2018, fashion designer Marc Jacobs released "Grunge Redux" collections that feature several images from Nirvana, including the "smiley face" logo. Yet the cross-out eyes are replaced with the letter M and J. Marc Jacobs is a high-end fashion brand that targets a luxury-oriented audience and thus the polar opposite of Five Below. Remarkably, the "Grunge Redux" collection's "Come As You Are" t-shirt retails for $130. Cobain's image has become synonymous with an abundant variety of products for a variety of consumers; it is an icon that is not simply the image of an anti-fashion, alternative music performer.

References

Five Below partners with charity to give back. (2018, September 28). Retrieved from http://investor.fivebelow.com/news/press-release-details/2018/Five-Below-Partners-With-Charities-to-Give-Back/default.aspx

Adams, P. G. (1976). The anti-hero in eighteenth-century fiction. *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, *9*(1), 29.

Baume, P., Cantor, C.H., & Rolfe, A. (1997). Cybersuicide: The role of interactive suicide notes on the Internet. *Crisis: The journal of crisis intervention and suicide prevention*, *18*(2), 73. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0086111

Berman, A. L., Jobes, D. A., & O'Carroll, P. (1998). The aftermath of Kurt Cobain's suicide. In D. DeLeo, A. Schmidtke, R.F.W. Diekstra (Eds.), *Suicide prevention: A holistic approach* (pp. 139–143). Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Bickerdike, J. O. (2014). *Fandom, image and authenticity: Joy devotion and the second lives of Kurt Cobain and Ian Curtis*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Borchard, K. (1998). Between a hard rock and postmiodernism: Opening the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 27*(2), 242–269. https://doi.org/10.1177/089124198027002004

Campbell, J. (1949). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.* New York: Pantheon Books.

Cheney, G., & Cloud, D.L. (2006). Doing democracy, engaging the material: Employee participation and labor activity in an age of market globalization. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *19*(4), 501–540. https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318905285485

Cobain. K. (1993). All Apologies (Recorded by Nirvana). On *In Utero* (Compact Disk). Cannon Falls, Minnesota: DGC.

Coppa, F. (2006). A brief history of media fandom. In K. Hellekson & K. Busse (Eds.) *Fan fiction and fan communities in the age of the Internet: New essays* (pp. 41–59). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Fish, D. R. (1995). Serving the servants: an analysis of the music of Kurt Cobain. *Popular Music & Society*, *19*(2), 87-102.

Fiske, J. (1992). The cultural economy of fandom. In L. A. Lewis (Ed.), *The adoring audience: Fan culture and popular media* (pp. 30–49). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Hebert, D. G. (2011). Originality and institutionalization: Factors engendering resistance to popular music pedagogy in the USA. *Music Education Research International*, *5*, 12-21.

Hornblower, M. (1997, June 9). Great Xpectations. *Time*, pp. 58–66.

Horsfall, S. T. (2013). Understanding deviant music. In *Music and Law* (L. Deflem, Ed.). Bingley, UK: Emerald. 199–219.

Howe, N., & Strauss, W. (1993). *13th Gen: Abort, retry, ignore, fail?* New York: Vintage Books.

Jobes, D. A., Berman, A. L., O' Carroll, P. W., Eastgard, S., & Knickmeyer, S. (1996). The Kurt Cobain suicide crisis: Perspectives from research, public health, and the news media. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, *26*(3), 260–271.

Kahn, S. (2000). Kurt Cobain, martyrdom, and the problem of agency. *Studies in Popular Culture*, *22*(3), 83–96.

Kramer, Y. (2016). *The social life of death: Suicide and self-destruction in the Seattle Grunge Scene.* (Unpublished master's thesis). Central European University, Budapest, Hungary.

Martin, G., & Koo, L. (1997). Celebrity suicide: Did the death of Kurt Cobain influence young suicides in Australia? *Archives of Suicide Research*, *3*(3), 187–198. https://doi.org/10.1080/13811119708258271

Marx, K. (1906). *Capital: A critique of political economy.* F. Engels (Ed.) New York, NY: Modern Library.

Mazzerlla, S. R. (1995). The voice of a generation? Media Coverage of the suicide of Kurt Cobain. *Popular Music and Society*, *19*(2), 49–68. https://doi.org/10.1080/03007769508591591

Mazullo, M. (2000). The man whom the world sold: Kurt Cobain, rock's progressive aesthetic, and the challenges of authenticity. *The Musical Quarterly, 84*(4), 713–749. https://doi.org/10.1093/mq/84.4.713

Muto, J. (1995). He was the woman of his dreams: Identity, gender, and Kurt Cobain. *Popular Music & Society*, *19*(2), 69–85. https://doi.org/10.1080/03007769508591592

Powers, Ann (2005, July 5). Never More. *Village Voice*. Retrieved from Never More. The death of a hometown antihero: Ann Powers reports from Seattle on the suicide of Kurt Cobain. https://www.villagevoice.com/2005/07/05/never-more/

Raney, A.A., Schmid, H., Niemann, J., & Ellensohn, M. (2009, May). *Testing affective disposition theory: A comparison of the enjoyment of hero and antihero narratives*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association, Chicago, IL. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274710596_Testing_Affective_Disposition _Theory_A_comparison_of_the_enjoyment_of_hero_and_antihero_narratives

Rolling Stone (2012, March 28). Jesse Frohman on photographing Kurt Cobain. *Rolling Stone*. https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/jesse-frohman-on-photographing-kurt-cobain-11486/

Saint-Aubin, A. F. (2013). 'A Pool of Razor Blades and Sperm': A phantasy of white, heterosexual masculinity in Kurt Cobain's Journals. *European Journal of American Culture*, *32*(1), 5–23. https://doi.org/10.1386/ejac.32.1.5_1

Schafer, R. (1968). *Aspects of internalization.* International Universities Press, Inc.

Shevory, T. C. (1995). Bleached resistance: The politics of grunge. *Popular Music & Society*, *19*(2), 23–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/03007769508591590

Strauss, N. (1994, June 2). Kurt Cobain's Downward Spiral: The Last Days of Nirvana's Leader. *Rolling Stone*. Retrieved from https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/kurt-cobains-downward-spiral-the-last-days-of-nirvanas-leader-99797/

Thackray, J. (2015). In search of Nirvana: Why Nirvana: The true story could never be "true". *Popular Music and Society, 38*(2), 194–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2014.994326

Tokgöz, Y. (2016). *The Rise of The Anti-Hero: Pushing Network Boundaries in The Contemporary US Television* (Doctoral dissertation, Kadir Has University).

Vaage, M. B. (2015). *The antihero in American television*. Routledge.

Whetten, D.A., & Mackey, A., (2002). A social actor conception of organizational identity and its implications for the study of organizational reputation. *Business & Society*, *41*(4), 393–414. https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650302238775

Wood, J. L. (2011). Pained expression: metaphors of sickness and signs of 'authenticity' in Kurt Cobain's Journals. *Popular Music*, *30*(3), 331–349. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143011000389

Ziek, P. (2016). Cultivating Celebrity through Public Relations. *Celebrity Studies*, *7*(1), 122–124. https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2016.1131015

Corresponding author: Paul Ziek
Contact Email: pziek@pace.edu

Naderi's *The Runner*: A Cinema of Hope Amidst Despair

K. Neethu Tilakan, Sree Kerala Varma College, India

Abstract

This article aims to read the film *The Runner*, by the critically acclaimed Iranian Director Amir Naderi, in the context of the Iranian Revolution and of the Iran-Iraq War. Naderi was inspired by the aesthetics of Italian neorealist cinema, and this film is a classic example of that influence. The events are seen through the eyes of an orphan boy named Amiro. Consequently, this article seeks to explore the manner in which the director has thrown light on the devastation of war through the prism of an innocent street child. Perhaps a bit surprisingly, this poignant story of struggle, despair and longing has a strong underlying message of hope for a promising future. In light of this, the article aims to show how, in the dialectic between the external environment and the characters' personal, subjective microcosm, the film's emotive content seeks to neutralise the more paralysing aspects of an adverse environment through a strong focus on the protagonist's perspective, allowing the viewers to moderate their objective assessment of the situation with a sympathetic viewpoint that disposes them to form an emotional bond with the characters. In short, it is our sympathy for Amiro that shapes our overall assessment of the events, and as we cheer the characters on, the story rewards our emotional investment by ending on a joyful note.

Keywords: Amir Naderi, *The Runner*, Iranian new wave, neo-realist cinema

Introduction

Iranian film director, screenwriter and photographer Amir Naderi began his career with still photography and turned to directing in the 1970s. He made his directorial debut with *Goodbye Friend* in 1971 and rose to international fame with the films *Waiting* (1974), *The Runner* (1975) and *Water, Wind and Dust* (1989). Naderi was recently honoured by Iran's Fajr (FIFF) International Film Festival (2019), when the official poster of its 37th edition featured the character Amiro from *The Runner*.

Iranian New Wave

Iranian New Wave Cinema emerged during the pre-revolutionary (pre-1979) era. The New Wave emerged as a protest against the melodramatic films that were widely popular at the time, dealing with societal and political issues by employing the techniques and principles of social realism. The film that paved the way for this new kind of cinema was Dariush Mehrjui's *The Cow* (1969), a film that "received the Critics' Award in Venice (1971) and toured the world festivals. The Cow […] is now considered a cult film [and] has been selected as the Best Film of Iranian Cinema in 3 different [occasions] by Iranian critics". (Iranian Cinema and Performing Arts, n.p.). Zeydabadi-Nejad explains how the New Wave Cinema emerged in Iran:

> From the late 1950s a number of socially conscious films, both documentary and fiction, were made, many of them by intellectuals including writers and poets who had earlier produced realist literary work and the New Poetry. While in Iran the film movement was named *sinema-ye motefavet* or Alternative Cinema, in the West it became known as the Iranian New Wave. (2010, p. 33)

As stated above, this cinema was profoundly influenced by Italian neorealism. The features of Italian neo-realism, like on-location shooting, the use of non-professional actors, poor and working-class protagonists, long takes, etc. are all elements present in Iranian New Wave films. We can identify the primary characteristics of Italian neorealism in *The Runner*: Naderi has made use of simple yet visually striking narrative, long shots, natural settings, and nonprofessional actors.

Iranian cinema experienced harsh censorship both before and after the Revolution. The filmmakers had to be very cautious, as the film would be banned if it contained any politically explicit theme. Significantly, most Iranian New Wave film directors made use of children as main characters in order to evade such censorship mainly because there are substantial restrictions to the portrayal of male-female relationships (The Characteristics of Iranian New Wave Cinema, n.p.).

Islamic Revolution 1979

The Islamic Republic was declared in 1979, under the political and religious leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, who overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty founded by Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1925. Thus, the Imperial State of Iran received the new official name of Islamic Republic of Iran. One of the most tragic incidents of the revolutionary period was the massacre of more than 300 people in the Rex Theater in the southern city of Abadan, where they burned to death in a brutal act of arson. The audience was watching Mas'ud Kimiya'i's *The Deer*. (Dabashi, 2001, p. 31). The revolutionaries associated cinema with western modernisation. The veil was reintroduced, filmmakers avoided having female characters on screen and, if they did, they had

to adhere to the strict codes regarding the representation of women (Derayeh, n.p.) The new regime was initially opposed to cinema, but realising its importance for the dissemination of ideas, started using cinema as part of their own propagandistic agenda. Thus, the government founded the Farabi Cinema Foundation in 1983 (Farabi Cinema Foundation, n.p.). They believed that the right kind of cinema could educate people and the wrong ones would pollute the public mind and habits. So, they imposed restrictions on cinema in the form of censorship. Filmmakers now experienced a new kind of censorship, different from the one that prevailed during the Pahlavi period. Every filmmaker had to follow highly restrictive rules to be able to release their films.

Autobiographical Elements

Born in the southern Iranian port city of Abadan and orphaned at a young age, Naderi was mostly self-educated and learned the art of film making through photography and watching Hollywood movies. Naderi had to leave school at a very young age and had to fend for himself (DreamLab Films, n.p.).

The film's narrative is autobiographical because, like the protagonist, Naderi was an orphan and was very ambitious. He had to struggle in his life because he was not very well educated, but that did not obstruct his way in becoming a global icon of Iranian cinema. Naderi's desire to be taken away to some unknown land for a better future is fully characterised in the young boy through his love for airplanes, ships, and vehicles. They suggest movement, a permanent change, a shift to a better and more peaceful atmosphere. "This protoexilic film presents one of the most graphic inscriptions of the desire to escape to foreign lands. It also foreshadows its maker's own actual exodus from his homeland." (Naficy, 2001, p. 243). Owing to the growing involvement of the government and the strict codes of censorship, Naderi migrated to the United States in the early 1990s (DreamLab Films, n.p.). His last film made in Iran is *Water, Wind, Dust* (1989).

The Runner

The Runner (1985) was a remarkably successful post-revolutionary film that was shown at major international film festivals. The film was "shown in Venice and London and won the Grand Prize at the Nantes Festival of Three Continents" (Wong, 2011, p. 110). It was made under Kanun, the Iranian Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (Langford, p. 62). Even though it is a film for children, Naderi encourages both children and adults to survive under grim circumstances through the experiences of the young boy Amero, who experiences all that life has thrown at him while keeping a positive outlook.

The Runner tells the struggle and hardship of an 11-year-old orphan boy named Amiro living on an abandoned ship, which reminds us of the director, whose "homes were rusting post-war hulks on the Gulf shoreline, moving from one to the next when older people claimed ownership" (Web, 1991). He does every job he can to survive, such as collecting bottles from the sea, shoe polishing and selling ice water, but not without the danger of having to fight off the older kids who pose a serious threat to the younger ones.

In the opening scene, we see a long shot of the sea, with Amiro (Madjid Niroumand) shouting and waving at the silhouette of huge oil tankers moving towards the port. He is awestruck seeing the airplanes, and the film has visually pleasing scenes of the airport and the ocean. In the next scene we see him picking rags near heaps of garbage along with other people.

We often witness how the older boys bully the younger ones and snatch away the things they have collected. We see Amiro being bullied by older boys for the discarded bottles collected from the sea. They become friends later, but this highlights the violence and the struggle that these children must endure to survive. His love for airplanes is so intense that he saves money to buy magazines with pictures of airplanes that he later hangs on the walls of his room. He has a large collection of these magazines, but he cannot read. An entire wall is covered with such pictures. He even climbs the fence and caresses the airplanes, races against them as they take off and land, keeps shouting, jumping and waving his hands with joy and laughter. When Amiro is not working or racing with his friends he spends his time looking at pictures of airplanes in the magazines.

Running: An Empowerment

For Amiro, running is not just a hobby, but also his life, his passion. He runs regardless of the scorching heat. It seems that, with this character, the director is attempting to teach the viewer to find happiness in every difficult and challenging situation, to fight for their dignity and respect and to keep moving forward in life with a positive attitude and a bright smile. This is evident in the film where two men steal his ice block, but he outruns one of them, knocks him down and retrieves his ice block. He is overjoyed not because he could save his ice block (which has melted to half its size), but because he was able to outrun the man, much older than himself, and thus defeat him in running. There is another instance where a cyclist doesn't pay Amiro for a glass of ice water, and the man rides away without paying any heed to Amiro's requests. He runs after the man, knocks him down and demands his payment. Here again we see his bright smile not because he could get the money but because he could outrun a man on a cycle. Every time he runs, he shows great improvement in general outlook. This indicates the power and force of his legs and the importance of movement.

There are several instances in the film's narrative where Amiro learns the true worth of his legs. One is when, for example, he witnesses the inability of crippled and older people to move. Movement and speed are the essence of his life. Another instance is when all the boys engage in collecting discarded bottles thrown into the ocean and a fisherman alerts them of a shark that's too close. He gets frightened and shocked and swims towards the shore, then looks at both his legs to make sure that he still has them. For him, his legs are no less than a treasure, his most prized possessions. After this incident, we do not see him collecting empty bottles while his friends continue to do the same work. Amiro finds other ways of earning his livelihood. His passion for running suggests his intense desire to better his condition, to have better living conditions, a better job, a good education, etc. These sequences show the importance of movement and change, the energy that can eventually allow him to navigate away from his present situation.

So the film highlights the lives of poor orphan children and their strength and endurance in coping with an inhumane society. Naderi endeavours to depict the cruelty inherent to this society by exposing the manner in which it treats its orphaned children. "In Naderi's Iranian films, the characters struggle against environmental difficulties, social hardships, and their own limitations" (Gadassik, 2011, p. 479). We see how Amiro is accused of stealing at the seaport by a foreigner whose shoes he had polished. They search his belongings but do not find any stolen object in his polishing kit. The people involved refuse to apologize but, Amiro's dignity is offended, so he waits for the foreigner to return at dusk and assaults him with his polishing kit. His self-esteem is as precious to him as his legs (running).

The children are content even though they do not have access to the basic necessities. They indulge in all sorts of play and activities in their spare time. Their favourite sport is chasing trains, riding in trucks, cycling, and running. The boys often engage in chasing a train along the tracks to see who gets to touch it first. This competition is not based on fair play, as the boys push and trip the ones that manage to get ahead of them. In one such sequence in the film, Amiro keeps running even though an older boy has won. The boys are surprised and ask him why he would keep running even though the race was over, and Amiro replies that he wanted to know how far and how fast he could run. For Amiro, these competitions are much more than winning. He sees it as an opportunity to improve his running skills.

Amiro is a very ambitious child; he understands that being uneducated will not help him in any way to improve his life, so he enrols in a school. He doggedly endeavours to learn the alphabet and become literate. We see him religiously studying after school, during his free hours and when he is at work. We also see him reciting the alphabet standing on the rocks at the seacoast. The sound of the wind, water, and his alphabet recital join to form an organic whole. This is how Dabashi describes this scene.

> The alphabet sequence of *The Runner* remains the most glorious lesson in literacy beyond words, and it is one of Naderi's greatest achievements in his virtuoso performances as a sound designer: the noises of water, wind, fire, and dust all collecting momentum to syncopate Amiru's recitations of the Persian alphabet. (2007a, p. 242)

The last sequence is striking, as it brings both the fire and ice elements together in one scene. A block of ice is placed on a barrel with the background of fire from a burning oil well. The children are to compete against each other and the one who gets the ice first is proclaimed the fastest runner and thereby the winner. The group of boys consists of both older and younger ones. The race begins and, just like the previous competition, they begin to hit and push each other to move forward. The boys not only run the race, but also keep an eye on their competitors. Amiro manages to push and knock down other contestants, including the older boys, skilfully disrupting their progress. He rushes towards his ice trophy; ecstatic, he drums on the barrel and then lifts the ice block, which is quickly melting because of the heat from the burning oil wells. He lifts his melting trophy and jumps and shouts in pleasure and excitement. Performing an enthusiastic dance, he looks at his opponents, who are exhausted and are dying of thirst. Amiro rushes towards them with the ice block and they quench their thirst. Dabashi explains this beautiful scene:

> What do people see when they see this block of ice near the fire? A Universe. Those two items are insignia of a universe- ice the soul of salvation from the ungodly heat of summer, placed next to a fire whose raging flames exude an elemental violence at once life-affirming and deadly. The visual contrast of the block of ice and the raging fire command the camera's undivided attention. (2007b, p. 84).

Iran Iraq War

Under the leadership of Saddam Hussein, Iraq invaded Iran in 1980. *The Runner* was made during the Iran Iraq war (1980-1988). Iran was isolated in the war as most of the nations supported Iraq. Only Syria and Libya supported Iran. The major powers like the Soviet Union, France, Saudi Arabia, The United States etc. sided with Iraq (Iran-Iraq War, n.p.). This isolation is depicted in the film through the life of the street orphans, who have no support, no care from the outside world. Amiro's struggles in society is the collective struggle of the people during

the war. They wish to escape the situation and are hopeful that they will eventually overcome. Rastegar explains:

> *The Runner* gives significant emotive charge to the self-perception of Iranians as being an isolated and marginalized nation struggling in a nearly cosmological conflict, one of many parentless and self-made children who live in a world where they are compelled to brutally compete against one another (the backdrop of oil fire burning in the field where the boys undertake their race only makes the link between geopolitical concerns and competition over natural resources more clear). (2015, p. 145)

Naderi is from Abadan, a port city in southern Iran that was devastated in the war. He has witnessed his hometown and its people suffer. He alludes to the futile attempt of nations engaging in such kind of mass destruction. The final scene in the film testifies to this fact: The ice trophy in the final sequence of the film is not permanent or real; the trophy melts, pointing to the fact that winning a war is like winning an ice trophy. War, no matter who wins or loses, brings destruction and devastation to life and property. Instead of waging wars, nations should put their resources to better use.

The film ends with Amiro memorising his alphabets and an airplane flying above him. This suggests that his hard work will eventually pay off and he will rise high and reach great heights, just like the airplane soaring above him.

Conclusion

The people of Iran went through hard times during the revolution and the war. The war came immediately after the revolution, creating havoc in the lives of innocent people. *The Runner* represents a country and its people struggling to overcome a very difficult situation. Gadassik analyses the filmmaking of Naderi before and after the revolution:

> The films Naderi made before the revolution reflect national outrage about social injustice and political unrest, while the films he made in the country after the establishment of a new regime evoke sadness for a nation damaged by conflict and suggest a brighter future. (2011, p. 474).

Thus, the film promises a bright future for Amiro even though his present circumstances are not favourable. Amiro is self-righteous, cheerful, hardworking, intelligent and optimistic; a great future is certainly in store of him. Amiro, with his innocent smile, determination and inspiring energy is an encouragement to all who struggle to overcome difficulties, reminding them that with a positive attitude, a wish to excel and the defiant outlook that allows the person to look beyond current limitations, one can eventually overcome.

References

Dabashi, H. (2001). *Close up Iranian cinema, past, present and future.* London: Verso.

Dabashi, H. (2007a). *Masters & masterpieces of Iranian cinema.* Washington, DC: Mage Publishers.

Dabashi, H. (2007b) Dvandeh / The Runner. In G. Dönmez-Colin, (Ed.), *The cinema of North Africa and the Middle East.* London: Wallflower Press.

Derayeh, M. (2010, May-June). Depiction of women in Iranian cinema, 1970s to present. *Women's Studies International Forum, 33*(3), 151–158. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2009.12.010

Dreamlab Films. Amir Naderi. (n.d.) Retrieved from https://www.dreamlabfilms.com/amir-naderi/

Farabi Cinema Foundation website. (n.d.) Retrieved from https://cinando.com/en/Company/farabi_cinema_foundation_1130/Detail

Gadassik, A. (2011). A national filmmaker without a home: Home and displacement in the films of Amir Naderi. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, *31*(2), 474–486. https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-1264361

Hing-Yuk Wong, C. (2011). *Film festivals culture, people, and power on the global screen.* London: Rutgers U.P.

Iran-Iraq War. (n.d.) *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/event/Iran-Iraq-War

Iranian cinema & performance art. (2019, Oct. 7). *Iran Chamber Society*. Retrieved from http://www.iranchamber.com/cinema/dmehrjui/dariush_mehrjui.php

The characteristics of Iranian new wave cinema (2015, April 10). *Iranian Film Empire*. Retrieved from https://iranianfilmempire.wordpress.com/2015/04/10/the-characteristics-of-iranian-new-wave-cinema/

Langford, M. (2019). *Allegory in Iranian cinema: The aesthetics of poetry and resistance.* London: Bloomsbury.

Naficy, H. (2001). *An accented cinema exilic and diasporic filmmaking*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton U.P.

Rastegar, K. (2015). *Surviving images cinema, war, and cultural memory in the Middle East.* NY: Oxford U.P. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199390168.001.0001

Webb, R. (1991, March 12). Running, running, running. Retrieved from https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/running-running-running

Zeydabadi-Nejad, S. (2010). *The politics of Iranian cinema film and society in the Islamic Republic.* New York: Routledge.

Corresponding author: K Neethu Tilakan
Contact email: neethutilakan@yahoo.com

The "God, Where Art Thou?" Theme in the Literary Works of Auschwitz Survivors Ka-Tsetnik, Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel

Lily Halpert Zamir, David Yellin Academic College of Education, Israel

Abstract

This paper focuses on the search for God in Auschwitz in the literary works of three surviving writers: Yehiel (Feiner) De-Nur (known by his pen name – *Ka-Tsetnik* (often spelled *Ka-Tzetnik*) *135633* – and referred to hereinafter as "Ka-Tsetnik"), Primo Levi and Eli Wiesel. These world-famous authors survived the inferno, yet returned to it again and again in their post-Auschwitz writings. Their works describe their personal experiences in the concentration camps, the inmates' lives and their families and friends who were murdered in the gas chambers. Against this background, they tried to explain the underlying source of absolute human evil in Auschwitz. Although they came from different Jewish religious communities, their remonstrative grievance was the same: Where was God in Auschwitz?

A preliminary reading of their writings reveals their personal attitude to God in Auschwitz. Wiesel calls Him "the God of Bread" (Wiesel, 1967, p. 236), Ka-Tsetnik "the God of Soup" (Ka-Tsetnik, 1989, pp. 56-57), and Levi the "Supreme Chemist at the Auschwitz laboratory", a "gigantic biological and social experiment of the human animal, where the struggle for life was conducted" (Levi, 1961, p. 80).[1] Each asked in his own way: Where was God in Auschwitz?

Keywords: Holocaust, Auschwitz, Ka-Tsetnik, Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel; concentration camps, absolute evil, divine responsibility

---

[1] Wiesel and Ka-Tsetnik came from Eastern European orthodox Jewish families, while Dr. Primo Levi, a chemist from Turin, Italy, was an entirely secular-minded Jew.

Introduction

The search for God in Auschwitz[2] in the literary works of Ka-Tsetnik, Primo Levi and Eli Wiesel (listed in order of date of arrival at Auschwitz) leads to the critical question: Where was God in Auschwitz? How can it be that the God of nature and history did not become involved and ordain some kind of miraculous redemption? In his theological-philosophical treatment of the presence of God in the Holocaust, Hans Jonas (2004, pp. 65–87), claims that: "Auschwitz added to the Jewish experience something unprecedented… and of a nature no longer assimilable by the old theological categories… What God could let it happen?" (Hans Jonas (2004, p. 68). Does God bear responsibility for allowing Auschwitz to occur?

Ka-Tsetnik (Yehiel De-Nur [Feiner])

Ka-Tsetnik was born on 16 May 1909 in Sosnowiec, Poland, and died in Israel on 17 July 2001. He attended the Sages of Lublin Yeshiva and in his youth was known to be precocious. He even studied Kabbalah with the Head of the Yeshiva, composed music and wrote Yiddish poetry. Moreover, he was an activist in the Agudat Israel Youth Movement in Poland during the period between the two world wars. Ka-Tsetnik's life story and its connection to his writings are dealt with at length by Szeintuch (2003).

During the Holocaust, Yehiel was arrested for underground activity and was taken from the Sosnowiec Ghetto to Katowice, where he was interrogated twice by a Gestapo officer whom he later discovered was none other than Adolf Eichmann. In August 1943 he was deported to Auschwitz, where his wife, children and members of his extended family were exterminated. In 1945, he wrote his first book, *Salamandra*,[3] in a Naples DP camp, where he gave it to a soldier in the Eliyahu Goldberg Brigade to bring to Israel. Yehiel explained the importance of the manuscript to the soldier: "The people who went to the crematoria wrote this book," he said, signing it K. Z. (pronounced *Ka-Tset* in German) as an abbreviation of his pen name, Ka-Tsetnik,[4] an acronym-based nickname for a concentration camp inmate (German **K**onzentrationslager, with the Yiddish/Slavic suffix *nik*, meaning "person [of]"), adding his prisoner ID number, 135633 (Segev, 1991, p. 2).

Yehiel came to Palestine in 1946, two years before the independent State of Israel was established. The public only became familiar with him on 7 June 1961, when he collapsed while testifying at the Eichmann Trial. At the time, he was explaining the origin of his pen name: "This is a chronicle from the planet Auschwitz… And the inhabitants of this planet had no names. They had no parents and no children… They did not live according to the laws of the world here… " Years later, following medical treatment with LSD, he altered his testimony somewhat, avowing that Auschwitz is indeed on the planet Earth and that the perpetrators of evil there were people just like us: "You cannot say that Auschwitz is God's doing… This is

---

[2] Auschwitz, the largest and best known of Nazi concentration camps, was built in 1940 when the Nazis realized that they had more prisoners than prison space. It was liberated by the Red Army on 27 January 1945. Nine days earlier, all inmates capable of walking – 48,342 men and about 16,000 women, along with another 96 prisoners of war – were dispatched on foot via Austria to other locations in Nazi-occupied Europe. These evacuation campaigns would later be known as Death Marches, leaving about 6,000 sick inmates behind. The last of the Nazis left the camp on 24 January, three days before its liberation.

[3] In 1977, Yehiel's wife, Eli-yah (Nina) De-Nur, produced an English version of *Salamandra* called *Sunrise over Hell*, attributing it to Ka-Tzetnik 135633 (see References).

[4] Yehiel Feiner's pen name is not spelled consistently in the literature, appearing alternately as *Ka-Tsetnik* or *Ka-Tzetnik*. This article uses the former spelling, including the alternative in parentheses where relevant (bibliographical entries, for example).

the lesson I learned from the Holocaust, the moral of the story: It is not God who destroyed the world, but human beings. Auschwitz was only the dress rehearsal" (Ka-Tsetnik, 1987, p. 113).

Ka-Tsetnik wrote about 12 books, most of them dealing with the Holocaust. The best known among them is the autobiographical *Salamandra*, which he called the "chronicle of a Jewish family in the twentieth century."

Primo Michele Levi

Primo Michele Levi was born 31 July 1919 in Turin, Italy, to secular, enlightened parents. He spent most of his life in Turin, in an apartment on Re Umberto Street that his grandfather bought for his mother the day she and his father were married. In 1941 he completed his university studies in chemistry with honors.[5] On 13 December 1943, he was arrested for his activity in the anti-fascist underground. Having been denounced as a Jew, he was sent to the Fossoli Concentration Camp at the end of January 1944. On 12 February of that year, he was dispatched to Auschwitz together with another 650 Italian Jews, of whom only 20 survived. As of November 1944, he was working as a chemist at the Buna-Monowitz camp (Auschwitz III); he was spared the March of Death when he fell ill. Liberated on 27 January 1945, he returned to Turin, where he continued working as a chemist until 1977. From that year on, he devoted himself entirely to writing. On 11 April 1987, he committed suicide.[6] His tombstone in the Jewish cemetery of Turin bears his K. Z. number–174517.

Elie (Eliezer) Wiesel

Elie (Eliezer) Wiesel was born into a Yiddish-speaking, Hassidic family in Sighet, Transylvania,[7] on 30 September 1928. In May 1944, he was deported to Auschwitz with the rest of that city's Jewish community,[8] where he was given the number K. Z. A7713 (Wiesel, 1960, p. 49). Like Primo Levi, Elie and his father also worked in the Buna-Monowitz sub-camp. As the Red Army drew closer, they were sent on the Death March towards Buchenwald. His father died of dysentery several weeks before Elie was liberated on 11 April 1945 (Wiesel, 960). At first, he refused to write about the Holocaust because he believed that there are no words capable of describing the extent of the horror, but his meeting with François Mauriac changed his mind. His first book, *And the World Remained Silent*, an extensive account of his life in the camps, was originally published in Yiddish. A briefer version, *Le Nuit* [Night], was translated into French and then into other languages, including English (Wiesel, 1960). In 1956, Wiesel immigrated to the United States and in 1986 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his Holocaust remembrance work. He donated the proceeds of his numerous books to be used for humanitarian purposes. Elie Wiesel died in New York on 2 July 2016.

---

[5] In August 1932, he registered for two years of Jewish studies to prepare for his Bar Mitzva in Turin. In 1934, he was accepted to a senior high school specializing in the classics, from which he was expelled when the Fascists rose to power. His 1941 bachelor's degree diploma in chemistry bore the remark: "of Jewish race." Levi's profession saved his life in Auschwitz (Anissimov, 2007).

[6] Three days before he took his own life, Levi remarked to one of his friends: "Even though the poison of Auschwitz no longer courses through my veins, I still think only of suicide" (Paz, 2007).

[7] Hungary annexed Transylvania from Romania in 1940. Wiesel was expelled from the academic high school he attended in Debrecen because of race laws.

[8] His mother and younger sister were dispatched to the gas chambers on arrival and his two older sisters were sent to the women's camp and survived. After the war, Elie was taken to an orphanage in France. As a young man, he studied French and philosophy at the Sorbonne.

The Search for God in Auschwitz

The literary works of these Jewish writers who survived Auschwitz make no substantive reference to the Jewish tradition of Divine Providence and theodicy, as addressed in the Book of Job. Nevertheless, they do depict God as present in Auschwitz and responsible for all that occurs there.

Notwithstanding his declaration that it was not God but man who created Auschwitz, **Ka-Tsetnik** does seek God there: "I lift my eyes to the Auschwitz skies. Suspended against the horizon is the vision of the *shivitti* [contemplative images of a candlestick used by some Jews to meditate on God's name]; like the one usually hung framed in the front of the eyes of the prayer-leader in the synagogue… The awe of it is upon me. I stand in the truck, ne, in a mass of skeletons; stand there and stare at the letters YHWH gleaming from within the *shivitti*… while I cry out: "God! God! Who decreed?! Who decreed?! God! God! Auschwitz— whose is it?" (Ka-Tsetnik, 1999, pp. 10–11).

Just as a Jewish prayer leader faces the *shivitti* on the lectern as he stands in awe asking God to open his heart to the worshippers, Ka-Tsetnik looks towards the *shivitti* in heaven and calls on God to open his heart to the dead, asking "Who decreed?" Was it God Himself or does He allow human beings to do such things without intervention? Remarkably, even as Ka-Tsetnik stands among the slaughtered innocents, he does not deny the existence of God.

A similar scene was described in his first book, *Salamandra*, concerning the Sosnowiec Ghetto and its destruction. When the order was given on Saturday night to set the synagogue on fire with all the worshippers inside, when women and their infant children tried to escape the flames and were shot by the Germans, Ka-Tsetnik took a defiant stance: "The Sabbath is over, and the God of Israel is intoning His *Havdala*[9] in his burning synagogue… over a full cup of Jewish blood… the blood of his chosen people" (Ka-Tsetnik, 1977, p. 34).

Even after he was deported to Auschwitz on 12 August 1943, as the Germans ordered their victims to speed up, causing them to tread on and trample one another, Ka-Tsetnik sought God: "The cry encompassed the square, breaking through to the highest heavens. The heavens then fell silent, as if they had become uninhabited and there were no God on high" (Ka-Tsetnik, 1946, p. 127).

Ka-Tsetnik's awareness of the presence of God in Auschwitz comes at the time he found the body of his friend Marcel. He moved the body to keep it from being stepped on, then looked around and said: "The value of all the theories and methods of ethics... the true vision of the image of God…" (Ibid., p. 166). Honoring the dead man is evidence of the existence of God in Auschwitz and not the moral theories and practices that could not prevent his murder.

Ka-Tsetnik also encounters God in *The Clock* (Ka-Tsetnik, 1989, pp. 56-58).[10] The hero is in Auschwitz among the other living skeletons, waiting for soup. Here, "each skeleton yearns to

---

[9] *Havdala*: A ritual at the conclusion of the Sabbath in which blessings are recited over a cup of wine, revitalizing spices and a bright, flaming candle, followed by a final blessing praising God for distinguishing between the sacred and the earthly.

[10] The book was first written in Yiddish as *Der zeiger vos ibern kop* [The Clock Overhead], published by Y. L. Peretz Press. *The Clock* was the fourth in the *Salamandra* series, the chronicle of a Jewish family in the twentieth century. It begins in late August 1939, two days before the Nazi invasion of Poland and concludes in winter 1945, on Poland's liberation. The clock is the same clock, the city is the same city; only Jews are no

be first in line" (Ka-Tsetnik, 1989, p. 55). And as he stands there in line, he realizes: "Death in Auschwitz, its body and essence—is soup! It's the most horrible of horrors— the God of soup… O God! May my portion be a full one… O God! May it not come to pass that even a drop spills from my soup bowl" (Ka-Tsetnik, 1989, p. 58). All that God can do at Auschwitz is to see to it that not one drop of soup spills. That truly confirms the existence of God and not the murderous horrors.

In *Code*: *EDMA* (Ka-Tsetnik, 1987) as well,[11] Ka-Tsetnik returns to God in a Hassidic-Kabbalistic context—the four letters of the code[12] are what saved him from death in Auschwitz, when he was a *Muselmann* (camp slang for an emaciated, exhausted inmate awaiting imminent slaughter) standing before Mengele (Szeintuch, 2003, p. 121, Protocol No. 28). A supreme power, beyond the God of Soup, staring at the Jews ascending in flames, brings about his rescue: "There are things that one must not reveal lest they be burned. That is an internal matter… the code that has no tongue and no interpretation" (Israel Broadcasting Authority, 1988). His survival, in Auschwitz and thereafter, was made possible thanks to his mystic-Kabbalistic[13] devotion to the *shivitti*. The core of *The Code*'s structure is an appeal to God, calling upon Him by the Tetragrammaton *YHWH*, spread across the skies of Auschwitz: Ka-Tsetnik knew full well that God was present in Auschwitz. His silent appeal, "Lord God, answer me!"[14] is what saved his life. Ka-Tsetnik renders God present in Auschwitz, a place in which one could not conceive of the existence of God, thereby fulfilling the commandment to justify Divine judgment, by virtue of which he is rescued.

Primo Levi was a secular Jew[15] "who was 'turned into a Jew by others'… If it hadn't been for the racial laws and the concentration camps, I'd probably no longer be a Jew, except for my last name" (Lang, 2013, p. 91).[16] Hence he determined unequivocally: "There is Auschwitz, and so there cannot be God" (Giuliani, 2003, p. 51), having reached this conclusion after observing that decent inmates live no longer than three months at Auschwitz (Levi & De Benedetto, 2006).

Levi maintained that the greatest danger is not death, but a loss of humanity. He felt that concentration camp life necessarily turns human beings into wolves. Those who wish to remain human must struggle constantly with themselves (Levi, 1961). He did not end up in Auschwitz

---

longer there… The book has no chapters, but rather stages, wherein Stages 4-6 focus on the speaker from the moment he arrives in Auschwitz until his dispatch to the gas chambers and Stages 7-12 describe everyday life in Auschwitz. In this article, we cite Stage 10: Prayer in Auschwitz, pp. 56-60 in the Hebrew version.

[11] The original Hebrew book was published following Ka-Tsetnik's treatment with LSD in Leiden, in an attempt to cure him of PTSD brought on by his experiences in Auschwitz. It was later translated into English as *Shivitti* (see References). This name change has great symbolic value and meaning, as it relates to Ka-Tsetnik's mystic conceptions of the existence of God even in Auschwitz, in the form of the Kabbalistic *shivitti*.

[12] The letters *E.D.M.A.* appear at the beginning of each of Ka-Tsetnik's works. He claims that these letters kept him alive throughout his incarceration in Auschwitz. Essentially, they constitute another form of observing the *shivitti* commandment: I will keep the Lord before me always—a Biblical verse and its attendant insight that differentiate between Mitnagdic and Hassidic Judaism, as Szeintuch (2003, p. 105) explains.

[13] For a more extensive treatment of this issue, see Szeintuch, 2005, p. 277.

[14] "Lord God of Meir [the Mishnaic sage Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes], answer me!—*shivitti*" appears in a comment by Rabbi Moshe Isserles (known by the Hebrew acronym *Remah*) on the *Shulḥan Arukh, Oraḥ Ḥaim*, Section A, Paragraph A: "I have set the Lord always before me…" [Psalms 16:8] is a supreme principle of the Torah and among the virtues of the righteous who walk before God." According to Szeintuch (2005, p. 282), the expression symbolizes the annihilation of the Jews by the Roman Emperor Hadrian and by Hitler.

[15] See Levi (1988, p. 68): "I, the non-believer, and even less of a believer after the season of Auschwitz…"

[16] Lang also notes: "That he had been sent to Auschwitz *as* a Jew was never far from his consciousness; that those selected for the gas chambers were sent to their deaths as Jews would be a constant shadow" (Lang, 2013, p. 99).

because he was a Jew being persecuted at God's command, but rather as a result of people who sought to efface the humanity of others. They brought Levi there. Hence he was "turned into a Jew by others." This theory intensified when Peppo, a 20-year-old from Greece, was sent to the gas chambers. One inmate, Kuhn, thanks God for not having been selected, regarding which Levi declares: "If I [were] [sic] God, I would spit at Kuhn's prayer. (Levi, 1961, p. 124). For if God is responsible for Kuhn's rescue, He is also responsible for Peppo's murder. Levi added: "Today, I think that if for no other reason than the existence of Auschwitz, no one living in our times should ever speak of Divine Providence" (Levi, 1961, p. 152). The existence of God is an unsustainable assumption after Auschwitz.

Levi did believe that the people incarcerated in Auschwitz were capable of retaining their humanity and guarding freedom of thought. The culmination of this philosophy lay in his attempts to quote from Dante's *Canto of Ulysses* as he went to bring his comrades their soup, exerting efforts to recall the text so he could recite it to his friend Jean (Levi, 2012, pp. 118–121). Applying all his mental faculties, he drew an analogy between the Hell of Auschwitz and Dante's *Inferno* (Levi, 2012, p. 106). As a chemist with the requisite analytical abilities,[17] he perceived Auschwitz as a behavioristic laboratory in which people serve as guinea pigs for the Supreme Chemist (God), who examines the mouse/man and his psychological-sociological behavior under extreme conditions, under circumstances more abhorrent than those imagined in any known culture or ethos (Levi, 1961, p. 79). In Auschwitz, terror may be found everywhere. Hence there is no need to study the separate components of terror, but rather to examine them in the human compounds that result, as in chemistry (Dudai, 2002). In this analogy to Auschwitz, Levi does not deny the possibility of God's existence and certainly not of His presence in Auschwitz, even if only as a Supreme Chemist. According to Levi, humanity is only part of the natural reality in which the Supreme Chemist conducts His experiment. In the Book of Job, God tests Job's ability to withstand horrific torture yet maintain his faith. In Auschwitz, God conducts an experiment that studies extreme human life under laboratory conditions. If those subjected to these conditions deny God's existence, it is only the result of a divine experiment, so it means that Levi's God is real, He is the God of Job, even though Levi does not believe in Divine Providence and consequently does not perceive himself as a Jew, but rather as a human being whose Judaism is forced on him.

Elie Wiesel was raised among Wiśniczer Hassidim and did not cease believing in God during his incarceration in Auschwitz and thereafter, even though his belief in God was affected adversely. In Wiesel's narrative, the presence of God in Auschwitz is described in different ways. In the scene in which three Jews were hanged, He is called *God of the Gallows* (Wiesel, 1960, p. 65)[18] because He allowed a youngster to be hanged. In the food distribution scene, they call Him *God of Soup* because the soup that day was excellent, although it did have the taste of a dead body (Wiesel, 1960, p. 66). In both these scenes, He is the Harbinger of Death. But in one place, Wiesel calls him *God of Bread*, the staff of life and the object of every prayer in Auschwitz (Wiesel, 1967, p. 236). God is present in death and in perseverance (regarding the absence of God in Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek and other camps, see Wiesel, 1988, p. 211). Although He was silent as His children were led to their deaths (Ibid.), He is revealed in the "still, small voice" that follows the din of destruction (Wiesel, 1966, p. 112). As such, perhaps when there are no Jews, there cannot be a God (Ibid., p. 154), only silence. Wiesel vacillates among the various possibilities of God's existence in Auschwitz, but as a religious

---

[17] For a more extensive description, see Jagendorf, 1993; Dante Alighieri, 2010, 55; Levi, 2012.
[18] Prisoners were compelled to view the hanging of three Jews, adults and youth. The narrator reports: "Behind me, I heard the same man asking: 'For God's sake, where is God?' And from within me, I heard a voice answer: 'Where He is? This is where – hanging here from this gallows'…" (Wiesel, 1960, Foreword, p. xx).

Jew, he could not deny it outright: "No space is devoid of God. God is everywhere, even in suffering and in the very heart of punishment" (Wiesel, 1995, p. 103). Thus, Wiesel's conclusion is: "Nothing justifies Auschwitz…" (Wiesel, 1995, p. 105). Wiesel maintains that God was capable of and obligated to halt the deaths of innocent people, but He did not do so. Hence He is not a moral agent. The meaning of God's presence in Auschwitz is a fact: "I have never renounced my faith in God. I have risen against His justice, protested His silence and sometimes his absence, but my anger rises up within faith and not outside it" (Wiesel, 1995, pp. 8–-84). Wiesel maintained that God is present throughout Auschwitz, during acts of annihilation and at moments of grace. His world cannot exist without God, as Auschwitz demonstrates. Even God does not intervene. All that human beings can do, perhaps, is to charge God with the murder of his people and his Torah as well as with mass murder, just as Job demanded compensation for his suffering.

Conclusion

The idea of God's absenteeism with regards to Auschwitz troubled a substantial number of survivors, as Israel Aviram notes: "One night during the Ten Days of Penitence (between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), his father woke him up[19] and asked him to climb into his pallet. 'I have something important to tell you,' he said to me: 'God is not my God any longer!... No one knows the day of his death, how much the more so under the conditions we have here. Hence it is important to me that you know my feelings, thoughts and conclusions regarding a matter that is the center of my life as a Jew and a human being: Until today, I had never departed from full and perfect faith in the Almighty God of Israel. I have set God before me always. I never doubted that He is everywhere… He is here as well and all that occurs here is at His knowledge, at His will and by His power. Did He not decree it all from above?… So I have indeed reached the conclusion: What's the difference? Either there is no God and all they taught us—and all I have taught—is false and there is nothing to say, or, if there is a God, then the necessary logical conclusion is that He is satisfied with all that happens here. Had that not been so, the Germans would have been unable to perpetrate their evil deeds, but if it is so, then the God of Israel is not my God. I do not want Him. I will not worship him, I will not appeal to Him and I will not obey His commandments'" (Aviram 1997, p. 2).[20]

This article focused on three authors who survived the Holocaust and sought God in Auschwitz. Ka-Tsetnik claimed that there is no connection between God and Auschwitz, because human beings are responsible for the inferno, although God was present there. Consequently, thanks to his devotion to God, he was saved. God watches over human beings in the Inferno as well, even if he does allow them to perpetrate the evil that they've created. By contrast, Primo Levi concluded that if God exists, he is the Supreme Chemist of the human laboratory called Auschwitz, where He determines whether people are able to maintain their humanity, even though he himself declared more than once: "I have no religion… I am not a believer" (Lang, 2013). No matter what the Nazis did, Levi's incorrigible optimism reinforced his belief in the human spirit, human intellect and human good will. In this respect, he resembles Sisyphus, who "teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks… The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart" (Camus, 1942). Levi is a Jewish Sisyphus, a committed humanist. Even after Auschwitz, he praises the good in people, despite their occasional moral lapses. For Levi, the Holocaust proved that the power of God is limited or

---

[19] The man was a Talmudic sage, a student of the Gerer Rebbe. His son, Israel Aviram – who was dispatched from Auschwitz to the Jaworzno Labor Camp—attested that he would gather Jews together so that he and his son could teach them Torah, Talmud and Mishna (Aviram, 1997, p. 3).

[20] Israel Aviram was a survivor of the Lodz Ghetto and Auschwitz, an educator and Holocaust eyewitness.

that He does not exist at all. Consequently, Levi disagreed with creative believers such as Wiesel, who avowed that God's deeds and choices are too lofty for human comprehension and that evil is not perpetrated by means of the Divine entity, but rather represents the outcome of human misuse of God-given free choice. Ka-Tsetnik, in turn, claimed that it was not God who created Auschwitz but human beings; nevertheless, at moments of truth, he sought the *shivitti* in Auschwitz. Levi remains strong in his belief: "Today I think that if for no other reason than that an Auschwitz existed, no one in our age should speak of Providence" (Levi, 1961, p. 152). By contrast, Elie Wiesel said God was responsible for His silence at the horrors of Auschwitz, but as a religious man, he maintained his belief that God is involved in everything, even in Auschwitz. Consequently, like Job, he wanted to charge God with murder of His people and his Torah. He had incontrovertible proof of God's negligence (Jonas, 2004).

References

Anissimov, M. (2007). *Primo Levi—Tragedy of an optimist*. Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan. [Hebrew]

Aviram, I. (1997). My faith in God went up in flames at Auschwitz. *Yahadut Ḥofit* (October): 3. [Hebrew]

Camus, A. (2018 [1942]). *The myth of Sisyphus*, 2nd ed. New York: Vintage Books.

Dante Alighieri (2010). *The divine comedy* (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Trans.). Seattle: Pacific Publishing Studio, p. 55.

Dudai, R. (2002). Primo Levi: Speaking from the flames. *PSYART: A Hyperlink Journal for the Psychological Study of the Arts* (2002). http://www.psyartjournal.com/article/show/dudai-primo_levi_speaking_from_the_flames [Accessed 1 May 2013]

Giuliani, M. (2003). *A Centaur in Auschwitz: Reflections on Primo Levi's thinking*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Israel Broadcasting Authority (1988). Ram Evron interviews Ka-Tsetnik on the Channel 1 television program *Now is the time*, 30 May. [Hebrew]

Jagendorf, Z. (1993). Primo Levi goes for soup and remembers Dante. *Raritan: A Quarterly Review*, *12*(4): 31–51.

Jonas, H. (2004). *The concept of God after Auschwitz*. Tel Aviv: Resling, pp. 65-87. [Hebrew]

Ka-Tsetnik (1946). *Salamandra*. Tel Aviv: Dvir. [Hebrew]

Ka-Tsetnik (Ka-Tzetnik 135633) (1977). *Sunrise over Hell* (Nina De-Nur, Trans.). London: W. H. Allen.

Ka-Tsetnik (1987). *Code: EDMA*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad. [Hebrew]

Ka-Tsetnik (Ka-Tzetnik 135633) (1989). *Shivitti: A vision* [*Code: EDMA*] (Translation of *Code: EDMA*. Eliyah Nike [Nina] De-Nur and Lisa Herman, Trans.). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Ka-Tsetnik (1989). *The clock*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad. [Hebrew]

Lang, B. (2013). *Primo Levi*: *The matter of a life*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Levi, P. (1961). *Survival in Auschwitz*. New York: Collier Books (Kindle edition).

Levi, P. (1988). *The drowned and the saved* (Raymond Rosenthal, Trans.). New York: Simon and Schuster.

Levi, P. (2012) *If this is a man – The truce* (Stuart Woolf, Trans.). London: Abacus.

Levi, P., & De Benedetti, L. (2006). *Auschwitz Report* (Judith Woolf, Trans.). London and New York: Verso.

Paz, M. (2007). *Primo Levi in the Israeli press*. Tel Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth. [Hebrew].

Segev, T. (1991). *The seventh million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (Haim Watzman, Trans.). New York: Henry Holt & Co.

Szeintuch, Y. (2003). *As a distraction: A series of dialogues with Yehiel De-Nur*. Jerusalem: Ghetto Fighters' House and Dov Sadan Institute. [Hebrew]

Szeintuch, Y. (2005). *Salamandra: Myth and history in Ka-Tsetnik's writings.* Jerusalem: Carmel. [Hebrew]

Wiesel, E. (1960). *Night* (Stella Rodway, Trans.). New York: Bantam Books.

Wiesel, E. (1966). *The gates of the forest*. New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston.

Wiesel, E. (1967). *A Jew today*. New York: Vintage Books.

Wiesel, E. (1988). *Twilight* (Marion Wiesel, Trans.). New York: Schocken Books.

Wiesel, E. (1995). *All rivers run to the sea: Memoirs, vol. I, 1928–1969*. New York: Knopf.

Corresponding author: Lily Halpert Zamir
Contact email: lilyzami@gmail.com

Awareness and Usage of Social Media by Undergraduates in Selected Universities in Ogun State

Olubunmi Adekonojo, Federal University of Agriculture, Nigeria
B. A. Ajiboye, Federal University of Agriculture, Nigeria
T. D. Adekonojo, Federal University of Agriculture, Nigeria

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore undergraduate students' awareness and usage of social media. A descriptive survey design was adopted with the use of questionnaires as instruments for data collection. Out of one thousand, one hundred and ninety-two (1,192) questionnaires administered to the students, one thousand, one hundred and eight (1,108) were retrieved, a number that represents 93% of the total. Data were analysed using frequency counts, percentages and means. The results revealed that the respondents were aware of almost all social media platforms, with WhatsApp (99%) ranking highest, followed by Email (97.9%) and Twitter (95.3%). The most frequently utilized social media tools were WhatsApp ($\bar{x}$ = 2.72), Email ($\bar{x}$ = 2.61) and Facebook ($\bar{x}$ = 2.50). Social media platforms were mainly used for group discussions and tutorials with course mates ($\bar{x}$ = 3.22); sourcing current materials ($\bar{x}$ = 3.21), and checking updates on current research ($\bar{x}$ = 3.18). The study concluded that social networking is not new to most undergraduates and that they use social media for academic purposes, self-expression and in order to establish friendships with other students around the globe. It was recommended, among other things, that students should be aware of the fact that overindulgence in social media is addictive and time-wasting; moreover, lecturers should assist students in making more meaningful uses of social networking sites by incorporating them into their lessons.

Keywords: social media, Uses and Gratification Theory, usage of social media

Introduction

New technologies have radically changed the way in which people communicate (Adebayo 2015 and Balaban-Sali, 2012). With the ubiquity of platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Skype, LinkedIn and the like, social media is quickly becoming an indispensable part of people's lives. They are used to communicate, read, comment, share, like, and create content (Chen and Sakamato, 2013; Ma et al., 2014). These platforms are gaining popularity, and an increasing number of young people (Pempek et al. 2009), especially students, now comprise the highest percentage of social media users (Lewis, 2009; Sponcil and Gitimu 2013; Yoo and Kim, 2013). The young make use of social media primarily to meet their information needs (Rubina and Shakeel, 2012).

Mozee (2012) has outlined social media benefits: they encourage greater social interaction via electronic platforms; they provide greater access to information and information sources; they encourage creativity among and between individuals and groups; they create a sense of belonging among users of common social media tools, and they increase the technological competency levels of frequent users.

Social media have a significant influence on the academic performance of undergraduate students, and their qualitative impact is determined by the type of usage (Mehmood and Taswir, 2013; Ahmed and Qazi, 2011). Students oftentimes find it difficult to concentrate and study effectively because of the time spent on social networking sites. Quan-Haase and Young (2010) found that a majority of college students login into Facebook several times a day. Younger students tended to use Facebook more frequently than older students to keep in touch with friends from high school or from their hometown (Pempek *et al.*, 2009). This kind of activity has been found to cause distraction during instructional time, resulting in a tangible negative impact on learning (Flad, 2010). Thus, it is essential to determine the intensity and current trends of social networking among students, an objective for which we'll explore the types of social networks of which undergraduates are cognizant as well as the frequency of use.

The Problem

Students' current unwillingness to read comprehensively is considered exceptionally worrisome by many educators (Trend, p. 1). It has been observed that students' reading culture has been negatively impacted by various factors, resulting in a distinct plunge in levels of literacy (Trend, p. 10). Many place most of the blame regarding falling standards on the persistent use of social media (Trend, p. 73). Furthermore, it has been observed that undergraduates spend an inordinate amount of time in front of screens and on social media platforms, which they access on their laptops, desktops, cable television, palmtops, iPods, GSM Phones, smart phones, smart television, etc. Many choose to spend their time chatting with friends instead of reading. Even when some students use social media for academic purposes, they do so because it allows them to quickly lift answers for their assignments. Despite the abundant research and analysis that scrutinises social media usage, not much of it centres on undergraduates in Nigeria's Ogun State. Hence, this study was undertaken to examine the awareness and the usage of social media by undergraduates in selected universities in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What are the demographic characteristics of the undergraduates in the selected universities?

2. To what extent are the undergraduates in the selected universities aware of social media?
3. How frequently do undergraduates in the selected universities use social media?
4. For what purposes do the undergraduates in the selected universities use social media?

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. describe the demographic characteristics of the undergraduates in selected universities
2. determine the undergraduates' awareness of social media in selected universities
3. examine the undergraduates' frequency of use of social media in selected universities
4. identify the undergraduates' purposes for using social media in selected universities

Uses and Gratifications Theory

As this study is based on the undergraduates' awareness and usage of social media, the Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G) of Katz et al. 1974 is employed, as it provides a systematic explanation of why people use and access media programmes. This theory refines the conceptual conversation, allows for a cogent and methodical identification of the critical pieces needed in data collection, and points the way to the most efficient method of analysis. Furthermore, it is not passive and does not admit contents at face value, requiring the scrutiny of key terms in the data that are grounded upon personal, social, cultural, and emotional considerations: these are instrumental in guiding people in what they choose to consume from the media.

Social Media

According to Langat (2015), social media is the interactive communication that exists between people using a specialized electronic platform such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Myspace, Linkedin and Instagram. These provide a means that allows them to create and share content (Lewis, 2009). Scholars observe that social media facilitates the growth of interactive dialogue and communities of users, regardless of their physical location; notably, academic libraries market their products and services on social media and make users aware of what goes on in the library, providing useful information that is accessed by online users in the social network space. Social media involves technology, social interaction and the coordination of ideas for creative and scientific innovation. This interaction and the manner in which information is presented allow for the integration of diverse perspectives, as people share information freely and confer and interact with others. Through websites, individuals can create, share, connect and exchange ideas and opinions with one another and engage in person to person conversation.

Usage of Social Media

Social media allow people to easily create their own online profile and display an online network of friends. Lenhart *et al* (2010) observed that about 57% of social media users are 18–29 years old and have a personal profile on multiple social media websites. More than 50% of college students access a social networking site several times a day (Sheldon, 2008). Eberhardt (2007) opined that the culture of the student's environment is lately more socially oriented because of the emergence of online technologies. Students can use social media platforms tools to connect with other classrooms, track a word or phrase, attend lectures remotely, learn personal responsibility, find scientific research papers, create apps, classmate connections,

provide direct communication with instructors, brainstorm, and knowledge-sharing among others. Mehmood (2013) stated that students are positively affected by the informative use of the social media while at the same time there can be a drastic impact on recreational use of social media on them.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The population was made up of undergraduates of selected public and private universities in Ogun State who are in their second to fifth years of study. The study was carried towards the close of 2017/2018 academic session. The only instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire that contained close-ended items. A multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study. This was done to obtain an even representation of the population. Ten percent (10%) of the total population (11,919) of the undergraduate students in the three faculties/schools was used as the sample size for the study. This was to ensure a fair representation of the entire population.

At the end of the administration of the questionnaire, 1108 copies of the questionnaire were found to be usable being properly filled by the respondents. This figure represents 93% of the entire number of the instrument. Frequency count, percentages and mean were used to analyse the data collected.

Results

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	547	49
Female	561	51
Total	1108	100

The gender of the respondents as presented in table 1 shows that the female students 561 (51%) are more than the male students 547 (49%).

Table 2: Respondents' awareness of social media platforms

S/N	Social Media	Frequency	Percentage	$\bar{x}$	S.D
1.	WhatsApp	1097	99.0	1.008	0.303
2.	Email	1085	97.9	1.029	0.309
3.	Twitter	1056	95.3	1.069	0.032
4.	Google+	1042	94.0	1.197	0.036
5.	Instagram	1035	93.4	1.201	0.036
6.	Facebook	1033	93.2	1.313	0.037

7.	Youtube	1026	92.6	1.412
	0.040			
8.	Snapchat	1016	91.7	1.537
	0.046			
9.	BBM	993	89.6	1.583
	0.048			
10.	Blog	900	81.2	1.690
	0.051			
11.	LinkedIn	452	40.8	1.779
	0.053			
12.	Myspace	356	32.1	1.807
	0.054			
13.	Flickr	318	28.7	1.848
	0.056			
14.	Friendstar	292	26.4	1.915
	0.058			

Weighted mean = 1.44

The result in Table 2 reveals that majority of the respondents representing 100% responded affirmatively, which indicates that they are aware of almost all social media platforms with WhatsApp ranking highest with a percentage of 99.0 followed by Email (97.9%); Twitter (95.3%) and the least was Flickr (28.7%) and Friendstar (26.4%) respectively. The inference drawn from this is that social media is not a new thing to most students in this era.

Table 3: Usage of Social Media

S/N	Social Media	Always	Occasionally	Never	$\bar{x}$	S.D
1.	WhatsApp	852 (76.9)	194 (17.5)	62 (5.6)	2.72	0.571
2.	Email	727 (65.6)	312 (28.2)	69 (6.2)	2.61	0.632
3.	Facebook	637 (57.5)	370 (33.4)	101 (9.1)	2.50	0.864
4.	Youtube	624 (56.3)	397 (35.8)	87 (7.9)	2.48	0.646
5.	Instagram	490 (44.2)	430 (38.8)	188 (17)	2.26	0.735
6.	Google+	409 (36.9)	557 (50.3)	142 (12.8)	2.25	0.669
7.	Twitter	481 (43.4)	412 (37.2)	215 (19.4)	2.23	0.757
8.	Snapchat	418 (37.7)	381 (34.4)	309 (27.9)	2.08	0.803
9.	Blog	152 (13.7)	524 (47.3)	432 (39)	1.75	0.689
10.	BBM	141 (12.7)	462 (42.1)	500 (45.1)	1.69	0.692
11.	LinkedIn	105 (9.5)	266 (24)	737 (66.5)	1.44	0.663
12.	Myspace	95 (8.6)	175 (15.8)	838 (75.6)	1.34	0.636
13.	Flickr	83 (7.5)	167 (15.1)	858 (77.4)	1.31	0.606
14.	Friendstar	86 (7.8)	153 (13.8)	869 (78.4)	1.30	0.613

Weighted mean = 1.90

The above table indicates the frequently used social media platforms by the respondents. The frequently used were WhatsApp ($\bar{x}$ = 2.72), Email ($\bar{x}$ = 2.61) and Facebook ($\bar{x}$ = 2.50) while the least use social media were Flickr ($\bar{x}$ = 1.31) and Friendstar ($\bar{x}$ = 1.30) indicated as being used by the respondents. The inference drawn from this is that, WhatsApp, Email and Facebook were the major social media being used by the undergraduates. This was because they were the social media platforms that ranked above the weighted mean of 1.90 set for the social usage.

Table 4: Respondents' Purpose of Utilising Social Media

S/N	Utilization of social media	Always	Occasionally	Seldom	Never	$\bar{x}$	S.D
1.	I use social media for group discussions and tutorials with course/classmates	575 (51.9)	322 (29.1)	105 (9.5)	106(9.6)	3.22	0.974
2.	Sourcing for materials to read for examination and tests	488 (44)	420 (37.9)	118 (10.6)	82 (7.4)	3.21	1.504
3.	Check updates on current research or new developments in my field of study	482 (43.5)	418 (37.7)	143 (12.9)	65 (5.9)	3.18	0.875
4.	I use social media for finding and chatting with friends online	546 (49.3)	329 (29.7)	112 (10.1)	121 (10.9)	3.16	1.003
5.	Group socialization with peers, relating to issues like politics, education and religious matters.	422 (38.1)	493 (44.4)	126 (11.4)	68 (6.1)	3.15	0.856
6.	To share and exchange academic information	490 (44.2)	387 (34.9)	142 (12.8)	89 (8)	3.14	0.933
7.	To source for current information on my course	472 (42.6)	327 (29.5)	216 (19.5)	93 (8.4)	3.08	1.555
8.	Checking, reading and sending e-mails	474 (42.8)	360 (32.5)	115 (10.4)	159 (14.4)	3.02	1.053
9.	Research activities such as finding journal articles or publications	285 (25.7)	573 (51.7)	143 (12.9)	107 (9.7)	3.00	1.745
10.	Downloading scholarly articles for assignment or term papers	344 (31)	467 (42.1)	220 (19.9)	77 (6.9)	2.97	0.893
11.	To get relevant information related to my research or project work	305 (27.5)	502 (45.3)	201 (18.1)	100 (9)	2.91	0.910
12.	Online learning and web-seminars (webinars)	339 (30.6)	405 (36.6)	248 (22.4)	116 (10.5)	2.89	1.163
13.	To search for information on scholarship	272 (24.5)	544 (49.1)	175 (15.8)	117 (10.6)	2.87	0.908
14.	Reading of newspapers and magazines on-line	346 (31.2)	412 (37.2)	171 (15.4)	179 (16.2)	2.83	1.051
15.	Photo sharing	337 (30.4)	402 (36.3)	144 (13)	225 (20.3)	2.77	1.142
16.	To follow/learn from people who have made their marks in my chosen course/desired career	253 (22.8)	411 (37.1)	275 (24.8)	169 (15.3)	2.67	0.998
17.	To create groups of likeminded individuals	227 (20.5)	479 (43.2)	165 (14.9)	237 (21.4)	2.66	1.562
18.	To buy books or other information materials online	262 (23.6)	397 (35.8)	259 (23.4)	190 (17.1)	2.65	1.028
19.	Sharing of business or vocational ideas	206 (18.6)	484 (43.7)	188 (17)	230 (20.8)	2.59	1.021
20.	Sports and entertainment news	284 (25.6)	325 (29.3)	193 (17.4)	306 (27.6)	2.52	1.155
21.	To enrol for online certificates or professional training.	195 (17.6)	367 (33.1)	248 (22.4)	298 (26.9)	2.40	1.071
22.	Online shopping	171 (15.4)	378 (34.1)	241 (21.8)	318 (28.7)	2.37	1.217
23.	Marketing my products	263 (23.7)	253 (22.8)	179 (16.2)	413 (37.3)	2.36	1.233

24.	To publish my blog	190 (17.1)	294 (26.5)	188 (17)	436 (39.4)	2.25	1.184
25.	To communicate with my lecturers	107 (9.7)	375 (33.8)	195(17.6)	431(38.9)	2.20	1.619
26.	Betting and online money making	142 (12.8)	244 (22)	193 (17.4)	529 (47.7)	2.02	1.102
27.	Online dating	138 (12.5)	193 (17.4)	135 (12.2)	642 (57.9)	1.86	1.112

Weighted mean = 2.6

Table 4 revealed that social media tools are mainly used for group discussions and tutorials with course mates ($\bar{x}$ = 3.22); they are also used to source for current materials for examinations and tests ($\bar{x}$ = 3.21), used to check for updates on current research or new developments in my field of study ($\bar{x}$ = 3.18), and the last two purposes were occasionally for betting or online money making ($\bar{x}$ = 2.02) and online dating ($\bar{x}$ = 1.86). The inference drawn from this is that, undergraduates use social media platforms tools to connect with other classroom mates, track a word or phrase, attend lectures remotely, learn personally, find scientific research papers, create apps, provide direct communication with instructors, brainstorm and share knowledge among others.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that the undergraduates in the selected universities in Ogun state have knowledge of social media and they make use of them. Also many of these students use the sites for the purpose of group discussions and tutorials, maintaining social contacts with friends/relatives and they also use them for sourcing current materials for examinations and tests. However, it was discovered that many of the students spend lots of time visiting the social media platforms. No wonder, a significant percentage of the students claimed that using social media reduces the time they spend studying, and some are distracted in the classroom.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations were made:

- The students should be sensitized on the purposive use of social media for their education.
- Students should be aware that overindulgence in social media is addictive and time wasting hence exercising self-control as early as possible.
- Time-off software should be installed to control social media use by students.
- Parents can also advice and monitor their wards especially teens to limit the time they spend on social networking. They should rather use those hours to read other academic books that will help to improve their knowledge.
- Lecturers should help the students to make meaningful use of social networking sites by incorporating them into their lessons.
- Students should be advised on the dangers of getting addicted to social networking

References

Adebayo, O. A. (2015). Awareness and usage of social networking sites by students of library and information science: The case of federal polytechnic, Offa, Nigeria. *Information and Knowledge Management*, *5*(12), 116–121

Ahmed, I. and Qazi, F. T. (2011). A look out for academic impacts of social networking sites (SNSs): A student based perspective. *African Journal of business management*, *5*(12), 5022–5031

Balaban-Sali, J. (2012). New media literacies of Communication students. *Contemporary Educational Technology*, *3*(4), 265–277.

Chen, R., & Sakamoto, Y. (2013). Perspective matters: Sharing of crisis information in social media. *Proceedings of the Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* 2033–2041.

Flad, K. (2010). The influence of social networking participation on student academic performance across gender lines. *Counsellor Education Master's thesis*. Paper 31: 1–58 Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/edc_theses/31

Lewis, B. K. (2009). Social media and strategic communication: Attitudes and perceptions among college students. *Public Relations Journal*, *4*, 1-23.

Ma, W. K. & Chan, A. (2014). Knowledge sharing and social media: Altruism, perceived online attachment motivation, and perceived online relationship commitment. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *39*, 51–58. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.06.015

Mehmood, S. and Taswir, T. (2013). The effects of social networking sites on the academic performance of students in college of applied science, Nizwa, Oman. *International Journal of Arts and Commerce*, *2*(1), 111–123

Mozee, S. (2013). The Impact of social media use on academic performance at one urban university: A pilot study, urban education: *Online Journal of Rural and Urban Research*, *2*(1), 1–10.

Pempek, T. A., Yermolayeva, Y. A., & Calvert, S. L. (2009). College students' social networking experiences on Facebook. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 30*(3), 227–238. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2008.12.010

Quan-Haase, A., & Young, A. L. (2010). Uses and gratifications of social media: A comparison of Facebook and instant messaging. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society, 30*(5), 350–361. https://doi.org/10.1177/0270467610380009

Rubina, B. and Shakeel, A.K. (2012). Application of social media in marketing of library and information services: A case study from Pakistan. *Webology, 9*(1), Article 93. Retrieved from http://www.webology.org/2012/v9n1/a93.htm

Sponcil, M., & Gitimu, P. (2013). Use of social media by college students: Relationship to communication and self-concept. *Journal of Technology Research*, *4*, 1–14.

Trend, D. (2010). *The end of reading: From Gutenberg to Grand Theft Auto*. New York: Peter Lang.

Yoo, S. J., & Kim, S. (2013). How and why college students use Web 2.0 applications: The role of social media in formal and informal learning. *International Journal of Web Based Communities*, *9*(2), 174–187. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJWBC.2013.053242

Corresponding author: Olubunmi Adekonojo
Contact email: bunmiade16@gmail.com

Women in Film Time: Forty Years of the *Alien* Series (1979–2019)

Susan George, University of Delhi, India.

Abstract

Cultural theorists have had much to read into the *Alien* science fiction film series, with assessments that commonly focus on a central female 'heroine,' cast in narratives that hinge on themes of motherhood, female monstrosity, birth/death metaphors, empire, colony, capitalism, and so on. The films' overarching concerns with the paradoxes of nature, culture, body and external materiality, lead us to concur with Stephen Mulhall's conclusion that these concerns revolve around the issue of "the relation of human identity to embodiment". This paper uses these cultural readings as an entry point for a tangential study of the *Alien* films centring on the subject of time. Spanning the entire series of four original films and two recent prequels, this essay questions whether the *Alien* series makes that cerebral effort to investigate the operations of "the feminine" through the space of horror/adventure/science fiction, and whether the films also produce any deliberate comment on either the lived experience of women's time in these genres, or of film time in these genres as perceived by the female viewer.

Keywords: Alien, SF, time, feminine, film

Alien Films that Philosophise

Ridley Scott's 1979 S/F-horror film *Alien* spawned not only a remarkable forty-year cinema obsession that has resulted in six specific franchise sequels and prequels till date, but also a considerable amount of scholarly interest around the series. The film's lasting impression on 1980's film studies and cultural scholarship in general is matched perhaps only by its generic companion, *Blade Runner* (1982). The sheer volume, breadth and depth of the *Alien* series allows us a wider field of speculation: including Scott's original, the series consists of James Cameron's adventure-war film *Aliens* (1986), David Fincher's brooding psychological thriller *ALIEN³* (1992), Jean-Pierre Jeunet's dark fantasy *Alien Resurrection* (1997) and two recent prequels by Scott, *Prometheus* (2012) and *Alien: Covenant* (2017). The four original films follow the life of a female central character, Lt. Ellen Ripley, as she participates in a series of futuristic events that revolve around 21st century space colonisation and monstrous alien encounters, while the prequels return to a time before Ripley to understand how the organic matter that later becomes the race of aliens, particular to the franchise, came into contact with humans in the first place. My interest in this essay is to think about how time is constructed as a part of the series' narratives, as a thematic focus as well as, from outside, a factor in the longevity of its popularity and production. A specific interest herein is in positing the *Alien* series as a meditation on the oft-discussed subject of women's time.

In the original 1979 *Alien*, a crew aboard a space trading company ship (the Nostromo) are awakened from their cryo-sleep to find their journey automatically diverted to a planet named LV246. Here an alien parasite awaits them with a massive silo of unhatched eggs. The horror of the film (and arguably, the memorable set-piece for its sequels) kicks in with the parasite's penetration of and attachment to a male crewmember, his violent 'pregnancy' and birthing, leading to the presence of the alien on-board. The action revolves around the crew's concerted efforts to kill it while the ship's resident android Ash attempts to preserve it even at the cost of the crew's lives. After a prolonged battle the heroine Ripley gets away in an escape pod with her cat, only to find the alien on board with her. She blasts it into outer space and returns to cryo-sleep in the pod. This general frame of events is repetitively represented in the following sequels; each beginning where the last left off with Ripley asleep in her cryo-pod. In 1986's *Aliens*, Ripley's pod is discovered 57 years later, and she is taken as consultant on board a special assignment to investigate violent events on LV246, where a human colony now resides. The alien species on the planet has multiplied with the presence of an Alien Queen, and subsequently annihilated the human population, all except for a girl child named Newt. Together with the assigned marines, Ripley must guard Newt and escape the planet. Eventually only Ripley, her love-interest Hicks, Newt and the android Bishop escape to safety in their pod. In the next decade's *ALIEN³* this pod crashes upon Planet Fiorina 161, a maximum-security penal colony for "YY-chromosomal" hard criminals. An alien egg on-board has hatched and killed Ripley's co-passengers while impregnating her with an alien queen embryo. The pregnant Ripley must battle both the hyper-masculinity of the planet's inhabitants as well as the alien infestation she has brought amongst them. Since she is carrying the alien queen, Ripley's suicide must end the action of this instalment, and she must be cloned anew 200 years later for *Alien Resurrection* (1997). Ripley's clone is developed by scientists to reproduce the 'prized' alien species for defence use. A fourth-generation alien is thus born half-human, while Ripley's new avatar is half-alien. Ripley 2.0 must help a crew of space-pirates rid the facility of the rampaging alien clones as well as the fourth generation humanoid one before they crash land and find themselves safely upon Earth.

We might, as Stephen Mulhall (2002) does, organize the entire conflict of the series around the issues of nature versus culture, nature versus science, or nature versus industry. Mulhall goes as far as to claim that the *Alien* films, because they are discursive exercises themselves, are films that philosophize. A significant proportion of critical analysis centering on the *Alien* series has been marked by feminist enquiry into its themes, provoked not only by the centrality of a female character, but also because images and metaphors in the series are markedly female throughout: the central computer on the Nostromo is named Mother, apart from which the womb-like interior spaces, cryo-sleep pods that "give birth" to their inhabitants at the start of every film, parasitic aliens that make the Host give unnatural births, male mothering/female mothering, egg-laying and the like are the obvious outward images that suggest this. Horror and terror, suspense and action in the films hinge on both the unfamiliarity and repulsion of the excessively female, grotesque images, as well as on the familiar knowledge the audience have of the natural repetitive cycles of birth and death. But does this knowledge only serve to propel the action and reaction in these films or does it provide the series itself with a frame of experience that is different? In this essay, I seek to investigate whether the experience of the female or feminine informs the temporal quality of the series – is the conceptualization and experience of time in any way different in the *Alien* series?

Four Types of Women's Time

The question of time has been a central concern that preoccupies feminist thought in the 20th century and endures in the work of Rita Felski, Sharon Marcus, Elizabeth Grosz and Emily Apter among others in the 21st century. Is the experience of time different for women? What relation does time itself bear with feminine lived experience? How does time figure within the movement of feminist history? What current structures of time must women accept or resist? Do current theoretical notions of time work against women? The *ur*-text among the clamour of responses to these concerns is Julia Kristeva's seminal article "Women's Time" (1981) where she proposes that:

> …[F]emale subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains repetition and eternity from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilizations. On the one hand, there are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality … whose regularity and unison with what is experienced as extrasubjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions and unnameable jouissance. On the other hand, and perhaps as a consequence, there is the massive presence of a monumental temporality, without cleavage or escape, which has so little to do with linear time (which passes) that the very word "temporality" hardly fits: All-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space… The fact that these two types of temporality (cyclical and monumental) are traditionally linked to female subjectivity insofar as the latter is thought of as necessarily maternal should not make us forget that this repetition and this eternity are found to be the fundamental, if not the sole, conceptions of time in numerous civilizations and experiences, particularly mystical ones. (pp. 16–17)

Kristeva's two modalities – cyclical and monumental – go against the contemporary Western notion of time as linear sequence. Against a chronology of time, they present either first, the nature of repetitive time as experienced through gestation and menstruation cycles, birth/death

and other cyclical natural events or second, the gaping maw of incommensurate eternity as emblematized in primitive mother-cult figures that are uncontrollable symbols of excess and infinity. But also, in postmodern thinking we have the notion of time as rupture, or time as new event, a non-linear conceptualization that need not run counter to Kristeva's *4eminine* modalities. In her update to Kristeva's concepts, Rita Felski (2002) proposes four models of time that women respond to – the four 'R's – 'time as redemption, time as regression, time as repetition, and time as rupture' (p. 21). Felski's first two Rs revolve around optimism and nostalgia: to see time as redemptive is to look hopefully towards a redemptive future, whereas to see it as regressive is to look mournfully back at a golden past. The second two Rs evoke more complex reactions: to see time as a Kristevan repetition or as a postmodern rupture/discontinuity could either evoke serenity or terror, according to Felski. In sum we are left with five possible models of time – monumental/eternal, repetition, redemption, regression, and rupture – of which I find the models of the monumental/eternal, repetition and regression could be read as important temporal themes in the *Alien* series.

Susan Sontag claims that S/F films allow us to "participate in the fantasy of living one's own death and more the death of cities, the destruction of humanity itself" (as cited in Byars, 1980, p. 280). She suggests that these films permit us to cope with the simultaneous banality and terror of life and death cycles. Indeed the death of cities and human populations are stock themes in S/F films, where often the disintegration of Earth pushes mankind into the outer reaches of space for living and resources (as in *Alien*, the *Star Trek* series or *Avatar*); where the ruined skylines of modern cities are stock motifs (as in *Blade Runner*, or the *Terminator* series). But if this is a generic norm, then in the *Alien* series we are forced to cope with the horror of a spatio-temporal reality that is somewhat the inverse of big cities, civilization and outer space: the womb-like interior of the maternal body/mothership. This is reflexively acknowledged in the shot of the probe that breaks into the EV Pod carrying Ripley at the start of *Aliens*. It is the same probing camera lens that invades the dark, quiet womb enclosures of the films' spaceships.

> …[F]emale subjectivity as it gives itself up to intuition becomes a problem with respect to a certain conception of time: time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding; time as departure, progression, and arrival – in other words, the time of history. It has already been abundantly demonstrated that this kind of temporality is inherent in the logical and ontological values of any given civilization, that this temporality renders explicit a rupture, an expectation, or an anguish which other temporalities work to conceal. (Kristeva, 1981, p. 17)

Science and technology, capitalism and industry are the markers of a positivistic teleology of human history that is in turn the basis of S/F, but it is these very projects that are endangered by the grotesque female excesses of birth and death in the *Alien* films. Similarly, scientific enquiry and its uses for human industry are thought to be the impetus that draws viewers to S/F in the first place, but it is this human attribute that is negatively portrayed in the series. This moral negativity is most obviously conveyed in the plot outlines of the films, where company or governmental missions and projects inevitably come to ruin or are the reasons for tragic action. Always in S/F the hopeful look towards a redemptive future propels the interest of the viewer or the movement of a film's action, but this hope that a new project, a new mission, a radical turn in the page of history will solve humankind's troubles ends in disappointment here. I find that in this way the redemptive model in S/F time is closely associated with the model of rupture. After all, it is a conventionally male heroic impulse that moves positively in the

direction of the new and the transformed that is symbolized in the futuristically designed spaceship hurtling light years towards its unknown destination in space-time. Felski says feminist scholars have long argued against using crisis as an organizing metaphor; questioning what Cornelia Klinger calls the "futile gesture of heroic rupture" (as cited in Felski, 2002, p. 21) they suspect that the fetish for the new originates in an oedipal tendency to see the past as a foe to be vanquished. Felski sees repetition as the enemy in modernity: "It is a sign of dull compulsion, grey routine, the oppressive regimen of natural or man-made cycles. It threatens the existential dream of authentic self-creation by yoking the self to a preordained pattern" (2002, p. 25).

If we take this "existential dream of authentic self-creation" (the goal of modern artistic or scientific creation?) to be the objective of the futile heroic gesture above discussed, we understand why the *Alien* series' cyclical events and insistence on the feminine betray the goal of the conventional S/F narrative; a goal as primitive as S/F's prototypical overreachers, Prometheus and Frankenstein. The Prometheus myth and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) (subtitled 'The Modern Prometheus') are both proto-S/F narratives of unnatural male mothering, of creation that goes against the eternal human feminine role and consequentially merits punishment. Perhaps then, the *Alien* films are not so unique in their conclusions.

The *Alien* films' attitude towards the past is largely in tune with Felski's regressive temporal model. There is undoubtedly a yearning towards the Earthly past and the quiet normalcy of family and society that Ripley and her crew cannot have in space. This is signified most poignantly by the reference to a daughter that Ripley has left behind on Earth in *Aliens*. This daughter is given no mention in *Alien* unless we read her cat Stanley as a displaced daughter-figure, but in the sequel she is an important device to set up Ripley's desire for a family again. (It could even be argued that it is the viewer's desire to fix Ripley within a family role as a mother/sexual being that maintains some level of our engagement with the films). The backward glance is also conveyed in the melancholic last shot of *Alien Resurrection*, when Ripley 2.0 and the android Call arrive on an Earth they have never actually seen, sit looking over a ruined Paris skyline, and instantly recognise it and perceive their loss. For Felski (2002) the lost preoedipal mother is the locus of this regressive model, and the civilising process is an alienation from the feminine, which is just what the action of *Alien* suggests. It is ironic, therefore, that a series of films that hark back to a lost maternal core must convey their horror element by making a monstrosity of mothering.

Monstrous and Other Mothers

Several scholars have noted that the *Alien* series locates the monstrous-feminine within the maternal principle. Barbara Creed lists this mother-monster as being everywhere in Alien:

> She is there in the text's scenarios of the primal scene of birth and death; she is there in her many guises as the treacherous mother, the oral sadistic mother, the mother as the primordial abyss; and she is there in the film's images of blood, of the all-devouring vagina, the toothed vagina, the vagina as Pandora's box; and finally she is there in the chameleon figure of the Alien, the monster as fetish-object of and for the mother. But it is the archaic mother, the reproductive/generative mother, who haunts the mise-en-scène. (Creed, 1990, p. 128)

The *Alien* series' mother figures are many and of many kinds: protective and possessive but also violent and destructive to their own (like the Nostromo's Mother), a product of science and culture (like Dr Shaw or the android Call or Ripley 2.0) or unnatural mothers (like the impregnated men). They are also either tiny like Dr Shaw or immeasurably massive like the hulking Alien Queen whose egg sac stretches out like a vast membranous dome from which Ripley and Newt recoil in horror in *Aliens*. The massiveness of the Alien Queen, her egg sac and her innumerable eggs (just a few of the thousands that viewers have seen from the first film to the last) suggest the incomprehensible mass of the feminine eternal – there will always and have always been mothers, just as the all-mother of myth herself is beyond time and the measure of space. From this scheme of things we might tend to disqualify the mechanical Mother of Nostromo, whose functioning is outside of human morality, meriting her the title of "Bitch" from a frustrated Ripley. But in *Aliens*, Ripley will repeat this phrase at the Alien Queen while trying to save Newt, shouting the now infamous "Stay away from her, you bitch!", implicating both Mother and the Queen in a kind of monstrous fellowship that is unacceptable to Ripley's evaluation – either because it is immoral or because it not human… or because to be immoral *is* to be inhuman.

The films show a variety and hierarchisation in the types of living beings they present. There are in this respect three types of beings in the *Alien* series – humans, aliens and androids (not counting the human-alien hybrids that form later). The latter two are humanoid in that they are the unnatural offspring of human creation or hosting, Frankenstein-like monstrosities that originate from humans but are portrayed as questionable on the scale of what it means to really be human. Stanley Cavell (1979) claims that "only what is human can be inhuman"; perhaps then only the human can be monstrous. With this syllogism he goes on to say that only humans can feel horror and perhaps horror is therefore "the perception of the precariousness of human identity" (as cited in Mulhall, 2002, p. 17). It can be said that in the *Alien* films to be human is to be moral. It is the android Ash's lack of morality in the first film that demarcates him and all androids as taboo and untrustworthy for Ripley. After Ash's betrayal of the Nostromo crew, she is hard pressed to trust the next android she encounters in *Aliens*, Bishop. Bishop and the female android Call of *Resurrection* must both make moral choices in favour of humans and against the company/government wiring in order to be found 'acceptable' in Ripley's sight. On the theme of humanoid creations, *Resurrection* takes up the issue of cloning as well, dwelling on the failings of the project and ultimately exposing the limits of the franchise itself.

Cloning is an apt metaphor for the larger temporal framework of the series' production. The endurance and success of the franchise finds its embodiment in the recurring character of Ripley. Fused together in her character are both the cyclical quality of return and the eternal quality of persistence. Even though director David Fincher, in his characteristic search for closure, kills off Ripley in *ALIEN³*, she is cloned and regenerated for a fourth appearance in *Alien Resurrection*. Her persistence is not only a feature of the script, but an external imposition of the presence of Sigourney Weaver as a fixture of the franchise that producers could never quite shake off. (Her vice-like grip over the films' writers and directors and their struggle to keep her on against the wishes of studio bosses is well-documented.) It is interesting to note that, if it were not for the effects of excessive pre-release marketing, one might have taken John Hurt to be the central hero of *Alien*. Stephen Mulhall describes how the opening shots of the Nostromo's crew waking up focus on him, and combined with the instant recognisability of his face and name, it comes as a surprise to the viewer when he is the first character to die in the action. It is not only Ripley who alone endures, but so does her character type: the sterile, celibate mother-figure of the scientific world who resists sexuality both in her choices and her

physical image (Ripley's physical representation as an aggressive, gun-toting heroine has been popularly christened 'Fembo'). Even in his 2012 prequel *Prometheus*, Ridley Scott splits the Ripley-type metaphorically into two separate characters: the tender but sterile Dr Shaw and the aggressive, efficient Vickers. Shaw alone survives the film but only as a ghostly acousmatic voice and cadaver in *Alien: Covenant*, the next film.

One notices a paradox here – that of the depiction of Ripley as both maternal and sterile. This paradox is kept alive in the films by allowing Ripley to 'mother' other characters, protecting her own kind, but at the same time ensuring that she remains fiercely independent and somewhat celibate. Her alter-ego of the Alien Queen provides a fecund, over-reproducing foil against which to analyse Ripley's sterility. While in *Alien* she is untouchably frigid, in *Aliens* Ripley engages in some level of romantic attachment with a male hero-character, Hicks, and together they metaphorically adopt and protect their 'child', the survivor Newt. When this happy trio is destroyed at the start of *ALIEN³*, Ripley starts over as a sexual being: first because she is impregnated with an Alien Queen embryo growing inside her, our/her greatest fear throughout. In a beautiful but exquisitely brief flash of images in his title sequence, Fincher spells out Ripley's doom even before the film begins, but also manages with this flashing brevity to deny the viewer a lasting, memorable image of Ripley's alien impregnation. To me, this mystery almost turns religious, like an immaculate conception, foreshadowing the film's Christian overtones. Unaware of her conception, Ripley becomes the object of desire in the all-male prison camp of Fiorina 616 and is sexually involved with Clemens, the prison medic, before he is killed. In *Resurrection* we encounter a new Ripley, freed of her previous sterility and now the mother of an alien race; she is also an aggressively sexual being because her character has fused with that of the Alien Queen, physically as well as mentally. In *Prometheus*, the duo of female characters, Dr Shaw and Vickers, deviate somewhat from the model Ripley sets up. Dr Shaw, like Ripley, does become pregnant with alien offspring, but by an inversion of events she conceives 'naturally' through intercourse with her infected partner, but delivers 'unnaturally' by conducting a robotic Caesarian section upon herself. Shaw's flawed conception and delivery in *Prometheus* set us up again for the theme of maternal disappointment and horror, following which we find her cadaver being used as genetic raw material (an extreme form of mothering) for the android David's experiments in *Covenant*. In Shaw's absence from *Alien: Covenant*, the role of sterile woman is transferred to a new character: Daniels, who is widowed by and from the initial few moments of action in the film.

Repeating Ripley/Eternal Ripley

The persistent all-mother figures of Ripley and the Alien Queen often mirror and parallel each other until they finally fuse in the cloning experiments of *Resurrection*. What is important is that the films, though not linked by a unified directorial vision, nonetheless create a movement of progress, a process of development of Ripley's character. She must go from sterile Fembo to pseudo-mother to the nurturing, protective biological mother of the last two films. However, it is as if director Jeunet inscribed his own critique of the franchise into the concerns of the last film. In resurrecting a new Ripley and Queen for a fourth instalment, Jeunet exhausts the creative potential of the two beings, both as mothers and as successful film characters. The new Ripley is not half as engaging as the old and some might balk at the thought of a fifth sequel starring her. In a sense, the real-world bounded-ness of an actresses' career comes to impact the 200-year span of her character. I think this highlights the contradiction that even while a film franchise can make a female character eternal, it cannot undo the irreversible ageing of its female star, or the distaste that is conventionally tied with the ageing female body in

commercial cinema. Furthermore, I would suggest that the dogged reappearance of Sigourney Weaver in the franchise began to erode its popularity by creating a sense of cyclical redundancy, a thirst for something or someone new. The Ripley character might transcend the time of the franchise but the immanence of the female body ties the actress down.

> Repetition is linked to the everyday, and the everyday to woman. For feminists, this connection can be a problem or a source of strength. Simone de Beauvoir, for example, laments the fact that women are mired in the repetitive tasks of everyday life. "Woman," she writes, "clings to routine; time has for her no element of novelty, it is not a creative flow; because she is doomed to repetition, she sees in the future only a duplication of the past." Here, repetition is a sign of women's association with immanence rather than transcendence. Unable to create or invent, she remains trapped in the deadly grip of cyclical time. (Felski, 2002, p. 25)

After presenting the core argument of this paper to a postgraduate class, one student (who admitted she had not seen the films) complained that the repetitive structure of the franchise's plot sounded "boring". Indeed, if summed up in five minutes it does sound like a banal cycle, the routine quality of which we abhor as feminine, everyday and restrictive in its creative possibilities. It is this abhorrence that marks the male attitude both as audience and as characters within the films. As much as the films' overarching themes might seem to highlight the feminine and create space for it within the S/F genre, the inner victimizations of its women characters run another trajectory. Yes, Ripley does manage always to survive death, but apart from the combative action-figure role, she is allowed a very restricted freedom of speech in the series. Many scholars have pointed out the regressively patriarchal quality of Ripley's verbal output, from her operation within male mechanical work ethics to her co-option within the patriarchal language of derogation when she uses the term "bitch".

Verbal excess and melodrama have always been associated with the feminine in psychoanalysis and cinema history. There is only a fine line between the words 'histrionics' and hysteria, and in modern psychoanalysis, hysteria has always been associated with the feminine. Kristeva says that the "obsessional time" of the hysteric who suffers from reminiscences correlates more to the cyclical and monumental modalities (Kristeva, 1981, p. 17). For her, the hysteric is pointedly outside of linear time and all its rules – the syntax of language and sequence of history. It has often been argued that the silencing of the hysteric is the normative fate of women in narrative, and this is no different in the plotlines of the *Alien* films. In the second and third instalments, there is heavy emphasis on Ripley's verbal accounts of events now past and their repeated discrediting by the Company/government. The only sanctioned version of the films' history is the product of official communication and computer logs, company records and official statements. So, when Ripley produces a testimony of events in *Aliens*, she is called crazy and false. Later in the film, company officer Brooks physicalizes this silencing abuse by shutting her and Newt in a sound-proof lab to die, where their shouts for help cannot be heard. By the time of *ALIEN³*, Ripley has internalized the official response to her spoken accounts and is wary of producing information. She has to constantly be asked, prodded for information and is loath to provide because she knows she will be called crazy again. There is apparently no space in official history and time records for the truth statements of the lingering female witness figure. This might be why little Newt's response to events is usually only a scream.

This conscription makes apparent the conflict between female and male subjectivity that the films carry out. The denial and resistance of the feminine that is systematic to the capitalist

science and industry that creates *Alien*'s human world is the root of its repeated failure to conquer space. Of course, that is what we expect science fiction films to do: like *Star Trek*, to go where no man has gone before. But wherever the crews of these films go, they encounter death, defeat and escape. This could suggest that the overarching view of the franchise is that the incommensurate mass of space and time is not something that can be accessed if we deny the symbolic familiar of eternity, the Mother.

In his 2010 lecture on eternity and time, Alain Badiou proposes several possible philosophical models by which to access eternity, of which the first model is that of the mystical experience. I liken this mystical point in time that Badiou describes to the moment of birth/creation. For Badiou, this experience is the possibility to recognise an immediate relationship between the pure present and eternity, in which we recognise eternity in the pure present itself. At this moment, there is a fusion of two levels, like the presence of God in the immediate present – a moment often mythologized in religion as either annunciation (fusion of human and divine) or the birth of monstrosity. (Kristeva too points at the annunciation of the Virgin Mary as typical of this.) For Badiou the creation of this moment is the creation of new time, a moment of absolute freedom in which we glimpse Truth and experience an interruption of the dictatorship of the outside/world. The moment something is created, the birth of the thing is the birth of something eternal, he says (as cited in EGS Video Lectures, 38:01). In Badiou's vision, the modalities of the eternal and rupture are fused at the moment of birth.

It would seem, then, that in the *Alien* series, the moment of birth is proffered as a replacement for the masculine heroic impulse of the S/F film. The multiple birth sequences repeatedly offer a glimpse of eternity, but by turning these births monstrous in the viewer's eyes, we and the characters are denied that glimpse, denied that participation in a moment of absolute possibility, a moment of total creation. Ripley herself, though implicated within this frame, will repeatedly turn away too.

In *ALIEN3*, in fact, David Fincher suffuses a religious tone to the overall narrative itself, not only with the violent conception scene of the title sequence that I have already discussed, but also by portraying a radical Christian sect within the penal colony of Fiorina 161 that is waiting for its apocalypse and redemption, but yet fail to recognize the Mother Mary-like character of Ripley when she comes amongst them. Fincher's narrative arc being already closed by our foreknowledge of Ripley's death, we are forced to concentrate on the significance of redundancy and banality as characters live and die before us and an elaborate plan is laid out to trap and kill the intruding alien. The elaboration of the plan and its execution in fact mirror the drawing out of the same events film after film but tellingly highlight the brevity of the opening sequence where the real "action" took place. The prison's pastor-figure Dillon reminds us, as he prays over the interment of Hicks and Newt, that "within each seed there is the promise of a flower; within each death, no matter how small, there is always a new life, a new beginning". As Ripley plunges into the fire at her death, we glimpse the Alien Queen bursting forth from her but then both vanish in the engulfing flames. Still, we know from Dillon's reminder that the two life-forms will find renewal in a fourth instalment, and once again we will be given the chance to participate in the possibilities of the eternal.

References

Alcalá, C. (1996). Masochism and representation in modern horror: The case of "ALIEN3". *Atlantis, 18*(1/2), 62–73. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/41054814

Byars, J., Jeff Gould, Fitting, P., Newton, J., Tony Safford, Clayton Lee, . . . M. A. (1980). Symposium on "Alien" (Un Symposium sur "Alien"). *Science Fiction Studies, 7*(3), 278–304. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/4239357

Creed, B. (1990) Alien and the monstrous-feminine. In A. Kuhn (Ed.), *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema* (pp. 128–144). London, Verso.

EGS Video Lectures. (2011, May 3). *Alain Badiou. Eternity in time. 2010*. Retrieved from http://youtu.be/k5wsT9fF9AM

Felski, R. (2000). *Doing time: Feminist theory and postmodern culture*. New York, NYU.

Felski, R. (2002). Telling time in Feminist Theory. *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature, 21*(1), 21–28. https://doi.org/10.2307/4149213

Fincher, D., Swerdlow, E., Carroll, G., Giler, D., Hill, W., Ferguson, L., Weaver, S., ... Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, Inc. (2003). *Alien 3*. Beverly Hills, Calif: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment.

Giler, D., Hill, W. & Scott, R. (Producers) & Scott, R. (Director) (2012) *Prometheus* [Motion Picture]. United States. Scott Free Productions, Brandywine Productions & Dune Entertainment.

Hurd, G. A. (Producer), & Cameron, J. (Director). (1986). *Aliens* [Motion Picture]. United States. Twentieth Century Fox.

Jeunet, Jean-Pierre. *Alien Resurrection*. (109 min.) 20th Century Fox: 1997.

Kristeva, J., Jardine, A., & Blake, H. (1981). Women's time. *Signs, 7*(1), 13–35. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173503

Mulhall, S. (2002). *On Film*. London: Routledge.

Rizzo, T. (2004). The *Alien* series: A Deleuzian Perspective. *Women*, *15*(3), 330–344. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/6957404042000291454

Scobie, S. (1993). What's the story, mother?: The mourning of the Alien. *Science Fiction Studies, 20*(1), 80–93. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/4240216

Scott, R., Giler, D., Hill, W., O'Bannon, D., & Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation. (1979). *Alien*. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox.

Zwinger, L. (1992). "Blood relations: Feminist theory meets the uncanny Alien bug mother." *Hypatia*, *7*(2), 74–90. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1992.tb00886.x

Corresponding Author: Susan George
Contact Email: sgeorge@jmc.du.ac.in

A Multimodal Discourse Study of some Online Campaign Cartoons of Nigeria's 2015 Presidential Election

C. F. Akpati, Samuel Adegboyega University, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper analyses different patterns of verbal and nonverbal meaning-making strategies in a variety of political campaign cartoons produced during the March 2015 general elections in Nigeria. The data for the study comprises six campaign cartoons selected from the *Nairaland* online community, an Internet forum created by Nigerian Internet entrepreneur Oluwaseun Temitope Osewa in 2005. Furthermore, it takes into account the cartoons' linguistic and extra-linguistic components while developing a context within which to define their pragmatic potential. The data largely concern the two major political parties in Nigeria (All Progressives Congress and People's Democratic Party). Data were analysed using Machin and Mayr's (2012) multimodal critical discourse analysis; this careful scrutiny revealed the manifold levels of exaggeration, satire and mockery that parties employ in their quest for visibility, acceptance and success.

Keywords: Nigeria, elections, political cartoons, political parties, multimodal, critical discourse

Introduction

In an open society with multiple political parties, competition is compulsory if the vigour of its democratic institutions is to be sustained. Most political parties try to outclass or outwit one another by employing different strategies to win the heart of the electorates and present their candidates in a positive light. Opeibi (2009, p.141) also explains that politicians and political actors believe that winning people's support is a very serious business and must be done with high sense of dexterity and deftness.

Strategies for gaining people's support were on full display in Nigeria's 2015 general elections. These elections saw the two dominant parties (APC and PDP) skilfully displace other parties by way of their financial clout and popular support. Prior to the election, most Nigerians were yearning for change; they wanted a new government. The build-up to the election was characterised by high expectations, propaganda and uncertainty regarding the continued unity of Nigeria. Assassinations of political opponents were common, at both federal and state levels. These two political parties clinched virtually all of the elective offices in the country as a result of their substantial financial resources, inventively used to convince voters to embrace their platforms. The major aim of political parties is to win elections and, accordingly, they embark on political campaigns that include rallies, debates, interviews and advertisements (Opeibi, 2009). Given the nature of such campaigns, language, with its subtle semantic features, rhetorical levels and modes of presentation plays an important role in the success or failure of a party's message.

A party's ideological perspectives are generally conveyed to the electorate through linguistic and non-linguistic resources (Opeibi, 2009, p.141). Given their linguistic and non-linguistic properties, cartoons have proven to be crucial instruments in a party's attainment of electoral success. Additionally, the public have made their own contributions by representing the two major presidential candidates (of the APC and the PDP) and some of their chieftains in satirical caricatures.

This paper attempts to provide insights on the manner in which cartoons project the ideologies of Nigerian candidates and their parties during their campaigns in the 2015 Nigerian elections. Also, it focuses on the various visual modes and linguistic features that betray discourse strategies, paying special attention to the way in which they play into the Nigerian socio-political environment.

Stating the Problem

Over the recent years, political cartoons have received growing attention from scholars, and their analyses have focused mainly on social and political issues. For instance, Walker (2003) has examined, in great detail, cartoons as a form of political communication, while Conners (2005) completed a detailed survey of the political cartoon campaigns of the 2004 U.S. presidential election. Udoakah (2006) studied political cartoon readership in Nigeria; Mazid (2008) investigated the political cartoon construction of George, W. Bush and Osama Bin Laden; Tsakona (2009) analysed language and image interaction in cartoons and expatiated on the use of verbal and non-verbal language devices like contradiction, exaggeration and metaphor, and Ekpenyong and Bisong (2012) examined the language of Nigerian political cartoons selected from tabloids in run-up to the 2003 general elections.

Despite a plethora of studies on political cartoons, attention has not yet been given to the study of visual modes, linguistic features and ideologies in Nigerian campaign cartoons. Therefore, it is against this background that this study is carried out in order to discuss the multimodalities used in the 2015 presidential election campaign cartoons and their underlying ideologies.

Cartoon

A cartoon is a drawing and a symbol that make a satirical, witty, or humorous point (Lee & Goguen, 2003). It is mainly used by cartoonists to mock or abuse individuals, organisations or even institutions. Most cartoonists portray societies either by mocking them or criticising them. Bitner (2003, p. 306) defines cartoon as "comic strip characters that represent observable characters in a society". Osho (2008, p. 238) explained that cartoons are messages meant to cause laughter, messages that are humorous in representation. Sani (2004, p. 79) defined cartoons as

> "…pictorial representations portray the real-life events through comparison into condensed graphical form that can only be understood and interpreted by the public when they map on the visual depictions contained in the cartoons with the real-life events and this is the cognitive process through which metaphors convey meanings".

According to Bitner (2003), cartoons are of two types: single panel and panel cartoons. The first type is a frame that contains only one cartoon. The second type is also a frame that contains two or more cartoons. Osho (2008, p. 243) also identified six different categories of cartoons. These are:

- General interest cartoons (these forms of cartoons represent public issues that generate public comments. They leave the readers guessing, thereby allowing them to deduce the message from the image represented).
- Economic/Trade cartoons (these are cartoons that are used to emphasise trade and commerce as well as economic issues).
- Sociological/Environmental cartoons (these are cartoons that portray different human endeavours or domains such as health, sport, education etc.)
- Social cartoons (these forms of cartoons address issues like marriage, parties etc.)
- Gag cartoons (used mainly for over and sometimes under-statements. They are equally used for brainstorming).
- Political cartoons (these mainly represent different political parties and politicians who are seeking government office).

Political Cartoons

The origin of modern political cartoons can be traced to the 16th century. Cartoons were further developed with the use of caricature in Britain in the 1800's. Political cartoons sometimes use wild imagination, exaggeration and great sense of humour in narrating or depicting things that appear to be real or factual. The political cartoon, according to Sani, Naab and Aziato (2014) "is a specific genre of political reporting because they are pictorial representations which depict political and social issues and events, as well as the parties involved, in an immediate and condensed form". Marin-Arrese (2015) asserts that it is a genre of discourse and communication that combines caricature, humour and satire in the pictorial representation of public or political figures and/or current socio-political events, its evaluative dimension being the expression of the cartoonist's critical stance.

This kind of cartoon is mainly an artistic vehicle characterised by both metaphorical and satirical language. It usually points out and explains the problems, issues and discrepancies inherent to a specific political situation. It is also used as commentary on politics, politicians and political events in a country, most especially during elections.

Political cartoons possess linguistic features that are used for constructing ideologies and social identities, reflecting real life events in a society's political arena (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999 [cited in Sani *et al.* (2004)]). Because they are used for comic relief, all the various forms of cartoons perform similar functions. As per Osho (2008, p.238-239), these include: informing, educating, entertaining, amusing, disseminating information in an amusing way, recording of an event in a memorable manner, and discussing serious national issues and reflecting current issues through the images of its apposite personalities.

English Language and Politics in Nigeria

The English language was introduced into the linguistic environment of the Nigerian nation as a result of early trade between Europeans and West African sub-regions, while the slave trade, missionary activities and colonialism contributed to its spread (Opeibi, 2009, p. 69). Today in Nigeria, English has been domesticated and nativised. Bamgbose (1995, p. 26) is of the view that English has been pidginised, nativised, acculturated and twisted in order to express unaccustomed concepts and modes of interaction (cited in Opeibi, 2009, p. 71). In other words, it has been made to perform unaccustomed functions in order to fit into new cultural environments. Some of the functions, as outlined by Opeibi (2009, p.70), include:

a) as language of formal education
b) as lingua franca in a multi-ethnic and multi-lingua Nigerian nation.
c) as language of the mass media
d) to memorialise legal documents and proceedings in Nigeria's superior courts
e) as language of written literature
f) as language of political activities.

Educated Nigerians use English to share their experiences and express themselves in political campaign rallies. The use of English in political rallies in Nigeria can also be traced to the time of independence, especially among the educated. The development of English in the Nigerian socio-political context is also a result of politics and political activities in Nigeria (Opeibi, 2009, p.72). According to Lasswell (1960), politics is mainly rooted on "who gets what", "when and how". To a large extent this explains how values and individual interests are promoted through political power and influence. Ayoade (1997, p.2) describes politics as that which defines the government; the government defines the people, while the people at the final stage define the politics of the state. Also, the process of choosing who occupies a political office is usually done through disagreement among members of a given political party, discussion, lobbying, fighting, campaigning and voting. For one to be successful in politics, he/she must master what is termed "language of politics". This involves versatility in communication. Communication in this sense explains both verbal and nonverbal features. The verbal deals basically with the oral and written forms of expressions while the nonverbal focuses on gestures, that is, body language, facial expressions, and so on. in politics, language is a strong device for communication as it carries many or different shades of meaning. It is the tool of political discourse (Aduradola & Ojukwu, 2013). They are used in campaigns by political aspirants to entertain, persuade the electorates and inform them of their programmes. A good candidate chooses his/her words carefully based on their target audience.

A political campaign is an organised effort that seeks to influence the decision-making process within a specific group or environment. It can also be viewed as the mobilisation of forces either by an organisation or individuals to influence others in order to effect an identified and desired change (Aduradola & Ojukwu, 2013). Ademilokun (2015, p. 2) also considered a political campaign as the total and collective efforts of politicians to present themselves favourably to the public for acceptance and support. It is characterised and sometimes shaped by rhetoric, persuasion, and propaganda ad slogans. According to Harris (1979, p. 58), rhetoric in politics foregrounds an individual or the individual's beliefs in a good light. This is in line with George Orwell's view (in his 1946 essay *Politics and the English Language*) that "Political language... is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind". Rhetoric is a process of speaking to people and using language persuasively to convince them. Persuasion is an art in which a convincing argument is presented to appeal to a certain judgment so as to achieve desired goals. Most politicians adopt persuasion to cajole the electorates to vote for them and their political parties. In order to achieve this, they present themselves as the only capable individuals that can do the job. Propaganda is another important language of politics. Jacque (1962) maintains that propaganda is a deliberate action or opinion used by a group of persons with the intention of changing the opinions or actions of others through psychological manipulation. Lastly, slogan is a catchy phrase that usually accompanies political party logo that captures the ideology of a political party with the aim of influencing or changing the opinions of the electorates.

The fact is that language and politics have played a great part in strengthening democratic processes. Both contribute to the process of engaging the people and convincing them during campaigns. In order to interact and convince people, most especially during campaigns, linguistic and non linguistic communicative strategies or features are very important language tools and are usually employed.

Methodology

The data for this study were sourced from the Internet. The data were selected from www.*Nairaland*.com. A total number of six cartoons were selected for both the APC and PDP. This is because cartoons are embellished with different non verbal modes and linguistic features which are meaning making strategies in communication. The data were analysed using Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), which combines both visual and linguistic features.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Machin and Mayr's (2012) Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis. Machin and Mayr (2012, p. 9) opined that MCDA explains the meaning relationship between words and semiotic resources like images, diagrams, photographs and colours. Machin and Mayr further posit that MCDA also pays close attention to linguistic features such as lexical choices, transitivity, modality and non linguistic features like iconography (poses, objects, settings), attributes, salience (potent cultural items, foregrounding, colour tone focus), gaze, pose, light, shadow and colour saturation. Machin and Mayr (2012, p. 9) also add that in using MCDA as an analytical framework for any discourse analysis, focus is usually on images, photographs, diagrams and graphics and explaining how they create meaning.
Machin and Mayr (2012) further explained that the task of a multimodal critical discourse analyst is to identify and analyse semiotic choices used by speakers or authors and explain how these choices depict certain ideas, identities and values. Also, Machin (2013) added that the

most significant thing in MCDA is the way different kinds of semiotic modes are used by speakers to express or communicate the scripts of discourses. It allows room for an extensive explanation of meanings in texts with both visuals and linguistic features.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The selected data for this study are six 2015 presidential election political campaign cartoons on www.*Nairaland*.com. The political actors involved in the cartoons are the two major political parties (APC and PDP) presidential candidates and their party chieftains.

Cartoon 1:

The two represented individuals in this cartoon are Jonathan Goodluck, the former president of Nigeria, and his vice Namadi Sambo. The two politicians are presented in a small lorry with Jonathan Goodluck driving it on a grounded lorry while Sambo is seen holding a PDP flag. The small lorry being driven also has the logo of PDP. This portrays both of them travelling to Kano State or returning from a political campaign. This is evident from the expression on the small car "Kano Dream 2015". The irony of this journey by these two politicians is the fact that they are both travelling on a spoilt vehicle known as "Toyota Dyna", abandoned on the road, without wheels or tyres. A closer look at the vehicle also shows that a log of wood is supporting it. The lorry symbolically represents Nigeria as a failed nation yet the leaders ride on it to solicit for support in order to win the 2015 election so as to remain in power. This representation of the lorry as Nigeria is obvious from the word inscribed on it, "Nigeria", and the colour of the vehicle "green". Green is one of the major colours of Nigeria, symbolising agriculture and abundance. This is a mock cartoon used in lampooning the former president and his vice president who could not fix the problem of the country yet are driving on the failed nation to Kano to solicit support. The cartoon further projects the two politicians as desperate and conscienceless leaders who despite their poor performance in office (fully captured in the poor state of the spoilt vehicle) still want to remain in power at all cost. This is colourfully expressed in "THEY CANNOT STOP US FROM MOVING, LET'S GO".

Cartoon 2:

The cartoon above is a picture of the two major leaders, Asiwaju Bola Tinubu and Muhammadu Buhari, who spearheaded the formation of All Progressives Congress in 2015. The two leaders are seen sitting on an armoured tank. This cartoon further shows the unambiguous objective of APC, which is to defeat terrorism, most especially in the northeastern states of Yobe, Adamawa, and Borno. A closer look at the cartoon also shows Muhammadu Buhari, the APC presidential flag bearer, sitting in front of two pointed revolvers ready to shoot and wipe out every form of terrorism in the country. This was presented strategically to discredit Jonathan and the PDP's administration as being weak in the fight against terrorism with the intention of gaining votes and winning the 2015 election. Muhammadu Buhari's image was also used in front of two revolvers, being a retired general and a former military head of state, to convince the electorates that he would restore normalcy in the troubled region with his experience as a retired Major General.

Cartoon 3:

This cartoon has the faces of All Progressives Congress (APC) leaders. A close study of the cartoon also shows the leaders wearing lab coats with their native caps on their heads. The caps mirror their ethnic backgrounds. On the sick bed is a dying patient with Bola Tinubu, the chief medical doctor, examining the patient with a stethoscope. The dying patient here symbolises Nigeria, which the APC leaders have come to rescue by administering drugs and to cure it of the disease plaguing her and to give her the necessary strength that she needs to remain stable, as can be seen from APC bottle that contains drugs and the APC drip. The party leaders also alleged that the disease Nigeria is suffering from is an "umbrella", which happens to be the symbol of the PDP

Cartoon 4:

This cartoon contains the images of Bola Tinubu and Muhammadu Buhari, who are the two major leaders of APC. The two leaders are dressed in their native attires with each of them holding and displaying the party flag. At the centre of the party's flag is a hand holding a broom, which is the party's symbol. The broom is a symbol of change mainly used to clean up a particular mess. In the 2015 presidential election, the party used it to sell their ideology to the electorates. The flag has four major primary colours: green, white, blue and red as its background. "Green" represents agricultural abundance and fertility of Nigeria, "white" represents purity, peace and unity, "blue" projects peace while "red" symbolises thickness and firmness. This further projects the party as being solid, having the ability to tackle all challenges that may face the country, ranging from corruption to security.

Cartoon 5:

This cartoon contains the image of Jonathan Goodluck, the former president of Nigeria, sitting on a chair that symbolises Aso Rock[1]. The image also shows him holding the ASO ROCK chair with his two hands at the back of the chair. The inference is that he does not want to leave the presidential villa, which is the seat of power. The former president is also seen in the cartoon struggling with the opposition in order to remain in power. This is obvious from the way the

---

[1] "A large outcrop of granitic rock located on the outskirts of Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. The Aso Rock is a 400-metre (1,300 ft.) prominent monolith with a peak height of 936-metre (3,071 ft.) above sea level. It is one of the city's most noticeable features. The Nigerian Presidential Complex, Nigerian National Assembly, and Nigerian Supreme Court are located around it". Wikipedia article, retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aso_Rock

opposition rope is tied directly to his left leg with a hand holding the rope firmly and pulling him so as to unseat him from the ASO ROCK.

Cartoon 6:

This cartoon is a mockery of the major opposition party's desperation to unseat the ruling party (PDP) from Aso Rock. First in the cartoon is the hurdle tagged: "2015 PRESIDENTIAL RACE" over which the major opposition party needs to jump. The Horse has the head of Muhammadu Buhari, who was the flag bearer of APC and the eventual winner of the 2015 presidential election, while Bola Tinubu is seen at the back of the horse holding a broom which is the symbol of the party's change mantra. The horse is used in the cartoon due to its ability to travel at high speed and jump, thus it depicts the ideology of change and the need to take control of power at the centre. The cartoon also depicts Bola Tinubu as the actual candidate, while Muhammadu Buhari is being used to achieve Tinubu's goal of ruling the country. This is obvious from the statement credited to him in the cartoon: "Jump! I need to win this race". The word "jump" is a command. Ironically, the horse, representing the ability to run and jump, seems quite unhealthy. This seen in Muhammadu Buhari's response, "Bros... doctor says I should take it easy o". This statement depicts clearly that Buhari should be more careful in carrying out difficult tasks because the rigours of the office of the president will be too demanding, given his advanced age and poor health.

Conclusion

This paper has focused mainly on the analysis of some of the political campaign cartoons of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. These cartoons depict the public discourse regarding the ideologies of the parties and the leadership qualities of the presidential candidates in the 2015 presidential elections. The multimodal resources and ideologies of the campaign cartoons show the desperation of the two major political parties in Nigeria, PDP and APC, to either remain in power or take power at all cost. Also, the cartoons depict politics as a game of wit. This is evident from the way the cartoons that give images of the candidates and party leaders of both parties are represented.

The data unmistakably show that the producers of these images employ exaggeration, satire and mockery; all are major ingredients in the satirizing and exposing the politicians' weaknesses and flaws.

Acknowledgements

References

Ademilokun, M. (2015). *A multimodal discourse analysis of some newspaper political campaign advertisements for Nigeria's 2015 election*. Conference paper.

Aduradola, R. R. & Ojukwu, C. C. (2013). Language of political campaigns and politics in Nigeria. *Canadian Social Science*, *9*(3), pp. 104–116.

Ayoade, J.A.A. (1997). *Nigeria and the squandering of hope*. An inaugural lecture presented at the university of Ibadan, 16th October.

Bamgbose, A. (1995). English in the Nigerian environment, In A. Bamgbose, & A. Thomas (Eds.), *New Englishes: A West African perspective* (pp. 9–96), Ibadan: Monsuro.

Bitner, J. R. (2003). *Mass communication: An introduction*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books.

Conners, L. J. (2005). Visual representations of the 2004 presidential campaign: political cartoons and popular culture. *In American Behavioural Scientist, 49*(3), 487–497.

Ekpenyong, B. & Bisong, M. (2012). The language of political cartoons in Nigeria. *Lwati; A Journal of Contemporary Research, 9*(2), 220-440.

Harris, P. (1979). *Foundations of science*. London: Hutchinson and Co.

Jacque, E. (1965). *Propaganda: The formation of men's attitude*. New York: Vintage.

Lasswell, H. D. (1960). *Politics: Who gets what, when, how?* New York: Meridian Books.

Lee, C.B. and Goguen, J.(2003). "A semiotic analysis of political cartoons". *CESE 271, Spring.* Retrieved from https://cseweb.ucsd.edu/.goguen/courses/271sp03/spapers/cartoons/cartoons.htm

Machin, D. and A. Mayr (2012). *How to do critical discourse analysis: A multimodal introduction*. London: Sage Publications.

Marin-Arrese, J. (2015) "Political cartoon discourse". *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118611463.wbielsi075

Mazid, B. M. (2008). Cowboy and misanthrope: a critical discourse analysis of Bush and Bin Laden Cartoons. *Discourse & Communication, 2*(4), 433-457. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481308095939

Opeibi, B. (2009). *Discourse, politics and the 1993 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria: A Re-invention of the June 12 legacy.* Lagos: Nouvelle Communication.

Osho, S. A. (2008). *Graphic arts and designs in mass communication*. Abeokuta: Essaoh Consult Publications.

Sani, A. M., Naab, F. & Aziato, L. (2014) Political cartoons in the first decade of the millennium *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities, 22*(1), 68–83.

Test, G. (1991). *Satire: Spirit and art.* U of South Florida Press.

Tsakonaa, V. (2009). Language and image interaction in cartoons: Towards a multimodal theory of humour: *Journal of Pragmatics, 41*(6), 1171–1188. *https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2008.12.003*

Udoakah, N. (2006). Political cartoons readership among Uyo residents of Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/.../294636143

Walker, R. (2003). Political cartoons: Now you see Them! *Canadian Parliamentary Review, 26*(1), 20–31.

Corresponding author: C. F. Akpati
Email: akpatichibuzor@yahoo.com

A Shot in the Dark: Delogocentrism in Harold Pinter's *The Dwarfs* and Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*

Amrita S. Iyer, Independent Scholar, India

Abstract

The advent of postmodernism and poststructuralism has served to decentre the idea of *logos*: reason. The "decentred" universe has taken centre-stage in a fair share of postmodern fiction, especially absurdist theatre. Central to this paper is delogocentrism (as opposed to logocentrism), as articulated by Jacques Derrida. Associated issues are the problems of language, the metaphysics of presence, the locus of identity, and so on, leading to the contention that reality is constructed through language. This paper is an attempt to analyse delogocentrism in Harold Pinter's *The Dwarfs* (1968), in which there is an attempt to articulate postmodern anguish; and Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), in which delogocentrism is theatrically represented.

Keywords: delogocentrism, absurd, theatre, metaphysics, identity, Derrida

Introduction

John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) was considered to be the point of departure from the modernist grand-narratives and arrival into the postmodern thought of disillusionment and alienation in the realm of modern British drama. However, an alternative perspective is that Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, first performed in 1953, could be the true initiation of British theatre into postmodernism. The former falls under the category of kitchen-sink realism, and so depicts situations as they are, while the latter is an absurdist play, and so provides a more scathing if exaggerated perspective that reveals the true absurdity of human existence. One characteristic feature of postmodern thought is delogocentrism (as opposed to logocentrism).

Logocentrism is the act of regarding words and language as a fundamental expression of an external reality. This idea was deconstructed by philosophers like Jacques Derrida, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, etc. in different ways on the premise that language does not communicate meaning, rather it creates misunderstanding. Compounding this, Nietzsche deconstructed the whole idea of reason being a fixture in his remark that there are only interpretations (as opposed to facts), showing that positivist ideals like "reason" and "the ultimate truth" are constructs built around *one* out of innumerable possibilities. This idea extended to reality as well. Reality was a construct that was interpreted and understood in terms of language. As Wittgenstein expresses in his book *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* the borders of language determine the borders of our world.

Post World War II

The Second World War is far worse than the first one for many reasons, the violence, death, and overall inhumanity notwithstanding. One of its aftermaths was that there was a collective loss of faith in the grand narrative of the individual, because the individual himself was denounced as fragmentary. However, it would be wrong to hold only the Second World War as causative agent. The postmodern mind was not the outcome of a single event. Rather, it was the result of the cumulative effect of large-scale events like the First World War, the Holocaust, amongst others that had shaken the belief that Europe was the decisive source of civilization. Second, the new scientific theories of relativity of time and space took away the stability that came with conceptualising time and space as absolute, as there was no point of reference in order to measure entropy. Instead, the situation was found to be that of increasing entropy, that is, change piled on change which cannot be measured without a point of reference. Hence, we now live in what post-structuralists have termed, a "decentred universe" (Barry, 2014, p. 60), because all that had previously defined the centre has been deconstructed.

Derrida's Delogocentric Discourse

Derrida's paper 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', delivered at a symposium at Johns Hopkins University in 1966, called into question the fundamentals of the Western philosophical tradition, most famously the ideas of logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence. Reality and the metaphysics of presence are the two foundational pillars upon which the edifice of human existence and all its subsequent constructs rest. Apropos of his theory of deconstruction, Derrida argued that the notion of 'structure' has always presupposed a 'centre' of some sort, which governs the structure *but is itself not subject to structural analysis*. This is because finding the structure of the centre would be to find another centre, which would only lead to an inward spiral. The importance of the centre lies,

as mentioned earlier, in its ability to tether itself to reality and in its ability to guarantee *being* as presence. If the 'centre' itself is found to be faulty and is deconstructed on the same basis, then the very idea of the structure can be dismantled.

Derrida calls the belief in a higher purpose and the search for ultimate meaning or, alternatively, the desire for a "centre", the logocentrism of Western thought. Central to logocentrism, suggests Derrida, is the belief that the origin of all things lies in God or, in Derridean terms, a 'transcendental signified'. It is expressed in the New Testament in the statement: 'In the beginning was the Word.' This epitomises the consequential assumptions of logocentrism: that words, *spoken* by God, were the source of everything in the universe. However, Freud's theory that the mind of man was split into the conscious and the unconscious, as well as Nietzsche's idea of the 'Death of God', upturned everything that was believed to be true and unshakeable before. Subjective truths replaced the one Truth. In 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', Derrida called this the "absence of the transcendental signified", which "extends the play of signification infinitely" (p. 354). Second, philosophers began to hail language as "the medium of retrogressive arguments" (Kermany, 2008). All this contributed to and culminated in Derrida's theory of delogocentrism. Thus, delogocentrism is the debunking of this logocentric theory which offered a recourse to those in search of meaning, purpose and stability. Continuing in this vein of thought in his paper 'Structure, Sign, and Play in The Discourse of the Human Sciences', Derrida made his famous statement: "in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse…" (p. 354).

With respect to language, philosophers as diverse (spatially and temporally) as Plato, Rousseau, Levi-Strauss and Saussure, to name a few, have all held the written word as subordinate to oral speech, reflecting the hierarchical nature of Western philosophical tradition. If Rousseau contends that "Languages are made to be spoken, writing serves only as a supplement to speech" (Rousseau), in his *The Confessions*, Saussure states (*Course on General Linguistics*) that "language and writing are two distinct systems of signs: the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first" (Saussure, 2011, p. 23); both meaning essentially the same thing. Derrida deconstructs this idea with the argument that whatever is claimed of writing is true of speech too: that it is derivative and merely refers to other signs. Second, the concept of 'the arbitrariness of the sign' shows that the signifier does not have a relationship with the signified, hence denying any *natural* attachment between signifier and signified. The conclusion is that if the sign is arbitrary and "eschews any foundational reference to reality" (Reynolds), one type of sign (i.e. the spoken) cannot be more natural than another (i.e. the written). The clincher was his concept of différance. Différance was "an attempt to conjoin the differing and deferring aspects involved in arche-writing" (Reynolds). However, equally significant is the term itself that plays upon the distinction between the audible and the written. After all, what differentiates différance and différence is inaudible, and this means that distinguishing between them actually requires the written, thus neatly deconstructing the ideas of Plato, Rousseau, Saussure, and so on, among others.

Furthermore, Derrida analysed and brought out the concept of delogocentric discourse, with reference to the instability and undecideability of language, by combining and synthesizing the precepts put forth by Nietzsche and Freud. Freud stated that writing as an action was not completely conscious while Nietzsche, in his essay "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" (1873), stated that "truth" is just "a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms" (as in Bennet & Royle, 2014). Both affirm the structural inconsistencies in language, identity, and truth, the concreteness of which had hitherto been considered as axiomatic. Thus, Freud's critique of consciousness, Nietzsche's critique of truth have

contributed in the "decentring" of the universe. These point to the fact that the stability of "truth" and of the human mind are merely constructs that have been legitimised over time. Therefore, carrying these precepts forward, Derrida concluded that meaning is perpetually deferred by supplementation or substitution and so the signified always remains elusive and illusionary. If the signified is elusive, then meaning can only be *inferred* from the signifier. Although context can control meaning to some extent, it is not stable enough to create a fixed meaning. This deconstructs Saussure's theory of the sign being a particular combination of the signifier and the signified that is indicative of the meaning of the signified, referred to in Saussurean terms as the "sign".

If the borders of language determine the borders of our world, as claimed by Wittgenstein, then the instability of language and its ability to create misunderstanding and miscommunication can mean that the universe at large is characterised by instability, in other words, by increasing entropy. In order to counteract this, Western philosophy since Plato has reverted to metaphysics of "presence" to reduce the possibility of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, so that absence is marginalised. The preference of speech over writing is rooted in the same idea that the presence of phonetic sounds and tone of the speaker can communicate the correct meaning. However, phonetic sounds can only hint at the meaning while tone can create misunderstanding. Jack Reynolds points out that Derrida's references to the metaphysics of presence borrows from Heideggerean principles. Heidegger insists that Western philosophy has consistently privileged that which *is*, and has forgotten to pay any attention to the *condition for that appearance*. For instance, it is evident that there is no good without evil, or light without darkness or happiness without sorrow. However, Western philosophy from Plato has privileged one above the other; the "pure before the impure", the "good before evil", etc., once again revealing the hierarchical structure of Western philosophy.

Thus, in terms of Derrida's delogocentrism, the methodology adopted to analyse Pinter's *The Dwarfs* and subsequently Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* will be to deal with issues of reality (metaphysics of presence), meaning (logocentrism) and their subsequent effect on identity as a construct.

Delogocentrism in *The Dwarfs*

In Pinter's *The Dwarfs*, delogocentric discourse is most evident in Len's statement:

> It's no use saying you know who you are just because you tell me you can fit your particular key into a particular slot, which will only receive your particular key *because that's not foolproof and certainly not conclusive* (p. 111).

It shows Pinter deconstructing our day to day reasoning ability, which involves defining the self with reference to other(s).

The Dwarfs voices Len's angst at being unable to find the answer to "the who", an apparently easy enough question but one which has no definite answer. The inability to answer the truly significant question that Len finds in the system of language leads him to believe that "[We]'re the sum of so many reflections. Whose reflections? Is that what we consist of?" (p. 112). This metaphor of reflections refers to identities, thus effectively portraying the fragmented postmodern individual. Mark Silverstein points out that Len's attempt to synthesize these "reflections" into a cohesive entity is doomed to fail because the "reflections" prove to be nothing more than the empty signifier of reality. Allan Thiher has stated that these linguistic

"reflections" underpin the metaphysics of presence and reinforce the illusion of being. *The Dwarfs*, therefore, captures the anguish felt at the failure of language to articulate anything of worth because language is nothing more than "periphrastic conjugation"[1] (as in Silverstein, 2011, p. 310). Thus, the attempt to enable understanding is, quite literally, a shot in the dark.

At one point, while arguing with Mark, Len says, "You think I'm a ventriloquist's dummy" (p. 107). The idea of being a ventriloquist's dummy reflects the situation of any individual with respect to the institution of language, and the "human linguistic condition of being born into a language always already stamped with significations and meanings" (Silverstein, 2011, p. 312). These pre-existing significations are indicative of the idea that language creates ambiguity and misunderstanding because our form of expression *is not our own*.

That language poses a serious threat to identity becomes evident in Len's statement: "this is a journey and an ambush" (p. 96). That outright violence is ever-present in the linguistic arsenal is witnessed in Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, wherein the character of Stanley is reduced to incoherence, with his psychology marred, possibly permanently. Secondly, Len's denial of the presence of the "voices" and the statement that "they make no hole in my side" (p. 97) conveys the idea that they are very much present, simply because he mentions them. This brings to light the damaging effect language can have on one's psyche. With respect to Len, however, the perpetuators of the defective linguistic system - here Pete and Mark - possess the power to bulldoze him into submission. This idea of eroding identity is reinforced when Len directly accuses Pete and Mark of "[making] a hole in my side" (p. 107). Marc Silverstein uses Baudrillard's concept of the 'ecstasy of communication' from his eponymous essay to explain Len's condition:

> Len experiences what Baudrillard terms "the ecstasy of communication" marked by "the loss of private space... the sovereignty of a symbolic space which was also that of the subject", but now "dissolves completely". (Silverstein, 2011, p. 312)

However, *The Dwarfs* also depicts a more insidious characteristic of language: that it, like any other institution, has the potential to fail us. This becomes evident in the play in Len's naming objects around him, showing that language operates upon a certain set of rules (which have been constructed using that language), while providing the frame of reference too, as pointed out by Wittgenstein. Therefore, the entire institution of language has been constructed using its own elements as building blocks, and so with the failure of one element, the entire structure can come crashing down. Wittgenstein reaffirms this fear that language and existence separating so far apart that not even the illusion of knowledge can be claimed. In *The Dwarfs*, Len is frightened of this idea of going beyond the highest of (human) "truths" and he repeatedly says that he "has been thinking thoughts [he has] never thought before" (p. 104). In terms of the metaphysics of presence, the unknown realm which lies beyond the range of human knowledge is characterised by a conspicuous "absence", because there is no knowledge of that realm. Since there is no knowledge of it, language cannot describe it.

Metaphysics of Presence

Pinter's philosophy and his simultaneous deconstruction of the Western philosophical 'metaphysics of presence' is best described in the exordium for his acceptance speech of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005. Therein he stated that "There are no hard distinctions

---

[1] From the novel *The Dwarfs* (1990) by Harold Pinter.

between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false" (Art, Truth & Politics).

The metaphysics of presence in Pinter's plays usually revolves around the paradigms of real and unreal. Other paradigms like good and evil, pure and impure, etc. are not applicable in his plays because Pinter does not portray good and evil as something divergent and present in diametrically opposite characters; they exist together as complements, thereby creating conflict within an individual. Continuing in the same vein, Pinter's plays offer an "unwavering ambiguity" to the roles of victimizer and victimized, which, in the words of Penelope Prentice, "invalidates easy application of those terms to his work generally" (p. 23). The real/unreal paradigm, however, occupies a central role in his plays. With respect to *The Dwarfs*, this real/unreal syncretism is observed in the character of Len, who seems to belong to two different worlds: one which consists of his friends, Mark and Pete, and the other which consists of dwarfs.

The dwarfs could symbolically signify Len's psychological frame of mind wherein he has reduced his overbearing friends to diminutive dwarfs or his utopian vision where the dwarfs are "real professionals" (p. 102). This is evidenced in a turning point in *The Dwarfs*, when Len exclaims, "There must be somewhere else" (p. 107), in the midst of conflict over divided loyalties between himself, Mark and Pete. These words articulate the appeal for another place, for another kind of space, which is less conflicted and perhaps more inclusive in nature. Len reiterates his unhappiness by plaintively asking Mark, "Why haven't I got a home?" (p. 111). Also, the fact that the dwarfs remain in Len's head and gain space on the stage only through his *words*, shows that the dwarfs are indeed "somewhere else". In this context, the dwarfs symbolize Len's utopian dream of what should be, but what does not exist in reality.

Pinter's deconstruction and reinterpretation of reality is observed in *The Dwarfs* in the statement: "Occasionally I believe I perceive a little of what you are but that's pure accident on both our parts, the perceived and the perceiver. It's nothing like accident, it's deliberate, it's joint pretence" (p. 112). Pinter not only reveals in blunt terms that reality is a construct, an "accident", but also denounces it in the subsequent statement, calling it a "joint pretence". However, the realization that reality is nothing more than a "joint pretence" does not offer consolation to Len, who realises that he must partake in the methodical madness to validate his existence in society, even though "he can't keep up". He says,

> We *depend* on these accidents, these contrived accidents to continue. It's *not important then that it's conspiracy or hallucination.* What you are, or appear to be to me, or appear to be to you, changes so quickly, so horrifyingly, I certainly can't keep up with it and I'm damn sure you can't either. (pp. 112, italics mine)

To affirm his stance on reality, Pinter describes at length the state of constant change in which our surroundings are immersed. In *The Dwarfs*, Len complains,

> The rooms we live in… open and shut. Can't you see? They change shape at their own will. I wouldn't grumble if they would keep to some consistency. But they don't. And I can't tell the boundaries, the limits, *which I've been led to believe are natural*. (pp. 99, italics mine)

This partial monologue shows the inherent inconsistency of the truly real and the mutability of the presence of things, while the conclusion reveals that "boundaries" are nothing more than human constructs.

Locus of Identity

"The point is, who are you? Not why or how, not even what" (p. 111). This statement encapsulates the essence of the undefinable concept of identity in *The Dwarfs*. Pinter expresses the desire to find an identity with respect to the self, contained within the self; hence his emphasis on "who". The whys, hows and whats question and construct an identity with reference to the outside, that is, society. However, the play does not present a positive picture when it comes to the search for identity, showing that such a search for something as intangible as identity is doomed from the beginning. Towards the end of the narrative, Len does come to some sort of conclusion about his identity (or lack thereof), but it comes at the cost of his friendship with Mark and Pete. What the play seems to suggest is that "the essence" of identity may be non-existent or, as Len states, indistinguishable from "the scum". Echoing Pinter's assertion, "A moment is sucked away and distorted, often even at the time of its birth" (Prentice, 2000, p. lxvii).

In Pete's vision, everything is logical and has its own place. However, he too suffers a nightmare, which he describes:

> When I looked around, everyone's faces were peeling, blotched, blistered.... When I looked at the girl, I saw that her face was coming off in slabs too.... She wouldn't budge. Stood there, with half a face, staring at me.... Then I thought, Christ, what's my face look like? Is that what she's staring at? Is that rotting too? (pp. 101-102).

Pete sees the melting physical form, notably faces, which reveals his fear of the dissolution of being. It shows that individuality and identity at the physical level are only skin deep. Beneath the features, we are all essentially the same. That the fear finds expression in someone as logical as Pete shows that one need not be overly imaginative to fear the idea of homogeneity. It also provides a relative form of evidence that the epiphanies Len has been having are not just an overly imaginative delirium of his mind.

In *The Dwarfs*, Len's difficulties with reality are evident from the beginning when he is seen naming his surroundings methodically, using language as a medium to determine his world's parameters. Unlike Sarah from Pinter's play *The Lovers,* Len does not wish to live in an 'imaginary world' or an 'alternative reality'. Penelope Prentice asserts that Len chooses to ground himself in the reality of everyday objects around him. He watches his friends Pete and Mark leave and simultaneously watches the dwarfs leave, after which he reverts back to naming his surroundings as he had in the beginning: "There is a lawn. There is a shrub. There is a flower" (p. 117), in order to ground himself in the accepted construct of reality (as it is generally perceived). He neither accepts this reality nor does he outright reject it. His ambivalent attitude is observed in his rhetorical question, "What have I seen, the scum or the essence?" (p. 112).

***Six Characters in Search of an Author*: Illustrating delogocentrism through theatricality**

Theatre as a medium, since ancient times, has had a commonly contested space in a conceptual tug-of-war: does it portray reality or fantasy? The postmodern approach, especially delogocentrism, shows that there is no "truth" but only a range of subjectivities expressed

through the highly unstable system of language, one that governs and is governed by its own rules. Since reality itself is revealed to be a construct, what theatre represents is twice removed from reality, and hence, is illusory. This artificiality becomes the main basis for the postmodern theatre. Hence, theatre is a "where people play at being serious" (Pirandello, *Six Characters*, Act II)

Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* dramatizes the delogocentrism through the performative aspect of theatre itself, most overtly by portraying characters in physical forms on stage such that characters and actors are two different types of entities. The space provided in theatre becomes the scope of imaginary characters to "live" their "reality". However, the illusory "presence" of the characters on stage contradicts the logocentric preference for presence and contributes to postmodern theatre.

Linguistic Solipsism

In *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, solipsistic angst is reflected in the Manager's statement when the Father articulates a central theme of absurdist theatre.

> The Father [mellifluously]. Oh sir, you know well that life is full of infinite absurdities, which, strangely enough, do not even need to appear plausible, since they are true.
> The Manager. What the devil is he talking about? (Act I)

This statement implying a general lack of understanding is oft-repeated in the play, mostly by the Manager. However, there is more to the solipsism in the play. Pirandello's usage of language possesses an ambiguity that has the effect of not only applying to the context of the play, but also to the condition of the postmodern theatre in general. One such example is in the Leading Man's statement: "But it's ridiculous!" (Pirandello). The Leading Man's comment, in the context of the play, is addressed to the Manager, as he is denigrating the cap he is to wear, the "book" and the stage directions. On the other hand, in a general context, it could be intended for the entire body of readers/audience, critics and actors due to the ridiculousness of postmodern theatre, specifically the Theatre of the Absurd, so this might be regarded as a metafictional comment. This especially gains traction because the "book" is one of the things he deems ridiculous. The Manager's retaliation is an emphasized rant against absurdist theatre as he complains:

> The Manager. Ridiculous? Ridiculous? Is it my fault if France won't send us any more good comedies, and we are reduced to putting on Pirandello's works, where nobody understands anything, and where the author plays the fool with us all? (Act I)

With respect to historical context, it can be observed that this statement encapsulates the essence of the Theatre of the Absurd[2], which came into prominence in the 1950s; Pirandello wrote his play in 1921. Second, Pirandello also brings to light delogocentrism in his statements: "Phrases! Isn't everyone consoled when faced with a trouble or fact he doesn't understand, by a word, some simple word, *which tells us nothing* and yet calms us?" (Act I, italics mine), showing that language is periphrastic in nature. This is reinforced by the scene where the Mother holds God as her witness. God, or the Derridean transcendental signified, cannot affirm her story, so her argument is rendered redundant.

---

[2] a post-facto term coined by Martin Esslin in his essay 'Theatre of the Absurd' in 1960

On a related note, it is seen that a conversation between the Father and the Manager moves from a defence of art to a succinct expression of the postmodern condition and then towards an attempt to establish the metaphysics of presence and to legitimize being, born as a character in a play. The Father says, "nature uses the instrument of human fantasy in order to pursue her high creative purpose" (Pirandello), referencing the value of art. The Manager questions the purpose of it: "Very well, -- but where does all this take us?" (Act III), to which the answer is "Nowhere". In the context of the play, it is the Manager's way of bringing to an end a pointless discussion, while in conjunction with the postmodern condition, the question as well as its answer is the expression of the anguish that accompanies the absurdity of life.

Inversion of Reality

Pirandello also reverses the dynamics that exist between characters and actors. The characters perform the drama that is "in them" while the actors become the audience. Second, characters are meant to be concepts or ideas that have no metaphysics of presence while actors are the "truly real" people who "bring the characters to life". Pirandello subverts this status quo by his directions that the characters should not be phantasmic, rather they should be created realities.

> A tenuous light surrounds them, almost as if irradiated by them -- the faint breath of their fantastic reality. This light will disappear when they come forward towards the actors. They preserve, however, something of the dream lightness in which they seem almost suspended; but this does not detract from the *essential reality of their forms and expressions*. (Act I, italics mine)

When compared to the introduction of the actors, it is evident that the characters are more real by virtue of their detailed description. Additionally, the actors give "life" "to immortal works" (Act I), to which the Father adds "Exactly, perfectly, to living beings more alive than those who breathe and wear clothes: beings less real perhaps, but truer!" (Act I). This establishes that actors give life to characters who are less real metaphysically, but truer than humans actually living. This shakes the foundation of the metaphysics of presence, for Pirandello grants presence to Characters while labelling Actors as illusionary because the sole raison d'etre of their existence is "to make seem true that which isn't true...without any need...for a joke as it were" (Act I).

The Father's continuous insistence that he and the rest of the characters are "alive" combines with the view that the Boy "dies" in the end according to some actors, while according to other actors "it's only make believe, it's only pretence!" (Act III). Thus, with respect to the metaphysics of presence, the reality of the characters is open to interpretation; there are no clear boundaries.

Multiple Truths, Multiple Perspectives

The subjectivity of truth, when it is ascertained from different perspectives, can be seen in the fact that the same series of events is told differently by the Father, the Mother and the Step-daughter. Where the Mother holds herself as a victim to the Father's tyranny, the Father maintains that all his actions stemmed from altruism and selfless love for his wife, while the Step-daughter characterises the Father as an unfeeling villain. This situation is articulated by the Father:

> The Father. But don't you see that the whole trouble lies here. In words, words. Each one of us has within him a whole world of things, each man of us his own special world. And how can we ever come to an understanding if I put in the words I utter the sense and value of things as I see them; while you who listen to me must inevitably translate them according to the conception of things each one of you has within himself. We think we understand each other, but we never really do. (Act I)

Pirandello also shows that the unitary nature of personality is false because we adopt different personas with different people. This goes in tandem with Pinter's assertion that identity is "the sum of so many reflections" (p. 112). Pirandello also brings to light the idea of trying to attach each one to a particular reality, something that we are all guilty of doing in order to contend with the anguish of being alienated from reality.

In the same vein, the Son brings forward the idea of the mirror's falseness, showing that what is reflected back is not true. He articulates this in his question, "haven't you yet perceived that it isn't possible to live in front of a mirror which not only freezes us with the image of ourselves, but throws our likeness back at us with a horrible grimace?" (Act III). The reflection, thus, possesses an element of unrecognizability. In conjunction with Pinter's idea that identity is "the sum of so many reflections" (p. 112), both plays give rise to the idea that identity as a construct is as intangible as reality and the metaphysics of presence. It can be summed up and articulated in Len's assertion that the "whats" and "whys" can be answered while the "who" remains unanswered.

The concept of reality is severely tested in the play, from the moment Characters walk on stage and announce that they are in search of an Author. Another aspect of reality as a construct is revealed when the Step-Daughter states that the set does not look like the real setting at all. In this context, the ending of the play points directly to the dichotomy of real/unreal, one of the dual paradigms by which Western philosophers had attempted to establish a metaphysics of presence.

Conclusion

The Dwarfs, therefore, shows that the closer we look at the many institutions that govern and *define* our lives, we will find that they are no more than hollow, unstable structures. This kind of analysis even removes the illusion of knowledge we may claim to possess, echoing Wittgenstein's fear of language and the world diverging so far apart that neither can define the other anymore, leaving us literally nowhere. This train of thought serves to take away a stable *weltbild* in addition to affecting our conceptions of identity and metaphysics of presence. Len's condition reflects Wittgenstein's fear, for at the end of his epiphany, he has seen something transcending human constructs. However, since language cannot articulate that experience – which has no metaphysics of presence – he is left to wonder, "What have I seen, the scum or the essence?" (p. 112).

Luigi Pirandello shows through his play-within-a-play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* that theatre and life in general share the commonality of having a performative aspect. An individual, as a member of a community or society as a whole, caters to the norms postulated by the group to which he belongs, and so acquires a performative aspect at the same time. This theatrical metaphor of our lives is best expressed by Jacques in William Shakespeare's *As You Like It:*

> "All the world's a stage,
> And all the men and women merely players;
> They have their exits and their entrances,
> And one man in his time plays many parts," (Act II, Scene VII)

Pirandello, therefore, destabilises the idea of reality by *theatrically representing it* on stage instead of finding recourse in theoretical expostulations.

With respect to delogocentric theory in general, if the aspects postulated are put into order, it can be observed that the origin of language led to the idea of the metaphysics of presence, which has contributed in the construction of reality as we know it. The questioning of these constructs has led to the issue of identity crisis in the postmodern mind, between the dualistic paradigms of good/bad, conscious/unconscious, real/unreal, and so on. Outright rejection of either would contribute in the formation of a new "centre". According to Derrida, a viable course of action is to disallow either pole in a system to become the centre and guarantor of presence.

Thus, we see that while deconstruction attempts to unravel the complexity with which constructs have been woven (in order to provide legitimisation and authenticity), the solution cannot be as simple as suggested by Rousseau: that we go back to being a 'noble savage'. Since history cannot be erased, one of the few solutions available is to hark back to the causes of the origin of such constructs and attempt to understand them, instead of getting lost in our own creation, our own spaces. Even if all these aspects were dismissed, all that is required to recognise delogocentric discourse in daily life is to ask ourselves a simple question: if even our expressions aren't our own, where is the question of reasoning; furthermore, where is the question of having an identity individual to oneself?

In brief, postmodernists and poststructuralists (authors as well as critics) have attempted to bring forward the idea that instead of legitimising one possibility out of "a thousand and one possibilities" (to quote Salman Rushdie in *Midnight's Children*), there is the option to broaden our horizons and enjoy the variety and the diversity that would accompany acceptance of all of feasible possibilities.

References

Barry, P. (2014). *Beginning theory*. (3rd ed.). New Delhi: Viva Books Pvt. Ltd.

Bennet, A., & Royle, N. (2014). *An introduction to literature, criticism and theory*. NY: Routledge.

Derrida, J. (2016). *Of grammatology*. (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press. (Originally published 1976)

Derrida, J. (2005). Structure, sign, and play in the discourse of the human sciences. In *Writing and Difference* (pp. 351–370). (A. Bass, Trans.). London: Routledge. (Originally published 1967)

Esslin, M. (2004). *Theatre of the absurd*. NY: Vintage Books.

Kermany, F. V. (2008, October). *Towards Delogocentrism: A study of the dramatic works of Samuel Beckett, Tom Stoppard and Caryl Churchill*. Retrieved from GWDG: http://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/ebook/dissts/Frankfurt/VaziriNasabKermany2008.pdf

Pinter, H. (2005, December 7). *Art, truth & politics*. Retrieved from Nobel Prize Web Site: https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2018/06/pinter-lecture-e.pdf

Pinter, H. (1986). The Dwarfs (1968). *In Harold Pinter plays: Two* (pp. 89–119). London: Methuen.

Pirandello, L. (2006, November). *Six characters in search of an author* (E. Storer, Trans.). Retrieved from Project Gutenberg Australia: http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0608521h.html. (Originally published 1921)

Prentice, P. (2000). *The Pinter ethic*. NY: Garland Publishing Inc.

Reynolds, J. (n.d.). *Jacques Derrida*. Retrieved from Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: https://www.iep.utm.edu/derrida/

Rousseau, J. J. (2015, September 5). *The confessions of Jean Jacques Rousseau*. Retrieved from Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3913/3913-h/3913-h.htm

Saussure, F. (2011). *Course on general linguistics*. (W. Baskin, Trans.). (P. Meisel & H. Saussy, Ed.). NY: Columbia University Press. (Originally published 1916).

Selden, R., Widdowson, P., & Brooker, P. (2005). *A reader's guide to contemporary literary theory*. (5th ed.). Harlow: Pearson Education .

Silverstein, M. (2011). "CAN YOU PUT A WORD TO IT?": LANGUAGE AND EPISTEMOLOGY IN "THE DWARFS". *Studies in the Novel, 43*(3), 306–327. https://doi.org/10.1353/sdn.2011.0046

Wittgenstein, L. (2014). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. (D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinness, Trans.). NY: Routledge. (Originally published 1921)

Corresponding author: Amrita S Iyer
Contact email: iyeramrita@gmail.com

The Role of Anxiety and Anger in Wole Soyinka's *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known*

Charles Alex Patrick, Samuel Adegboyega University, Nigeria

Abstract

This is an examination of Wole Soyinka's collection of poems *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known*. The diagnostic objective of the paper is grounded upon an interpretive analysis of the poet's critical stance in relation to the dominant socio-political arrangements in Nigeria. To specify the analytical horizon, I will argue that the nauseating despair, unbearable decadence and widespread anger conveyed in the poems are formulaic devices intended to postulate and contour a space that is both aesthetic and comminative, one in which the artistic purpose will synchronise with the poet's manifest social commitment. The paper aims to reveal that the picture of the society that emerges from *Samarkand* is that of a socio-political junkyard, one in which the poet describes a nation flirting with sundry disasters while dancing on the edge. In most of his poems, Soyinka pours out his disgust and outrage at what his country has been reduced to in the hands of the tyrants and junkies in governance. Within that synergic space, the poet is able to x-ray decayed infrastructures that favour corruption in recurrent regimes, the agonies and sorrows of its citizens both at home and abroad, the atrocities committed in the name of religion, the scape-goating, torture and assassination of prominent Nigerians by despots and tyrants, the corruption and misappropriations of tax-payers' money by looters, and the dreadful proclivities of its over-ambitious youths, showing how each element contributes to bringing the country down to its knees. In short, the paper aims to show that Soyinka's work is a clarion call for Nigerians to rise up to the challenges of building a better nation; to believe that the looters and power-mongers masquerading as politicians would bring about the needed change is a dangerous delusion.

Keywords: anxiety, agony, anger, tyranny, change

Introduction

Wole Soyinka is a writer who labours under the influence of clairvoyant perceptions. More than any other writer in Nigeria, he has turned his literary genius to the service of the nation by beaming his search light upon the political arena, bringing to the fore the rot in the corridors of power during the period of military misrule and in the present democratic maladministration. Tunde Adeniran (1994) observes that "Soyinka remains a phenomenon which constantly impacts upon the consciousness of Nigerians and keeps successive governments on edge while his public service politics remains a reference point" (p.178). Soyinka's pervasive poetic concern with Nigeria and Africa's socio-political problems is not limited to the collection of poems in *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known* (hereafter *Samarkand*) alone. Works like *Idanre and other poems, A Shuttle in the Crypt, Ogun Abibiman* and *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems* all espouse this same critical stance. Moreover, his dramatic works also confirm his commitment to Nigeria's prosperity. For instance, in *A Dance of the Forests*, *A Play of Giants, King Babu, Kongi's Harvest*, and so on. Soyinka also dramatises the problems bedevilling Nigeria and the African continent with acidic touch. In the prose genre, he has also voiced his displeasure at the inhumanity of those at helm of affairs in Nigeria.

Samarkand was published in 2002. It was written in five parts: *Outsiders, Of Exits, Fugitive Phases, The Sign of the Zealot* and *Elegies.* Many of the poems were written while Soyinka was in exile after Sani Abacha, the military dictator who ruled Nigeria with a heavy hand between 1993–1998, put a price on his head. Thus, most of the poems address issues such as tyranny, assassination, corruption and exile. The collection of poems was launched at the National Theatre in Lagos under a tree that is now known as the "Samarkand Tree". In some of these poems he celebrates departed friends such as Femi Johnson, Kudirat Abiola, former French President Francois Mitterrand, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Noble Laureate Naguib Mafouz, and "the dead and maimed of Kenya, Tanzania".

As a social critic and human rights activist, he has taken to the streets to protest against impunity and the reckless use of power. He has collaborated with platforms such as the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), PRONACO, NALICON, RADIO KUDIRAT, and the recently-formed SAVE NIGERIA GROUP, which he co-founded with others to make his *voice* heard, since Nigerian leaders seem to be mere rulers and not readers. Thus, Soyinka is one writer who does not stop at just writing about revolution, like other Nigerian writers. Biodun Jeyifo (2004) notes that "the combination in Soyinka's career of political risk taking with a propensity for artistic gambles reveals a convergence of aesthetic and political radicalism which, apart from Soyinka, we encounter only in a few other African writers" (p. 20). Soyinka is a militant social critic who has consistently spoken out against the tyranny of many Nigerian military dictators and despots. Adeniran describes this stance well: "Soyinka has been speaking for all: the deprived, the disadvantaged and the dispossessed as well as the indignant power addicts who must yield to reason or be swept away by the inevitable forces of change" (p. 178). In the face of tyranny, silence is never an option for Soyinka. His activism has often exposed him to great risks, especially during the government of General Sani Abacha, who placed a death sentence on his head "in absentia", forcing Soyinka into exile. While abroad, he visited parliaments and conferred with world leaders, urging them to impose sanctions against the brutal regime of Sani Abacha without much success.

Nigeria and its sea of problems have defied all logic, so much so that at present there seems to be no hope for its citizens. As Karl Maier (2000) observes, "the Nigerian state is like a battered and bruised elephant staggering toward an abyss with the ground crumbling under its feet" (p.

xx). It has been described as "a land of no tomorrow" (Richard Dowden, 2009, p. 440). However, for Soyinka, the struggle continues probably until he breathes his last or Nigeria takes its pride of place among the other great nations in the world.

Anxiety and Outrage in *Samarkand*

The picture of the society that emerges from *Samarkand* is a socio-political junkyard. Apart from a few poems like "Business Lunch-the Bag Lady", "Doctored Vision", and "VISITING TREES" which seem to deal with social issues, the remaining poems in the collection deal with the prevailing economic, political and religious crises that are suffocating the Nigerian nation.

The poem in *Samarkand* that sets the direction for this paper is the first poem in the collection; the poem "Ah Demosthenes" is filled with powerful wrath and the desire to communicate painful truths to the world. Therein, Soyinka wishes to fortify his voice to enable him to engage fiercely and effectively in a war of words with political tyrants who have plunged the country into abysmal misery by ramming pebbles into his mouth:

> I shall ram pebbles in my mouth
> Demosthenes. (p. 3)

Pebbles here symbolise caustic words that would sting and burn corrupt politicians portrayed as "breakers" (Adekoya 2006: p. 436).This poem seems to echo Fela Anikulapo-kuti's popular song, "Beasts of no Nation", in which he threatens to open his mouth wide like basket in order to reveal the lies and deceits of those in power.

Demosthenes was an Athenian Statesman who was reputed to be the greatest orator of his time. His speeches are said to provide valuable information about the political, social, and economic life of IV century Athens. The character of Demosthenes is deployed in the poem as a bane to politicians who hoodwink the poor masses by sweet-talking and inciting them; these politicians are then able to engage in political thuggery for their own selfish end while they put their own children in universities abroad. Though the poetic persona is angry and draws the battle line, he is not yet ready to absorb any damage:

> Not to choke, but half-dolphin, half
> Shark hammer-head from fathoms deep
> Ride the waves to charge the breakers
> They erect, (p. 3)

In the following stanza which seems to echo the first, the persona again says that he is ready to "place nettles" on his tongue to inflict pain on the oppressors. This stanza seems to amplify the message of the first. Pebbles and nettles do not have the same effect on the skin. Pebbles cause immediate pain when thrown at someone, a pain that subsides after a short period of time, while nettles on the other hand produce more agonizing pain through irritating itches that take much longer to diminish.

In stanza three, the poetic persona is not sure if his opponents (politicians) understand what nettles mean, since they don't read, so he resorts to using a word they would understand:

> But have you heard of *werepe*
> Demosthenes?
> Not all your Stoics' calm can douse
> The fiery hairs of that infernal pod. (p. 3)

Nettles and *werepe* are not the same. While nettles are plants that sting, *werepe* is, as the persona has said, a plant "with fiery hairs" that itch when it touches the skin. By using *werepe* to substitute "nettles", the persona brings his message closer to home for his targets since he is not sure it they know what nettles means. Note again that in stanza two, the poetic persona still maintains that in dealing with his targets he does not want to come to any harm:

> Then thwart its stung retraction, oh,
> Let it burn at root and roof. (p. 3)

The poem, as Segun Adekoya (2006) rightly observes, "grows by word substitution" (p. 4). In the first stanza, the persona intends to use pebbles, in the second stanza, "nettles" replaces pebbles, in the third stanza, it is replaced with *werepe* while in the fourth stanza, "ratsbane" is used and finally "bile" replaces ratsbane.

In this poem, Wole Soyinka outlines the several ways in which he intends to begin to deal with the tyrants who use lies and empty promises to hoodwink the poor and illiterate masses into voting for them with no intention of doing anything to alleviate their sufferings. The entire poem lambasts the political despots who dominate the political firmament of Nigeria. The poetic persona is ready for a fight (though a war of words) in which no matter how much they think that they cannot be moved by words, they certainly cannot endure the heat he wants to put them through with his acidic words:

> Not all your stoics' calm can douse
> The fiery hairs of that infernal pod.
> It makes a queen run naked to the world
> An itch that tells the world its flesh
> It whorish sick-
> I shall place *werepe* on every tongue. (p. 4)

The poetic persona wants to make Demosthenes understand that no amount of stoical calmness can defy the power of his biting utterances. The intensive itching of *werepe* will force them out of their pretentious calmness and, to drive home his point, he draws an analogy of a queen running "named to the world", thereafter leaving her skin with blisters as the result of scratching her body so that her skin ends up looking like that of a whore.

The stanzas show Soyinka's rising anger and sickening despair at the way the leaders are misruling and mismanaging the affairs of the country. This stanza echoes one of Soyinka's views as quoted by E.M. Iji (1991):

> We haven't begun actually using words to punch holes
> Inside people. But let us do our best to use words and
> Style when we have the opportunity, to arrest the ears of
> normally complacent people; we must make sure we
> Explode something inside them which is a parallel of the
> sordidness, which they ignore outside. (p. 71)

In the following stanza, he says again:

> I'll drop some ratsbane on my tongue
> Demosthenes
> To bait the rodents with a kiss of death. (p. 4)

"Ratsbane" here is a white powdered poisonous trioxide of arsenic, mostly used in manufacturing glass and as a pesticide (rat poison) and weed killer.It is usually dropped in the corners of a room or store where rats wreak havoc on foodstuffs or other valuables. By dropping ratsbane on his tongue, the persona is determined to wreak total havoc that might end in the death of his targets. His words, he believes, would bite them with a "kiss of death".

His anger reaches its peak by the following stanza, where the reader discovers that hatred is gradually seeping into his heart:

> I'll thrust all fingers down the throat
> Demosthenes
> To raise a spout of bile to drown the world. (p. 4)

The intense anger shown in earlier stanzas builds up to fierce aggression which would make the poetic persona thrust "all fingers down the throat" to vomit bile that would "drown the world". This bile, he believes, would not only drown them alone but the entire world if that were the only way to wipe them out. The persona does not seem to care after all if innocent people suffer in the process of drowning the tyrants. In the last stanza he to reminds us again that he is not ready to do all this at the risk of his own life:

> I'll let the hemlock pass
> Demosthenes
> Oh, not between my lips-I've shared
> Its thin dissolve in myriad throats
> At one with that agnostic sage. (p. 5)

Unlike Socrates, he is not ready to take poison that can cut short his life, like those who die because "their lives were spent with heated pebbles/on their tongues". He is ready to fight and live to fight another day. However, this fight "begins and ends at the level of rhetoric" (Adekoya, p. 438) since the persona is not ready to sustain any personal injury. It is like someone who wants to swim in the river but does not want to get wet, it is an irony. However, the poetic persona believes in the power of the word. That the word is more effective than the sword, hence, "crush impediments of power and inundate/their tainted towers" (*Samarkand*, p. 3).

The poem is a savage attack on bad leadership in Africa, especially in Nigeria, the poet's country. The picture painted here is that of a nation that is filled with corrupt propagandists who only make empty promises and raise false hope, with little or no intention of doing any tangible thing for the people. The position of this poem in the collection is deliberate and of significance: It is the first poem in the collection and it is written in the present tense, which shows that the poet is setting out on a mission of seeking vengeance by drawing the battle line, and he is ready to engage the political demagogues in a war (even if it is a war of words) in which he intends to expose their corruption and ineptitude.

However, it is important to note that Soyinka is not advocating that the masses should be contented with just barking without biting. He believes in taking concrete actions to address or redress the many anomalies in the nation, especially the hardships and misery created by the incompetence of those at the helm of affairs. The criminal contrast between the have and the have-nots in Nigeria boggles the mind. His own life is a glowing testimony to this, especially if one considers his activities from his younger days, when he held a radio station staff under gunpoint to disprove the fabricated election results, read on the air in favour of Samuel Ladoke Akintola. Echoes of this attitude show in his recent activities in the Save Nigeria Group.

The poem is a dramatic monologue in which the poetic persona pours out his intentions to a silent audience (Demosthenes), which then gives insights into the emotional agonies and anger of the poetic persona. The persona is a loquacious character that is not ready to sacrifice anything or entertain any suffering while trying to achieve his mission. Thus, he satirises the attitude of the political class, whom he sees as mere propagandists. The poem is "a panegyric of the magic of words" (Adekoya, p. 435) and the positive objectives to which this magic could be oriented.

The metaphors deployed in this poem have great imagistic impact. Politicians are described as "Rodents", "whore", "Demosthenes", metaphorically used to evoke in the reader a spiteful image of politicians who are smooth talkers, but are never "doers". "Waves" is a metaphor for the poor masses. Images such as pebbles, nettles, *werepe*, ratsbane, and bile all signify the tools with which the persona wishes to express his anger.

The use of repetition in the first and second lines of each stanza and the recurring pattern ending each stanza enhance the rhythmic flow of the poem. Each stanza seems to echo the previous one. There is the use of figures of speech like alliteration, assonance, pun, and so on. In stanza one, line four, alliteration is deployed: "hammer-head", "from fathoms" and in stanza two line five, assonance /e/ abound: "let rashes break … every pore" all of which enhances the musicality of the poem.

The only rhetorical question deployed in the third stanza has an evident impact on the poem. It places doubt on whatever the political tyrants think they know. The persona has been using words like "pebbles", "nettles", and so on, and all of a sudden it occurs to him that his targets might not know all the meaning of those words, so he decides to borrow an indigenous word to drive home his message. There is also the use of allusion in the last stanza. It is probably an allusion to Socrates, who died after taking the hemlock, so the persona says he is not ready to end up like him.

The poem is made up of six stanzas in which the first and the last stanzas are composed of nine lines, while the remaining four stanzas are octaves composed of eight uneven lines, most of which run into each other. It is significant to note that there is interplay or parallelism between the first and the last stanzas, which are composed of nine lines. It is in these two stanzas that the persona makes the declaration of not wanting to come to any harm or death. It can be interpreted to mean the persona's attitude of watching his front and his back against any possible attack, for the demagogues could strike at a time least expected.

In another poem in the collection, titled "Elegy for a Nation", the persona seems to make good his threats of exposing corruption and mismanagement in high places. The poem was written in honour of Chinua Achebe to mark his Seventieth birthday anniversary, and it is rendered in

the form of an apostrophe to Achebe, who is imagined as being present. The poem reads like a nasty obituary of a nation.

Just as the title suggests, the poem is an elegy. It mourns the death of the Nigerian nation. Though the persona declares in the second line that the nation is not yet clinically pronounced dead, which surprises him:

> Ah, Chinua, are your grapevine wired?
> It sings: our nation is not dead, not clinically
> Yet, Now this may come as a surprise to you,
> It was to me… (p.74)

He states again in another instant that it is dead:

> Lay this hulk in state upon the Tower of Silence,
> Let vultures prove what we have seen, but fear to say- (p. 74)

From the above, the persona says that the corpse is lying in state waiting for vultures to feed on.

He then goes into a historical diagnosis of the problems of the nation that brought about its death. Soyinka traces the struggles of our forefathers under colonial rule and the waste their efforts came to when Nigeria attained independence:

> To drums of ancient skins, homoeopathic
> Beat against the boom of pale-knuckled guns.
> We vied with the regal rectitude of Overamwem-
> *No stranger breath*-he swore- shall desecrate
> *This hour of communion with our gods!* We
> Died with the women of Aba, they who held
> A bridgehead against white levy, armed with pestle,
> Sash and spindle, and a potent nudity-eloquent
> Abomination in the timeless rites of wrongs. (p. 75)

Soyinka shows in this poem the obvious collapse of the hope and excitement generated by the independence project into disappointment and despair; the disillusionment and alienation brought about by the political elite breeds nothing but poverty:

> Like levi jeans on youth and age,
> The dreams are faded, potholed at joints and even
> Milder points of stress. Ghosts are sole inheritors.
> Silos fake rotundity-these are kwashi-okor blights
> Upon the landscape, depleted at source. Even
> The harvest seeds were long devoured. Empty hands
> Scrape the millennial soil at planting. (pp. 77–78)

The poem is a compendium of several issues that the poetic persona wishes to share with Achebe. It talks about the Nigeria-Biafra war in which many people were killed and which left the Igbos scrapping here and there to survive in the midst of devastating hunger. It also talks

about the Negritude movement in which poets like Senghor and Diop celebrate beauty of African culture in form of a beautiful woman.

Soyinka also takes a sweeping look at religion; especially the Christian religion introduced by the whites (which is more like opium) and how it has trapped a good number of the country's population in churches instead of engaging in activities that can bring development to the nation. He laments that this borrowed religion is devastating the African culture that is our only heritage:

> They'll murder heritage in its timeless crib,
> Decree our heroes, heroines out of memory
> Obliterate the narratives of clans, names
> That bind to roots, reach to heavens, our
> Links to ancestral presence. The Born-agains
> Are on rampage, born against all that spells
> Life and mystery, legend and innovation.
> Imprecations rend the air, song is taboo.
> The stride of sum-toned limbs racing wind a sin,
> Flesh is vile, wine, the gift of earth, execrated.
> These tyrants have usurped the will of God. (p. 82)

The message is that Christianity frowns upon African culture and tradition and the elements of the ancestral past like herbs, dance, kola nuts, and songs. He lambasts the clerics for milking their sheep instead of shepherding them.

The poem is written around the significant hyperbole of the death of Nigeria. The poet touches on almost every aspect of the country's history, showing how each of them contributed to bringing the country down to its knees. The tone of the poem is elegiac; the poet is genuinely disturbed by the state of the nation and, therefore, expresses his sorrow. Typical of Wole Soyinka, the poem is rendered in a sarcastic tone, employing several rhetorical questions to achieve that tone. For instance, "what shall we do, Chinua, with these hate Clerics?" (p.83) In fact, the poem starts with a rhetorical question and ends with it.

There is also the abundant use of allusion. Allusion is made to three important historical events in Nigeria: the struggle of Oba Overamwen with the British, the Aba women's riot of 1922, and the struggles of the coal miners of the Iva Valley for improvement in working conditions. Allusion is made to other important historical figures like Queen Amina, Moremi, Senghor, as well as to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Allusion is also made to important towns like Abeokuta, Oyo, Kano, Maiduguri, Benin, Bida, Ife, and so on.

Soyinka's language in this poem is colloquial and humorous with a satirical touch. He makes use of symbolism in many instances. For example, he makes allusions to Obudu, located in the Southeast, Jos in the North and Idanre in the Southwest, which symbolise the three blocs into which the colonial masters, for ease of administration, partitioned Nigeria.

Figures of speech such as alliteration, assonance, pun, hyperbole, and so on abound in this poem. Alliteration occurs every now and then: for instance, /H/ in "with all the Heavenly Host. Has the last Imam" (p.84). Assonance as well; "seek me out among the questers, creed divorced" (p.84). Hyperbole occurs in "these tyrants have usurped the will of God" (p.85).

In "For Chinua Achebe at 70" Soyinka also deploys the myth of Ajapa in this poem, an habitual poetic practice. The exploration of the myth of Ajapa, who borrows feathers from the birds to survey the earth, is a touchstone with which the poet makes a comment regarding the advancement of other nations while Nigeria remains behind:

> How shall they taught, Chinua, that Ajapa
> Lives, but no longer borrows feathers from the birds
> To survey earth. (p. 84).

Soyinka uses it to explain the phenomenal advancement of some nations like Malaysia, India, and China, which used to depend on others while Nigeria is still bedevilled with domestic and ethnic issues. There is also a dialectical usage of the Ajapa myth. The poetic persona seems to suggest that those who build spaceships got their concept from Ajapa:

> The galaxy is boundless host to a new race
> Of voyagers, seeking the once forbidden. Cinders
> From promethean dares, shards of Ajapa's shell,
> Are constellations by which ships of the space are steered. (p. 84)

The mood of the poem is best captured by Segun Adekoya's observation of Wole Soyinka's characteristic disposition: "the poet feeds on emotions and sensations of anger, anxiety, despair, fear, hunger, and love which he shares with humanity" (p.435). It would be abnormal foranyone not to be angry at the state of the Nigerian nation. Soyinka is definitely not happy with the state of things in Nigeria, a country with great potential, rich in human and natural resources.His anger comes across in almost every line in the poem.

Another poem of a somewhat similar theme is "Exit left, Monster, Victim in Pursuit: Death of a Tyrant." It is taken from the second segment titled "Of Exits". In this poem Soyinka ridicules Sani Abacha. It is an expository post-mortem on the reign and death of the late dictator, Sani Abacha. The tone of the persona is that of mockery and satisfaction while the mood is that of triumphant vindication of Soyinka, who was always on the run during the reign of Abacha's military junta. The diction is not overloaded with his usual obscure words, and this is probably due to the fact that he wanted his reader to understand it and have a laugh as well.

The first stanza immediately transports the reader to the heart of the matter: Sani Abacha's maniacal attachment to money and power, the brutalities he wreaked on the nation which resulted in the death of many, and his pervasive sexual escapades which led to his eventual death:

> Long, long before he slopped
> Viagra
> Down his throat, and washed it down
> His favourite gargle from Iganmu,
> Libelled home-made brandy as in
> Home-made democracy the gunner
> Was a goner. (p. 24)

The poem, as seen from the first stanza is tinted with satire. The persona's deployment of "long, long" in the first line stretches the mind of the reader back to the days when people lived in fear as a result of Abacha's killer squads. He suggests that he was already dead while he was

busy killing his citizens. Abacha's military regime was a most horrible experience in Nigeria. Jeyifo (2004) describes him as "so brutal, so corrupt and mediocre that it seemed like an occupying foreign power without any program for its subject population beyond plunder and repression" (pp. 267-8). Maier further describes Abacha's regime:

> General Sani Abacha had been perched imperiously on the throne of power, running Nigeria not so much as a country but as his personal fiefdom. Billions of dollars were siphoned off into overseas bank accounts controlled by Abacha, his family, or his cronies, while the masses simmered in anger at their deepening poverty. Literally millions of Nigerians had fled into economic and political exile. Newspapers were shut down, and trade unions were banned, while human right activists, journalists, intellectuals, and opponents imaginary and real were jailed or, in a few cases, eliminated by state-sponsored death squads. (p. 3)

The wordplay on "home-made brandy" and "home-made democracy" in the poem is an indictment on the kind of democracy Abacha wanted to enthrone when he tried handing over power to himself. In subsequent stanzas, the poem also addresses the military's misadventure in politics. It explores the shoddy practices of the first and the second republic politicians who pushed Nigeria to the fringes, thereby inviting the hellish regimes of Babangida and Abacha (1985-1998), regarded as the most horrible in the history of military dictatorship in Nigeria. As the time ticked away, the juntas and the military institutions drifted and lost their sense of direction. The greed of the military pushed the nation by degrees, slowly but surely, away from the project of nationhood. Thus, by the end of almost forty years of military misrule, Nigeria was far more fragmented than it was in January 1966, when they first seized power.

Abacha's devilish tactics are said to have "outgunned/the finest and the best/of a hundred million…" The finest and the best could mean the very many military officers that Abacha has killed to get to the corridors of power. By its very nature, the military rule by command, thus making no room for an opposition that would have guaranteed checks and balances of any sort. Working by diktat, by and large, allowed unrestricted access to the national assets, whose resources they expended so unsparingly, irresponsibly and inefficiently. The persona recounts the names of notable personalities Abacha liquidated in his attempt to hold on to power:

> The Gunner's gone
> Who never faced his foes
> But took them from the rear
> His targets-women (kudirat*et al*)
> Octogenarians-Alfred Rewane-and
> Once faithful servitors now mired
> In the Gunner's fears. (p. 25)

The above stanza can at best be described as a catalogue because it records the names of the people who suffered death at the hands of Sani Abacha. M. K. O. Abiola, the winner of the June12th 1993 presidential elections was also named. Though exterminated after the death of Abacha, his death is still a sad reminder of Abacha's murderous regime. Thus, he dies after losing his courageous wife Kudirat at the hands of the same people who imprisoned him.

In this collection of poems, Soyinka shows the effect of bad leadership in all its ramifications. In "The Children of This Land", he believes that the youths of the nation have been short-changed by the corrupt government Nigeria has had, coupled with their own narrow-

mindedness. The money meant for building a strong economy has gone into private pockets, stored in foreign accounts as a result of which the youth seek better life in foreign lands where they are despised and abused. They do all sorts of odd and dirty jobs to survive. This poem seems to echo Soyinka's much quoted opinion that the present generation is a wasted generation. The first stanza reads:

> The children of this land are old
> Their eyes are fixed on maps in place of land
> Their feet must learn to follow
> Distant contours traced by alien minds
> Their present sense has faded into past. (p. 68)

These youths, the poetic persona continues, nurse the inordinate ambition of travelling to the western world, where they "grow the largest eyes within head sockets", "their heads are crowns/on neat fish spines…" (p. 68) due to extreme misery and abuse. The fact that they have not learnt to be law-abiding makes their situation worse as they are abused and treated as "castaways". Most of these youths are "so battered and twisted by poverty that they look like animals and lunatics, especially those of them who take to foraging as means of livelihood" (Adekoya, p. 521). The persona paints the plights of the youths of the nation more vividly in the last stanza:

> But the children of this land embrace the void
> As lovers. The spores of their conjunction move
> To people once human spaces, stepping nimbly
> Over ghosts of parenthood. The children of this land
> Are robbed as judges, their gaze rejects
> All measures of the past. A gleam
> Invades their dead eyes briefly, lacerates the air (p. 69)

The children of the land are pictured as lovers whose love is never reciprocated but instead "embrace" the "void" while chasing shadows. The persona holds that they become old faster than their real age would suggest as the result of the abysmal poverty in the land. He says that they are robbed of parental care and so sees nothing of interest about the "measures of the past". Parental care here represents the adequate provision and development which government is supposed to have put in place for the youths to develop their potential, something that would result in the development of the nation. The poem aptly captures the present mind-sets of many Nigerian youths: the rugged determination and mad struggle to travel abroad which has fettered any hope for a meaningful life in Nigeria. They have forgotten that some other people made sacrifices and took the pains to develop the countries they are running to. But the government is not helping matters. Instead they embark on white elephant projects that have no bearing on the betterment of the people or the development of the country.

As such, in "Low-Cost Housing" Soyinka takes a look at the wanton waste of resources on projects that are never completed. The poem is directed more to the Shehu Shagari government, which embarked heavily on building low-cost houses around the country, a major mission statement on the manifesto of the defunct National party of Nigeria (N.P.N). In this poem, the persona takes us through the low-cost housing scheme that gulped huge sums of money and was subsequently abandoned, leaving the Nigerian landscape littered with uncompleted structures surrounded by bushes:

> Wrapped in flirtatious blade of grass,
> You'll find them, derelict sentinels, where lizards
> Conduct their blatant rapes, metronomic heads ablaze (p. 73)

Soyinka takes the politicians to task when he further declares that:

> These are the planners' master-piece-
> Shelter for all by the new millennium-
> Low-cost housing schemes, lowly and costly-
> Long on invoice and short on shelter… (p. 73)

After allocating huge amounts of money to execute the low-cost housing scheme, and building is in progress, it suddenly grinds to a halt because the money has gone into private pockets. Thus, the uncompleted structures remain "wrapped in flirtatious blade of grass" where lizards pose as "derelict sentinels" to conduct their "blatant rapes". The use of animal images with sexual innuendo suggests the rape of the citizens' sensibility. Words like "flirtatious" and "rape" symbolize moral corruption while "the sexual image is reinforced by the male "lizards" that conduct their "blatant rapes" as their red combs keep nodding majestically in dubious affirmative action" (Adekoya, p. 521).

The animal images continue in the second stanza:

> But yes, they house the rodents, reptiles, passive
> Denizens of wood and undergrowth dumb observers
> Patient browsers. These beasts are not so dumb. (p. 73)

Segun Adekoya affirms that what the images represent: "is an acknowledgement of animals' power of endurance of human encroachments on their territories" (p. 528). There seem to be competition going on between beasts and human beings in the use of space and the end-point is to see who laughs last:

> Your beasts are perennial squatters, reclaiming
> Space that was ever theirs. (p. 73)

The animals, to further quote Adekoya, "have learnt to patiently wait until human hubris plays itself out and in the nick of time they move in to reclaim what, in default of the planner's sincerity of purpose, is theirs" (p. 528). This is happening in a country where many people are homeless.

The title of the poem has a mocking undertone: the compound word low-cost suggests that the housing scheme appears cheap but is in fact very expensive since politicians use such schemes as smokescreens to embezzle public funds:

> Long on invoices and short on shelter… (p. 73)

What is seen on the construction sites does not justify the huge capital pumped into the projects. And these uncompleted structures littered the country:

> Covers tracks from Abuja to the central Bank. (p. 73)

The poem is highly satirical in tone, mocking a government that claimed that by the new millennium they would have built housing for all, but ended up building for reptiles and denizens of the woods. The mood of the persona is that of disgust at the wanton waste of funds and the criminal misappropriation of public funds that the schemes entail.

The piece is a very short poem of three stanzas. It is an elegy lamenting the wanton waste of resources and the last stanza which is made up of three lines (tercet) comments on the regrettable loss that humanity suffers while animals triumph.

In the poem "Vain Ransom" that ends the collection, Wole Soyinka relives the colonial experience and the brutalities and horrors suffered in many East African countries, especially in countries like Kenya and Tanzania to which the poem is dedicated. Written in ten stanzas, it is a free verse without regular rhyming scheme or metre. He laments that all the labour and the sacrifices that the founders of these nations made seem to have come to nothing:

> The price their forebears paid, it seems
> Has not sufficed as ransom for this
> Future-stillborn, a past in perpetual labour. (p. 86)

This poem completes the poems in the "Elegies" segment. It once again touches on religion, especially the Islamic religion and its fanatics, whose overblown sense of devotion results in wars about which the persona sees nothing holy. With this and the previous "Elegy for a Nation", Soyinka paints a grim picture of an Africa that needs much overhauling if it is to make headway in the modern world. It is a remarkable elegy that strikes a chord with anyone familiar with historical and socio-political narratives like the slave trade, the civil wars and the ethnic clashes recurrent in so many African countries. Soyinka makes particular reference to East African countries like Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, and most especially Rwanda, which experienced a genocide that reduced its population by half.

Conclusion

In *Samarkand*, Soyinka seems to be encouraging the oppressed masses to stand-up and face their oppressors; to fight for a better nation that would ensure a better life by replacing the junkies in the corridors of power with credible people who would deliver governance as constitutionally expected. Adeniran clarifies Soyinka's view of revolutionary action:

> It would be wrong, too, to see Soyinka as a revolutionary ascetic. The changes he calls for no doubt very often amount to revolution, and he has always placed his special traits in the service of the change of his vision: a fundamental change of values, and changes in social structure, economic relations and control, political organization and the goals of society. (p. 179)

Soyinka's major concern in most of his works is to uphold the dignity of all persons regardless of differences in religion, race, nationality, gender or personality, especially in Nigeria, where the humanity of the poor masses has been abused and suppressed by the impunities and tyranny of the ruling class.

References

Adekoya, S. (2006). *The inner eye: An Oriel on Wole Soyinka's works*. Ile-Ife, Nigeria: ObafemiAwolowo University Press Ltd.

Adeniran, T. (1994). *The politics of Wole Soyinka*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Fountain Publications.

Dowden, R. (2009). *Africa: Altered states, ordinary miracles.* London: Portobello Books.

Iji, E. M. (1991). *Three radical dramatists: A study.* Ibadan, Nigeria: Kraft Books.

Jeyifo, B. (2004). *Wole Soyinka: Politics, poetics and postcolonialism.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486593

Maier, K. (2000). *This house has fallen: Nigeria in crisis*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books.

Olowonmi, A. (2008). The writer and the quest for democratic governance in Nigeria: Transcending post-independence disillusionment. *The Journal of Pan African Studies,2*(3), 55–67.

Soyinka, W. (2002).*Samarkand and other markets I have known.* Ibadan, Nigeria: Crucible Publishers.

Corresponding author: C. A. Patrick
Contact email: charlespatrick282@gmail.com

Memento Mori: A Positive and Contemporary Reflection Through Visual Art on a Life Spent Well

Debbie Walter
Charles Darwin University
Casuarina, Australia

Abstract

"Memento mori", a Latin phrase meaning "remember you must die", is generally conceived as morbid. But there is a long and fascinating tradition of artwork based on this concept that is designed to encourage a more beneficial appraisal of the time a human being spends on the planet. In a world where the media inundates the social sphere with negative stories and where people have been desensitised to the significance of death, the topic is compelling. In many cultures nowadays consumerism is encouraged and extravagance is promoted. This consumerism can function as a distraction that helps people avoid thinking about death, but it certainly does not help one to truly prepare for something that is inevitable.

The present practice-inspired visual arts analysis explores memento mori with compassion, insisting on the layers of unanticipated beauty and aesthetics that survive in the traces humans leave behind as evidence of their ephemeral existence. Furthermore, it posits positive new ways of representing an age-old contemplation that is universal and spans all cultures.

Keywords: memento mori reflection, visual arts, cultural and philosophical perspectives, time, aesthetic traces of existence

Introduction

With this article the aim has been to describe the new ways of representing an age-old and universal contemplation: one's mortality. It further explicates how exploring humanity's ephemeral nature can lead to the development of an aesthetic where the focus is not the negative aspects of that contemplation. It intentionally steers away from the morbid depictions of death and instead demonstrates how memento mori can be used to focus on life and living, all the while expressing gratitude. With this unique, compassionate approach viewers are prompted to think about their own mortality and embrace the time they have.

The individual's consideration of time is necessarily related to his or her own mortality – time as the fundamental element of a human life span. There is a specific beauty in the various spiritual narratives that are the result of the *tempus fugit* motif. Herein we will not only observe the continued relevance of the memento mori motif within the visual arts, but will also explore it through a self-reflective process by using my own work as exemplar.

Memento Mori Origins and Examples in Art

There is a long tradition of memento mori artwork designed to remind the viewer of their mortality (Tate.org, 2018). The first known use of the expression memento mori in English is said to be in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 1* (Laurie, 2014). Stoics have described memento mori as the practice of meditating on the fragility of life. So this perspective asks 'What if reflecting and meditating on that fact was a simple key to living life to the fullest?' (Daily Stoic, 2019). This approach has been used across the centuries and into modern times to raise awareness that one must "seize the day".

Images such as the "Dance of Death" or "Danse Macabre" fresco (Hrastovilie, Slovenia, 1490) still powerfully resonate with viewers today. This fresco and other versions of the dance of death concept depict a person alongside their dead self (represented as a skeleton) repeated at all stages of their life. Sometimes a corpse is featured to remind the living person to consider their worldly ways, such as in "The three living and the three dead" from the Serristori Hours illuminated manuscript (Florence, 1500). This idea is believed to be derived from a French poem from the late 1200s whose concluding line is *"as you are, we once were; as we are, so shall you be"* (Townsend 2009, p.44). Dance of death was a major theme for artistic output during this period, and prints of its images spread quickly across Europe (Townsend, 2009). This was a harsh and grounding reminder, as people of all levels of society were portrayed (even kings were shown dancing with their dead selves).

The "Vanitas" still life was also a substantial part of the memento mori tradition in art. "Vanitas" artworks grew in popularity in the 1600s (Tate.org, 2018), but the underlying notion of preparing oneself for death with images and art objects dates back to as early as the thirteenth century. Skeletons and skulls were common images that made appearances on the borders of pages in prayer books, often being accompanied by the phrase "*Remember you will die*" (Townsend 2009, p.44). This is a religious age where it was commonplace to think of human lives as preparation for the afterlife. The existential nature of memento mori and its underlying ponderings of the meaning of life make the concept ageless.

More traditionally a memento mori art piece would be a portrait with common symbols such as a skull, an hourglass or clocks. The low flicker of a candle flame about to be extinguished and symbolised fragility and fleeting nature, along with images of fruits and flowers (Williams,

M. 2009). Besides these symbols, the Vanitas still life had the added purpose of bringing awareness to the vanity and materialism of life. Vanus is derived from the Latin word meaning "empty" (O'Toole, 2018). It is a reminder not to be distracted by worldly pleasures and to always be aware of the temporal nature and eventual worthlessness of worldly goods. To aid in this purpose, there were material objects represented, such musical instruments and wine. The concept itself may have originated in the Bible's first line of the book of Ecclesiastes: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:2).

Antonio de Pereda's "*Allegory of Vanity*" (Kunsthistorisches Museum, 1632–1636) is an example of a Vanitas still life that includes many symbols to represent time, including a globe to represent the turning of the world. There are several skulls depicted in de Pereda's work along with an hourglass and a clock. An extinguished candle and old images are present. Different gold tones are used to emphasise the worldly possessions and the impermanence of wealth. Symbols depicted in memento mori art still have incidence in the work of modern artists. In a recent memento mori themed exhibition, curator Ted Snell eloquently described artist Andrew Nicholls's work, which is influenced by Dance of Death, as "becoming *a very personal acknowledgment of life's end rather than a threatening image of impending death*" (Snell, 2014, p. 4).

Of all the memento mori symbols, the skull remains the most familiar and relatable as an image of death across virtually all cultures. Picasso, master of all styles, had recurring representations of skulls, both animal and human, such as the "*Goat's skull Bottle and Candle*" (Tate Britain, 1952)*.* Prior to the use of skeletons, a devil was used in allegorical lessons and as a reminder regarding worldly pleasures, and during the latter Middle Ages an "animated skeleton" was considered a very powerful image.

Contemporary artist, Damien Hirst was interested in the precise dividing line between life and death. He is renowned for controversial works and shock art. This differs from my focus but there is a shared underlying interest in themes and an agreement that, to a great extent, the mysteries of death and surrounding questions will remain a mystery and must be left unresolved. Hirst's butterfly paintings may be seen as more of a celebration of life and thus, more light hearted than his other works. He was interested in how lifelike dead butterflies still appeared. Butterflies' powers of attraction are quite universal, a fact that helped make this a choice motif for my work as well. Butterflies were also a traditional memento mori symbol to represent the fleeting nature and fragility of life.

In addition, Hirst's diamond encrusted skull piece "*For the Love of God*" (White Cube Mason's Yard, London, 2007), although clearly commercialising and creating a play on questions of the value of an artwork, is a commentary verging on exploitation on capitalist art. In this piece Hirst has beautified the symbol of death: Luke White has described Hirst's work as a transformation of the skull into "an enigma, an obscure, sublime object of desire" (White, p. 4).

A darker side in Hirst's contemporary art was obvious in works with animal carcasses such as *Mother and child divided* (Tate Britain1993). This was a more formidable reference to death and decay. My work introduced shortly, will intentionally navigate away from this confronting imagery, in spite of sharing an interest in common. The title of Hirst's 1991 piece *The Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Somebody Living* is a great line to prompt thought for the need for memento mori.

On his part, Ron Mueck is a contemporary artist whose work reflects the continued relevance of memento mori, with its traditional symbols still prevalent. Mueck has taken this universal symbol to a monumental scale, stacking galleries with one hundred skulls that, while realistic in appearance, are each 1.5 metres high. A study of mortality, his installation "*Mass*" makes resonances to Dutch Still life painting and the "Vanitas" painting genre of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Figure 1). Mueck celebrates the Skull as a "form that links all humanity and pays homage to a symbol that has stood within the art of essentially all cultures and religions" (Azzarello 2017).

Figure 1: My niece at NGV – shows the scale of Mueck's skulls

When viewers visit this massive installation, they are given a startling reminder of the transient nature of life. Nina Azzarello (2017) described the installation as "an imposing wall of human heads that resonates with a simultaneous and strange sense of impermanence and eternality" (Azzarello 2017).

Memento Mori in Contemporary Art Practice

I will be analysing my own work at this point – in an attempt to illustrate how the notion of memento mori is interpreted in an individual's practice. While I avoid the most common macabre metaphors in my work, it contains diverse "remembrance of death" concepts. My work can be described as a contemplation, aiming to capture a new way of positively representing this irksome pondering about death. Alongside this, other works will be explored as a comparison. These relationships to death tend to have more confronting and unsettling images – even shock tactics. Though this approach purposely avoids the morbid, skulls have come into one series of my work but with a new aesthetic, one that aims to evoke a re-thinking of our associations with traditional symbols and the skull motif in particular.

Art Practice 1: Beautifying the skull. This resin series is made in response to the most well-known memento mori symbol: the skull. The work aims to question and evoke a re-thinking of our associations with this traditional symbol, the symbol that links all humanity. It is a series that explores contemplating mortality in a new, contemporary way that finds and incorporates beauty. They are an aesthetically reimaged memento mori, prompting us to rethink what we associate with the skull whilst making reference to some other traditional memento mori and vanitas images.

Figures 2A and 2B: *Resin skull with butterflies*   *Resin skull with clock parts* Debbie Walter

Butterflies (left) symbolise the fleeting and fragile nature of life. Historically they have also represented resurrection and the soul (Neve, 1974 p. 131). Clocks and clock parts feature in the second example above (right) as a reminder of our limited life span. Other Memento mori symbols depicted in the resin *Beautifying the skull* series include skeletal leaves, reminding the viewer that earthly pleasures fade. The leaves show that beauty may be found in the effects of the weathering of time and that there is no antithesis in the seemingly opposing factors of beauty and decay. Flowers commonly represent life. Flowers are prominent in another of my resin skulls, a symbol linking back to the traditional memento mori reminder of delicate worldly pleasures that fade. Moreover, these flowers form a beautiful preserved memento, a captured moment in time.

The skull has been beautified to explore how it can become a contemporary memento mori and to demonstrate how this can help remove any sense of dread one may associate with it. This series intentionally strives to transform the skull shape into an adorned polished artwork. The pieces are displayed propped up on shiny glass stands accompanied with their image reflected in a mirror. A literal reflection to prompt reflective thoughts whilst also making reference to the vanity associated with mirrors.

Figure 2C: *Resin skull with gold coins* Debbie Walter

Coins are used to question the true value of wealth and the cost of time. Gold coins were chosen to emphasise the eventual worthlessness of material objects in line with the Vanitas concept. It is a reminder to consider the wasteful distraction of worldly, superficial, material pleasures. Many become slaves to the procurement of those coins at the cost of valuable and limited time.

The resin skull depicted in figure 3.D has a doubled appearance depending on the angle from where it is viewed and the light. The aim on first appearance is to be attractive to the viewer with its glittery sparkle and "bling", then from a second view point an hourglass is revealed, a traditional memento mori symbol used in Vanitas still life's. A hidden symbol of time to get people to ponder how they are spending it and to bring to light the time wasted on superficial worldly/material distractions.

Figure 3.D: *Glamour Resin skull with hour glass* Debbie Walter

These works celebrate life and its beauty and are a tribute to the gift of life.

Art Practice 2: What Is a Year of Your Life Worth?

This series is a time-based art project. A contemporary memento mori reminder of fleeting time "What is a year of your life worth" is also about the traces humans leave. The spaced timing is a key conceptual aspect, as a mark was completed for every day for a year. This project is derived from the question: what is the value of a year in a mortal lifespan? It was also a project questioning if this brief time is spent well, particularly with regards to the time spent in the safety of a regular, paying job. This resulted in a sizeable series made up of 365 mixed media pieces. Through making a mark each day, a year in the artist's mortal life span was recorded, visually gaining aesthetic form from the collection of inscriptions left. These are traces of existence, culminating in the preserved record of a year of the artist's life span.

There is a clear link with the exploration into the effects of time, evident in emulated erosion, rust and the patina-effect paint. This aims to capture the weathering effects of time and the look of corrosive materials and eroded landscape. Also, regularly appearing in this series were mementoes preserved in resin (including those making reference to Memento mori and Vanitas) such as clock parts, keys and skeletal leaves. This is a multimedia work that includes text from priceless letters from the artist's grandfather… capturing moments in time and memories in layers.
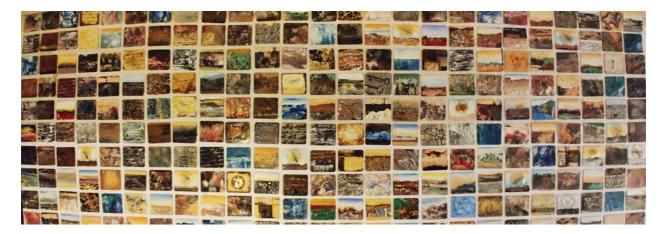

Fig 4A: Title -*What is a year of your life worth* (In progress). Each 11.5cm wide x 9.5cm long. Acrylic and mixed media on board Debbie Walter
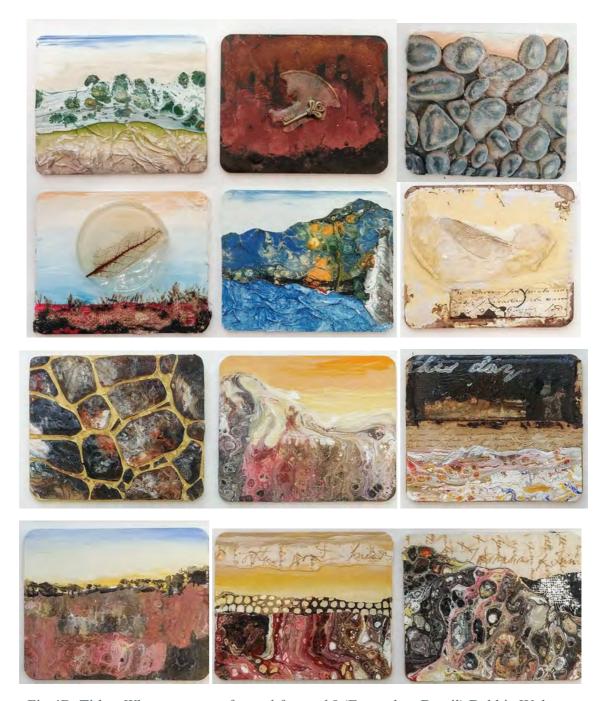
Fig 4B Title: *What is a year of your life worth?* (Examples -Detail) Debbie Walter
Acrylic and mixed media on board
Each 11.5cm wide x 9.5cm long

Art Practice 3: Postcards: Another year apart

A second time-based project, simultaneous with this one and continuing production for a second year, is based on a postcard made from my own imagery, sent home weekly to my parents over the year 2018. Now, with the completion of that year, the text and imagery from the 52 postcards will record the interaction, the relationship and the time frame, forming the basis of a series of artworks to be completed in 2019. I aim to bring art together with the important things in a mortal lifespan: the connections we depend on like family, whilst continuing to explore the ephemeral nature of these relationships. The time-based aspect is

important to the project as a reminder of our fleeting time and in order to prompt thought on how it is spent, continuing the aim of bringing memento mori into a new contemporary and compassionate aesthetic.

The text from the postcards forms layers in the subsequent Palimpsest artwork, while adding the relatable quality of a personal record of interaction, story and relationships of individual lifespans crossing paths. The postcards have been created using original photographs from the artist's travels and cropped sections of their existing artwork, most of which are already recordings of markings of time, including the effects, colours, rust and mossy regrowth of layers. On closer inspection there are dates and text, often rustic in appearance, with some worn and illegible print. Other surfaces point to evidence of time and place. All of these aspects combine as reworked imagery juxtaposed into suggested landscapes. Ultimately the remnants will be imbedded into the landscape as recorded traces in the earth. The addition, text and stamps add a quality reminiscent of traditional collage such as the work of Kurt Schwitters (Cardinal, 1994).

Figure 5: Work in progress exploring composition. A section of the *Postcard project: Another year apart* Debbie Walter

Figure 5.2: The *Postcard project*   detail   Debbie Walter

The close-up example above shows that sometimes the text is used to form and suggest parts of the landscape (in this case hills on the horizon), combined with other painterly areas that may resemble the organic formation of rock walls, cross section of a cliff face and soil.

Figure 5.3 Title: *Letters in time layers landscape* Debbie Walter
Acrylic on Canvas 2015 71 x 35.5 cm

Art Practice 4: Reflecting on Memento Mori

In this piece a skull has been created from resin and attached to a mirror with added painted layers, suggesting the earth and a cross-section landscape. When the viewer looks at the piece they see themselves reflected through the skull, creating thus a literal reflection on life/death…a Memento mori. Memento mori is reflecting on one's mortality, thus this piece reminds the viewer of this in a literal sense when their own face is partially reflected back through this familiar symbol associated with death.

Figure 6a & 6b: *Reflecting on Memento Mori* Resin skull and paint on mirror Debbie Walter

In *Contemplating spending a lifetime*, money is depicted in the form of notes, taking the traditional Vanitas symbols for wealth (usually coins) into a contemporary setting whilst continuing to be a reminder of the temporal nature of worldly possessions. This memento mori piece prompts the audience to question how limited mortal life spans are spent, particularly in reference to how much time one spends working. It wants the viewer to share in reflecting on how much time they devote to work and the true value of the money earned at the cost of their time. Hence the skeleton in the bottom right hand corner is a reminder that, regardless of wealth, people all end up in the same place.

Figure 7 a: *Contemplating spending a life time*   Debbie Walter

Figure 7b: *Contemplating spending a life time* Detail Debbie Walter

Conclusion

Memento mori continues to be a very relevant and powerful process of self-reflection. Artists continue to contemplate mortality through their work, including through this artist's/author's practice, which transfers expressions of memento mori to contemporary formats and new aesthetics. This paper has examined how artwork can explore contemplations of mortality and how the visual arts can bring the viewer closer to a work with which they can connect, while demonstrating that the topic of death does not need to be engaged in with a sense of dread. With these illustrations, this artwork provides a space to aesthetically provoke thought and open the viewer to a perspective on what can be gained from a relevant understanding of memento mori. It asks one to rethink one's acknowledgment of limited time in the twenty-first century, thus focusing on a relevant appreciation of its value.

This practice-led research should provide insight into the way in which the negative connotations associated with memento mori can begin to be derogated within the contemporary new aesthetics. It has been argued that memento mori is not morbid and is more about a mindfulness of the value of time and the insightful awareness that that time is limited. On a more practical plane, the author hopes that an awareness of memento mori brings satisfaction and contentment by helping the viewers feel that they are in a better position to make decisions on how their time is spent, and there is comfort to be gained from that.

References:

Azzarello, Nina. (2017). Ron Mueck scales-up and stacks 100 sculpted skulls at the national gallery of Victoria. Retrieved from https://www.designboom.com/art/ron-mueck-national-gallery-victoria-triennial-mass-12-15-2017/

Cardinal, R. (1994). Collecting and collage-making: the case of Kurt Schwitters. In J. Elsner & R. Cardinal (Eds.) *The Cultures of Collecting* (pp. 68–96)*.* Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press

Coogan, M., Brettler, M., Newsom, C. and Perkins, P. (2010). *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version*. 4th ed. The book of Ecclesiastes*,* p.937. New York: Oxford University Press.

Daily Stoic *"Memento Mori": The reminder we all desperately need.* Retrieved 2019 from https://dailystoic.com/memento-mori/

De Castua, J. (1490). Dance of Death or 'Danse Macabre (15th century fresco). Retrieved from https://www.thinkslovenia.com/sights-attractions/holy-trinity-church

Edwards, P. (2009). Existentialism and death: A survey of some confusions and absurdities. Philosophy and Death: Introductory Readings, 3.

Feldman, F. (1992). *Confrontations with the Reaper*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Grube, G. M. A. (1958). *Plato's thought*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Hirst (1991) With Dead head. Retrieved from http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hirst-with-dead-head-ar00617

Laurie, V (2014). Exhibition memento mori explores our preference to ignore death. Retrieved from https://www.theaustralian.com.au/subscribe/news/1/?sourceCode=TAWEB_WRE170_a_GGL&dest=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.theaustralian.com.au%2Farts%2Fuwa-exhibition-memento-mori-explores-our-preference-to-ignore-death%2Fnews-story%2Fef513d9fe862d43b5d51b37a06e4f4a0&memtype=anonymous&mode=premium

Neve, C (1974). Casement to infinity. Summary. Retrieved from http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/underwood-casement-to-infinity-t02323

O'Toole, N. (2018). Retrieved June 2018 from https://issuu.com/naomiotoole/docs/mortality_project_part_1.pptx

Picasso, P (1952). Goat skull, bottle and candle. Retrieved from http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/picasso-goats-skull-bottle-and-candle-t00145

Ronald Alley, (1981). *Catalogue of the Tate Gallery's Collection of Modern Art other than works by British artists*, Tate Gallery and Sotheby Parke-Bernet, London 1981.

Snell, Ted 2014. retrieved Feb 2018 from https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=2ahUKEwjg0vL1yJblAhUR7mEKHe_2AvQQFjAAegQIAhAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.lwgallery.uwa.edu.au%2F__data%2Fassets%2Fpdf_file%2F0009%2F2638935%2FMemento-Mori-Catalogue-Print-Version-PDF.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3bCGBRfe3fJ-QrBPxUlgpd

Tate Gallery *Art Term - memento mori*. Retrieved October 2017 from http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/memento-mori

Townsend, T. *Death and art: Europe 1200-1530.* London: V&A Publications.

White, L. (2009). Damien Hirst's diamond skull and the capitalist sublime. In L.White & C. Pajaczkowska (Eds.) *The Sublime Now.* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press. Retrieved from https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/17300342.pdf

Williams, M. (2009) Mourning half begun. *Runway*, *13* Autumn 2009: 10–13. Retrieved from https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;res=IELLCC;dn=06915834734590 1

Corresponding author: Debbie Walter
Contact email: debdesignwalter@gmail.com

Editor's Essay

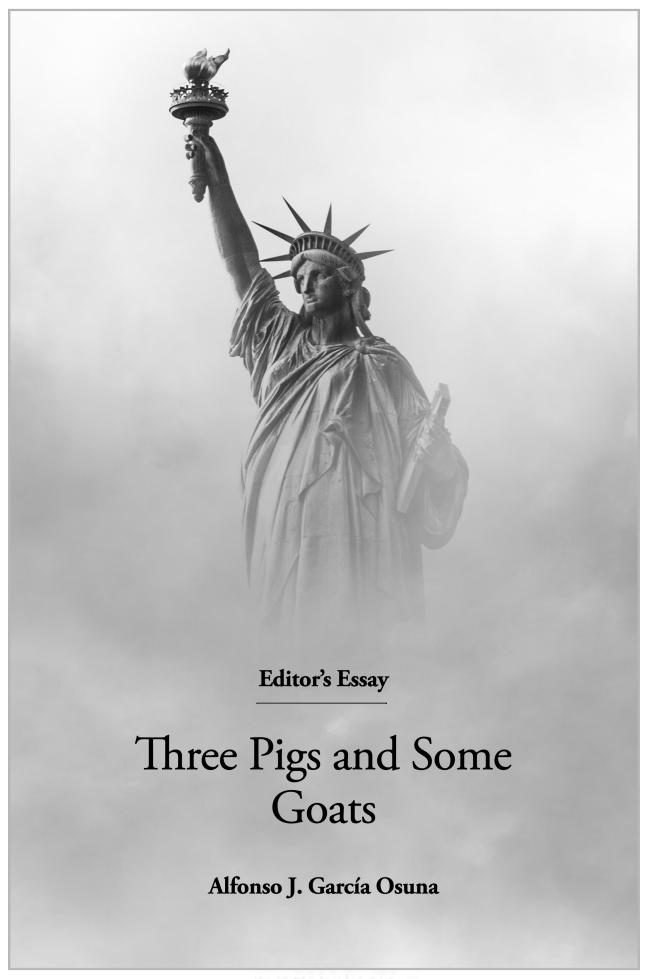# Three Pigs and Some Goats

Alfonso J. García Osuna

Image: Tom Coe, Unsplash

> "To begin to understand this, ask yourself why, if everyone agrees that "we" are entitled to rule ourselves, it is often so hard to agree about who "we" are.[1]
>
> K. A. Appiah

> "All [prejudices] are founded on shaky historical assumptions. No country has an unchanging essence. No community has an unchanging identity. What it means to be English or Chinese or Spanish or Indonesian or American changes all the time".[2]
>
> Felipe Fernández-Armesto

In his recent (2014) book *Our America: A Hispanic History of the United States*, Felipe Fernández-Armesto methodically defines the clearly misinformed manner in which ordinary citizens of the United States continue to build what I'd call our national self-image. The text makes it clear that the problem is not just the consequence of a general lack of information; it mostly revolves around a standardised approach to the construction of that image, one that still, I would add, reflects the mind-set that gave us Manifest Destiny. The term, coined around the year 1845, (newspaperman John O'Sullivan is commonly credited with introducing the term) refers to the philosophy that propelled the United States' expansion across the continent. According to this doctrine, the United States was destined by God to expand its territory and dominate the continent. This domination was conceived as the inevitable consequence of the natural superiority of people of northern European descent, so it follows that an inherent requirement for expansion throughout a continent already full of people was to deprecate, macerate or jettison every swarthy bastard in it. Perhaps the pompous sense of uniqueness so prevalent among us has its roots there; it is certainly revealed in the seemingly arrogant manner in which the proper noun "America" is used to refer exclusively to the United States and the adjective of nationality "American" to refer only to U.S. citizens, as if other nations on the American continent, having evaded their divinely-ordained responsibility to submit to the United States, were obscure footnotes to the history of the Western Hemisphere. Surely, were Frenchmen inclined to call their country "Europe" and themselves "European" as a consequence, many around the world would be justifiably perplexed. Nigerians don't call themselves "African" expecting their interlocutors to know that they are specifically from Nigeria.

Truth be told, it can be very problematic to assign an adjective of nationality to citizens of a country whose founders didn't bother to contrive a proper noun to designate it. Heck, if

---

[1] K. A. Appiah. (2018). *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity*. [E-reader Version]. Retrieved from https://books.google.com/books?id=5786DwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=K.+A.+Appiah.+(2018).+The +Lies+that+Bind:+Rethinking+Identity&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi3wv_K_aPkAhUn11kKHQKsC9EQuw UwAHoECAMQBQ#v=onepage&q=K.%20A.%20Appiah.%20(2018).%20The%20Lies%20that%20Bind%3A %20Rethinking%20Identity&f=false

[2] F. Fernández-Armesto. (2014). *Our America: A Hispanic History of the United States*. [E-reader Version]. Retrieved from https://books.google.com/books?id=WFUlAgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=our+america+armesto&hl=en &sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwia-Mmx_aPkAhWExFkKHWGUDRsQ6AEwAHoECAUQAg#v=onepage&q=our%20america%20armesto&f=fal se

eventually they're going to conquer the continent, why waste valuable time trying to come up with a provisional name: they might as well call the country by the name of the continent and get home in time for tea and digestive biscuits.

Yes, there have been original names proposed for the country. One that stands out is "Columbia", used by patriots to refer to the United States during the struggle for independence. Yet, although it was subsequently used to name the federal district, a university, a major river, a television network, a Cleveland-class light cruiser and a large number of streets and businesses, it evidently never prospered (to the delight, I am sure, of northern South Americans, who could now employ their version of the name without the fear of infringing upon copyright laws). So it appears that the way the founders found it expedient to proceed was to use a descriptive phrase to refer to the country: Several states united on the continent of America = The United States of America. This was a clever move: The ever-growing dominion would incorporate areas whose original names did not have to be erased or subordinated to the behemoth's name: United States of America was a "one size fits all" cowboy hat.

And yet, mystified by the "Manifest Hutzpah" of their overbearing neighbours, American republics that had − partially or entirely − escaped the land-grab came up with unique names for the United States (Yanquiland; Gringolandia). Astonishingly, perhaps owing to a lingering Manifest Destiny mentality, these colourful and eye-catching appellations have yet to be given serious consideration by Washington. Other options have been proposed: "Great Satan", a name preferred by people who don't particularly like us, cannot be broadly accepted due to its impracticality: the adjective of nationality associated with it, "Greatsatanian", is far too difficult to pronounce, and one can foresee a considerable number of Greatsatanians misspelling it.

But I stray.

The event that triggered my bizarre ruminations and a re-reading of *Our America* was a recommendation by the Greatsatanian president to four United States congresswomen, one of them Puerto Rican, that they should go back whence they came because, if they "hate America" so much, they'll be happier "over there" (*New York Times*, 2019, 14 July). The fact that this "send them back" narrative has gained so much traction among the U.S. public is the product, according to some, of a broad-spectrum mentality in a country where so many believe that global warming is a hoax, where 31% of its people reject evolution,[3] 26% believe that the Sun orbits the Earth,[4] 61% don't know that the universe began with the Big Bang[5] and almost half of them voted for a madcap television personality for president. This mentality has been termed "American Stupidity" by Steven Nadler:

> A stupid person has access to all the information necessary to make an appropriate judgment, to come up with a set of reasonable and justified beliefs and yet fails to do so. The evidence is staring them right in the face but it makes no difference whatsoever. They believe what they want to believe. Not only do they have no good reasons for

[3] Boston, R. (2019, February 12). How Many Americans Reject Evolution? The Answer May Surprise You. Retrieved from https://www.au.org/blogs/wall-of-separation/how-many-americans-reject-evolution-the-answer-may-surprise-you

[4] Neuman, S. National Public Radio (2014, February 14) Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2014/02/14/277058739/1-in-4-americans-think-the-sun-goes-around-the-earth-survey-says

[5] Neuman, S. National Public Radio (2014, February 14) Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2014/02/14/277058739/1-in-4-americans-think-the-sun-goes-around-the-earth-survey-says

thinking that what they believe is true — there are often good reasons for thinking that what they believe is false. They are not acting in a rational manner.[6]

While I believe that Nadler is correct in stating that citizens have access to much of the information a person might need in order to make appropriate judgments, what we "Americans" don't have, in my view, is the set of intellectual tools that would allow us to process that information in a wholesome and reasonable way. As such, American Stupidity would be the result of an inept educational system that is buttressed by a set of cultural values that is prejudiced.

Case in point is the nonchalant manner in which the person "Americans" elected as president suggests that Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a person of Puerto Rican descent born in New York City, should return whence she came. What should be worrying is not so much what was said; what should be very disturbing is that such a dim-witted challenge to reason seems cogent and compelling to large parts of the U.S. public. The reason is simple: the country's cultural values are the result of a prejudiced, ideologised view of history and an educational system that inculcates that prejudice:

> … prejudice that the United States is a country made by Anglo-Saxon Protestants, constructed by anglophone colonists, where concepts of liberty and law are defined by traditions that originated in England; where English language is the basis of whatever cultural unity can be contrived among the ethnicities that make up the population; and where you become "American"–or more accurately, where you qualify to be a citizen of the United States–by subscribing to a canonical version of the history of the country that begins among English colonists on the east coast of the continent.[7]

While this Anglo-centric narrative disregards the 15,000 years of Native American presence and the long and storied history of Spanish exploration and settlement of much of what would become the United States (Englishmen were latecomers to the continent; they would first enjoy kippers and mash on a Virginia beach at a much later time), the "go back to where you came from" proposal ignores the fact that Puerto Rico, where Ocasio-Cortez would somehow or other have to "go back" to, is not only a part of the United States, but *the* part of the United States where the country's history begins, and it begins with three pigs and some goats. It was on August 8, 1505 that Spanish navigator and explorer Vicente Yáñez Pinzón (who had captained the Niña in the famous 1492 voyage) marooned those animals on the island so that their progeny could provide food for the future colony that he envisioned creating upon his return.[8] Notwithstanding the fact that they walked on four legs, they are truly the first Europeans to settle on U.S. soil. Perhaps three pigs do not provide a very heroic story of origins for a nation that would conquer a continent, but if Bladud, one of the legendary early kings of Britain, was gainfully employed as a swineherd, why shouldn't the United States begin its historical narratives with three pioneering pigs and their goat associates? At the very least the pig story could begin to eat away at the prejudice and bigotry that have dishonoured the social and cultural life of an otherwise magnificent country, disqualifying as well those absurd

---

[6] S. Nadler (2017. September 12) "How to Fix American Stupidity". *Time* https://time.com/4937675/how-to-fix-american-stupidity/

[7] F. Fernández-Armesto. (2014). *Our America: A Hispanic History of the United States*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., n.p.

[8] F. Fernández-Armesto. (2014). *Our America: A Hispanic History of the United States*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., n.p.

statements and incongruous chronologies that disguise so many real people and conceal events that have contributed to the development of the nation.

The issue, as I see it, is rooted in the concept of historical truth as understood by U.S. historians and educators. Having been formed in an ideological environment that proposes prejudiced narratives as truth, these people have mechanically and instinctively endeavoured to accommodate the political imperatives of a prodigious national project. As such, their "truth" has a task: that of facilitating the "appropriate" interpretation of a present wherein the United States, in the unrelenting pursuit of its Manifest Destiny, is the world's major superpower. Interpretations like this are apt to be subjective, carrying with them a generic, compelling point of view intended to create the image of a "standard" American, representative of a defined group whose virtues (and ethnic background) enabled the remarkable growth of "American" power, a standard individual that is the inheritor of an intrinsic set of values and traits that justify our hegemony.

So, a "truth" like historical truth, divorced as it is from the bygone context that generated it, is in a synergetic relationship with those who produce and consume it. As such, the process of generating that truth and then conveying it does not take place in an ideological vacuum, but rather it is directed towards an objective that is in harmony with the requirements of a national project called the United States of America. Someone like Ocasio-Cortez, because her ethnic background has never been palatable to the framers of the ideology that generates that "truth," can be portrayed as alien to the national project and be told to return to "her country". After all, nearly half of the U.S. population is unaware that Puerto Rico is part of the United States and that Puerto Ricans are US citizens.[9] So the suggestion that the congresswoman should leave "our country" actually makes sense to many people: It is as if our education and our historical narratives have *prepared* us for ignorance so that we can accept suggestions that advance the fundamental ideology of the sectarian national project. And this is a national project that has as its ultimate objective the strengthening of the status quo, traditionally labelled as "American democracy". So preparing the young to accept the values of that ideology can displace one of the essential requisites of education, which is that of supplying students with the unsanitised content upon which they might build knowledge that is not ideologised. In the December 6, 2011 piece in *Time* magazine, Jon Schnur comments on what he believes is one of the truly critical tasks incumbent upon our schools: "…schools should help students acquire the knowledge and skills needed to become active participants in American democracy".[10] While we can understand Shnur's well-meaning attitude, we must also keep in mind that at present too many active participants in American democracy are ignorant of the status of Puerto Rico, do not know about the Big Bang, consider Darwin an atheist liar (if they've even heard of him), deem Global Warming to be an anti-American hoax, accept that people that don't toe the line, like the four congresswomen, should go back to "their" country, and get the derisory option of voting (2016) for one of only two sanctioned (and largely unpalatable) candidates for president, an option that was deemed tragically inadequate by a considerable part of the country's population.[11] Moreover, such political

---

[9] Dropp, K and Nyhan, B. (2017, Sept. 26). Nearly Half of Americans Don't Know Puerto Ricans Are Fellow Citizens. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/26/upshot/nearly-half-of-americans-dont-know-people-in-puerto-ricoans-are-fellow-citizens.html

[10] Schnur, J. (2011, December 6). Can We Teach Kids to Be Good Citizens? *Time*. http://ideas.time.com/2011/12/06/can-we-teach-kids-to-be-good-citizens/

[11] "Nearly 18 million voters cast ballots this election despite believing that neither Donald Trump nor Hillary Clinton were qualified to be president". In Heath, D. and Agiesta, J. (2016, November 11) How voters who found both candidates unfit broke. *CNN*. Retrieved from https://www.cnn.com/2016/11/11/politics/hillary-clinton-donald-trump-voters-dislike/index.htm

manipulation of knowledge and disregard for content might explain the dismal ignorance of facts that is rampant among us. After all, we've been prepared to be active participants in American democracy, to aptly perform a guided political role, and *that* is what matters most. So, because there is a dogmatic political *purpose* behind the manner in which our dominant ideology interprets the past and imposes a subjective evaluation on its events, inexpedient facts can be devalued or even erased. It follows that supervised ignorance needs to be a critical part of the process of "culturing" citizens into the political system.

Because the conveyance of knowledge has political purpose, events that took place at a particular time and place in the past must assume the form of Petri dishes for culturing insights and preconceptions that can evolve into "historical truths". If we fail to recognise that historical "truth" is in fact the narrative truth of historians who've filtered the raw material of past events through their ideologies and their social, ethnic, class and national identity, we will also fail to see how historical truth is an allegory that, *re ipsa*, conveys alleged "truths" and conventional generalisations about the past that make it relevant to ideological environments in the present. If in future we in the United States come to discern these limitations, we will be in a better position to correct historical prejudices and rectify the way in which we, a well-informed public, process the wealth of information available to us.

I suggest that we begin that process by rescuing three pigs and some goats from the hidden files of U.S. history. The pigs might even provide an adjective of nationality for us.

How does Swineans sound?

Reference

Appiah, K. A. (2018). *The lies that bind: Rethinking identity*. [E-reader Version]. Retrieved from https://books.google.com/books?id=5786DwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=K.+A.+Appiah.+(2018).+The+Lies+that+Bind:+Rethinking+Identity&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi3wv_K_aPkAhUn11kKHQKsC9EQuwUwAHoECAMQBQ#v=onepage&q=K.%20A.%20Appiah.%20(2018).%20The%20Lies%20that%20Bind%3A%20Rethinking%20Identity&f=false

Boston, R. (12 February, 2019). How many Americans reject evolution? The answer may surprise you. *Wall of Separation Blog*. Retrieved from https://www.au.org/blogs/wall-of-separation/how-many-americans-reject-evolution-the-answer-may-surprise-you

Dropp, K and Nyhan, B. (2017, September 26). Nearly half of Americans don't know Puerto Ricans are rellow citizens. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/26/upshot/nearly-half-of-americans-dont-know-people-in-puerto-ricoans-are-fellow-citizens.html

Fernández-Armesto, F. (2014). *Our America: A Hispanic history of the United States*. [E-reader Version]. Retrieved from https://books.google.com/books?id=WFUlAgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=our+america+armesto&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwia-Mmx_aPkAhWExFkKHWGUDRsQ6AEwAHoECAUQAg#v=onepage&q=our%20america%20armesto&f=false

Heath, D. & Agiesta, J. (2016, November 11) How voters who found both candidates unfit broke. *CNN*. Retrieved from https://www.cnn.com/2016/11/11/politics/hillary-clinton-donald-trump-voters-dislike/index.html

Nadler, S. (2017, September 12) How to fix American stupidity. *Time*. Retrieved from https://time.com/4937675/how-to-fix-american-stupidity/

Neuman, S. (2014, February 14). 1 in 4 Americans think the Sun goes around the Earth. *National Public Radio*. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2014/02/14/277058739/1-in-4-americans-think-the-sun-goes-around-the-earth-survey-says

Schnur, J. (2011, December 6). Can we teach kids to be good citizens? *Time*. Retrieved from http://ideas.time.com/2011/12/06/can-we-teach-kids-to-be-good-citizens/

the iafor
journal of arts & humanities