Maps of Empire

A Topography of World Literature

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To Elizabeth, without whose patience and love I could not have completed this book.

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MAPS OF EMPIRE

A Topography of World Literature

Introduction

Cartography and the Space of World Literature

In the aftermath of the Second World War the wave of liberation movements that defined the mid-twentieth century can be seen reflected in a changing map. Territorial exchanges after the war and the independence movements across the colonized world led to changes in the names of countries, national languages, and the lines of demarcation found on maps. The character of nations was also in flux, along with identities within them. These conditions also had a significant impact on exiles, refugees, and migrants who traversed borders or who became victims of the new maps. These transformations were both real and imaginative, affecting cultural as much as political realities.

This book investigates how literary spaces are organized in tandem with spaces of empire and reorganized through and after liberation events in unique but related ways. Geographical changes that accompanied the formation of new nations in the post-colonial era reorganized spaces of representation and interpretation in literature, especially with respect to how literature is engaged with the world and its politics. Reflecting political and literary engagements that cut across different experiences and spaces of conflict and struggle, the particular works of literature I read in this book offer different approaches to such themes as pastiche, subversion, authorship, orality, and authority.

The works I discuss here are each entangled in histories of reception that attempt to make the text conform to certain cartographic, or mappable, models of relation. That is, spaces depicted within a text are extracted and reframed in the process of the work's reception by critics according to established histories and relations of power. These imagined "maps" are designed to speak to dominant conceptions of space and identity, especially by grounding identity in strict relational terms such as North/South, East/West, Indigenous/settler-colonial. The tensions set up within and between the following chapters, therefore, follow from the way in which the texts work to subvert and defy the very terms by which they might be made most legible and marketable to a general audience. I have chosen texts that explicitly trouble assumptions about how research in area studies traditionally organizes and delimits space. The chapters examine different thoughts and representations on the connections and disconnections between identity and cartography. Reading these works on their own terms requires resisting the spatial rubrics that would flatten identities and historical relations in order for them to be more easily digested. Yet the works explored in this book not only produce cartographies that conform or clash with dominant modes of organizing space. They also reflect richer topographies, creating various layers and echoes that can be too simply overlooked.

The Territory of Cartography

> ... In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography.
>
> – Suarez Miranda, Viajes de varones prudentes, Libro IV, Cap. XLV, Lerida, 1658 [Jorge Luis Borges "On Exactitude in Science"][1]

Maps have a strange, paradoxical fate in this Borges fragment. A map remains useful only as long as it reduces in scale the territory it represents. Its infidelity, then, is part of what makes it serviceable: differences between the map and the territory imbue the map with meaning. The absurd idea of a map that is drawn to the scale of its territory emphasizes the true function of the map: to reduce in scale while drawing on particular details favoured by the map-makers or their patrons. In other words, the idea of the map is to create a version of the world in miniature, reduced to two dimensions, with lines of demarcation that stand for an idea of place.

The trajectory of Borges's cartographic project reaches its zenith when the map-makers, grown dissatisfied with the inadequacy of those maps of reduced scale, create a map whose extensions correspond exactly to the material dimensions of the empire. Thereby, the map is brought to perfection, as the representational relationship between the map and territory coincide. Yet by the same token, the map becomes obsolete.[2]

It is not incidental that Borges chose the ideal of the cartographic project as a map of empire. There is something quixotic about the imperial desires of the cartographers to chart the space of the empire with a perfectly accurate representation of that space. It acts as a fable warning against the pitfalls of overestimating the power of this form of representation. The map has always been a major organizing principle for the way imperialism has been spatialized, imagined, and reproduced. In *The Cartographic State*, Jordan Branch argues that the visual representation of political power as represented through territories, borders, frontiers, and rival blocs of power has had a significant role to play in politics. According to Branch, political power has adapted to the representational form of the map rather than the other way around.[3] The sustained impact of the map on relations and distributions of power plays a significant role in the history of colonialism and the liberation movements of the twentieth century. These movements mark a disruption of the process by which geographical space was moulded by imperial desires. They reworked the maps of empire but, unlike the succeeding generations in Borges's fragment, did not abandon them altogether.

Cartography remains a powerful and at times intrusive model for imagining not just historical developments, territorial or administrative political centres of control, and forms of sovereignty, but also present-day demarcations of difference.[4] The map represents a demonstration and imposition of power, organizing territory into centres and peripheries, freezing the shifting dynamics of the space charted, and flattening irregular details. While maps of the known world have been produced for millennia, they took on a privileged role charting the nation, its centrality, and the borders that defined it during the early rise of European nationalism that coincided with the European Renaissance. Then, from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (note that Borges dates his fragment from 1658), they began to play a central role in European projects of imperial expansion.[5] Maps had become the instruments of empire.

Since then, maps have continued to shape social and cultural ideas of national or imperial affiliation. In the twentieth century, nations across the world that achieved liberation from imperial domination often renamed territories and places named under colonial rule, which had in turn replaced earlier place names. This process redefined post-colonial space. The coordinated remapping was one that not only took place in the practice of drawing and redrawing new maps. It also had an impact on cultural life and its forms of representation, including the reorganization of space within literary imaginations. According to Jonathan Bishop Highfield, "The very act of looking at a piece of land transforms it into landscape, because the viewer layers the physical piece of topography with cultural assumptions and personal associations. Looking at land through the eyes of a colonizer creates one type of landscape, while seeing the same land with postcolonial or anticolonial eyes creates a different landscape, one with potential beyond the stripping of timber and minerals to feed the growth of an empire."[6] Literature that is tied to a sense of place, recreating and reimagining the cultural and social possibilities of that place, has this very transformative potential.

This is particularly significant for understanding the period of mid-twentieth-century struggles against colonialism and the challenges they presented to imperial powers. As maps were being redrawn to reflect newly liberated states, internal struggles in post-colonial and settler-colonial spaces were being buried or obfuscated within the new order. Writers from colonized and occupied spaces questioned the necessity and ethics of their histories as empire "wrote back" to the self-ordained centres of the world.[7] And, of course, the uncertainties about space were also reflected in the work of literary scholars and in the audiences trying to understand how to read work by colonized peoples and writing from former colonies. It is no coincidence that this period closely coincides with the inception of the discipline of comparative literature, which increasingly saw its task as coming to terms with the complexities of a multi-nodal network of literary voices in a decentred world.

The Cartographic Imagination

"Maps of empire" can refer to any cartographic representation that is produced to chart territories belonging to an imperial domain, or territories that serve the ends of imperial expansion, such as places designated for future conquest. These actual maps play an important role in statecraft for adherents and strategists of war, and can have dire consequences for the populations that inhabit their spaces. As we have already seen, such maps contain structural biases; for example, unless appointed for the purpose of suppressing such challenges to their power, most maps drawn up by administrators of the imperial powers during the colonial period give no evidence of insurgencies, uprisings, or rebellions. But maps that serve or represent empires in structurally biased ways need not be "real" in a physical sense. In Imīl Habībī's *The Pessoptimist*, one character claims the ability to "see the flags of state even when folded up inside people."[8] Maps are much like the flags of state in this statement. The structures and purposes of cartography have become internalized and affect the imagination of space, geography, and culture. This is the metaphorical dimension of these "maps of empire."

The chapters of this book reflect a struggle to understand how literary forms were affected by the decay and break-up of old models of imperial administration during the middle of the twentieth century. Some of the works explored in the following chapters engage with political realities by creating imaginary states or kingdoms.[9] This can be seen in the context of imaginary cartographies that open onto an allegorical dimension, but also may be the result of political conditions the writers faced. As Dominic Thomas has argued, "postcolonial works were often compelled to adopt imaginary topographic backdrops as a way of bypassing brutal repression and dictatorship."[10] Yet while such concerns may have contributed to decisions by writers, the imagination of states and identities has greater implications for the ways cartographic forms are internalized and persevere. As Thomas writes of the French colonial context, "maps provided people with information about the colonies, including representations of colonized peoples (many of which have survived into contemporary French society and are reflected in current mindsets)."[11] This insight is significant not only in France but much more widely in the way colonialism and its structures of thinking and seeing continue to make up part of the collective or popular unconscious in spaces of privilege.

Hence, the map is an instrument of empire that aided in the perpetration of colonialism. As Jörg Dünne writes, "the geopolitical correlation between colonial order and geographic positioning is largely achieved through cartographic practices."[12] Yet cartography is also imaginative: it has become a way of thinking about, encountering, and being in the world. The enduring structures of power that link the colonial and post-colonial periods share in an epistemology with its foundations in the seemingly neutral figure of the map.

Conventional forms of cartographic representation have been critiqued by scholars of comparative literature for their diminution of charted space as a template for further reductions to the complexity of identities and the world. For example, critics including Arjun Appadurai, James Blaut, Christopher Prendergast, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Djelal Kadir, and Amir Mufti have all criticized what they see as problems of the Eurocentrism in approaches to globalization and world literature. While the old idea, used to prop up imperialism, that supposedly universal ideas were, to borrow Mufti's phrase, first "Made in Europe,"[13] and then exported around the globe has been critiqued roundly by literary critics and social scientists, yet such false narratives somehow continue to persevere in popular discourses and become part of the feedback loops of imperialism in its latest iterations. Perhaps this is because, on a certain level, the world map offers its own narratives concerning history, which might be said to constitute a kind of visual unconscious, with particular spheres of origination and peripheries of recognition and reception.

The idea that lurking behind ideas and forms disseminated across the world, origins can be traced to Europe or to the even more geographically ambiguous bloc, "the West," interferes with a critical view of literary production and its recent histories. It serves to create a particular model of bounded space, structured by static relations of power rather than contingent and shifting ones. A strict, cartographic imaginary extends to the way identities are imagined and inhabited. The intertwined paradigms of nation and nationalism take ascendency over alternative ideas. In analysing these phenomena in *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson emphasizes the vivid feelings of affiliation and belonging at the core of nationalism. The nation is an imagined community, organized by shared beliefs and relationships of identity within a community.

Edward Said[14] builds upon Anderson's ideas through his notion of imagined geographies, extending the analysis to the way the world is organized geographically and how conceptions of identity are projected onto and organized around and within geographical regions. Imaginary geographies, then, reveal the excesses of unconscious investments in territorial modes of affiliation, emphasizing that which cannot be fully encapsulated by actual maps. Just as Branch argues that the map has a political impact that goes far beyond the science of cartography, the way geography is discursively reinforced has its most profound impact on the way people imagine themselves and their relations to others. Structures repeatedly mapped and branded as patterns of thought on one's imagination through force of habit become projected outward into the cultural realm. Among other things, they affect the possibilities of literature.

By approaching literary space as opening outward to the world beyond the text, I am following Edward Said's example of worldly reading. He persuasively argues that texts are worldly, and "even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and, of course, the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted."[15] This means reading is, or should be, an ethical engagement that connects the reader to the world beyond the text. It also implies that cartographic representations privileging nations and borders over diversity, change, and migration are insufficient for understanding the complex and largely unconscious connections between place and identity.

Worldly reading suggests that the complexity of the world should be the point of departure for efforts to study the exposure of the text to the world or representations of literary space. Said proposes "a new geographical consciousness of a decentred or multiply-centred world, a world no longer sealed with watertight compartments of art of culture or history [*sic*], but mixed, mixed-up, varied, complicated by the new difficult mobility of migrations, the newly independent states, the newly emergent and burgeoning cultures."[16] This means drawing upon area studies while exploring cross-site conversations rather than remaining fettered to a single regional focus and specialization that operates on the basis of the exclusion of such conversations.

World Literature as Palimpsest

Most critical discussions of world literature will mention Goethe's famous appeal, made in 1827, for the arrival of what he imagined to be the new era of world literature.[17] Goethe is celebrated for emphasizing the importance of a cosmopolitan embrace of an international perspective where literature is concerned. After all, he argued that "every one must strive to hasten" the approach of the "epoch of world literature."[18] This moment is often understood as a decisive move away from entrenchment within national literary positions towards a progressive view that transcended them in order to begin the work of cross-cultural understanding. This may be an overstatement of what was at stake in Goethe's suggestion. But did his ideas about foreignness and familiarity also evince something like a cartographic code, or an internal map of an exclusive community, behind his stated aims? Is world literature haunted by the very formations its international horizon appeared to render obsolete? And if so, does it continue to be haunted by the formation of the nation-state which it was purportedly leaving behind?

Directly following his call for everyone to hasten the approach of world literature, Goethe goes on to say that the model of literary greatness is not, in fact, to be discovered so far from home. In a strange reversal, he remarks that foreign influences should be valued and considered as mere historical sources, while the writings of Greek antiquity are the literary model to which "we Germans" must remain bound. As he says, "we must not give this value to the Chinese, or the Servian, or Calderon, or the Nibelungen; but if we really want a pattern, we must always return to the Greeks, in whose works the beauty of mankind is constantly represented. All the rest we must look at only historically, appropriating to ourselves what is good, so far as it goes."[19]

Goethe was charting a new kind of map that may not have been free from the pretensions of civilizational progress that had also served as a justification for European imperialism. By holding literary works up to measures of civilization, progress, and development, Goethe was privileging a new kind of imperialism of occidental culture, anchored in the prestige of Europe's Enlightenment.[20] In other words, even as world literature disentangled literary production from the ideology of a singular "national character," it also may have created cultural and national hierarchies within its new international scope.[21] Meanwhile, it was tacitly excluding alternative forms of literary and cultural production, including orature, works of folk origin with oral roots,[22] songs, speeches, and ritual performances of all kinds.

The international sense of affiliation expressed in Goethe's call is not automatically liberatory. Rather, it is an alternative template for the imaginary cartographies of nations and nationalisms. Over the next two centuries, the expansion and promotion of the concept of world literature would incite a major shift in the possibilities afforded within literary study, allowing for the reception of minority voices, including what Deleuze and Guattari have called "minor literatures."[23] It promoted literature in translation and a liberal sense of curiosity about other cultures and ways of life in foreign places. Indeed, the study of literature has expanded since world literature has gained significant traction across the academy and in intellectual circles to include voices that would previously have been considered marginal. This resulted in the inclusion of non-Western works in literature survey classes, making writers like Chinua Achebe, Jamaica Kincaid, and Gabriel García Márquez part of the foundation of a worldly literary education.

One of the defining characteristics of world literature in this sense is its capacity to appropriate cultural production from across the globe under the banner of its own universalism. World literature also has had a significant impact as an idea in practice: what Djelal Kadir refers to as "worlding"[24] imagines and creates the world as an intellectual commons, framing demands for translation and readerships who want to understand conditions of life across national, ethnic, gendered, sexual, and classed boundaries. This has consequences for ethics as well as politics. It redraws the imaginary cartographies of empire, creating a palimpsest with traces of the former maps, but one that is perennially unfinished.

Literary Space

In Borges's fragment, topography represents a problem for the cartography guilds to overcome. As Peter Turchi points out, the map in Borges's fragment "includes only surfaces."[25] The roll of the land and the contours of the cities disrupt the plane on which the empire can be charted, while the forces of sun and rain wear away at the map's authority. By presenting obstacles to the map-makers' project, topography becomes an unspoken challenge to the logic of the history recounted by Suarez Miranda, the historian credited with writing the fragment. In this study of the topography of world literature, I will have occasion to refer to topography in at least two ways, although these may at times overlap. Firstly, I mean to invoke topography in its most literal sense: the writing of place and the way actual spaces are made a matter for representation. Yet while I am interested in the way the mid-twentieth-century writers in this book create space, altering it to meet the demands of an oppositional and creative imagination, this is not the only, or main, focus of this book. Secondly, I use the word topography to refer to a way of thinking about the implicit forms and relations of space for interpretation. If topography focuses on the peaks, valleys, contours, and echoes within a landscape, then I use the term as a metaphor for considering the textural complexity of a text and the scenes of its reception and interpretation (including the way it creates worldly effects outside of the text). I distinguish this way of thinking from the cartographic imaginary, which charts the world according to set boundaries and structures of power. For example, the manner in which an author like Imīl Habībī redeploys orientalism in a reflexive and subversive way fundamentally changes how his readers think about the oppositional relations of power amid the geopolitical struggle in Israel/Palestine that is often represented in competing maps of the region. This provisional approach to topography views forms of power comparatively across different official, dominant, and imperial systems of influence and control.

I am indebted to the work of many critics who have made significant progress in developing a working definition of literary space. Maurice Blanchot started the conversation in 1955 with his book *L'Espace littéraire*, which approaches literary space as something internal to the work of fiction. He presents a complex vision of the demands facing the writing at the moment of creating form and representation. Only three years later, Gaston Bachelard published his *La Poétique de l'espace*, more directly focused on representations of particular kinds of spaces (e.g., cellars, wardrobes, attics) within works of literature and poetry.

Bachelard calls his method "topoanalysis." More recently, J. Hillis Miller published a book named *Topographies* that explores spatial dynamics within literature and poetry, much like the method Bachelard used before him, but from a deconstructive perspective.

These forays into literary space and topography in literature have proved very useful to me, providing an array of efforts to explore and chart literary space. Yet in this book I am more interested in extending the methods of topoanalysis beyond a work's inner representations to include the politics of the works' translations, dissemination, and reception. In other words, as a reader of a text I find its history of reception nearly as important as the intentions of its author and the original politics that inhere and unfold within the work. Who the audience of a work is, how and for whom it is translated and distributed, and what kind of world it represents are occasions for interpretation in which readerships play an important role in the political dimension of a work of art. In this sense, the notion of topography in the study of literature shares certain properties with what W.J.T. Mitchell has suggested of the analysis of the visual field, linking the history of landscape painting to the imperial gaze and political claims. He argues that landscape is not separable from the relations of power of the colonial era. Rather, it is a medium of representation that often serves to enhance or provoke the colonial imagination.[26] Likewise for literature, representations and their interpretations are never neutral or objective, but are always entangled with relations of power. Exploring literary space entails dealing with such complexities. Several of the works I discuss in this book have been chosen because they have set off particularly revealing (yet rarely reviewed) debates among critics, scholars, and audiences.

Topographies of Empire

The idea for this book can be traced back to sometime in 2005, when I began studying Pima, focusing on the dynamics of orality. I was fortunate enough to be introduced to Virgil Lewis, a Pima elder with an interest in language preservation and traditional stories and songs. Exploring the Ant Song cycle that appears in the fifth chapter alongside my graduate work, I became interested in how orality had a role to play in many of the non-European works I was reading at the time. I was fascinated by the way the Ant Songs were recorded, lost, and found again in translation, as well as by the various efforts made to locate them in space, time, and genre. The questions raised in the course of analysing the songs drew my attention to other mid-century works that, for various reasons, set off debates around identity, dislocation, and provenance (of ideas and even of words and passages within the works). In other words, I was intrigued by how the reception of certain works became centred on questions about the regional identity and belonging of the work and its author(s). This led me to think about the conventions of authorship and the various expectations facing writers from colonized contexts in significantly different ways from those facing "Western" writers.

By extension, the process of translation, through which a work of literature is taken out of its original linguistic context and introduced into a new one, is critical. I am interested in the stages and forms through which non-Western works must pass to enter into larger spheres of literary circulation. In order to render these visible, it is important to consider the histories of production and publication and the various media through which literary works must move. Translation is essential to this process because it is a mode that highlights the way imaginary geographies penetrate even into language and are expressed in the friction between languages.

In the first chapter, I look at the reception history of Imīl Habībī's tragicomic Palestinian novel *The Pessoptimist.* Habībī directly undermines the idea of orientalism by bombarding it with forms of infiltration and masquerade in relation to the double consciousness of Israeli-Palestinian identity. Set in northern Israel/Palestine, the novel engages with a territory bound up with competing nationalisms and explores the problem of place and indigeneity across different historical and national formations. The changing form of the nation-state in Palestine/Israel contributes to the confusion of Sa'īd, who is haunted by the panoptic reach of the state. As a Palestinian novel about a territory that shares different claims of belonging and nationality, the book treats spaces as richly textured. This novel offers a highly complex and nuanced approach to contested spaces, using humour to convey the convoluted significance of identity through experiences of colonialism and occupation. It also offers an important contribution to understanding the concept of how literary space makes use of topography to challenge readers' assumptions and the politics of carceral maps.

Topography in literature is about not only what an author does or intends to do to change our ways of imagining space. It can also be about what is done to an author's work in the way it is understood to represent space or demarcate boundaries of difference. In other words, readers, publishers, and critics also are affected by the imaginary maps they carry inside them, and this can have significant implications for how a work is addressed and evaluated. For example, in *Remapping African Literature*, Olabode Ibironke looks at how the map of Africa was used by James Currey at Heinemann Publishers in promotional materials. He argues that the map was used by the publisher to mark claims of coverage and representation, while licensing a particular cultural vision of writing from Africa. This vision relied upon the very symbols used during the history of colonialism for imperial plunder. The following two chapters explore francophone West African novels that weave together oral traditions with inspirations from the poetics and politics of *négritude*. In my analyses of these works, I focus on the way they are written to engage with French literature and ideas, as well as the history of French colonization in West Africa, directly challenging colonial legacies and white racial entitlement in Africa.

In chapter 2, "The Limits of Historical Understanding," I focus on the use of comic subversion in Camara Laye's *Le Regard du roi* to undermine colonial forms of authority and entitlement. This chapter explores how the novel engages creatively and subversively with the history of the African slave trade and European travel narratives based in Africa. Laye's novel incorporates the stylistic influences of surrealism and modernism that the author was exposed to during his nearly ten-year period of study in Paris. Yet it also develops a significant critique of the sense of privilege and entitlement that marked a tradition of travel writing about Africa, a practice imagined with maps but realized in terrain. My reading of the novel highlights the history of the book's reception in France and the United States, where some critics impressed by the complexity of the novel discounted the idea that an African man such as Laye could have written such a book. This history ironically highlights the themes of racial superiority that are illustrated humorously within the novel. Laye's book's reception reaffirmed categories of colonial cartography and their attendant forms of bias. This applies not simply to the way his work was understood as part of the provenance of North vs. South, but to the way the map is seen as constitutive of the authenticity of the author's voice itself (or lack thereof). Laye's modernism, his changes in genre across his writing career, and even facts about his sexuality and African experience become the grounds upon which the argument rests that his work is a forgery. These misreadings, which ignore the subversions of identity within the book and assert that the book was written by a white European man, become important to understanding how not just the internal representations of a work, but also its reception, belong to the warp and woof of its literary space.

In the third chapter, "History as an Exquisite Corpse," I focus on Yambo Ouologuem's efforts in his *Le Devoir de violence* to consider history through his metaphor of ghostwriting. The author of this francophone novel was, like Laye, also accused of plagiarism. Yet he responds to these accusations quite differently. Rather than giving a defence of his work, he offers a critique of the epistemology of writing in the West in general, and France in particular. I am interested in how Ouologuem deploys language in his writing as a subversive response to the brutal history of colonialism while drawing on a range of African and European storytelling traditions. I explore ghostwriting as a mode of writing that Ouologuem ironically embraces and recommends to other writers in order to shift the terms of intellectual property concerns from legal to comparative grounds, while exposing suppressed histories of violence. Ouologuem exploits the fact that in French, "ghostwriting" came to be associated with the history of slavery and the unpaid labour that slaves were forced to perform. This offers him a platform from which to criticize the history of European modernism in response to its cultural appropriation of African writers writing in French. It demonstrates how montage, coupled with an ironic view of literary property, can bring to light different ways of understanding the European legacy of colonial forms of violence, including slavery.

The fourth chapter, "Disorientation in the Non-Western Novel," explores how Sadeq Hedayat's great work of Persian modernism, *The Blind Owl*, breaks the conventions of literary space altogether. Hedayat wrote in a simple and straightforward prose style that was highly innovative in Persian letters, leading to the transfiguration of Persian literature in the twentieth century. This style was influenced by his studies in Paris and Bombay, cities where he conceived and partially constructed the novel. Since its appearance in 1937, the novel has been variously interpreted either as "Western" or "Eastern," according to where certain scholars wish to locate and map the work and its influences. These efforts suggest an anxiety of influence that cuts across orientalist/occidentalist concerns, demonstrating the shortcomings and the limitations of defining certain kinds of literature as being solely the province and product of a single geographically situated tradition. My reading of the novel attempts to bring out the complex and international heritage of the novel while drawing attention to the limitations of methods of interpretation that attempt to fix literature within a single, monolithic tradition.

The fifth chapter offers a close reading of a translation from an oral performance of the Ant Songs in a Native American language, Pima, into written English. This section responds to the poetics lost in translation, and considers the work against the historical backdrop of settler colonialism in the United States. Just as maps are highly visible claims that "cover over" the territories they represent, as in the Borges fragment, the written word can conspire to erase alternative topographies that would be readily available in oral forms of memorialization. Oral traditions offer technologies of remembrance that contribute to a deep sense of belonging and being there in ways that attest to their visceral presence, rather than being composed in a flat, cartographic form. The Ant Songs challenge the palimpsestic maps of the United States that cover over traditional lands with place names like Arizona and California, and that give alternative names for mountains, valleys, and rivers. Yet the "space of translation" explored in this chapter also registers the failure of writing about such an embodied practice embedded in its mythological depths.

Taking American imperialism into consideration, I explore the topography charted and expressed within the song, exploring the legal and political implications of an oral tradition that could remap the region through alternative geographies to those set up under colonialism. I consider the original cassette tape on which the work is recorded and closely read the work in its original transcription, as well as in its translation. Problems that face readers and translators of the Ant Songs from the oral, performative original into written English can be understood as part of the matrix of uneven power relations between the United States and the smaller nations its territory encompasses but which its maps efface. While attending to difficulties that arise for linguistic translation in this context, I find it necessary to approach translation as not being limited to the transference of material from one language to another, or between one culture and another, but as the confluence of multiple languages, cultures, and forms of transmission in the context of uneven structures of power.

Ultimately, the mid-twentieth-century struggles for liberation and independence across the globe produced important uncertainties about the forms and representations inherited from colonialism. Literary space plays an important role in this shake-up of the dominant epistemologies, since it offers a way to think about how literature is mapped historically and generically – especially today, in the context of increasing pressures in the humanities to consider the global. As Djelal Kadir argues, "a close adherence to the textuality of literature itself"[27] through "an insurgent, critical, and worldly literacy"[28] could be the best antidote to the predations of neocolonialism. Attending to the layers and contours of literary space, encompassing its representations as well as translations and histories of reception, the following chapters seek to read each of these literary works on its own terms through the spaces, interpretive and textured, it creates.

The Ethics of Reading in a Divided and Uneven World

This book looks at the way the spaces of literature – spaces that are imaginary yet real, including territories, nations, and the globe itself – are carved up and disseminated in particular forms by writers struggling with unstable boundaries generated by colonial projects and their dissolution. My choice of works has been determined by interests that reveal a set of biases: that the selection be broadly comparative, and that these works not already be canonized as works of world literature. Together they display the way literature speaks to and across multiple histories and subject positions. Thus, they present the occasion to reflect on histories and spaces of imperialism and methods of resistance.

This book comes at a time when technologies have helped create echo chambers rebroadcasting and amplifying politicized hatreds and racializations. The phenomenological fabric of this world is made up of difference and dissensus, yet it seems increasingly untenable to remain ensconced within petty narcissisms of national or identitarian limitations. An ethical response to this scenario makes explicit the interconnection and intersectionality of lived experience on this planet.

The world, divided and uneven,[29] presents its own challenges to efforts to understand literary space or what is world literature. The ethics of reading come into play in a responsibility first of all to the particularities of the work of literature and its immediate contexts, and secondarily to its imbrication in the systems of reception, translation, and criticism, all of which help secure its place within the world we share.

Chapter One

A Portmanteau of the Nation in Imīl Habībī's *The Pessoptimist*

Imīl Habībī's novel, *Waqā'i' al-gharībah fī ikhtifā' Sa'īd Abī al-Nahs al-Mutashā'il*, published in Arabic in 1974 and translated into English in 1985 as *The Secret Life of Sa'īd, the Ill-Fated Pessoptimist: A Palestinian Who Became a Citizen of Israel*, is a book that dances. Incredibly entertaining, full of nuance, subtle humour, and a playful contrapuntal imagination, it is light and heavy at once. The book, rooted in both formal and colloquial literary traditions, is an extraordinary work of Palestinian literature. It is steeped in paradox and challenges our expectations from the very first page.

Neither purely pessimistic nor optimistic, Sa'īd's *pessoptimistic* narrative is impossible to pin down, being rife with contradiction, spatial and thematic. Allegedly, he writes from high up in outer space and deep down in the catacombs beneath the city of Acre. Sa'īd, who is both protagonist and main narrator, is a collaborator and an informer working for the state of Israel as well as a victim of injustice and abuse; a humble servant of Israel yet also a supporter of Palestinian resistance. He is everywhere present in the story, but has already disappeared before it begins.

In this chapter, I explore how the topography in Palestine/Israel is politicized, converted into competing maps, and internalized. Maps of the region will mark the territory "Israel" or "Palestine" according to when and from what political perspective the map-makers come.[1] The illegal occupation of the occupied territories by Israeli settlers complicates the picture of any map consistent with the reality of the way spaces, identities, and geographies are negotiated, and how people are displaced on the ground. Habībī creates a view of how these contestations are internalized, how they are represented and speak to identity formations, and how these become the object of derision or mischievous reconfigurations.

In a state where topography has helped determine which zones are marked out for capture in the occupied territories, creating vertical observation points and settlements constructed over and above the landscapes of Arab villages,[2] the topographical is not simply a liberatory alternative to the cartographic paradigm. Topography and cartography are brought together in Israeli architecture and planning in the settlements, as Eyal Weizman has shown.[3] Yet Habībī's novel operates on the conceit that imaginary spaces can create an alternative topography, characterized by humorous and unexpected possibilities, quite apart from the maps and the territories they represent. The intellectual structures of orientalism become the object of creative play, resulting in their being undermined through what the narrator calls the "Oriental imagination." In other words, the novel I focus on in this chapter hilariously and self-consciously creates a richly topographical imaginary, enmeshing its hero in a bizarre state of exile and drawing upon the contradictory politics of identity in Israel/Palestine after 1948. It does so in the habit of a postmodern portmanteau novel, raising questions about boundaries and hybrid identities, problematizing the very notion of belonging in a landscape where the map keeps changing.

Sa'īd flees his home in 1948 during the military siege that forcibly removed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.[4] This founding moment of Israeli statehood, known to Palestinians as the Nakba, or "catastrophe," forms the context of the novel. Yet, the characters forced to deal with the aftermath of these events are presented in the ironic spirit of *Candide*, with Sa'īd himself sharing a similar naive, unwitting temperament with Voltaire's eighteenth-century protagonist. As Israel is consolidating its claims on the territory of the recently displaced, Sa'īd returns to Haifa on the back of an ass. Equipped with a letter of reference from his father (who had been a collaborator for the British under the Mandate for Palestine), he becomes a citizen of Israel.

Sa'īd goes on to struggle with the meaning and implications of this return. He marries and has a son, Walā', who later takes up arms against the state. Tragically, he loses both his wife and son when Israeli military forces attempt to apprehend Walā'. Sa'īd is then left to consider the strange ironies and repetitions he recognizes in his life as an Arab living in Israel. This deceptively simple plot is fragmented by detours that range from Sa'īd working for Israeli intelligence, being imprisoned by the state, discovering the presence of aliens, searching for buried treasure, and exploring a diverse topography from the catacombs to outer space. Although the cartography of Israel is necessary for understanding the way state power is imagined in the novel, the range and force of its horizontal expanse are limited, as Sa'īd eventually realizes. In contrast, the realm of topography, verticality, and the infinite ascent into outer space represent the contours of Sa'īd's exile and imagination. On one level, Sa'īd is in exile in the sense that he has disappeared at the opening of the book and his story is told only in his absence through his letters. But on another, metaphorical, level his state of being in exile transcends the cartographic territory of Israel that frames the character and his interactions.

The atmosphere of contradiction and paradox in the novel can be related to the literary space of a portmanteau. Literally, a portmanteau is a "coat carrier" or a suitcase, a stiff leather carrying case, opening into two parts of equal volume. A portmanteau involves two words which are truncated into a single neologism, such as smog from smoke and fog, or spam from spiced and ham. The most obvious portmanteau in the novel is Sa'īd's family name, *al-Mutashā'il*, which combines *mutafā'il,* or "optimist," and *mutashā'im*, "pessimist." Yet the novel also exploits the principle of the portmanteau by bringing it into the realm of ideas and identities. Expressions of allegiance and difference throughout the novel are occupied with complexity and hybridity in the manner of a portmanteau, combining seemingly opposed notions. This means not simply that these seemingly opposed ideas are brought together, but that they are done so in such a way as to be linked inextricably. And it is the spatialized portmanteau of Sa'īd's imagination that may account for his exile. The space of the nation in which the novel takes place also represents a kind of metaphorical portmanteau in which experiences of belonging and exile are paradoxically brought together as the two parts of his divided, double consciousness.[5]

Set in northern Palestine/Israel, the novel engages with a territory bound up with competing nationalisms and explores the problem of place and indigeneity across different historical and national formations. Arguing against an interpretation of the book as a simple nationalistic allegory, my reading raises questions about the portmanteau structure of the novel in order to explore how the work resists a single identity. I offer a reading of the work that demonstrates how the topographical imagination opens onto the way imperial and national geographies are imagined and identities are produced.

If we consider the problem of Sa'īd's exile from a limited cartographical perspective, as if he has simply left the country, we will miss the entire vertical vector of the novel. For Habībī, exile is not only an expulsion but a dynamic space of imagination that involves more than territorial borders. The experience also resonates between underground caverns and outer space. In this sense the novel treats Sa'īd's absence as highly topographical rather than flatly cartographic.

Critics who try to pinpoint and unmask the character of Sa'īd and the underlying meaning of his secret life risk dispossessing him of the territory of ambiguity that is his treasure and homeland. The strange ambiguities, tensions, and contradictions that multiply are never fully resolved. Sa'īd is a character without a straightforward sense of home, place, or belonging. Therefore I argue that his secret, sought amid extra-terrestrial sorties, subterranean catacombs, and the sea, is the very possibility of secrecy itself. It is his discovery that identity need not always be sanctioned, avowed, or remain consistent. This resistant secrecy takes shape alternatively as buried treasure, flight, lies, and literature. Through parodic and critical gestures, the novel offers a complex message about compromised identities and the necessity of secrecy and subterfuge under a state of occupation.

The topographical imagination in *The Pessoptimist* presents a critical view of the dynamics of identity in the context of demands upon writers to chart or define their work within a single provenance. Minority literary traditions, as explored by Deleuze and Guattari, are themselves caught within larger structures of national traditions, where they must strive for expression and recognition. *The Pessoptimist* challenges the very singularity of a dominant national tradition in Israel. As a Palestinian-Israeli novel, it is also a portmanteau of competing cartographies. Yet, on the cover of the English translation of the book published by Interlink, the word "Israel," designating the author's location, is written in all capital letters on the spine. Thus the text is identified as belonging to the body of Israeli letters, in spite of the work it does to challenge the singularity of Israeli culture from a Palestinian point of view. Hence, in certain frameworks, *The Pessoptimist* finds itself relegated to a marginal status. But the very message of the novel is to challenge the singular identity of the nation through the lived dynamics of non-transparency. Misunderstandings, withholdings, contested maps, and historical residues unearthed by archaeologists form the main features of the topographical representations in the novel. These features do not rely upon singular national or identity formations but offer ways to examine the multiple, compromised, and changing perspectives of the characters and the contested maps in which they are enfolded.

The Lure of Discovery: Stumbling over Subtlety

The formation of the state of Israel in 1948 creates the context for the complex sense of place and belonging experienced by Sa'īd and other characters in the novel. After Sa'īd returns to his hometown of Haifa, he becomes an employee of the government. Collaborating and working on their behalf against Communist organizations, Sa'īd is tasked with informing on and helping to sabotage the efforts of minority and oppositional political leaders within Israel. As the novel progresses, however, he exhibits increasing ambivalence towards his role as an informer. Yet, throughout, his character is portrayed as tremendously naive about his own obligations to the state and seen as unwittingly caught up in the vast reach of powers beyond his control.

In this sense, the novel addresses the conundrum of being a Palestinian Israeli, one whose identity is compromised by contradictory ascriptions in an uncertain context. This point is echoed in the epilogue. Mainly consisting of letters composed by Saʻīd to an unnamed friend, the novel includes a short epilogue written from the perspective of this unnamed addressee. Having received Saʻīd's letters (and presented them to the reader), this narrator starts an investigation into where Saʻīd may be located now. Yet as we have already seen, our sense of place in the novel is deeply compromised by the disputed history of the region. Unsurprisingly, Saʻīd's friend is unable to track him down. Finally, he turns to the reader and says, "It is now his hope that you will help him search for Saʻīd. But where should one look?"[6]

Although this request appears at the end of the book, it is a lure and an invitation to slip down the rabbit hole, to partake in an absurd mission of reflection on the many displacements (of place and identity) of the central character. The ambition to root out Saʻīd in his final resting place may precipitate, if not already betoken, a state of lunacy. If we believe what Saʻīd tells us, we would have to resort to the very reaches of outer space in order to find him. At the beginning of the novel, Saʻīd explains that "I did indeed meet with creatures from outer space. I'm in their company right now. As I write to you of my fantastic mystery, I'm soaring with them high above you."[7] Whether he really is flying over our heads or has gone underground, the fact is that Saʻīd has disappeared. Searching for him between the lines of the novel would be tantamount to a wild goose chase. But how and why has he disappeared? Sensing the complications involved with any direct answer to these questions, the epilogue writer offers a cautionary allegory about a lawyer who heard from a madman that there was treasure buried beneath the roots of a molasses tree. After uprooting the tree and finding nothing, the frustrated lawyer confronts the madman, who is busy painting a wall with a brush and a bottomless paint bucket. In response, the madman tells the lawyer to get a brush and a bottomless bucket to help him with his painting. The moral of this story: "The point is, gentlemen, how will you ever find [Saʻīd] unless you happen to trip over him."[8]

The attempts of critics to articulate Saʻīd's secret life once and for all may be on par with the sort of madness that uproots trees in search of treasure, paints murals with bottomless buckets, and trips over Saʻīd if it encounters him at all. Yet warnings like this one have not discouraged critics from trying. Many critics sidestep ambiguous scenes and themes in the novel, fixating instead on the question of identity. They seem to see the politics of the novel as forming the basis of identities in the book, either as the singular collapse of author into character or the simplification of character into a national political figure. But the imaginary of identity often attributed to the book does not take account of the important role of parody and farce in the novel. For example, Rachel Feldhay Brenner argues that "*The Pessoptimist* is ... based on the author's life story."[9] Such a reading risks reducing the novel to the details of Habībī's biography. Links between character and author certainly exist. Both are Palestinian Arabs who lived in Israel. Sa'īd becomes a leader in the Union of Palestine Workers, while Habībī was a leader in both Maki and Rakah, the Communist parties in Israel. While such resemblances are both interesting and potentially illuminating, Brenner's implication that Habībī uses fiction as a confessional mode misses the point. Although she correctly suggests that writer and character share a divided subjectivity, identity is never straightforward in the novel. Brenner sees Sa'īd as an alter ego of the author, capable of providing insights into the traumas of defeat that Habībī himself may not have been capable of when he first underwent them. This is dangerous because it draws attention away from the ironic distance between character and author, and lends support to other readings that go even further in their conflation of character and author.

For example it has even been suggested that, like his character, Habībī acted as a secret collaborator for the Israeli Forces. Confronted by such extraordinary allegations, Habībī was actually forced to initiate a libel trial. The trial, held in an Israeli court, demonstrates the paranoid atmosphere of incrimination under which Arab Israelis live, which Habībī also confronts in his fiction. The controversy, drummed up by Lutfi Mashuur in the pages of *Al-Sinara*, a newspaper based in Nazareth, began with accusations that Habībī had collaborated with Israeli forces during the military operations of 1948.[10]

Habībī plays with the notion of complicity and the implication of guilt by association in the novel. Such play, however, makes insinuations that Sa'īd's complicity with Israel is code for Habībī's own dirty laundry rather ironic. In Mashuur's reading, the guilt of the character is heaped upon the writer. This interpretation misunderstands Habībī's complex view of the position of Arab Israelis and their relation to the state of Israel. Arab Israelis are entangled in a set of opposing nationalisms and transcriptions of identity. Upon close examination, however, Habībī was actually working against the kinds of reductions Mashuur's reading insists upon. As a reformist politician and an Arab writer living in Israel, Habībī saw himself as a Palestinian with a complex relation to the masses of exiles and refugees who share this identity. Both author and character held prominent positions in pro-Arab Communist organizations in Israel. Yet Habībī, who was highly critical of Israel's discriminatory laws and policies, played a very different historical role from Sa'īd. Habībī fought against these policies. His character, on the other hand, works in their service in the first part of the novel.

From a stringently anticolonial perspective, the idea of "collaboration" may entail any effort to work within the institutional structures of Israel, even if the aim is to change them. Habībī demonstrates how slippery the idea of collaboration can be, since one's double consciousness as a Palestinian Israeli entails seeing oneself both from within as well as from outside: "One of the communist leaders asked me if we were collaborators. I said, no, we were not collaborators. But from the point of view of someone on the outside, especially if he is an Arab, it is legitimate to think that we were collaborators. Also, Jews from the far left would sometimes accuse us of being collaborators. But collaboration was the only way to survive in our land."[11]

The interpretations of Habībī's work by Brenner and Mashuur, collapsing important differences between author and character, are not alone in reducing the complexity of what is at stake in the novel. Taking a very different approach, Jonathan Scott argues that Sa'īd's complicity – that is, his collaboration with the Israeli authorities – is a false controversy. Scott absolves Sa'īd of his guilt, yet this too erases the troubling ambiguity of Sa'īd's identity and removes the productive uncertainty behind it. Scott's argument collapses the specific issues Sa'īd faces into universal problems of tyranny.

According to Scott, "the real controversy is how Saeed and the Palestinians have been ethnically cleansed from their own land while the whole world was, and still is, watching."[12] He asserts that the book should be read in the historical context of Palestinian "national coming to consciousness."[13] Thus championing a reading of the novel as nationalist in a strong sense, Scott argues that Sa'īd's complicity in the actions of the new Israeli state is not important to an understanding of the work. He goes so far as to claim that the "protagonist is national self-consciousness not individual personality."[14] By draining him of his idiosyncrasies and defining Sa'īd as a representation of a collective and developing national self-consciousness, Scott obscures the productive ambivalence he provokes in us, his readers. It misses the important way tragedy is mixed with farce in the novel to produce a tragicomic effect. It is precisely Sa'īd's compromised and complicit identity that throws his exilic imagination into relief.

It would be misguided to make Sa'īd an icon of Palestinian nationalism. As a collaborator, state power acts through him. This is Sa'īd's inheritance and legacy. Sa'īd is tied to the long arm of the state through his very bloodline. As the character known only by the epithet "the big man of small stature," who oversees Sa'īd's operations in the government, explains of the continuity of state power, "your father gave [your vocation as collaborator] to you as his inheritance, and you will pass it on to your children. They will curse you, but our long arm will reach them nevertheless, generation after generation."[15]

However, in this novel, identity is portrayed not merely as complex and capturing, but as something that can be constantly jettisoned and undermined. Sa'īd escapes to Lebanon during the military operations of 1948. Yet in spite of the fact that Sa'īd successfully returns to his ancestral home of Haifa[16] after the formation of Israel, nevertheless he remains in a state of exile. Not that he is literally expelled from a nation-state, as he is granted citizenship. Rather, his exilic state refers to what is going on in his imagination. Having disappeared from the narrative, Sa'īd is, in a sense, an exile from his own story.

As an Arab Israeli, Sa'īd is granted citizenship by the state, but denied equality within it. His attendant exile is portrayed figuratively in the novel when he discovers himself sitting alone on a gigantic blunt stake in a fathomless pit, or when he is soaring through outer space. Deeply critical of Israel and its colonial policies towards Palestinians, the novel nevertheless avoids promoting counternationalism as a response to Zionism. The satirical dimensions of the novel are directed at the inhospitable climate of Israeli politics. The supremacy of any one single tradition, culture, or language is ridiculed and derided throughout the novel. So too is the official view of non-Europeans as second-class citizens or potential security risks. Upsetting the totalizing narratives of Zionism, Sa'īd's life in Israel underscores the stubborn fact that Arabs are part of Israel, and its population and culture are heterogeneous, in spite of the attempted removal of the Palestinian people during the 1948 Nakba.

Additionally, Habībī complicates the notion that these tensions reside only between Jews and Arabs in Israel. Ethnic identity, spatialized as skin colour, making even bodies mappable entities, becomes code for whether or not one is subject to suspicions of working against the state. For example, Jacob, Sa'īd's Mizrahi Jewish supervisor, is often forced to share the same miserable fate as Sa'īd. As a Mizrahi Jew, Jacob finds his position already compromised in the eyes of his racist superiors simply because he is not of European descent. When Sa'īd is accused of conspiring against the state, Jacob also falls under suspicion as a fellow "Oriental." As the big man of small stature warns them both, "the state ... knew exactly how to preserve its security and to clamp down until its enemies were sorry they had ever been born."[17] This "big man," wishing to flex the might of the security state, actually expresses its very insecurity through his hysterical reaction, further revealing the slippery nature of identity in the novel.

Habībī's politics are reflected in *The Pessoptimist* without a trace of pedantry. As an active member of the Palestine Communist Party during the Mandate period, and a long-standing member in the Knesset, Habībī was an outspoken proponent of civil rights. Habībī's turn to writing literature is in line with his ongoing struggle for the recognition of Palestinian presence, culture, and rights. As Jacqueline Rose points out, his literary career began in response to an outrageous statement made by Yigal Allon, the former minister of education: "Had there been a Palestinian people, it surely would have had a literary legacy."[18] Habībī's wit and satire are powerfully subversive of such visions of Israel whitewashed of Arab presence and culture. And nowhere does this come across more than in the novel's continual play on secret places and identities. Within this topographical play, territory is constantly shifting while the lives, loves, and memories of Palestinians cannot be effaced even as the state seeks to monitor and control them. The following sections of this chapter will highlight how this play involves problems of intimacy, love, and relationships that become entwined with the complex and contradictory politics of identity after 1948.

Extraterrestrial Perspectives

In chapter 12, Sa'īd informs his interlocutor that he has encountered extraterrestrials, quite unexpectedly, in the catacombs below the city of Acre. Yet, these aliens facilitate a series of reversals in the novel, underscoring the roles played by topography, exile, and the absurdities of Sa'īd's everyday life. As a Palestinian, without a nationality of his own, his official identity is bound up with the occupying power. Sa'īd is in a weird form of exile, still living within the space of his former home, but he now finds himself alienated from it. As an alien in search of (and in need of) other aliens, he finds himself instantly at ease with the extraterrestrials he meets. At the same time, it is this encounter beneath the catacombs that allows him to begin to understand the importance of secrecy.

The Pessoptimist is not the product of a singular geographical sphere of influence. The novel's mode owes much to Arabic literary traditions, both formal and folk, as well as to European literature. Sa'īd is thrown into relation with such diverse forms in order to emphasize his quixotic and hapless appearance among them. Sa'īd's character has often been compared to Juha, a trickster character in Arabic folklore, the wise fool who makes others appear foolish either through his own naive innocence or because he cunningly dons the mask of stupidity.[19] The narrative explicitly alludes to *A Thousand and One Nights* as well as *Candide*, and critics have commented on similarities to Aesop, Ibn al-Muqaffa', Al-Hamadhānī, Al-Harīrī, Rabelais, Swift, Dumas, Kafka, Joyce, Hašek, and Disney.[20] Rather than strictly conforming to any literary tradition, the book freely weaves elements from disparate traditions into its unique narrative, making it difficult to contextualize. The book therefore serves as a versatile lure tempting readers to place it alongside whatever tradition with which they are most familiar or which they favour.[21] It is stuffed full of these possible influences like an over-full portmanteau.

The literary space of the novel is neither straightforward nor oppositional, but intricately layered. Habībī's style mixes elements of *fusha*, the formal "high-brow" style of Arabic literary writing, with colloquial and folk parlance in a way that does not resolve their incongruity. As it is often referred to as a hybrid text,[22] Bakhtin's idea about polyphony may help elucidate the novel. But in *The Pessoptimist*, polyphony not only is produced through different characters, but also inheres within a single character (Sa'īd's), through the multiple perspectives he takes up, destabilizing identity through ambivalence and paradox. The narrative reinforces this polyphony by circulating the elevated and lofty with the lowly and the abject. Moreover, the novel's sense of humour draws upon this atmosphere of incongruity and absurdity. Its broken humour, in which laughter offsets and displaces despair, produces tragicomedy.[23]

The anomalous topography of the novel is established through the vertical movements, the ups and downs, undergone by Sa'īd. This can be seen illustrated in the question the novel raises about Sa'īd's whereabouts. At the end of the novel, Sa'īd describes himself sitting alone on top of an enormous blunt stake.[24] He is high above the heads of several characters, who parade by as in a Fellini film, offering him some final words of counsel. His situation atop the stake is isolated and precarious, yet also completely impossible and ridiculous. One well-meaning young man with a newspaper and an axe intends to "save" Sa'īd by cutting him down from the stake. The absurdity of this situation is, of course, that he needs to be saved from this would-be saviour. But it also illustrates how Sa'īd is simultaneously trapped and exposed, vulnerable to the dangers of falling but also isolated and alone. With no other solution in sight, he is finally saved from his uncertain fate by his friends from outer space.

In addition to solace and consolation, his companions from outer space offer Saʿīd the experience of flight, both in the sense of an escape from the mundane experience of life in Israel as well as a new elevated and lofty perspective. As Saʿīd's companion explains, "You each take flight to breathe and suppress your words in order not to perish. Many adopt literature because they lack power for anything more, while others avoid taking a stand by moving abroad."[25]

Saʿīd's extraterrestrial companion seems to show up when the absurdities of life have reached such a pitch that his incursion does not seem all that disruptive. As he tells Saʿīd, "when you can bear the misery of your reality no longer but will not pay the price necessary to change it, only then you come to me."[26] This suggests a reversal of the normal roles associated with alien abduction: Saʿīd is the one seeking the alien, rather than the other way around. Always already there, the space alien is nevertheless an outsider to the narrative, part lurid fantasy, part spiritual teacher. As "alien" he represents another kind of exile that hypostatizes Saʿīd's exile (and by extension, that of other Palestinian refugees). Saʿīd encounters aliens when he reaches an impasse, and requires the intractable situation to be shattered. As extra-textual beings, the aliens interrupt the flow of the narrative, creating spatial and thematic detours, and providing relief to the narrative like a *deus ex machina*.

The exilic imagination represented by the aliens is key to understanding the play of narrative form and topographical space in the novel. They represent a necessary interruption, in both his life and in the narrative, from the everyday experiences of oppression and humiliation that Saʿīd is forced to undergo. Wishing for the sort of redemption from this life that could come only from another world, his imagination had long been a fertile ground for strange encounters. Saʿīd recalls the moment in school when he first learned that outer space was limitless: "ever since that time I began looking upward and awaiting their arrival. Either they will transform my monotonous and boring life completely, or they can take me away with them." Adding, "Is there any alternative?"[27] Yet even though he searches for them in the sky, he first meets them underground. The reversals of expectations serve to challenge the relations of power as being static and unassailable.

The intervention of the extraterrestrials also offers Saʿīd an escape from the feelings of guilt and culpability that he begins to bear in the novel as he starts to reflect on his complicity with the actions of Israel. For most of the book, Saʿīd seems to implicitly believe in the word of his employers in government. For example, after Saʿīd's first love, Yuʿād, is discovered hiding in Sa'īd's house and deported, Israeli officials promise to locate her and bring her back to him. Like a carrot on a stick, the promise of reunification is dangled before him to motivate his collaboration: "I ... never rested, never slept, in order to continue my pursuit of the Communists. I plotted against them, organized attacks on them, and gave witness against them. I would infiltrate demonstrations, tip over garbage cans in their way, and yell slogans advocating the destruction of the state to provide the police an excuse to attack them."[28]

But for all the operations of sabotage he carries out, he is offered only renewed promises of Yu'ād's return. His misguided confidence in the promises of the state reflects the great faith Sa'īd places in its paternalism. Yet his faith is also burdened by an intense fear of its capabilities, as he has fallen prey to a paranoid belief in the state's powers of surveillance. This belief is actively instilled in him and encouraged by agents of the government. Sa'īd's superiors in government warn him that Israel's sovereignty is not limited to external forms of surveillance. They insist that his interior, psychic life is also being monitored. As his boss, "the big man of little stature," tells him, "You should realize that we have the latest equipment with which to monitor your every movement, even including what you whisper in your dreams. With our modern apparatus we know all that happens, both within the state and outside it. Take care you don't ever behave this way again."[29]

Although Sa'īd unquestioningly believes in the omnipotence of the state for much of the first part of the novel, the force of events that follow leads to the eventual unravelling of his faith. The aliens offer Sa'īd the important insight that secrecy from the state apparatus is possible. Partly because he has made contact with and held meetings with the extraterrestrials without the state's apparent knowledge or interference, Sa'īd realizes that the "big man of small stature's" boasts about the panoptic gaze of his instruments must be limited. As Sa'īd tells us, "my opinion about his equipment was fully formed now. If he had really been able to detect every single one of my movements he would definitely have marked down against me my strange meeting with the man from outer space. But this he had not done."[30] Even if the meetings with aliens are pure fantasy, concocted by Sa'īd's imagination and desire for adventure, the seed of doubt is planted, and he begins to see things quite differently.

Thus, Sa'īd's meetings with the aliens draw attention to the multiple layers of possibility in the novel, represented by subterranean and outer space, a sort of vertical spatial axis, as it were. In this sense, they provide a much-needed sense of relief from the mechanisms of state surveillance by taking (and making) Sa'īd out of place. It is unclear whether this is because the aliens are simply a product of fantasy or madness, or because they take place under the radar of the government's monitoring apparatus. But either way, they also offer Sa'īd new perspectives on his own life. These perspectives are bound up with their understanding of time, archaeology, and the sea. The vertical axis on which Sa'īd's meetings with aliens take place (underground, on a tall stake, or flying off into the sky) eschews the flatness of the cartographic imaginaries of state power and offers the landscape back to him with new, hitherto unnoticed depths.

The extraterrestrials represent a distant, cosmic perspective that provides a much-needed contrast to his conflictual feelings and obligations. At the same time, the fact that he first encounters them underground suggests that they may be associated with something deep and buried, perhaps long dead, or thought to have been so. Speaking of the fever for archaeology and excavation of the old ruins around them, the man from space observes, "Your ancestors built above their predecessors, but then the age of the archaeologists arrived. They began digging beneath while demolishing above. If you continue like this, you'll reach the dinosaurs."[31] In the context of Israel, the "age of the archaeologists" refers to initiatives, following 1948 in the service of "nation building," to search for ancient sites and artefacts. Because Zionist claims to the land are founded in part upon the excavation and discovery of artefacts, archaeology has become the national science in Israel.[32]

Ironically, Sa'īd and his companion from outer space find themselves continually displaced by the government's interest in excavating and renovating the catacombs. This creates an insecure and mobile sense of exile that Sa'īd carries with him:

> Greetings! And the mercy and blessings of God be upon you! I haven't written for some time for reasons of security – this time mine and not the state's, as well as that of my brothers from outer space, with whom I now live in the catacombs of Acre, safe but not secure.
>
> When the government began renovating the catacombs, rebuilding their walls, putting in electric lighting, clearing the halls and the decorative work and restoring them, we began retreating into other invisible tunnels. Now we never remain in one place, never can feel at ease with ourselves, not for a single moment.[33]

In this passage, Sa'īd plays upon the idea of his own and his alien friends' vulnerability. It is already clear at this point in the novel that he does not want to be found: that his disappearance requires vigilance and protection. Since he is a Palestinian living in Israel who has "gone underground," his hiding place among the dead and buried can be interpreted both in terms of what Israel suppresses (ethnic and national diversity: he is with "aliens" after all) as well as whom it displaces and how the state generates an air of precariousness.

The archaeological renovations eventually push Sa'īd and his friends out of their underground enclave towards the sea. Because of the national designs Israel has on the land and what is thought to be buried beneath it, the fact that they are being forced towards the sea is significant. The sea is impassable for Sa'īd. He stops short of it when his wife and child enter it. Yet the sea is also a space over which so many other crossings and migrations have taken place. In contrast to the aggressive excavation of the earth, the sea is a deep and accommodating model for migratory flux, displacement, and multiplicity.

Sharing a sense of mystery and depth with the catacombs, the sea hides fish and buried treasure, yielding them to those who angle and dive. Like the cavernous crypts of the catacombs, the sea also contains layered deposits of history beneath its surface. As the spaceman observes, "This sea calms down each spring and autumn, the best seasons in this lovely country of yours. It is then that all those people arrive who so fall in love with it that they stay, settling in wave after wave, layer above layer. That's why archaeology is the only science suitable for the study of the ruins and the history of this area."[34] Yet the sea also differs strongly from the structure of an archaeological site like the catacombs, with the tides representing the cyclical rhythm of time instead of the discrete layers of earth representing epochs past. If the layers of migration to Haifa resemble the fluid tides of the sea, the influx of European immigrants who occupied Palestine and helped establish the new state would also be natural from such an alien perspective. Yet their nationalism would be denatured and extraneous.

Later in the novel, this motif of the sea accommodating profound migratory shifts returns in the form of a parable woven by Sa'īd. As he is fishing in the sea and unselfconsciously mumbling to himself, a Jewish boy asks him what language he is speaking and to whom. He responds that he is speaking Arabic with the fish. When the boy wants to know if the fish understand only Arabic, Sa'īd distinguishes between the old fish, who speak Arabic, and the younger fish. When asked about the younger fish, Sa'īd tells the boy, "they understand Hebrew, Arabic, and all languages. The seas are wide and flow together. They have no borders and have room enough for all fish."[35]

This underwater Babel recasts the historically layered territory of Palestine/Israel as a utopic space without borders, security concerns, and forms of domination. Casting the sea in the light of the city of Babel without threat of destruction from sources divine or national, Sa'īd fills the unfathomable depths with talking fish, who are imagined in contrast from human beings, who cannot seem to live together or share the land in peace. Like the aliens, the fish are outside of the purview of Israeli surveillance systems, allowing Sa'īd to create an imaginary exile free of the difficulties he faces in Israel. Undermining fishy narratives about Zionist supremacy, the novel equally troubles forms of Palestinian counternationalism. However, while this extraterrestrial marine imagination can make a utopia of the sea, borders in Israel prove somewhat less fluid. The perspective Sa'īd has learned from his alien benefactors cobbles together disperse language forms and genres, and helps him find hidden spaces to write from and infinite space to imagine himself into. This exilic imagination cannot articulate his experience from a straightforward or a singular political or subject position.

Paranoia, Treasure, and Secrecy

It is in the sea, however, that Sa'īd discovers yet another feature of the relation between secrets and the state. Early on in the book Sa'īd explains that his superiors had designed and sanctioned a marriage between himself and Baqīyya (rather than his desired Yu'ād). During their first night together, Baqīyya reveals to Sa'īd that her family possesses a valuable heirloom, a box filled with treasure hidden in an underwater cave. Sharing this secret with Baqīyya marks the beginning of Sa'īd's gradually developing awareness of secrecy. For in addition to the news about the treasure, Baqīyya brazenly impresses on him that she is "used to living in freedom, husband!"[36] The true meaning of secrecy begins to dawn on Sa'īd, as he explains to his unnamed interlocutor:

> I was flabbergasted, utterly amazed, at the candor with which this girl expressed herself. Her manner and speech illuminated for me a truth about your friends, my dear sir, that would otherwise always have intrigued me: namely, how they maintain their courage in the face of officialdom and are never awed by a big man, even when not of small stature, no matter how poor they may be.[37]

Baqīyya's independence of spirit is an attribute that Sa'īd admires but does not, at first, fully understand. But he begins to believe that her confidence, linked to her treasure chest, has also revealed his interlocutor's[38] secret: that this man must have a buried treasure of his own that provides him with his courage and strength in the face of adversity. In fact, all those who stand up to authority must have buried chests of gold. His marriage to Baqīyya and her treasure therefore make him one of these men. Yet, it is the fact that they have concealed this secret so well that is most admirable. Finally, he concludes, recognizing the importance of harbouring secrets from the authorities: "so I said to myself: If they can do this, why can't I?"[39]

Secrecy has the effect of checking Sa'īd's paranoia. The treasure, and its rewards, are not fully encompassed within the iron chest. By sharing Baqīyya's secret with her, Sa'īd believes he now personally possesses that power to keep secrets from the all-knowing state. The gaze of officialdom and its representatives is not so sublime as the architects and custodians of the panopticon (in its disperse forms of state policing and surveillance) would have him believe.[40] In spite of all the "latest equipment" and "modern apparatus" laid claim to by "the big man of small stature," the state's mechanisms of surveillance fail to scrutinize Sa'īd's secrets and their growing shape in his imagination. By sharing her secret with him, Baqīyya shows Sa'īd how to be free of forces that "monitor your every movement even including what you whisper in your dreams."[41]

Yet although Sa'īd comes into possession of a secret through this event, its effect on his imagination is not immediate; on the contrary, it takes the rest of the novel to be realized. More critically, however, incorporating secrecy into this psychic state of affairs causes Sa'īd more, rather than less, anxiety. As he admits, while the knowledge that he is not alone in having secrets lightens his burden, "my knowledge of Baqīyya's secret scared me to death."[42] For a secret may always be discovered. As he says, "sometimes at work thoughts of my secret would intrude. At such times I felt my secret could be seen in my eyes, and so I closed them tight to keep it hidden. This happened so often that people said there must be some eye affliction running in my family."[43]

It is not until Sa'īd and Baqīyya's only son, Walā', becomes a *fidā'ī*, a guerilla fighter who takes up arms against the state, that the tenuous power of the surveillance state is exposed. Walā', having launched an attack on the state, takes refuge in a basement in the ruins of Tanturah. Sa'īd's superiors take him and Baqīyya to the shore of Tanturah, in hopes of coaxing Walā' to surrender. When Baqīyya asks him to come out, saying that he will suffocate in the small cellar, Walā', who up to this point has rarely expressed himself with such clarity and vigour, makes a long and eloquently defiant speech. In it, he admonishes his parents for the stifling experiences of his childhood: "in my cradle you stifled my crying ... As I went to school you warned me, 'Careful what you say!' When I told you my teacher was my friend, you whispered, 'He may be spying on you' ... One morning you told me, mother, 'You talk in your sleep, careful what you say in your sleep!' I used to sing in the bath, but Father would shout at me, 'Change that tune! The walls have ears. Careful what you say!'"[44] The state is paranoid, transmitting its anxieties to Sa'īd, which he then passes on to his son. Having choked on the oppressiveness of his childhood, Walā' takes this opportunity to claim his freedom and realize his escape. In the end, his mother joins him and together they disappear into the sea. It is only after he loses wife and son that Sa'īd fully realizes not simply the value of secrecy in resistance to forms of power and authority, but also that his own secret life is already taking place.

Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok developed a psychoanalytic theory that revolves around the figure of the secret and its language. Like Sa'īd and Baqīyya's secret, it is the specifically transgressive experience of sharing the secret that lays its foundations. It is then sustained by keeping silent about it (even after Baqīyya disappears). Moreover, it is the space of the crypt that contains it. Yet, and this is the critical point, the treasure and the crypt that holds it is not primarily material, but made of the very fabric of language, of language that becomes blocked because it must remain hidden: "the tomb's content is unique in that it cannot appear in the light of day as speech. And yet, it is precisely a matter of words."[45] Secrecy has its own space, neither charted nor exactly real. Rather, it is hidden within the very fabric of language in the absences of buried content.

Jean-Joseph Goux considers the topographical metaphor of buried treasure as obliquely referring to the soul, an unconscious, submerged resting place that gives value to meaning and literature. As he writes, "The soul is treasury, deposit, backing: this wealth is what guarantees the meaning of circulating meaning. It is buried treasure, hidden, lying deep below the surface."[46] Similarly, Sa'īd's buried treasure is not simply contained in the iron chest but rather by what the knowledge of the chest allows (that is, the possibility of the secret). As Goux writes, "It was not in the heavens but rather beneath the 'unintelligible' earth and below dark waters, in the archaeological vaults of the unconscious, that the true a priori elements of the imagination were being discovered."[47] Just as this creative, submerged imagination issues from beneath the earth or dark waters, Sa'īd's treasure activates poetic language, subverting gravity and deriding control through the creative power of an exilic imagination, making lies and literature possible.

The Exilic Imagination

A few years before Edward Said wrote *Orientalism*, Habībī was already playing with the term, with tongue in cheek, in a chapter entitled, "An Odd Piece of Research on the Many Virtues of the Oriental Imagination."

In this chapter, Sa'īd reflects on the mischievously playful range of this imagination in misleadingly representing Palestinian identities. While Edward Said used orientalism as a criticism of the way European representations of the Middle East are distorted and reflect imperialist interests and biases, in Habībī's novel, the "Oriental imagination" operates in a two-fold manner. On the one hand, it emphasizes the opacity of identity and its susceptibility to subterfuge, referring to practices of misrepresentation in the context of life under occupation. On the other hand, this ability to create subterfuge is also aligned with and seen as a source for literary creativity. It is a kind of double consciousness that entails an internal dimension in which the subject can make use of mischievous recastings of identity.[48] These new reimagined identities give the subject access to spaces that would otherwise have been foreclosed, opening onto the space of literary imagination.

What Sa'īd calls the "Oriental imagination" creatively transgresses boundaries. This becomes most clear in instances involving identity. It often appears as a mode to both deride and parody its reliability. The chapter abounds with examples of this imagination through elisions of identity, masquerades, and dissimulations. In one, an Arab youth slams his car into another and escapes by screaming about the other driver that he is an Arab. The youth's act plays upon a form of orientalism popular in Israel, a false consciousness that makes the driver's purported Arab-ness proof of his guilt in spite of obvious facts to the contrary.

The term "Oriental imagination" has an ironic resonance that undoes expectations precisely by parodying orientalism. For example, this imagination is said to inspire Arabs to fly the flag of Israel, so that European Israelis can see them in front of Arab homes. This act subverts the homogeneous imaginary of Israeli society that interpellates its Arab citizens as "intimate enemies" (to borrow a term from Ashis Nandy).[49] As one of Sa'īd's Arab compatriots explains, "They know our Oriental imagination is very penetrating and that we can see with it what they can't. We can see the flags of the state even when folded up inside people." And then he adds, "And didn't the late Prime Minister Eshkol try to transform the so-called military government into something that observes without itself being seen? But we could still discern it, in the orders for house arrest and in the furrows deep in our cheeks. Now that's what I call imagination!"[50] The cartographic imaginary, internalized, becomes the material for the surveillance of identities. But this is an imperfect machine, and the "Oriental imagination" can unfetter its subjects from limits imposed by the maps of empire. It can, for example, allow Arabs to earn a living in jobs for which they would not otherwise have been considered hirable. Another example Sa'īd gives of the plasticity of the imagination is translation: the changing of names from Arabic to Hebrew in order to be able to "earn a living in a hotel, restaurant, or filling station." Indeed, in many ways, translation is the model for the "Oriental imagination," or as Lital Levy argues, strategic mistranslation and elision.[51]

The very institution of the panopticon, that is, something that observes without itself being seen, is unravelled here by means of an imagination that subverts visibility, rather than submitting to it as a trap.[52] The "Oriental imagination," anticipating the orientalism of the other, is by turns satirical and parodic, subversive as well as visionary. Characters also associate it with the mischievous and lyrical inspiration that dreamt up the *Arabian Nights.* For example, when Sa'īd takes Walā' to Tanturah to search for Baqīyya's buried treasure, and Walā' asks what his father is searching for, Sa'īd tells him he is looking for "the golden fish." "Then I'd tell him all the *Arabian Nights* tales I recalled. And I also gave free rein to my imagination, searching busily for some treasure of gold ever since the days of our ancient ancestor, Abjar son of Abjar."[53] As Sa'īd suggests, if he does not find an actual treasure chest, at least he does find a treasure trove in the visionary creativity that animates the *Nights*. This treasure is discovered in the power of imaginative play.

After his son's death, Sa'īd distinguishes between this imagination and the stifling suppression that motivates Walā' to revolt against the state. As he says, "It wasn't this story of the golden fish, nor any other such tales from the *Arabian Nights* that caused the loss of my only son, Walā'. No; for if that suppressed 'Oriental imagination' which created those superb tales were once set free, it would reach the very stars."[54] Although he is aware of the double-edged irony that such a statement evokes, he also reveres the creative force behind it. While the "Oriental imagination" can act as a synecdoche for the creative enterprise of writing literature, it can also derail interpretation and disrupt social relations through lies and deception. Thus his reference to *The Nights* recalls even the framing of those tales recounted by Shahrazad each night to the despotic king under the threat of death. But in Sa'īd's narrative, this sort of creative play not only is mobilized to trick the authorities, but also generates perils for potential readers as well.

In "The Rewriting of *The Arabian Nights* by Imīl Habībī," Anna Zambelli Sessona argues that the "Oriental imagination" is a survival technique which makes use of the creative force behind narrative and storytelling. However, while Sessona captures a vital portrait of its creativity, she renders it without its essential irony, envisioning a little too literally the historical reality behind it. As she says, "The

'Oriental imagination' is employed not only to create stories ... but also to 'penetrate' reality, to see through it. Medieval Arab philosophers saw imagination as the 'forming power,' as an internal sense able to elicit delight or wonder ... In modern times and for modern Palestinians in Israel, 'the Oriental imagination' is a necessity, a mental act in order to survive."[55] Without irony, this description risks becoming a history and phenomenology of the "Arab mind." But this is precisely what the "Oriental imagination" forecloses by blurring the strictures of identity.

If we understand the play at the heart of this concept, we can see how Saʻīd's concept of the "Oriental imagination" challenges a single, hegemonic, and homogeneous vision of identity and subjectivity. Rather than playing into orientalism, it has the potential to break down the orientalist gaze through its creative play. By answering back to power, anticipating the manner of its surveillance, and maintaining a paradoxical relation to the other as well as to one's own ascribed identity, it has unique power to begin a dialogue about extremely vexed relations that are historically elided.

An example of how this takes place in the novel can be seen when Saʻīd raises a flag of surrender after he hears the official order for all "defeated Arabs" to do so during the 1967 Six-Day War. This directive, of course, applies to Arabs living in the newly occupied Palestinian territories. Saʻīd's extravagant act of loyalty, through which he illustrates the ambiguity of his own position as a "defeated Arab" in Israel, is interpreted by the government as an act of sedition.[56] As Jacob admonishes Saʻīd, "That announcer ... was telling the West Bank Arabs to raise white flags in surrender to the Israeli occupation. What did you think you were up to, doing that in the very heart of the state of Israel, in Haifa, which no one regards as a city under occupation?"[57] In his desire to appear obedient, Saʻīd's act reveals the equivocality of identity and obligation and the limits of the cartographic imagination. His "Oriental imagination" reveals the extent to which identities are already askew. Making a farce of orientalism, it subverts the state's controls over borders and forms of difference.

Lies and the Secrecy of Imagination

To try to articulate the secret referred to in the title of the novel would be folly. To explain it would paradoxically expunge it from existence. However, we can see how it performs, what it elides, and how it illuminates certain imaginative and ambiguous elements of the narrative, as well as explore its relation to language. What this requires is imagination that does not respect the rules laid down by state officials. In the eyes of the authorities, this transgressive imagination appears as treacherous, deceptive, perfidious, rogue. Secrecy is the counterpoint to Saʿīd's initial belief in the supremacy of the state's panoptic apparatus.

Without resolving the productive tensions between Saʿīd's secret life and his exilic imagination, psychoanalysis provides a tool to illustrate forces destabilizing the authorities who profess the ability to read and supervise his inmost thoughts. By making impossible demands on Saʿīd's psyche with their dream-monitoring devices, the government officials weaken the reach of their own sovereignty. And yet, the regulations imposed on Saʿīd help him discover the unrestricted imaginative territory to which he is eventually exiled. By setting itself up at the frontier to his dreams, the apparatus of the state exposes its own limitation at the threshold of his imagination and secret life.

In an essay by Victor Tausk, a student of Sigmund Freud, the author addresses what he calls the "loss of ego boundaries." Tausk argues that this is "the complaint that 'everyone' knows the patient's thoughts, that his thoughts are not enclosed in his own head, but are spread throughout the world and occur simultaneously in the heads of all persons."[58] It is a problem of losing track of one's mental separateness. In contrast, Saʿīd has this illusion dictated to him, having been subjected by a state that does not recognize his psychic sovereignty, claiming to have intelligence on things as intimate as his very dreams. Yet the effect is the same: a psychic life wherein the most fundamental uncertainty prevails concerning where "I" ends and the world begins, as well as what is permitted and what is illicit in that world.

Tausk argues that in the normal development of children there is a stage where the child does not yet recognize its ego boundaries and believes that others know its thoughts. "Until the child has been successful in its first lie," Tausk argues, "the parents are supposed to know everything, even its most secret thoughts."[59] The paranoid assumption of the child has to be broken down in the process of its development. It is only by way of striving for the right to have secrets from which the parents are excluded, the argument goes, does the child finally establish its separateness, its ego boundaries.

I would argue that this psychoanalytic theory touches on something very important in the novel: Saʿīd's need to keep secrets, to disrupt his complicit position as an informer to Israel, to be able to deceive the state apparatus. While both the panoptic regime with its secret police as well as the individuals under its observation can deceive and be deceived, the insight that Tausk offers clarifies the important distinction between secrecy in each instance. The decisive experience is not merely being successful in deception, but gaining possession of the representation of one's own identity through secrecy, rather than instrumentalizing deception for the sake of controlling others.

In one of his aphorisms, philosopher Guy Debord argues that "surveillance would be much more dangerous had it not been led by its ambition for absolute control of everything to a point where it encountered difficulties created by its own progress."[60] If surveillance is the reaction of a paranoid state seeking to retain control not only of its borders but over its "intimate enemies"[61] as well, to shut out difference and uncertainty, then its impossible ambitions point to lines of resistance. While the individual is confronted by a negotiation of boundaries and possibilities for movement, the authority's paranoia tends towards the closure of its borders, concerned with fears of contamination or pollution of the idealized state. In Sa'īd's case, the state oversteps its bounds, laying claim to his imagination, his dreams and secret life. In spite of all the external controls that it can subject him to, it cannot have access to the territory of his imagination. And when the individual has been deprived of his external freedoms, freedom of movement and freedom of will, it cannot but discover the subversive power and space of the imagination. As Rula Jurdi Abisaab argues, "the fact that there is an existential-political space that is left unviolated by the state, a space of secrecy, leaves the future open for 'Palestinian' possibilities."[62]

The Implications of Secrecy for Everyday Palestinian Life and Literature

This space centres on kinship relations and the bonds of love. Keeping secrets from the authorities and deceiving them when necessary makes it possible for these relations to survive despite precarious circumstances. At times, forms of subterfuge aimed at concealing intimate relations from the eyes of officialdom create confusion for Sa'īd as well. For example, he meets his namesake in prison without realizing it. This cellmate was the son of Sa'īd's first love, Yu'ād, who had named her child after Sa'īd. Then, shortly afterwards, he meets another Yu'ād, his former cellmate's sister and daughter of the first Yu'ād, who is the spitting image of her mother and whom he mistakes for her mother, the Yu'ād he loved in his youth.

When he wakes up in a village called Salakah (which, incidently, is not its true name: Sa'īd is protecting the village's secrets with a false toponym), he discovers that the second Yu'ād has informed the villagers that Sa'īd is her father. This false relation takes on the dimensions of a secret shared between Sa'īd and Yu'ād. Yet in this village, Sa'īd's secret identity is not the only one. He meets Abu Mahmoud, who tells them that for a generation now this village has kept a secret about his relation to his blind father for years. His father, who had been among those displaced in 1948, had infiltrated back into the state to Salakah to reunite with his wife and children. However, the entire village pretended that the man was the woman's brother-in-law and that her husband had died, arranging a marriage between the two.

If the authorities had discovered this ruse, they would have arrested and deported the infiltrator. Hence, Abu Mahmoud was obliged to deny his relation to his own father in order to live with him. The confusion of familial relations such as these has an important role to play in the novel. Such examples of secrecy allow family members to remain together, for certain characters to remain in Israel, in spite of official orders for them to be detained and deported.

This manner of making love relations opaque through shared secrets resonates with an episode at the beginning of the book, when the police search Sa'īd's house and capture the first Yu'ād (the love of Sa'īd's youth) who is hiding there. She proclaims loudly, as if making a performative speech act, "this is my country, this is my house, and this is my husband!"[63] In a final heart-rending scene, the second Yu'ād is now also torn from Sa'īd just as her mother had been twenty years earlier. She echoes her mother's exact words, except with the difference that she replaces "wife" with "uncle." The familial claims "wife" and "uncle" are creative acts of deception. They are meant to mislead and to lay claim to the legal right to being there with their family and loved ones.

While the two Yu'āds bear the same name, the structure of a portmanteau is present in their characters. Doubled in person (in Sa'īd's confused consciousness, which recognizes the one in the other) as well as in their exile, they bring together the exilic dimension of the portmanteau in the novel, in which presence and absence collide, and the impossibility of intimacy and love is expressed through interventions of state powers. These are portmanteaus not in the sense of two words thrown together, but as echoes of experiences of characters caught up in conflicting structures and systems.

Relations of love such as these reflect the creativity and opacity of relations that characterize the ambiguous territory of Sa'īd's exilic imagination. In Israel, secrets that protect the opacity of one's kinship relations are necessary to protect loved ones from deportation or imprisonment. And the state's successful capture of the second Yu'ād and the farcical repetition of tragedy in this instance is, perhaps, also the last straw for Sa'īd before we discover he is again in the company of beings from outer space.

While the authorities are concerned with the security of an ideal, with the impermeability of its borders, making claims on the subterranean history and the maintenance and conservation of the status quo, the individuals caught up in the midst of these borders and vertical encroachments have the security of a secret at heart. Concerned with the "Oriental imagination," that productive treasure trove of lies and literature, with its endless permutations and its propensity to mislead, conceal, elide, subvert, satirize, parody, perform, and deride, this ultimately *pessoptimistic* narrative does not set store by values set in stone, contained within iron chests or national borders. Instead, it allows us to laugh at the big men (however small of stature), the authorities and administrators of control, to laugh even at that part of ourselves which, like the lawyer from the end of the novel, would try to lay hold of the treasure by discovering its resting place.

Having disappeared, the protagonist of the novel reflects the paradoxical presence that transfigures identities in translation. This is a book in which identities unfold like a portmanteau, as aesthetic constructions. Sa'īd is a stumbling block over which readers and critics lose their footing because his paradoxical character acts as a lure to interpretation and fantasy. In the same way, the secret of the submerged treasure becomes for Sa'īd the treasure of secrecy, which grows into the knowledge that secrets can be kept private from the purportedly all-knowing apparatus of the state, in spite of recurring occupations and violations. And this knowledge creates a space, however contingent or roiled, for solidarity, allowing human connections to thrive. This is the territory of imagination that does not bow or bend before the law, where one may fathom the language of fish and Shahrazad's tales, and where Sa'īd faces exile. Entering the company of Candide and Shahrazad, Juha and Gregor Samsa, paradoxically requires Sa'īd to disappear from his own novel, to be the absent presence that entices readers to scour these pages for clues as to where he is hiding within the remarkable treasure trove of this book.

In this novel, identity takes on aesthetic dimensions that are both conflictual and ambiguous. As such they often destabilize efforts to interpret the book in the light of any single national or literary tradition and challenge fixed constructions of identity and their knowability. It is also a narrative that can be transformative for readers who encounter the oppositions of the narrative as significant to their own formations of identity. It juxtaposes the contraries of high and low, tragic and comic, the quotidian and the fantastic, to bring about an incipient polyphony that does not end even when the book is closed. It is a portmanteau of opposing aesthetic forces and conscriptions of identity. The story dramatizes variance and contradiction as a way of describing a living archive or treasure trove.

The work demonstrates the subversion of orientalism, destabilizing stereotypical fantasy formations and patterns of interpretation that rely upon them. It occupies multiple vectors of influence and identity. Blending traditions and aesthetic sources from across the artificial cartographies dividing East and West, the novel refuses to submit to categorical modes of thought that monitor and identify us, keeping us under surveillance, because of the suspected security threats or the calculated benefits to the security state we represent. In the next chapter of this book, I turn to a work of West African literature that shares some of these same challenges. The reductive literary cartography that is here demonstrated in divisions between "East" and "West" are transposed to the colonial confrontation between "North" and "South," or between "Europe" and "Africa."[64]

Chapter Two

The Literary Space of Authority in Camara Laye's *Le Regard du roi*

Camara Laye's *Le Regard du roi* engages imperial forms of authority and entitlement through comedic subversion. The book explores how these forms can be undermined through representations depicting tropes common to the European travel narratives that were produced by various colonial officials, commercial prospectors, tourists, and official recorders of the empire. Yet the history of the novel's reception presents a separate but related problem regarding African authority and authorship. Relying on research conducted on the history of the book's reception in France and the United States, where critics impressed by the complexity of the novel questioned Laye's ability as an African man to have written it, I trace the debates that arose around the book's publication as part of a feedback loop in which non-European writers are often caught. The accusations in Laye's case are particularly deplorable because they reflect a refusal of the critical imagination to acknowledge an author's diverse achievements, aims, and engagements based on the fact of his not being European. Rather than supposing that his experiences living abroad in a predominantly white society fuelled the author's literary work, some critics have levelled accusations that his writings do not reflect the scope of his experiences and identity. Arguing that Laye could not have written the book, one critic insists that she is aware that it was "written by someone with a European sense of literary form."[1] Yet inevitably Laye's writing was informed by his time in Europe. Examining these details of the book's reception as part of the literary effects of the work, I follow how this history ironically highlights the implicit critique of racial supremacy in the novel.

Playing on a major tradition of travel writing about Africa and incorporating the stylistics of surrealism and modernism, the book develops a critique of the privilege of the white male gaze that objectifies Africans. *Le Regard* follows the haphazard journey of a white man, Clarence, who wishes to gain an audience with the elusive black king of an unnamed African kingdom. His labyrinthine quest builds upon familiar tropes in European travel narratives about Africa. The novel is separated into three parts. The first part takes place mainly in Adramé, the capital in the north of the country, where Clarence has gambled away all his money. He reasons that if he can find a way to speak with the king, he might be granted employment. However, his desire to meet the king up close is continually deferred until the climactic scene at the end of the book.

Clarence first sees the king in Adramé during a celebration for the king. However, he cannot make his way through the throng of celebrants and dancers. In the crowd, he meets a beggar and two young men, Noaga and Nagoa, whom Clarence cannot tell apart.[2] The beggar convinces Clarence to go south in the hope that they may intercept the king on his journeys there. As they prepare to leave, Clarence enters into the debt of an Innkeeper whom he cannot pay. This leads to a trial where the Innkeeper demands Clarence's shirt and trousers to erase the debt. He is also expected to part with his underpants to pay the court fees. He barely escapes with the clothes on his back and flees with the beggar, Noaga, and Nagoa to the South.

On the journey, they pass through a forest that seems to never end. Clarence begins to believe that he is being deceived and that they are in fact walking in circles. He is aware of an odour emanating from the forest that has a powerful soporific effect upon him. Finally, the group arrives at their destination, a village called Aziana, where Noaga and Nagoa are from. The second part of the novel takes place in Aziana, where the beggar sells Clarence to the naba, the local governor, for a donkey and a woman. Clarence begins to live with another woman, Akissi, who takes care of his material needs. Nightly, he is drugged with the aid of flowers from the forest, and Akissi is replaced in his bed with different women from the naba's harem to increase the naba's offspring.

Finally, after years of living in this situation, Clarence discovers the trick that has been played upon him. In the third and final part of the novel, Clarence confronts his own shame and humiliation, and undergoes a transformation. It is only when he comes to understand his own iniquity and debasement that he is able to escape from this condition, and eventually present himself before the king. After accepting the state of his own abjection, he finds himself before the king and achieves a form of spiritual union with him.

The ill-defined nature of the location sets the stage for allegory, while alluding to and deriding the trend in travel writing on Africa that depicts the continent as a single, undifferentiated world with shared features. More recently, Binyavanga Wainaina has ridiculed such trends in his satirical "How to Write about Africa":

> In your text, treat Africa as if it were one country. It is hot and dusty with rolling grasslands and huge herds of animals and tall, thin people who are starving. Or it is hot and steamy with very short people who eat primates. Don't get bogged down with precise descriptions. Africa is big: fifty-four countries, 900 million people who are too busy starving and dying and warring and emigrating to read your book. The continent is full of deserts, jungles, highlands, savannahs and many other things, but your reader doesn't care about all that, so keep your descriptions romantic and evocative and unparticular.[3]

Playing on the stereotypes and expectations of the kinds of travel narratives that represent Africa, Laye's novel offers an allegory about the pitfalls of white supremacy. Yet while it deals with the colonial politics of race, it does not directly impugn the politics of colonialism. It satirizes and undermines the exemplification of colonialism in Clarence, but it does not directly take on the colonial administration. Clarence is more of a nobody and an anti-hero than someone of consequence in the colony. Thus, some critics have seen it as insufficiently anticolonial and retrogressive in its incorporation of European influence. My reading of the novel highlights the history of the book's reception in France and the United States, where critics impressed by the complexity of the novel first hailed it as a masterpiece of African fiction. However, some voiced dissent from this opinion, seeing it as apolitical or derivative. Others voiced concerns questioning Laye's authorship, sparking an ongoing debate about whether Laye was capable of producing such a novel. This history of reception highlights, in the imagination of critics of the novel, the very racial priorities that are humorously deconstructed by the novel. The insinuation that the author is secretly a white man, for whose work a black man took credit, draws upon a racialized imaginary that seeks to neutralize the subversive effects of the novel, ignoring or even reversing the colonial history of labour relations between Europeans and Africans.

Laye's Development as a Writer

The range of Laye's literary works demands that his readers grapple with the historical contexts of his writing as well as the geocultural tensions that were a part of his creative production. He lived under and wrote about very different regimes: an African colony, the European power of its administration, a post-colonial system with which he never seemed to find peace, and finally exile. But the way he approached these circumstances was rarely, if ever, straightforward.

Laye was born in 1928 to a Malinké family of blacksmiths in French Guinea. He studied at Koranic and French schools, in the small town of Kouroussa. Drawn away from this small river port when he was fifteen, Laye moved to the metropolitan capital city of Conakry, where the French colonial administration was centralized. At this young age, settled into the heart of the city, he began coursework in motor mechanics.

Laye's spiralling movement out of the colonial periphery towards the metropole continued when in 1947, he left Conakry for Paris to continue his study in engineering and work towards the *baccalauréat*. Here, Laye confronted a world transformed by literary achievements of the *négritude* movement, integrating African and African-diaspora ways of knowing with traditions of poetry and surrealism in France.

When Laye entered onto this scene, in the late 1940s, the early writers of *négritude*, such as Léopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and Léon Damas had already established themselves as an intellectual and poetic force to be reckoned with. Although his writing is not always stylistically reminiscent of these writers, Laye's work is marked by the movement's emphasis on the intellectual and artistic heritage of Africa, while incorporating European literary traditions. Surrealism and modernism deeply attracted Laye, and like many writers of his generation, he developed a profound fascination with the writings of Franz Kafka.

Initially considering his literary interests secondary to his skilled trade, Laye nonetheless became deeply steeped in the Parisian culture of the avant-garde. His first two novels were conceived and written during this time. *L'Enfant noir*, his first novel, was published in 1953. It is a representation of a childhood in French Guinea resembling the course of Laye's own early experiences. Laye offers a portrait of life that stresses local traditions over the colonial influence of the French (the latter is presented as implicit in the novel, through the institutions of higher learning), giving special attention to Indigenous Malinké traditions and rites of initiation. The experience of colonialism is conspicuously absent, leading to criticism from writers like Mongo Beti that Laye's writing was not sufficiently anticolonial. It is true that in this book, colonialism plays only a marginal role. Yet, this could be seen as an artful slight against the colonial power, demonstrating the limits of its authority in the life of a child growing up in a Malinké family in a village in French Guinea.

The following year, in 1954, Laye completed and published *Le Regard du roi*. It is a very different kind of narrative that participated in certain conventions of modernism while playing with the authority of white Europeans in Africa. Clarence believes that, as a white man, the colour of his skin should guarantee him special rights and privileges, yet during his quest Clarence's arrogance and his entire (European) system of values are methodically brought into crisis. His expressions of entitlement and superiority recall the trappings of European imperialism. When Clarence is sold into slavery, Laye is reversing historical race relations of domination.

After the publication of these novels, Laye returned to French Guinea in 1956. Two years later Guinea gained its independence from France. In post-independence Guinea, Laye became involved in politics, holding several government posts within Guinea and abroad. An outspoken critic of Sékou Touré's dictatorship, Laye left Guinea for Senegal to avoid arrest. After more than ten years since he had published *Le Regard*, he wrote his third novel, *Dramouss*, in 1966. In this book, Laye stylistically returns to a highly personal voice that was a hallmark of his first book. Yet *Dramouss* is dramatically different in effect, offering a bitter allegory against Touré's regime, which had been in power in Guinea since 1958. Unsurprisingly, Laye's book was banned in Guinea, and Laye was sentenced to death *in absentia*, forcing Laye to continue living in exile until his death.[4]

During the 1970s, Laye struggled on and off with his health. He completed a fourth book entitled *L'Exile*, but did not publish it, perhaps because at the time, his wife, Marie Lorifo, was being held in prison by Touré's regime. His last published work, *Le Maître de la parole*, presents a rendition of the epic of Sundiata, representing a written translation of a major Indigenous work of West African orature, being the result of a protracted collaboration with the griot Babou Condé.

It is evident that Laye flirted with different prose styles throughout his career. Yet taken together, his body of work suggests that he was working towards the development of an African form of modernism that provoked thinking about colonialism, ethnicity, oral culture, politics, and existence. Maligned by various critics throughout his career, Laye felt a deep ambivalence towards French, the language in which he wrote. F. Abiola Irele informs us that during a meeting he had with Laye shortly before Laye's death, Laye declared that "he had decided to abandon French and to write henceforth only in Malinke."[5] His vexed relation with the colonial tongue reflects his equally complex relation to the politics between France and its former African colonies. As he trained his pen on heterogeneous feats of imagination both cultural and political, Laye's divergent writings reflect a complex response to, on the one hand, colonialism before liberation, and on the other hand, neocolonial politics and the importance of preserving traditions of Indigenous orature after independence.

Yet, of all his works, *Le Regard du roi* remains the most enigmatic and controversial. Along with his short story "Les Yeux de la statue," which bears stylistic similarities to the novel and his last work of orature, it is one of the few works of his fiction that do not reflect some autobiographical elements. And although there have been questions raised about the extent of editing required in advance of publishing of *L'Enfant noir*, it is the only one of his works about which an argument has been put forward that it was not written by Laye at all. But why, then, did this novel, of all his works, receive the most attention from critics and what inspired the charges of forgery? In short, what makes *Le Regard* so controversial?

Before being able to address this question directly, I want to discuss the sort of travel narratives parodied by *Le Regard*. This will help expose the conventions flouted by this novel and reveal the cartographic imaginary behind them. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is perhaps the most prominent literary example of such narratives in which Europeans travel to Africa. *Le Regard* creates reversals of voice, authority, and labour from the tradition it parodies. Addressing the spiritual void of European imperialism, Laye responds to it by realigning the authority of the white colonial adventurer as an obstacle to having a true encounter in Africa. Finally, I examine the history of reception of Laye's novel, which has been criticized and challenged as a forgery written by a white man. This reception history raises important problems for reframing the novel outside of this limiting cartography.

A Parody of Foreign Encounter

When the novel opens, we meet the hapless Clarence winding his way through a crowded esplanade, reflecting on his bad luck in this colony and hoping to gain an audience with the king, whose presence in the city is the reason for the immense gathering. Debts from gambling have reduced him to an outcast from the white community of colonials. Clarence's distaste for being among the African celebrants and his overall sense of superiority over them are expressed through a third-person limited narration.

Camara Laye upsets expectations in *Le Regard*, starting from the presumptive colonial authority of this European man travelling in Africa. The novel reveals that Clarence is completely out of his own depth and that all of his ideas of his racial priority over Africans are false. He is met with tricksters and con artists who pull the wool over his eyes and lead him into situations to suit their own purposes, completely disregarding his confused notions of what his white skin ought to afford him.

By showing Clarence's sense of confusion and discomfort among the native population, the narrative conveys a sense of his powerlessness while drawing attention to the false racialization in his judgments and sensibility. He is a white man who traverses territory he cannot see clearly and does not wish to pay attention to. Thus, Clarence stumbles over the landscape because his vision has been trained to flatten it. Laye parodies travel narratives where Africa is deemed the "dark continent" and in which white authorities draw their own maps of empire through practices of colonial administration as they seek to discover the heart of the continent's so-called darkness.

Mary Kingsley, Mary Anne Barker, Henry Morton Stanley, and Robert Louis Stevenson are among the list of European writers who wrote popular descriptions of their journeys to Africa, giving form to the patterns of representation associated with travel narratives of white colonials in Africa. Such writers produced an "invention of Africa" (to borrow V.Y. Mudimbe's term) and Africans through the lens of their own cartographic imaginaries. Early in the twentieth century, ethnologists and sociologists would join the fray, adding further authority through scientism to the already overdetermined descriptions of Africa. While many of these travel writers make appeals to objectivity, there is always a dimension of fantasy within their writings. Even writers like Stevenson and Joseph Conrad, whose fictions draw from the conventions of this tradition of writing, create their narratives within an established framework, mixing fantasy with reportage.

Of all travel narratives written by Europeans about journeys into Africa, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is perhaps the most prominent example of this genre in novel form. It reflects many of the norms of travel writing situated in Africa during the colonial period, including the unquestioned authority of white colonials and the belaboured subservience of Indigenous Africans. In order to provide an appreciation of the extent of Laye's skewering of these norms, Conrad's novel may serve as a comparative model of the European man's administrative travels in Africa in fiction.

Although Conrad's narrative was written in English and Laye wrote in French, *Heart of Darkness* belongs to this tradition that Laye knew well. Colonial European characters in this novel are invested with the authority to pronounce the "meaning" of Leopold's enterprise and, by extension, imperialism more generally. In contrast, authority completely eludes Clarence in Camara Laye's *Le Regard du roi*. Laye's parodic novel adapts well-established narratives about white colonial explorers in

Africa in a way that debases white male authority through the depiction of Clarence and his relation to the society in which he finds himself.

Distortions of a Witness Account

The narrative of *Heart of Darkness* revolves around the unspeakable violence that was perpetrated against the Congolese under Leopold's bloody regime. Although a novel, written through a fictive lens, *Heart of Darkness* is based upon Conrad's eyewitness experience of the brutal conditions in the Congo at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1890, Conrad was hired as a merchant marine by a Belgian trading company, and travelled by steamer up the Congo River, assuming command of the vessel when the captain was stricken ill. At this time, the Congo Free State, along with its inhabitants, had been named the legal private property of Leopold II, king of Belgium. In his novella, Conrad develops a powerful critique of Leopold's administration through his depiction of the atrocities perpetrated there. This critique played a significant role in affecting the cultural imaginary of the English-speaking public who read the novella. It helped raise consciousness about the horrors that were instituted throughout the Belgian colonial project in the Congo, and mobilized opposition to the continuation of Leopold's administration. Yet that is only part of the story.

Conrad transfers the mantle of storytelling to Marlow, presenting his impressions as a fiction. Understood in the broad historical context of colonialism, Conrad's complex narrative displays some part of the brutal treatment of the Indigenous Congolese population. Ultimately the novella offers a short but decisive statement on the meaning of the entire colonial enterprise, using the Belgian case in the Congo as a case study. Rather than unreservedly condemning imperialism, Conrad's work reflects a certain ambivalence about this enterprise. While isolating and condemning Leopold's projects of enslavement, mutilation, and extraction, it nevertheless suggests that there was an abstract idea underlying the mission of imperialism that could redeem it. As Marlow famously states:

> The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea.[6]

Yet the paltry redemption that is suggested and promised in these words is never articulated or realized. Rather, the ambiguity of this sentiment reserves a place for the spirit of imperialism, while condemning the practice of extractive colonialism. This reservation sinks into meaninglessness once Marlow is brought face to face with Kurtz. Kurtz, who comes closest to expressing the truth about imperial conquest, repeats the words in awed summary: "the horror, the horror." Yet in the end, Marlow effaces Kurtz's pronouncement, protecting the enterprise in all of its systemic horror.

In its representations, Conrad's novella bears a vexed and complicit relationship with European imperialism, as Chinua Achebe has argued. The authority of the white colonial figures not only is taken for granted, but remains unchallenged, without any true African counterparts. There are no African characters who are given much degree of agency, complexity, or a voice to speak. Rather, the Congolese serve merely as bodies upon which Leopold's form of imperialism leaves its marks, or as simple-minded go-betweens who serve their white masters without question. In this sense, Conrad's novella corresponds to the satirical demands put forward by Wainaina on what African characters should look like in writing about Africa. As he says, "Have them illuminate something about Europe or America in Africa. African characters should be colourful, exotic, larger than life – but empty inside, with no dialogue, no conflicts or resolutions in their stories, no depth or quirks to confuse the cause."[7] All of these narrative tropes are thrown into sharp relief, re-evaluated, and transformed in a work like Laye's *Le Regard du roi*.

Conrad's narrative is implicated in the values that establish the authority and prerogatives of the agents of European imperialism. Although Conrad very effectively criticizes the brutal colonialism of Leopold's exploitation of the Congo, he fails to extend his criticism to colonialism generally, and in its realization, the novel reflects the unquestioned racism at the heart of European imperialism. For Conrad, the real peril is the spiritual and moral life of Europeans who pervert themselves by committing such atrocities, rather than a consideration of the subject position of those at the receiving end of such violence. Achebe famously argues that "Conrad was a bloody racist," based on the dehumanizing representations of Africans within his novella.[8] Yet Achebe insists that this racism was not unique to Conrad. As he writes, "Conrad did not originate the image of Africa which we find in his book. It was and is the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination and Conrad merely brought the peculiar gifts of his own mind to bear on it."[9] As Achebe points out, Conrad's book continues to exercise a strong hold over representations of Africa, it being one of the most highly canonized literary works about Africa.

Other critics have focused on the narrative complexity at the heart of Conrad's approach to critiquing imperialism. For example, Edward Said discusses the novel as a vastly complex work by a Polish expatriate and an employee of the imperial system. He argues that Conrad self-consciously foregrounds the contingency of the systems he describes, anchors the narrative in an imperial perspective of a given time and place, and conveys differences between Belgian and British systems of colonialism. Yet for all of its complexity, the work also exemplifies an exclusive frame of mind that "assumes the primacy and even the complete centrality of the West."[10] Said shows how Marlow's narrative unsettles readers' assumptions about the world and their place within it. As he argues, "by accentuating the discrepancy between the official 'idea' of empire and the remarkably disorienting actuality of Africa, Marlow unsettles the reader's sense not only of the very idea of empire, but of something more basic, reality itself."[11]

Yet the impact of Conrad's literary intervention at the turn of the twentieth century was to allow readers to see the cracks in the edifice of the ideology upon which they, along with the entire European continent, depended. Thus, Patrick Brantlinger focuses on the role of Conrad's ambivalence towards imperialism. He argues that Kurtz's pamphlet for the International Society of Savage Customs is "an analogue for the story and its dead center, the kernel of meaning or non-meaning within its cracked shell."[12] According to Brantlinger, Kurtz's nihilism reflects Conrad's own. The supposedly redemptive idea of conquest behind the murderous administration of the Congo Free State remains a fundamentally empty one.

A writer's work may reflect the racist imagination popular in his day while also playing a significant role in raising consciousness about the brutality of imperialism. With this in mind, other critics of the novella have sought to qualify Achebe's strong condemnation. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o says that Conrad always made him feel "uneasy with his inability to see any possibility of redemption arising from the energy of the oppressed."[13] Drawing attention to his Eurocentric perspective, Ngũgĩ emphasizes its limitations. As he writes, Conrad's "ambivalence towards imperialism ... could never let him go beyond the balancing acts of liberal humanism."[14]

The Africans in the narrative are entirely voiceless, either silently suffering or serving their white masters, with a few minor exceptions. The only Africans in Conrad's story who are given a speaking voice with words that appear directly in the narrative is a young boy who announces Kurtz's death and the headman of the starving black slaves on the steamer, who expresses their cannibal desires. Both of these characters speak briefly and in broken English. The boy says simply, "Mistah Kurtz, he dead," while the headman's brief dialogue with Marlow begins after a few grunts are exchanged between the Congolese aboard the vessel: "'Catch 'im,' he snapped, with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth – 'catch 'im. Give 'im to us.' 'To you, eh?' I asked; 'what would you do with them?' 'Eat 'im!'"[15]

Neither voice presents psychological complexity. One delivers a message, the other makes a gruesome, cannibalistic request. Notably, Marlow does not reflect much on the conditions of these African labourers on his ship, whose desires seem motivated not least by their state of starvation. For Ngũgĩ it is significant that Africans are not given a voice, "except, indirectly, through the narrator when they express a wish to eat their enemies. They have otherwise been divested of all energy."[16] Moreover, the role played by the boy who announces Kurtz's death is a kind of Indigenous interpreter, an important colonial figure, whom the white authorities rely upon to be informed about fact on the ground. According to Ngũgĩ, this figure takes on broader ramifications:

> He helps in the conquest of the interior, in mapping out and classifying every corner and resource, and later in the actual administration. The interpreter, the one-way go-between who is actually so by virtue of his knowledge of the master's language, the one that Joseph Conrad described rather contemptuously but correctly as the re-formed African. He is re-formed in European language factories and schools, and he often acts as the carrier of messages.[17]

The boy's message is a transmission of information in a language brought to the Congo by colonialism, relaying information about one European to another. Because the boy speaks in a foreign language and is reduced to the function of giving information, any authority he could have established through his speech depends upon the authority of those he serves. The fact that he speaks in English is a significant recognition of the authority of this language in a colonial space, precluding translation. Even in the Belgian colony, the colonial agents of Leopold involved in the narrative reflect Britain's imperial reach and its exported monolingualism of English. Moreover, the fact that the boy's English is grammatically broken helps to shore up, by contrast, the language and authority of the agents of European imperialism and the institutions they represent.

This boy's message eventually makes it back to Kurtz's fiancée in Europe, but this time it is Marlow who serves as intermediary. Significantly, she is the only woman in the narrative who speaks directly in the text. Her powers to critically evaluate the realities around her are derailed by Marlow's own powers of storytelling. Kurtz's fiancée first presented the economic motivation to go to Africa, because he wishes to marry outside of his class and, lacking means, sought a position with a Belgian company with ivory interests in the Congo. Therefore, she is at the heart of the brutal adventure from which she is excluded, about which she is kept in the dark. Her ignorance (and by extension the ignorance of all genteel European society) helps prop up the violence and brutality going on in the Congo. And Marlow becomes complicit in its continuance by seeking to protect her innocence:

> "I heard his last words ..." I stopped in a fright.
>
> "Repeat them," she murmured in a heartbroken tone. "I want – I want – something – something – to – to live with."
>
> I was on the point of crying at her, "Don't you hear them?"
>
> The dusk was repeating them in a persistent whisper all around us, in a whisper that seemed to swell menacingly like the first whisper of a rising wind.
>
> "The horror! the horror!"
>
> "His last word – to live with," she insisted. "Don't you understand I loved him – I loved him – I loved him!"
>
> I pulled myself together and spoke slowly.
>
> "The last word he pronounced was – your name."[18]

The famous last words of Kurtz avow the horror of the entire colonial enterprise in the Congo. With his "white" lie, Marlow strikes upon a homology between the horror avowed by Kurtz and his fiancée's name. On a certain register, if she represents the whole wilfully ignorant European society of which she is but an example, the last words on his lips, that exclamation of horror, may also betray her true name. Then, the heart of darkness indexed by the book's title is not exactly located in Africa but circulating in the bourgeois drawing rooms of empire and buried in the false innocence and melancholia that Marlow's lie preserves. Marlow drops a hint that this darkness is a European export when at the beginning of his narrative, reflecting upon the gloomy environs on the Thames, he says, "And this also ... has been one of the dark places on the earth."[19]

Marlow's return to Europe thus serves to insulate and protect the European gentility and feminine innocence represented by Kurtz's Intended. Her ignorance must be protected from the ugly truths about imperialism. Thus, Marlow's authority serves its final and essential role by keeping Kurtz's fianceé in the dark about the goings-on in Congo Free State. In *Heart of Darkness*, meaning itself is effaced. The "virtue" of imperialism is the sham lie told to protect more sensitive natures from the horror of its true nature. In *Le Regard*, however, the meaning sought is not a lie—it is by contrast simple and direct, discovered in the aura emanating from the king.

A Parody of White Authority

This darkness that conceals the spiritual vacancy of Europe is powerfully transmuted to the radiant gaze of the king in *Le Regard.* Achebe suggests that people who are serious about understanding Africa and Africans should simply stop reading Conrad's novel. However, he also admits that *Heart of Darkness* is representative of something greater: a trend in thinking and writing about Africa. Laye's novel is a subtle corrective to this larger phenomenon, getting at the heart of what is never questioned in Conrad's work: the authority and privilege of white colonials in Africa.

Clarence's quest for the African king is a quest for meaning, rather than the meaninglessness secreted by shadows in Marlow's quest for Kurtz. Rather than eradicating the locus of authority altogether, the novel turns the values invested in the agents of colonialism on their heads, thereby developing an implicit critique of European imperialism. Whereas in Conrad's novel the native interpreter seems almost superfluous and reaffirms the structures of colonial authority, Laye's work follows a European who finds no reliable informant and is unable to render the native as an interpreter.

Marlow's narrative provides a Eurocentric lens critical of the particular institution of imperialism in the Congo, without raising questions about the framework of imperialism. Africa is merely the backdrop for European colonials to explore the inner nature of their souls. As Brantlinger argues, "the African wilderness serves as a mirror, in whose darkness Conrad/Marlow sees a death-pale self-image named Kurtz."[20] Laye's narrative, on the other hand, is not about "Europeans performing acts of imperial mastery and will in (or about) Africa," as Said says of Conrad's narrative.[21] Clarence, Laye's white protagonist, is shipwrecked in a kingdom in Africa that is governed by codes he does not understand. Rather than Africa playing the background to the interior journeys of white colonials, as in Marlow's narrative, Clarence becomes the subject of ridicule and laughter, the unwitting ass of the story. In other words, Laye's story emphasizes the ungroundedness of Clarence's cultural assumptions whereas Marlow's are affirmed with yet another white man, Kurtz, as his diabolical reflection.

As a tale of encounter between a European and an African society, *Le Regard* represents the foreign as seen through the folly of predetermined ideas about the way the world works. Clarence's prejudgments about Africa, Africans, and his own ability to successfully navigate and master them prove misguided and imprudent. From the initial scene on the esplanade, to his travels through the country, where he is drugged and sold by his guides, to the mystical conclusion where he finally meets the king, feeling unworthy but also purified and enveloped by love, Clarence undergoes a fundamental change of character. Realizing that his own authority is an illusion, that the world he is trying to understand is much more complex and less static than he had anticipated, he also comes to understand his own iniquity and shame when he comes before the king's gaze. His spiritual conversion requires his renunciation of white supremacy.

The bumbling character of Clarence is a reversal of a prototype established by other narratives with European travellers who visit Africa, such as Charles Marlow. Moreover, his journey provides a view of an African culture that is independent and self-sufficient, without reliance upon the evaluating consciousness of white colonial authorities. As Toni Morrison writes in her introduction to the English-language edition of the novel:

> Stripped of the hope of interpreting Africa to Africans and deprived of the responsibility of translating Africa to Westerners, Clarence provides us with an unprecedented sight: a male European, de-raced and de-cultured, experiencing Africa without resources, authority, or command. Because it is he who is marginal, ignored, superfluous; he whose name is never uttered until he is "owned"; he who is without history or representation; he who is sold and exploited for the benefit of a presiding family, a shrewd entrepreneur, a local regime; we observe an African culture being its own subject, initiating its own commentary.[22]

Clarence's journey effaces white colonial authority, laying bare the meaninglessness of the entitlements and privileges of the agents of empire. As Morrison suggests, his authority is undermined not only through his foolishness, but also through his bondage. Significantly, Clarence is sold to the Naba of Aziana, who is a person of wealth and title, a provincial king or governor, but whose authority does not compare by any measure to that of the elusive king himself. Yet Clarence's confusion is so great that he does not realize that the sale has taken place or any of its implications. This reversal inverts the history of brutalization perpetrated against Africans who were captured and sold into bondage during the Atlantic slave trade. Yet, it is important to point out that the spiritual debasement of Clarence never parodies the true suffering of African victims of the slave trade, and Clarence is ostensibly treated quite kindly (if disingenuously) by his African masters. Thus, Laye's novel annihilates his pretence of authority by placing Clarence in an embarrassing and degrading position yet allowing him to remain ignorant of the extent of his debasement. Clarence performs his duties, kept as an animal engaged in husbandry, in a state of semi-conscious debasement through drugs and subterfuge. His "slavery" involves the extraction of his labour in a set of relations he does not understand. It is a protracted servitude that lasts several years, during which he falsely believes he has joined the community of Aziana as an equal.

Clarence demands that the other characters recognize his priority and treat him appropriately. Yet his sense of entitlement is constantly refused through the course of the narrative. Clarence comes onto the scene believing that a white man in Africa should have special privileges not accorded to non-Europeans. Clarence exclaims at one point, "Je ne suis pas n'importe qui ... Je suis un blanc!"[23] ("I am not 'just anybody,' ... I am a white man").[24] With all the trappings of imperialism, it is this attitude of privilege and exceptionalism that leads to many errors in judgment, getting him embroiled in all sorts of trouble. Laye strips the white colonial figure of all his pretences of power and knowledge. His whiteness is a marker that signals his vulnerability rather than his prestige, and his false beliefs in what it ought to afford him facilitate the forms of subterfuge by the Africans who outwit him.

The assumption of privilege in Laye's text in fact relegates Clarence to a childlike position. For example, the beggar's relation to him is characterized by mischievous paternalism. He learns some basic points of etiquette from the beggar, as when, in response to his expectations that Africans should serve his interests, the beggar explains that it is bad manners to impose oneself on a host by demanding to be given hospitality. Rather, the beggar encourages him to understand that one cannot take anything for granted. As Clarence discovers, the discourse of rights and privileges is a remnant from his former life of privilege. His so-called rights are constantly refused. The beggar explains:

> Ne pouvez-vous comprendre qu'un droit ne se quémande pas? J'aurais pu quémander une faveur, je veux dire: une chose qui n'est pas due; je ne pouvais quémander un droit, qui vous est dévolu d'office. D'ailleurs je n'ai pas appris à quémander les droits: cela ne s'enseigne nulle part. Comprenez-vous à présent?
>
> (Can't you get it into your thick head that one cannot beg the favor of receiving something that is one's "right"? I could have asked for any favor,

> I mean something that is not due you; I could not possibly have asked for something that is your "right," something which devolves upon you officially. Anyhow, I never learned how to beg for "rights" – that sort of thing can't be taught. Now do you understand?)[25]

This rebuke shows how Clarence has to learn when to hold his tongue, and not continue to rely on the way things worked where he came from. The reversal of authority in the passage is clear. The beggar, whom Clarence at first assumes to hold a lowly status, actually has greater authority in this place than a foolish, disoriented white man. Yet it is only through realizing the humiliating state to which he has fallen in the second part of the novel, his loss of freedom and use as a stud under the influence of drugged wine, that his transformation is made possible because he is able finally to contemplate his own degradation. Rather than clinging to the false vestiges of his imaginary authority as a European, Clarence must learn to bow before the spiritual authority of the king.

Whereas in *Heart of Darkness* important information is relayed between whites, sometimes through an African interpreter, information in *Le Regard* is only selectively made available to the white protagonist. He is often kept in the dark about his own situation, prospects, and conditions. His manipulation by the beggar, the character who most clearly capitalizes on Clarence's cluelessness, culminates in the beggar's sale of Clarence into slavery. His bondage amounts to his use, against his will and without his knowledge, as a stud to sire children in the village of Aziana. This final point demonstrates the full extent of Laye's reversal of authority in literary representations of white travellers in Africa. In Conrad's novel, brutality is deployed by the colonial powers in service of primitive accumulation, where the bodies of the Congolese acted as disposable labour to produce vast amounts of personal wealth for Leopold II. In Laye's novel, the white traveller in Africa is part of the currency between two Africans, who treat him as their property and extract his labour from him. Being used in an animal capacity, the way one studs a horse, calls to mind the harsher historical practices instituted under slavery in the Americas, such as the breeding of slaves and the overall debasement of Africans who were treated as chattel. The novel strikes a delicate balance by playing with these allusions without trivializing them.

The "Good" Book

Just as there is a set of norms in historical writings about Europeans travelling to Africa that reflect a false conception of white supremacy, there are also norms that pertain to the reception of African literature.

For example, Saul Bellow famously dismissed non-European literary achievements when he asked, "Who is the Tolstoy of the Zulus? The Proust of the Papuans? I'd be glad to read him."[26] The chauvinistic sentiment behind such a question is not altogether exceptional. Unfortunately, such ideas and expressions are often coded in the way works of African literature have been treated in the course of their recent histories of reception.

Laye's work illustrates the limits of historical understanding between African and European literary traditions. As Irele suggests, Laye's satirical hybridity may stem from the differences between the traditions of European and African writing. He argues that the "protocols of authorship that obtain as a function of the structure of social and economic life within which, in the modern world, literary works are created, disseminated, and evaluated" have very little to do with traditional African conventions of authorship.[27]

Yet even as Laye's *Le Regard* first appeared, there were conflicting demands placed upon the writer. Mongo Beti, in the pages of *Présence africaine*, having called Laye intellectually dishonest the year before (for insufficiently criticizing the French colonial administration), went on to criticize the seeming carelessness of the king for the affairs of this world, claiming that Laye fashioned the king in his own image. Beti's demands, which he felt Laye did not live up to, was that his writing be engaged politically. Yet Beti's idea of politicized writing, at a time when struggles for national independence were mounting across Africa, was particularly stringent, and did not take the parodic dimension of the novel into consideration (Beti sees Clarence instead as an unbelievable character, being too stupid and without sufficient means to reflect the true condition of whites in Africa).

Following Beti's initial criticism of Laye's work, Wole Soyinka condemned *Le Regard* in strong terms for being derivative of work by European writers. There are several allusions to Kafka's *Das Schloß* in Laye's book, particularly in the first section, and the epigraph of the novel is a line from Kafka's numbered epigrams known as The Zürau Aphorisms. It is worth noting that K., Kafka's protagonist in *Das Schloß*, is a surveyor, developing a topographical element in the novel that depicts space as a challenge that is never finally surmounted. Much like Clarence's dogged pursuit of the king, in the course of Kafka's novel, K. tries, and fails, to gain access to the castle. Yet while the topography in each novel evokes the horizon of impossibility, unlike Kafka's protagonist, Clarence does finally reach his aim. Remarking these references to Kafka's style, Soyinka questions Laye's originality, writing that "most intelligent readers like their Kafka straight, not geographically transposed." He concludes: "it is merely naive to transpose the castle to the hut."[28]

Taken together, Beti's and Soyinka's critiques of Laye's writing characterize two major strains in the critical reception not just of Laye's writings but, more generally, of non-European writers who write from colonized spaces. Soyinka and Beti are important anticolonial voices who did not see Laye's text as being sufficiently overt in its challenges to colonialism. Yet this is a sort of litmus test for non-European writers like Laye that European writers are not subjected to: is the writing sufficiently politicized, and is the writing derivative of European modes, forms, and narratives? And then there are marketing concerns from European publishing centres: does the writing appeal to European tastes, politics, and standards? This makes for a powerful double bind for the non-European writer.

If a non-European writer opts to write in a realist mode about his own culture, as Laye did in his first novel, he risks being marketed as an authentic or exotic voice of the African experience. If he does not speak out about the evils of colonialism, choosing to portray the difficult exilic experience of a child leaving his family for opportunities abroad, he risks being branded a manipulator of harsh colonial realities or, worse, a collaborator. And if he incorporates European tropes, genres, or influences, he risks being denigrated as unoriginal, even if he is extremely innovative. As soon as the author's originality or authority is considered pierced, critics reaffirm the uneven system of prestige between European and African art. Cancelling out any laurels credited to the work, the circle is completed by yet other critics' reinforcing false beliefs in European superiority and encouraging a disdain for African traditions of production (such as is reflected in Bellow's comments above).

Of course, the claim of derivation ignores the role of parody and subversion, while the demand for overtly politicized writing misses the implicit anticolonial messages in Laye's work. In fact, Laye responded to critics like Soyinka who saw his work as merely derivative of Kafka, arguing that his debt to Kafka was only a matter of technique and that his world view was not the same as the Czech writer's. As he writes in "Kafka et moi":

> Le monde de Kafka n'est pas le mien. Si, comme Kafka et beaucoup d'autres, je crois "qu'il n'y a rien d'autre qu'un monde sprituel," c'est que ce monde-là est le mien depuis mon enfance, c'est que je n'ai jamais séparé le monde visible de l'Invisible.... À la difference de Kafka et de ses personnages, jamais je ne me suis senti isolé, abandonné dans ce monde spirituel.

> Kafka's world is not mine. If, like Kafka and many others, I believe "that there is no other world than the spiritual world," it is because that world is mine since childhood, it is because I have never separated the visible world from the invisible one ... Contrarily to Kafka and his characters, I have never felt isolated nor abandoned in this spiritual world.[29]

Laye invokes the atmosphere of Kafka's world to create a notably different effect. Rather than simply rehearsing Kafka, Laye rejects his essential pessimism, undoing the impossibility of the spiritual discovery of love and truth that haunts the pages of Kafka. Laye sees Kafka (along with other European authors with whom Laye feels kinship) as a writer who does not shy away from the spiritual world, but rather recognizes it as the only world there is. Moreover, Laye's engagement with Kafka follows the whole of his writing career. He argues in the preface of his last book that any disconnection between the visible and the invisible is meaningless, an insight he sees reflected in Kafka.

The great spirit of independence from European traditions that African writers of the mid-twentieth century sought to promote may have had a hand in motivating Soyinka's critique of Laye's explicit incorporation of European influence. Indeed, despite his playful sense of parody throughout the novel, Laye's subversion does not extend to Kafka's writing. Rather, Laye's reverence for the Czech writer seems inviolable.

Laye's laying claim to European literary influences as an African may also have stirred up some controversy over his authorship. A couple of years after Laye's death, nearly thirty years after the publication of the novel in question, the Belgian critic Lilyan Kesteloot declared that Laye had confided to her that he was not the true author of *Le Regard.* Kesteloot goes on to say that Laye could not have written *Le Regard* given its narrative complexity and its articulate references to Kafka and Mossi culture. Setting aside the anecdote about what Laye may or may not have said to Kesteloot, it is important to point out the structure of these assertions, which call into question Laye's authorship on the basis of judgments about what Laye was capable of writing.

Now, Mossi is a culture indigenous to a region that territorially overlaps with Laye's own Malinké culture. Therefore, it seems strange that Kesteloot should argue that Laye could not have possessed cultural knowledge of this or other West African groups. Moreover, it is remarkable to hold a writer to the standard of his own culture, as defined by outside critics and observers. As F. Abiola Irele asks, "should an African novel be no more than an ethnographic document that is required to be true to life in every detail? And was Laye thus constrained to an exclusive reproduction of his indigenous culture?"[30] And with regard to

Laye's awareness of Kafka, during the more than seven years he spent in Paris, at a time when Kafka had become a major celebrated author in Europe, it is difficult to accept the idea that Laye may not have read Kafka and that the signs of influence of Kafka in *Le Regard* could be taken as a sign that Laye did not write the book.

The fact that Laye's subversion of white colonial authority is not interpreted as his own but that of a European marks the limits within a cartographic understanding of the history of writing across the two continents of Africa and Europe. It suggests that the values attached to the maps of empire have not been put to rest, at least in the realm of interpretation.

Yet Kesteloot's claims have recently found support from another quarter. Adele King, in her 2002 book, *Rereading Camara Laye*, sets out on an in-depth investigation into the rumours about his authorship. Through interviews and extensive archival research, King attempts to provide support for the claims made by Kesteloot. She says that she was swayed by the mounting evidence; that she had initially set out to disprove the claims only to be persuaded in the process of the investigation. Yet King's book, which fails to prove Laye was engaged in any act of literary fraud, often falls back upon the same assertions that Kesteloot made. For instance, she suggests that Laye did not have the artistic proficiency to write his first two novels by himself, and argues that the influence of Kafka on Laye was improbable.[31] Moreover, she goes further to insinuate that Laye's technical training as a mechanic did not provide him with the breadth of knowledge to write such good novels, that he would have required extensive help in the composition of *L'Enfant noir,* and that the modernist mode in which *Le Regard* is written reflects a European sensibility.

Although she meticulously researches the connections that are supposed to make her readers believe that Laye could not have written *Le Regard*, her arguments only demonstrate a passionate hunch. King's case pivots upon an interview with Simon Njami, a curator and art critic, who tells her that his father not only has in his possession a manuscript of *Le Regard*, but also that Laye had told him he was not responsible for writing the novel. Yet King does not present her readers with the interview itself, nor was she able to secure access to Njami's father's manuscript, the existence of which would either validate or refute the rumours once and for all.

One of the reasons King gives for her suspicion is the dramatically different generic modes and narrative structures used in Laye's first two books. Yet the shift between genre and narrative can be understood in another way. Many scholars have argued, along with Gerald Moore, that there are many consistent themes that run through Laye's entire oeuvre, revealing his position to be both coherent and consistent. For example, Brenda Bertrand argues for Laye's authorship on ethnographic grounds, suggesting that Manding initiation rites provide a thread linking them together. One might equally point to the consistent significance of griots throughout his work, from *L'Enfant noir* on, or the Sufi elements of each of his fictions. In fact, his dedication to the more collaborative tradition of African storytelling may have made it possible for him to draw on European influences such as Kafka and to blend these with details from other influences of stories he knew from Malinké and Sufi traditions he was exposed to from an early age.

But the more concerning question amid this controversy is why should an author's laying claim to literary influences outside of his immediate cultural heritage raise questions about an author's authenticity? And why does King, who repeatedly stresses what a "good book" *Le Regard* is, not believe that Laye was capable of writing such a book?

Without giving much explanation as to what this might mean, she asserts that when she rereads Laye's novel, "I am aware of how it was written by someone with a European sense of literary form."[32] King gives little explanation as to what this is supposed to mean. It should not be surprising that European literary forms have been parodied and subverted by those designated as outsiders when the standards for achievement within world literature are understood as a means for Europe to continue disciplining the rest of the world. Indeed, Kenneth Harrow has pointed out two questionable assumptions upon which King's argument rests: "that a Laye could not have done the work that appears in *Regard*, and that there is an obvious African sensibility that can be deployed in judging whether a text or style, a reference, a point of view is truly African or not."[33] Efforts to see the writer behind *Le Regard* as a European rather than an African, based upon a test of excellence, tend to restore the authority of European artistry over that of Africans, something Laye's narrative tries to undo.

Moreover, in contrast to this European sense of literary form, King posits an "African soul." This soul, according to her book, is somehow reflected in representational form when it comes from an individual African author. As King writes, "the African soul in *Le Regard du roi* would be a soul as described by European anthropology, not the soul of an African author."[34] This statement is surprising, but it helps to demonstrate the kind of appeal to persuasion that her argument rests upon, lacking evidentiary proof. As Harrow has quipped, "one has to wonder where we are to locate the soul of an African author."[35]

King continually draws attention to what she sees as Laye's evasiveness in interviews and essays about his writing. Yet his not wanting to talk about the sources of his writing is no evidence of false authorship. She admits that Laye had a reputation for a mischievous sense of humour. Perhaps this allowed him to play in the margins between the divergent traditions of African oral storytelling and European modernism. He wished to be recognized as a versatile writer who could do European modernism as well as Europeans while also destabilizing the intentions of European writers in that mode. Laye certainly venerates European modernism yet is ambivalent with regard to European culture as a whole. He tends to place European literary and artistic voices in a contrapuntal relationship with African modes of cultural production. In the introduction of his last book, he links artists and writers like Van Gogh, James, Lautréamont, and Kafka with African oral storytelling. His engagement with oral modes of cultural production certainly gave him a more communal sense of the authorial voice than his European counterparts, but this does not mean he could not also produce a work on a par with these great modernists.

Playing with multiple sources of inspiration, Laye's work is subversive in the sense that it refuses to conform to certain rather limiting expectations. Not only is *Le Regard* a subtle challenge to colonialism, but it also performs a repatriation of modernism on an African stage. It regards the imaginary maps of literary forms as contingent and malleable, as maps that ought to be challenged or written over. The critics who accused Laye of either not being a good African writer, or being too good a writer to be African, have basically neglected to take into consideration the overall destabilizing effect of the novel.

Guilt by Association

A "rereading" such as that performed by Adele King brings insinuations and speculations into the scene of writing, disavowing the very possibility that Laye wrote the novel. The idea of a European man at the helm of Laye's written work not only places the authority to write about white colonials travelling in Africa in European hands, it confirms a false consciousness that the quality of writing produced by Africans is always something to be measured according to European standards. According to Claude Wauthier, who interviewed Laye in the mid-1950s, "one must realize that at the time the appearance of a black writer of talent shook the racist (and anti-Semitic) prejudices of the European colonial milieu."[36]

King's accusations not only challenge Laye's authorship but implicate others in the alleged forgery, including right-wing Belgians living in Paris in the postwar period like Francis Soulié and Robert Poulet, as well as the entire literary-political apparatus of France. She bases her claims largely upon the imbrication that existed between this apparatus and the French Union. King aligns Laye with the colonialist politics of 1950s France. She argues that officials in government saw Laye as a potential native Guinean supporter of France during the ensuing period of liberation and thought he might be useful for preserving ties between France and a newly independent Guinea. Thus King suggests that his alleged team of forgers and collaborators must likewise have been motivated by a desire to support the French government in its post-colonial endeavours. She does not say why they would be so invested or share the overall diplomatic interests of France.

Francis Soulié, a Belgian surrealist and Nazi sympathizer, is pronounced to be the true author of *Le Regard*. King presents evidence that Soulié helped Laye at times during his time in Paris, sometimes offering him a place to sleep. She makes this acquaintance the key to understanding the true authorship of *Le Regard*.

Surprisingly, King also hangs part of her argument on her feelings about Laye's sexuality, arguing that his sexual orientation should serve as evidence of the alleged forgery. She assumes that as a heterosexual, he could not have written a character, Samba Baloum, who seems to be homosexual. She also suggests that the complex emotions that Clarence has towards his own sexuality do not accurately reflect what she perceived as Laye's uninhibited feelings about sex based on a meeting she had with the author.[37] On the other hand, Soulié's presumed homosexuality is supposed to serve as evidence of his authorship of Baloum and hence, the book.

The manner of King's argumentation – from its indictments based upon hearsay and its assumptions about Laye's literacy with European modernism, to the association fallacy that depicts Laye as being in league with some shady characters during his time living in Paris – is problematic. Even though the extent of her research is impressive, her argument stands upon a perverse identitarian logic. It is constructed upon the principle that authorship is monadic and identifiable, that experimentation with forms outside of those narrowly associated with a non-European writer's own identity and provincial experiences are evidence of something having gone awry.

Constraints of Authorship

Playing outside of the rules that prescribe a certain transparency at least with regard to the genre the author has chosen to write in, Laye troubles the very conventions of European authorship. The questions raised about Laye's authorship can be seen as part of the continuing saga of a violent history of contact between Europe and Africa. Laye is caught in a matrix of relations between languages and practices of writing that prescribe what he can write and who has access to it. For such a writer, writing in the mode of high modernism was looked at askance only because of an existing expectation that he offer access to a different kind of experience, one that is authentic, African, and written in French. But Laye's work goes beyond his need to enter into a dialogue with the modern European novel. He uses the colonial patois to undo and parody certain assumptions about relations between Europe and Africa, as are reflected, for example, in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Ultimately, Laye's works reflect a commitment to the cultural and political concerns of a writer confronting European colonialism, exoticism, and language dominance.

While *Le Regard* enjoyed a period of success, there was something that some critics distrusted from the first. With a European at the heart of the narrative who is the butt of its joke, it had something interesting to say about Europe and European travellers and tourists in Africa that not everyone wanted to hear.

Late in his life, Laye became increasingly ambivalent towards the French language, in spite of his work on his last book, *Le Maître de la parole*, which translated an oral African epic into French. In fact, he appears to have made a decision to turn away from writing in French just before he died. Irele records Laye's declaration to him in an interview that he had decided to "abandon French and to write henceforth only in Malinke":

> We can deduce from this that he had become demoralized by the rumors swirling around his work, and was determined to prove himself by writing in a different language than French. He may well have come to the awareness too, like Ngugi wa Thiongo, of the need to address his immediate audience in a language and idiom common to author and public. But the collective consideration seems to me less important than a personal creative drive, a profound desire on Laye's part to finally bring his expression in line with his vision.[38]

This ambivalence towards the former colonial tongue reflects Laye's complex relation to the politics of relation between France and Guinea.

This may be linked to the constraints of authorship imagined within the European literary sphere. Orature lacks this narrow sense of textual ownership, as works are often seen as shared cultural property and passed from generation to generation. In Laye's case, the reverence for African orature was yet another form of subversion of modern European literary forms and tropes that began with *Le Regard*.

The book is caught in a matrix of power relations between languages with a colonial past (French and Malinké) and the norms and practices of creative activity in each language. Today, Laye's legacy remains uncertain. With important writers and critics like Toni Morrison and F. Abiola Irele arguing for his importance against those who discount him as a forger, there is some room for hope that his work will be recognized for what it is: an engagement with the stylistics of surrealism and modernism from a critical African perspective. The use of comedy in the novel to undermine Clarence's sense of white privilege has an important place within the tradition of travel narratives about white colonials travelling to Africa. The fact that such a work, which is influenced by European and African styles, incorporating the lessons Laye has learned from Kafka as much as from Conrad, while also making these styles his own, was put down as a forgery by a European, represents an extreme case of the constraints routinely applied in the reception of literature by African authors. Hence, even if Laye is finally acquitted and recognized as an important voice in the history of twentieth-century world literature, the story of his authorship counsels us to think differently about how African literature is imagined.

This chapter has explored the way in which the norms of European travel narratives are undone in Laye's novel, as well as the confrontation between his novel and the accusations of forgery levelled at it. The critics who accuse Laye of forging the novel sidestep analysis of its ironic subversions, focusing on the fact of his incorporation of European forms and influences, rather than their impact.

The uneven structures that distribute recognition and prestige between European and African literature may be undermined by considering the wider implications of a work like *Le Regard* outside of a cartography that is all-determining. By appropriating European forms, while also being subversive of them, *Le Regard* raises and exemplifies the very double bind in which non-European writers find themselves: pressured to break with hierarchies instituted by imperialism while at the same time meeting the criteria of authenticity established by it. The troubled and controversial history of the work's reception suggests that one must read texts across different cultural contexts to excavate the often overlooked complexities of the work and the apparatuses that judge it. The topography of reading literary space I am proposing here does just this: it considers the work as representation and as a set of relations and effects, including its reception. This topographical form of reading that considers the contours of world literature within the text and in the world continues into the next chapter, which explores a work that breaks with certain conventions of European authorship and creates a controversy of form.

Chapter Three

Imperial Palimpsest or Exquisite Corpse: Yambo Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de violence*

I think one writes also for the dead.

– Jacques Derrida[1]

As we have just seen, literature by African writers sometimes gets commodified as a *cultural* product imparting expectations about its genre, format, and content. This need not be clearly defined either in terms of the writer's ideological, geographic, or ethnic orientations, just so long as the work reflects some vague traces of its essential "Africanness," which can be marketed through lurid imagery splashed across the cover of a book or equally lurid blurbs on its back cover. In certain cases, intellectuals contribute and extend the market's matrix of avarice and essentialism by smoothing out complexities in formations and expressions of identity. My focus in this chapter, while continuing to explore the concerns raised in the previous chapter about the way authenticity makes up part of the package of expectations marketed to readers, specifically confronts the related concept of originality. The fact that both of these chapters concern works where African authorship is questioned is not simply the product of chance. These works enter into particular markets for African literature where they compete for attention and acclaim. Here they are beset by several challenges and demands that link publishing networks to their readerships. Yet these works that do not conform to the expectations of the market face scrutiny about their provenance. When something goes seriously awry in this process, authors do not always have the chance to respond to the new conditions suddenly facing their work. In this chapter, I look at an instance in which one author, Yambo Ouologuem, took an opportunity to respond with fierce rebuke to his entire publishing apparatus and audience. He did so by challenging the norms of the publishing networks, markets, and criticism that discipline African authors and their works.

Literary Proprietorship

Praise for the new and the original, the "truly African" and "the first of its kind,"[2] is a familiar discourse. It runs the risk of advancing the idea that heretofore African aesthetics has been a rudimentary, limited, and emergent field, having yet to achieve the same heights as Western literature. It bestows laurels only through a mark of relative distinction. In other words, such a discourse cancels credit to a community by making the individual its exception. This kind of thinking falls into the same trap that intellectuals bemoaning the absence of a "Zulu Tolstoy"[3] set for themselves: creating a deficit where there was none by setting an altar to an anatopic contradiction.

Deceptively laudatory remarks about particular African literary and cultural productions can be problematic not only because they often assume an impossible intimacy with the sum of African cultures in all of their complex and variegated forms. Such remarks can also represent a back-handed gloss on the quality of African work taken (somehow) as a whole. Moreover, a hostile solicitude towards the history of African letters tends to ignore its Indigenous oral and literary past and to assume that it constitutes a relatively new history, originating only through colonial influence.[4]

In the history of African letters, there have been several cases where scepticism and questions have been raised about the literary powers of authors and the role played by European editors.[5] When Amos Tutuola's novel *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* was published in 1952, the editors at Faber included a facsimile page of Tutuola's manuscript written in his own hand to stave off possible concerns about the authenticity of the text. In the previous chapter we saw Camara Laye accused of forgery, and his writing systematically attacked by intellectuals who maintained that he was personally incapable of producing the works published under his name. We explored how Laye's reception in this way reflects the legacy of colonial forms of perception as they pertain to the authority of the writer and the marketing of an authentic African artefact. In this chapter, we turn to another African writer accused of fraudulence. In Ouologuem's case, the accusation is plagiarism.

This chapter is an examination of the matrix of marketing, translation, and dissemination that embeds the work of Yambo Ouologuem in the landscape of world literature. It attempts to shed light on the challenges faced by contemporary non-European writers seeking a place alongside works of European origin. In rebellion against these constraints, Ouologuem refused to kowtow to the demands of international publishers. Confronted by their request to alter his work to conform to intellectual property regulations, Ouologuem provides them with a response they do not, predictably, find satisfactory.[6] It is only by taking into consideration the full range of his writings that a subversive theoretical perspective emerges that may be interpreted as a retaliation against the allegations of plagiarism with which Ouologuem was charged. It is from this perspective that a subterranean form of writing comes to light that engages with the idea of theft, the institution of slavery, and the legacies of colonialism.

The marketing of African literature unevenly distributes forms of capital and mystification among authors, publishers, and audiences. This process domesticates the text while exoticizing the product. In this chapter, I explore this paradoxical trend as illustrated by the critical reception of the work of Yambo Ouologuem. The literary criticism of his first novel, *Le Devoir de violence*, published in 1968 (and translated as *Bound to Violence* or *The Duty of Violence*), has been haunted by discrepant responses of authentication, uncertainty, and contempt. These reactions, ostensibly due to the charge of plagiarism, invite reconsideration. In effect, the book, which operates more as pastiche than facsimile, has been marginalized as a work that refuses to conform of the norms of European literature.

As with my discussion of Laye's writing, I do not wish to engage directly in the debates over these authors' actual authority or originality. Doing so would be to implicitly accept the terms of the debate. But what if these terms themselves are poorly chosen, resulting in false conclusions? What if staking the value of a work on the identity of the author disengages the reader from the text, inspiring violent misreadings? Perhaps then it would be deemed necessary to closely examine the terms of this debate for the values they reflect. By so doing, we shift the stakes of the argument. In this chapter, I explore a concept that undermines legal or proprietary judgments about the pure originality and authority of Ouologuem: ghostwriting.

Being the sole property of neither the publisher, critic, nor author, the ghostwritten text manifests a complex relation between itself and its audience while suggesting the involvement of spectres in the writing of history. Here, one may think of any official version of historical events where an unambiguous narrative links cause and effect. Such accounts are always haunted by their uncanny doubles: alternative narratives that do not make it into the official version for some reason or another and cannot therefore ever be fully acknowledged. Ouologuem uses the figure of the ghostwriter to subvert the norms imposed upon history in the course of its being written, and being read, in French. A history of violence and coercion subtends Ouologuem's own writing in a colonial language such as French. After all, as a Malian writer, it is notable that he does not write in an Indigenous language, but does so in a European tongue. Writing in an Indigenous language would have amounted to his non-entry into the field of world literature at that time, due to how the current networks for translation and distribution were structured, further demonstrating the continuing legacy of European imperialism in Africa.[7]

But rather than taking this legacy as a rigid fact, Ouologuem has the insight to play with representations of the history of empire (African as well as European), drawing his readers' attention to the residues that slavery and colonialism leave behind *in language itself*. Invoking the unpaid labour of slaves through his use of an antiquated sense of the term *nègre* for "black" that also means "ghostwriter," Ouologuem sets the stage for a new way to understand the intellectual property of stories, whether oral or written, in the light of histories of their dissemination and through the traces of colonial acts of theft and brutality. Meanwhile, he suggests methods for thinking about and reframing these legacies of colonialism through his subversive, at times unsettling, literary project. I build upon Ouologuem's theoretical perspective of the ghostwriter by thinking about his/her practice – the process of ghostwriting – in order to consider its role in subverting historical relations between North and South. This undermines the cartographic imaginaries that divide African from European writing, whether exoticizing or condemning. Indeed, this indicates a kind of literary space that is neither internal to the work's representations nor wholly outside the work, but one operating inside language, distorting and challenging limiting cartographies.

The Living Dead

Ouologuem's 1968 novel *Le Devoir de violence* is a work of historical fiction. Yet it is not narrowly focused on the history of European colonialism in Africa, but presents the history of the Nakem, a fictional African empire, over the course of more than seven centuries, unfolding from the year 1202. It spans the pre-colonial and colonial periods, charting the rise and fall of several empires, ending on the eve of independence. The book takes the form of an epic (or, as Christiane Chaulet-Achour calls it, a parody of the epic) relating the history of the most bloodthirsty and despotic Saifs, the rulers of the Nakem.

The first part of the book is taken up with the Saifs' wars of territorial expansion and the system of forced labour they institute. We learn that there is a legend the Saifs promulgate that they are the descendants of black Jews of biblical times. This purported geneaology, whether real or fictitious, structures their ideology of supremacy over the oppressed masses under their dominion. By the early sixteenth century, we learn that the evil and incestuous Saif Al-Haram is busy expanding the slave trade from the interior of the continent to the coasts, with European and Arab slave traders. The process of colonization damages the aristocratic lines of descent within the empire but does not entirely disrupt the core power held by the Saif. In fact, the colonizers see the Saif as a noble African with whom one can do business. While some colonial administrators begin to suspect the Saif of corruption and murder, they do not live long enough to present a real challenge to his power. The Saif uses poison asps to assassinate uncooperative administrators or aristocrats, trained by scent to bite the target individual.

Le Devoir describes the collusion between European colonial powers and the Saif, the ruthless African despot who is able to turn to his own advantage European interests within the Nakem empire while managing to keep alive a brutal system of exploitation of the masses. Saif ben Isaac al-Heit inherits the kingdom in the years of the European nations' "scramble for Africa." As European influence increases, he masquerades as a leader interested in the "spiritual advancement of his people," which he uses as code for the continuation of their subjection with their help. The French colonial administrators who flood the country where the Saif has his base of operations are treated by the Saif with respect, and they in turn bouy the Saif's influence and esteem in the new French colony. The introduction of Christianity in the empire is cautiously welcomed, but reserved for the servant class, providing a further contradistinction between the rulers and the ruled. It is agreed that only this class will be baptized and educated by the French.

One of the new Christians, a slave cook named Kassoumi, falls in love with another servant, Tambira, and they are married. After the Saif claims *le droit du seigneur*, the couple has four children, three boys and a girl. One of the children, Raymond-Spartacus, excels at school, becomes engaged to a girl named Tata, and goes to Paris to continue his studies. The Saif begins to bank on his success in Europe. He sees in Raymond a faithful servant who will be one of the first generation of native administrators for colonial France, but who will owe complete allegiance to the Saif.

Raymond's family come to reflect an inventory of the brutal measures used by the Saif to seek his revenge or simply express his power. Celebrating his success in completing the first baccalaureate, Raymond goes to a brothel, where he sleeps with a woman he later realizes is his sister. She tells him that the Saif had ordered the murder of Tata, that he has had their father taken to the south and sold, and their brothers drugged and gone mad. Before Raymond had left home, his mother was also killed and her body dumped into a latrine by the Saif's henchmen. A week later, he returns to see his sister, but discovers that she has killed herself.

Continuing to live in exile and flouting the Saif's desire for his hasty return, Raymond moves to Strasbourg, where he marries and has children, unwinding into a comfortable middle-class lifestyle, until the Second World War breaks out. After fighting to defend France, Raymond returns to his country just as France has begun to allow its colonies self-determination. Upon his return, he is chosen by the Saif as his proxy to power, and although conflicted, Raymond agrees to stand for election and to represent the new nation while giving the Saif free reign to continue his operations in the newly independent state. The book ends on the eve of Raymond's election.

In *Le Devoir*, Ouologuem's satirical skill was directed at several objects at once. Perhaps foremost among these is the idea that Africa and Africans do not have a history of their own. A close second, however, is the exophilia and exoticism that certain Europeans exhibit towards Africa. Through the figure of Fritz Shrobenius, in whom several critics have recognized a caricature of the German ethnologist Leo Frobenius (a European hero of the *négritude* movement),[8] Ouologuem offers a devastating critique of the xenophilic cult of authenticity and its expertise in Africanism:[9]

> Or, plus d'un conseiller de Saïf avait saisi que depuis la littérature shrobénuisologique salivant, en un rusé mélange de mercantilisme et d'idéologie, la splendeur de la civilization nègre depuis les guerres mondiales où le tirailleur noir avait éclaté de violence au service de la France, il s'était créé une religion du *Nègre-bon-enfant*, négrophilie philistine, sans obligation ni sanction, homologue des messianismes populaires, qui chantent à l'âme blanche allant à la négraille telle sa main à *Y'a bon, Banania.*

> From the time of the great wars in which the black *tirailleurs* had undertaken the duty of violence on behalf of France, many of Saif's councilors had learned to appreciate how the drooling Shrobenuisologic [*sic*] literature, with its mixed hucksterism of racial ideology and mercantile opportunism, celebrating the splendors of Black civilization, had created a religion of the "Good Black Child," an irresponsible and philistine negrophilia that offered no critique of the popular Messianisms, and that catered to the banana-mania of the white soul, with its fixation on the black-rabble.[10]

Ouologuem's play on history and writing remake them in the manner of an exquisite corpse game, offering a morbidly fascinating designation for a process that entails collective creativity and features hidden from the sight of the participants until the collective production (a poem or drawing in the case of the surrealists) is complete. These grotesque assemblages are manufactured, combined, and finally exposed to reveal an unanticipated completed form. Yet the most significant aspect of this play is that it revolves around the meaning of what it is to be, in his own word, a *nègre*.

There is a strange similarity between the Saif's attitude towards the "authentic" cultural treasures that get bought and sold in European markets and classrooms and his feeling towards the *négraille*,[11] the racially loaded and hateful term used for the black masses who are pawns in the Saif's game of sovereignty and control. Through the exercise of power enacted upon them, the Saif's subjects become *morts-vivants* (or living-dead): "Tu es mort. *Mort*, t'entends?! Tu n'as pas de preuves, pas d'état-civil, rien!"[12] ("You're dead. *Dead*. Don't you understand? You have no proof, no civil state, nothing!").[13]

These subjects are examples of what Achille Mbembe describes when he discusses the work of the slave in Africa after colonization and his/her status as somehow between life and death: "how is it possible to live while going to death, while being somehow already dead? And how can one *live in death*, be already dead, while being-there – while having not necessarily left the world or being part of the spectre – and when the shadow that overhangs existence has not disappeared, but on the contrary weighs ever more heavily?"[14] This condition of the *négraille* is an effect of what happens to their labour, which is unpaid and uncredited. Their lives have no meaning because the work they do is not their own and therefore they are, in Mbembe's terms, effects of a system of zombification.[15] Yet at the same time, their very presence within Ouologuem's history – that is, the presence of the ghost within the narrative of history – challenges and condemns the system of power and exploitation that has produced and alienated them.[16]

This living death is part of an occult market of drugged slaves that guarantees the Saif's (and other local tyrants) enjoyment of free labour. One victim of these experiences is named Sankolo. He had been one of the henchmen of the Saif, but once he has lost his usefulness in that role, he is sold off, drugged, and his labour exploited. He bitterly reasons that "peut-être est-ce un peu cela, une vie de Nègre. Esclave. Vendu. Acheté, revendu, instuit. Jeté aux quatre vents ... Il faut de la main-d'oeuvre à bon marché"[17] ("Maybe this is the way things are? This is the life of a black ... A slave. Sold. Bought. Sold again. Disciplined. Cast on the four winds ... There must be manual labors at a cheap price").[18]

The condition of Sankolo's existence as a slave involves his labour being siphoned from him while the significance of his existence is decomposed. This process signifies his union with the *négraille,* who are defined by their unspeakable misery. This collectivity without individuality, power, or thought might be aptly described with Fanon's epithet, "the wretched of the earth." They represent the anonymous toil that is exploited for the Saif to enjoy and preserve his power. Their lives are considered expendable since they are never seen as individuals by the Saif or his administrators, but only as a collective source of labour. At the same time, their fate is expungable, not only because they are subject to powers beyond their own control, but because, as a kind of living dead, the *négraille* are also subject to erasure. Their history will not be told because it is in the interest of neither the Saifs nor the Europeans to tell it. Hence they are written out of history, like spectres expunged from the history books. In fact, after seeking refuge with a colonial administrator, the Saif has Sankolo assassinated so that he cannot act as a witness to the Saif's crimes. Ouologuem's novel connects the *négraille*'s anonymous toil to its capitalization in a way that asserts the centrality of this figure, fundamentally challenging the material of history as it relates to the exercise of power. As Kwame Anthony Appiah puts it, "this is a novel that seeks to delegitimate not only the form of realism but the content of nationalism."[19]

Decomposed Original

Critical judgments about an author's originality can cut at least two ways: while bestowing authority on the work, they may also occlude the heterogeneous concatenation of voices that contribute to the creation of a work. This is simply to suggest that all writers are affected and influenced by the works and ideas of others. The way originality is often deployed by intellectuals and critics, on the other hand, implicitly denies this, dwelling instead upon the author's inspiration as something that is of a pure and singular origin, resting in the genius of the creator to whom it is ascribed. Such a concept refuses to acknowledge the share writers have in the ideas of others and the worldly experiences they have that contribute to the making of any work. Addressing this problem of seeing the modern work as plopping out of thin air, seemingly a product of pure conjuration, Edward Said argues that there is something paradoxical about this sort of ascription. As he says, "The originality of contemporary literature in its broad outlines resides in the refusal of originality, or primacy, to its forebears ... The best way to consider originality is to look not for first instances of a phenomenon, but rather to see duplication, parallelism, symmetry, parody, repetition, echoes of it."[20]

Certainly, Said's suggestion would lead to a very different methodology for literary appreciation than one that seeks out the pure and singular origin of genius. Rather, written works that have been memorialized and canonized are the after-effects of thousands of other voices that have been lost or forgotten, that fell out of the archive or were left unpublished and uncredited, and this forgetting is what constitutes our sense of literature and makes it possible. Originality, taken in this light, is always an ascription made after the fact, in the form of judgments about writers and their works that efface the profusion of their sources of inspiration. As literary scholar Walter Benjamin remarked, all of the great cultural treasures, works of art and literature we hold in the utmost esteem, "owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries."[21]

The concept of originality, so highly prized and yet so inconsistent in its European context, plays an entirely different role in traditionally oral cultures. In "Plagiarism and Authentic Creativity in West Africa," Donatus I. Nwoga argues that in African traditional culture, "it was taken for granted that a storyteller would tell the same stories that others had told before him, that he would be using materials that were already there in the culture. Originality was a function of manner rather than of matter."[22] Nwoga's insights bring us closer to our subject since Ouologuem's narration explicitly draws upon West African traditions of storytelling and oratory in *Le Devoir de violence*. While the manner of his telling the violent history of the Nakem, the fictional African empire that is the focus of the book, is highly original, he freely borrows and transforms materials that had a life of their own prior to the time of his writing from sources European as well as African. The questions that have been raised around his work tend to revolve around whether this was an intentional infraction of plagiarism and whether it discounts his merits as an author.

The writings of Ouologuem and their reception exemplify the problematic relationship between African and European literary traditions. The issue is not simply that an African writer has been misrepresented or misunderstood by his European audience. Nor is the underlying matter merely that African traditions of writing and orality are submitted to unfair scrutiny or inappropriate standards of judgment. Rather, what we are dealing with is the way that the European marketing of

African literary products is entwined with intellectuals and critics trained to interpret and appraise literature by applying universal standards regardless of what a particular work of literature is trying to do. It has been argued that setting such standards has value, in line with theories of cross-cultural poetics. Yet the reason many critical evaluations of Ouologuem's work go awry is that they ignore the way his work destabilizes the conditions of their own interpretation. Ouologuem is subverting a way of seeing, but, remarkably, this is precisely what goes unseen in the bulk of criticism of his work.

Solitary, creative genius seems to have its roots in the tendency, foundational to the European Enlightenment and one of its most resilient legacies, to represent the individual as a discrete product of society, while the work of art is considered an independent and organic growth of the artist's singular and unique psyche. According to F. Abiola Irele, the "protocols of authorship that obtain as a function of the structure of social and economic life within which, in the modern world, literary works are created, disseminated, and evaluated," have very little to do with traditional African conventions of authorship.[23] Traditions of African orature, for example, make use of productions of literary creativity as collective cultural possessions. This is true of the way folk stories are shared and passed from generation to generation, as well as how, solely for the initiated dignitaries of the court, more formal stories about the nation and sovereign are disseminated to select audiences. Of course, in the latter case I am referring to the orators of West Africa, known as griots, who acted as professional performers for their kingly patrons, reciting stories and panegyrics in return for payment.[24] These works, folk traditions alongside those of professional griots, are passed on orally and have become the repository of various forms of collective cultural memory extending even into the African diaspora.[25] As Irele argues, textual ownership was not an important feature of African literary and artistic production until quite recently, when institutions sprang up that kneeled at the altar of the individual genius, a European import.[26]

Mid-twentieth-century literary critics like Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva complicate the notion of authorship in the European context. For example, in "What Is an Author?," Foucault asks, "What difference does it make who is speaking?"[27] And Kristeva designates "intertextualité" in her *Desire in Language* as the practice of making productive reference to other texts within a given text or of using other texts as codes to illuminate the text.

These efforts to trouble our often highly rigid notions of authorship help to expose the way that a commonly accepted standard element of literary inquiry, left unexamined, may ultimately amount to little more than a naturalized convention. Authenticity and authentication lie in the aesthetic sphere of judgment. They are matters for the work's audience to decide, largely based on the sort of writing with which a particular author is associated. Abdelfattah Kilito makes an important point about such aesthetic conventions in *The Author and His Doubles* when he says, "An author cannot escape the genre where he first dropped anchor and where conventional wisdom has imprisoned him. He is forbidden to move elsewhere ... he resists being transplanted to a foreign soil where his coin has no currency. He lives on an isolated planet with its own elements, gravity, and laws of motion. If forced to move to another planet, he flounders in an unbreathable atmosphere and floats in space, unable to cling to any fixed object."[28] If this is the fate held in store for writers who change genres midstream in their careers, what might this suggest about an author who rails against the very literary conventions that moor authors to their own worlds and canons? Rather than changing genres, Ouologuem writes against Western literary protocols, undermining the ground on which the European intellectuals criticizing his work stand.

When critics discount the authority of writers like Ouologuem, they tend to employ a biographical fallacy. Claims about these writers' plagiarism or inauthenticity are dynamics that may be understood to have developed against a background of imperial European history. First hailed as a genius and as being among the first "authentic" literary voices from the African continent, Ouologuem was subsequently discounted as a plagiarist. Having examined the case against Laye in the previous chapter and turning now to Ouologuem's, the critical censure of African authors that follows on the heels of panegyrics emerges as a troubling pattern in the reception of African cultural productions.

Le Devoir de violence was published to great fanfare in 1968, winning the Prix Renaudot the same year. It should be clear that the initial period of international enthusiasm for the novel was accompanied by a celebration of the novel's originality.[29] For example, in *Le Monde,* the book was described as the "first African novel worthy of the name."[30] On the cover of the first edition of its translation in English, the publishers made the perplexing choice to place an image of a Nigerian statuette. Next to this figure is text that hails the novel, echoing the words of *Le Monde*, as "the first truly African novel."[31] Such panegyrics, backhandedly denigrating the history of African writing, were circulated in the French-speaking marketplace and echoed in the markets of the book's translations.

Le Devoir portrays an "*Afrique fantôme*"[32] (or "Phantom Africa") that is lurid and violent, full of biting satire and allegory, and brimming with forms of ornamentation from oral traditions of storytelling. It follows the exploits of the Saifs, the rulers of the Nakem, offering a profound depiction of how power operates and is maintained with disregard for those upon whom it is enacted. Considered in the context of Ouologuem's short book of satirical essays, *Lettre à la France nègre* (or *Letter to Black France*), which appeared shortly after the publication of his novel, the narration of history in *Le Devoir* takes on the unexpected form of a grotesque assemblage. Oulouguem uses the surrealist game "exquisite corpse" as an emblem of this history.

The debates around Ouologuem's "plagiarism" are juridical in nature, aiming to establish sufficient proof of his guilt. In order to shift the terms of this debate, it is necessary to examine the nature of subversion in his works, avoiding the limitations of a strictly legal debate on textual property. The problem is that any argument that seeks to establish whether or not Ouologuem as a writer should be characterized first and foremost by an imprint of originality remains aporetic. This is true of critics' arguments that defend Ouologuem against accusations of plagiarism as much as it is true of arguments that levy these accusations against him.

Instead of engaging with the sides in this debate, Ouologuem's work can be viewed as a pastiche with important consequences for how world literature is geographically inflected by certain persistent ideas and norms. Literary pastiche is the imitation in style, form, or expression of older literary works and models. Pastiche as a Western literary concept may be traced back to the Greek author Dionysus of Helicarnassus, who proposed it as a rhetorical mode of borrowing from or emulating other authors. Yet such technique cannot be said to belong to any one tradition. Abdelfattah Kilito suggests that any pastiche bears a mark of ambivalence due to its uncertain province: "A pastiche can be a masterpiece of its genre, but never a masterpiece plain and simple. When produced by a great author, a forgery may well escape marginality, but it can never escape ambivalence. The shadow of the supposed author looms on the horizon and weighs down – or enriches – any interpretation of the work."[33]

As a literary technique, pastiche has become associated with postmodernism through the work of critics like Fredric Jameson. Jameson describes pastiche as a "blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor."[34] He argues that pastiche closely resembles parody, while lacking its satirical edge. As he writes, "in a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum."[35] Yet is it realistic to assume that this is the "world" we inhabit or are these assumptions of postmodernism one trend in a longer series of revisions to imperial cartography? Pastiche is not simply this imitation of established styles or modes, and the degree of humour motivating its various forms is debatable. Pastiche can also refer to the constitution of a work as an assemblage of various sources, and Ouologuem's bitter irony employs pastiche in a way that undercuts the existing maps of empire.

Homi Bhabha is more cautious with the term pastiche, perhaps because of the imprint of postmodernism. He opts for the idea of colonial mimicry instead. As he writes, "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference."[36] For Bhabha, such mimicry, acting like a wandering referent or mask, has the power to disrupt colonial authority through its ambivalence. With this concept, we are drawing closer to the way Ouologuem deploys his pastiche. It is not a postmodern send-up of established styles or famous works. Rather it is more like a form of mimicry that in donning a mask unveils a dangerous and unwholesome reality.

Ouologuem's alleged plagiarism provides an opportunity to examine what is at stake for European readers and critics of his work and African writers more generally. It could also be seen in relation to other efforts by authors to eschew the oppressive demands upon writers. For example, the author Kathy Acker concludes that "our cultural demands for originality and creativity ... derive from capitalist and phallic values."[37] Acker is often celebrated for her literary works that incorporate pastiche of famous authors and she has also been brought up on charges of plagiarism. Like Ouologuem, she also works to undermine literary norms of propriety. Yet the cases of plagiarism that faced these two authors each had a different impact on their histories of reception. When Ouologuem was attacked, his books were removed from circulation. For Ouologuem, these attacks became an occasion to explore these matters by drawing on ghostwriting as a technique of violent pastiche and writing history against the grain. In so doing, he brings the idea of collective assemblage from the exquisite corpse game into dialogue with the legacy of colonialism in West Africa.

Ghostwriting

While pastiche is not the same as ghostwriting, and it is technically pastiche that Ouologuem engages in in his novel *Le Devoir*, he intentionally muddies the distinction, making an impassioned plea for ghostwriting as a metaphor for the technique of pastiche. Yet the idea of ghostwriting introduces a significant distinction between the author and the writer. The author is the figure to whom credit is given for writing a work, while the writer is the individual who sets the work down, inscribing and producing it as a written text. This non-identity between the author and the writer is often co-articulated with a distinction between the authentic and the counterfeit, drawn by juridical modes of reading. It forces us to re-examine originality and to view it as a mode of storytelling rather than as the unadulterated product of an individual in creative isolation. It also allows us to reconsider the politics of writing employed by writers like Ouologuem who are accused of plagiarism. Finally, ghostwriting highlights the violent legacies of colonialism and slavery that continue to haunt our historical narratives and disrupt European, no less than African, literary epistemologies.

Le Devoir plays with our sense of history by cutting it up, reconfiguring the still recognizable fragments, and redeploying these parts, forming new and sometimes unexpected relationships between the actors and those acted upon. The work expands the conventions of writing by incorporating oral historical traditions, creating a sense that the story is being recited. Moreover, Ouologuem's re-imagination of relationships between classes and colonizers within Africa reconfigures traditional historical narratives.

Ghostwriting is a complex form of writing that mediates between the oral and the written and between the author and the writer in ways that challenge their standard roles. I will consider ghostwriting from four distinct perspectives, though they can, and often do, overlap. First, there is the "genre" of ghostwriting, a form of storytelling that targets a particular audience and markets a product through a process of mediation between the author and writer. Amy K. Levin notes of the generic perspective of ghostwriting:

> Ghostwriting implicitly involves mediation in the act of composition. The mediator, or ghostwriter, is present to give form and expression to a story that might not otherwise be coherent. Because the ghostwriter helps make a book more readable and often more marketable, he or she participates in the marketing and publication of the work, a cultural product. Moreover, whereas a defining characteristic of nineteenth-century slave narratives is the marker "written by himself " [...] ghostwriting is identified by the tag "as told to," a phrase that, significantly, renders manifest the transition from oral to written text.[38]

The genre of ghostwriting complicates ideas about authorship. Taken in its generic form, we see ghostwriting as a mode of story adaptation.

It implies that authorship is not singular. Writers and storytellers who collaborate on a ghostwritten work may not be given credit and may remain anonymous.[39] By disappearing, in a sense, from their own work through their anonymous toil, the true writers can be said to become like ghosts. Ghostwriting in this sense is collaborative, but only in a non-isomorphic way, because of the way credit is distributed unevenly between an author who is named and a writer whose work is attributed to another. In other cases, as Levin points out, ghostwriting can operate as a vehicle transmitting works from an oral archive into writing. In such cases, the roles of author and writer are reversed, since it is the production of the oral storyteller that becomes the material for which the writer often takes authorial credit.

Second, there is a "technique" of ghostwriting. This is the form of writing that Ouologuem recommends in his *Lettre à la France nègre* to fellow African writers, which I explore in detail in the final sections of this chapter. The main purpose of this technique is to render obsolete contemporary legal discourse about literary property while creating a new model for literary production. As I show, this is a highly subversive strategy whose goal is to reorder the very systems and markets of literary exchange. Simultaneously, this technique invokes the brutal history of slavery through Ouologuem's use of an idiom in French. Hinging on his use of an antiquated meaning of the word "nègre" as ghostwriter, Ouologuem suggestively brings the idea of the technique to bear on the history of colonialism and slavery while equally calling attention to practices of interpretation that belittle and depreciate the value of works produced by writers of African descent.

Third, there are "politics" of ghostwriting. According to Jacques Derrida, ghostwriting has been an important aspect of the legal-political apparatus at least since ancient Greece. Henceforth, politicians have commissioned ghostwriters to write speeches aimed to influence an audience. Derrida explains that "the logographer, in the strict sense, is a *ghost writer* who composes speeches for use by litigants, speeches which he himself does not pronounce, which he does not attend, so to speak, in person, and which produce their effects in his absence."[40] Plato felt that this created a dangerous form of influence, since the words lacked the presence of the writer as a guarantee of the truth of his intentions. The ghostwriter stands in a paradoxical relation to his own words. Once committed to written form, they embark on a life of their own, exceeding the dictates and intentions of their author.

Elsewhere, Derrida has examined the historical "whirling dance of ghosts" and the concept of the spectre.[41] The paradoxical relation to the words of a ghostwriting author is taken further by these concepts in that they are no longer tied to a single source that can be divined, yet they have important and wide-ranging implications. These investigations consider the political life of the ghost and what he calls "hauntology," a way of getting at concepts that are immanently political but that cannot be adequately approached as being in an ontological sense. Gayatri Spivak has also explored the political aspects of ghostwriting, calling attention to the American Indian anticolonial spiritual movement of the ghost dance, which she understands as an attempt to form an ethical relation with history.[42]

Finally, ghostwriting invokes specific histories of trauma and colonialism. Helen Sword has pointed out that "all ghosts demand interpretation."[43] This demand echoes Derrida's assertion, "There is then *some spirit*. Spirits. And *one must* reckon with them."[44] Why should this be? It is because ghostwriting is a way of dealing with history, a way of writing history. According to Elaine Freedgood, ghostly reference – that is, the way ghosts are part of a system of reference as representational objects – "promises relief from meaning, from guilt, and from the burden of history that it avows and then displaces onto the apparitional, a category that is never resolved."[45] In this way, the idea of the ghost invokes traumatic histories, since the revenant that returns to haunt is deemed to have unfinished business. By revisiting lives unsettled by history and colonialism, ghostwriting may become a highly politicized way of thinking about the writing of history. For example, Erica L. Johnson insists that "ghostwriting is a crucial mode of subaltern historiography. Faced with the reality of blocked access to the past, ghostwriters seek out traces of the past in the present as well as in archival or oral material."[46] These traces haunt the margins between speech and writing because writing tends to be wrongly considered a higher mode of cultural production than oral culture. This is among the daunting legacies of colonialism.

Colonialism produces very real ghosts that are not properly mourned or laid to rest. For this reason, colonialism, in its historical as well as its practised forms, continues to haunt both colonizers as well as the colonized. Ghostwriting raises questions about the legacy of colonialism by transforming the way we understand the writing of history and its politics.

Writing Phantoms

Certain historical events may never be fully acknowledged due to the traumatic effects of their sheer atrocity. Hence the dead are not always given a proper burial.[47] What are the after-effects of legacies of violence and brutalization and their ramifications for historical representation? Imperialism continues in covert forms, after political processes of decolonization, partly because it is not named as such, remaining a scandal of thought. This is why Frantz Fanon emphasizes the need to completely call into question the colonial situation in a more fundamental sense than merely its external political reality.[48] From a critical perspective, it becomes clear that practical and theoretical means to represent and confront the lacunae of history may be helpful in the process of addressing this need. Psychoanalytic theories have made attempts to facilitate experiences of mourning, even when events seem ungrievable, fixing the possibilities for representation at an impasse. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok suggest that certain unspeakable and unmourned occurrences can actually be communicated unconsciously between individuals and even passed on from generation to generation. The unspeakable occurrence forms a gap within language itself and is thereby conveyed as a painful secret to its heirs. This is conveyed through the idea of the phantom, which can represent unspeakable crimes that were perpetrated against those who have already passed away. As Abraham writes, "The phantom which returns to haunt bears witness to the existence of the dead buried within the other."[49] Because the phantom remains in the shadows of secrecy and unknowing, mourning for the dead is never entirely achieved. Rather, the entombed secrets continue to be experienced through a kind of paralysis within language, uncannily returning to haunt and distort reality. In *Le Devoir*, the slaves of the Nakem become such phantasmic figures, being referred to as living dead. Their labour is made use of without their being compensated, putting them in the position of slaves. Their existence needs to be continually and systematically hidden from police and census takers for their enslavement to continue. But rather than representing a challenge to his rule, French imperialism enables the expansion of the Saif's power. Colonialism can be seen as a historical crypt whose victims can never be fully mourned. In its wake, perhaps writing and interpretation can also be a site for haunting, where the phantom's epitaph is inscribed and passed on. The notion of the phantom gets into the problem of how ghosts are thrust into language – and hence, into writing – as an absence that is paradoxically present. This difficult idea has precedents in psychoanalysis, among which are some of Freud's own critical reflections on forms of haunted language and textuality.

Freud explores the way memory traces imitate a process of incomplete erasure in the manner of a palimpsest in his "A Note upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad'" (1925).[50] In its operation, ghostwriting is not unlike the kind of writing that Freud describes there. He sees the perceptual apparatus of consciousness in the model offered by the mystic writing pad, which is a tablet for a kind of temporary writing that can easily be erased yet that also retains traces of the effaced writing. This writing (in the guise of Freud's metaphor for memories inscribed and buried in the psyche) has the quality of linking writer and text as if through some subterranean channel, as well as the text to the ghosts it conjures up. In other words, Freud's metaphor highlights the way in which what has been erased or distorted can sometimes return to haunt the text.

The interpretation of the written traces in a work of this kind of ghost-writing that engages with history through the palimpsest may be able to lead us back to the crime that produces the phantom. Interestingly Freud later takes up this idea of palimpsestic interpretation in his fascinating work *Moses and Monotheism*.[51] In this piece, Freud is concerned with the way a distorted narrative can consolidate a community. His thesis is that the biblical story of Moses conflates the stories of two individual leaders of the collective body that came to be known as the Jewish people. Freud insists that the first of these was of African origin and was killed by his adopted people. For Freud, this is the crime that could not be properly acknowledged and which led to the distortions that occur in the historical record. In an incredibly helpful passage, Freud outlines the practice of such an act of textual and historical distortion, which he compares to an act of murder:

> The distortion of a text is not unlike a murder. The difficulty lies not in the execution of the deed but in the doing away with the traces. One could wish to give the word "distortion" [*Entstellung*] the double meaning to which it has a right, although it is no longer used in this sense. It should mean not only "to change the appearance of," but also "to wrench apart," "to put in another place." That is why in so many textual distortions we may count on finding the suppressed and abnegated material hidden away somewhere, though in an altered shape and torn out of its original connection. Only it is not always easy to recognize it.[52]

Drawing attention to the conspicuous erasure of the African backdrop of the story, Freud argues that Moses's complex identity and ambiguous origins reflect the dyadic character of the figure that is represented and suppressed, along with his African origins. The erasure of these origins distorts and defaces both the biblical text and its reception. For Freud, the true remains of the crime are neither skeletal nor archaeological but in traditions both textual and oral. In fact, the double-ness of Moses is accompanied by the double-ness of the historical record itself, in contrasting narratives that survive in oral and written form.[53] Freud speculates that the writing enshrouding the murder of Moses exhibits a disavowal of an unspeakable act. This disavowal acts like a second murder and continues to exert a distorting force through the text. For Freud, the form of ghostwriting that uncannily overwrites Moses's murder also undermines Moses's African heritage.

The psychoanalytic efforts to trace the phantom through language and writing to the erasure of the African heritage of the founder of an ancient community help underscore certain qualities of ghostwriting that will be helpful in unpacking the way Ouologuem's own work has been rejected from the corpus of world literature. If Freud found the marks of a palimpsest by reading between the lines in the pages of the Old Testament, it should not surprise us that we may also find palimpsestic traces in Ouologuem's work and its interpretations. But in order to demonstrate more fully the relevance of the theoretical assertions that we have laid out here, let us turn now to the moment when Ouologuem's novel was published and the remarkable history that accompanied its reception.

An Exquisite Corpse

The initial excitement over *Le Devoir*'s publication was short-lived. Translations and adaptations of excerpts from novels by Graham Greene, André Schwarz-Bart, and Guy de Maupassant, as well as other works were soon discerned within the text. The book was then pulled from bookshelves in stores across France and abroad.

For example, Ouologuem's novel begins:

> Nos yeux boivent l'éclat du soleil, et, vaincus, s'étonnent de pleurer. *Maschallah! oua bismillah!* ... Un récit de l'aventure sanglante de la négraille – honte aux hommes de rien! – tiendrait aisément dans la première moitié de ce siècle; mais la véritable histoire des Nègres commence beaucoup, beaucoup plus tôt, avec les Saïfs, en 1'an 1202 de notre ère, dans l'Empire africain de Nakem, au sud du Fezzan, bien après les conquêtes d'Okba ben Nafi el Fitri.

> Our eyes drink the sun's rays and, vanquished, unexpectedly brim with tears. *Maschallah! Wa bismillah!* ... The bloody adventure of the black rabble—shame upon these worthless wretches!—could easily be recounted from the first half of this century; but the true history of the Blacks begins much earlier with the Saifs, in the year 1202 of our era, in the African Empire of Nakem, to the South of Fezzan, long after the conquests of Okba ibn Nafi al-Fitri.[54]

Compare this with André Schwartz-Bart's opening of *Le Dernier des justes:*[55]

> Nos yeux reçoivent la lumière d'étoiles mortes. Une biographie de mon ami Ernie tiendrait aisément dans le deuxième quart du XXe siècle; mais la véritable histoire d'Ernie Lévy commence très tôt, vers l'an mille de notre ère, dans la vieille cité anglicane de York. Plus précisément: le 11 mars 1185.

> Our eyes receive the light of dead stars. A biography of my friend Ernie could easily be set in the second quarter of the twentieth century, but the true history of Ernie Lévy begins much earlier, toward the year 1000 of our era, in the old Anglican city of York. More precisely, on March 11, 1185.[56]

Yet while there is a resemblance between these passages, they do not represent a smoking gun. Other passages reflect a similar mode of adaptation, shifting the historical focus from the traumatic story of a genealogy of the Jewish diaspora to the geneaology of a class of African rulers and oppressors. The message of historical depth is taken from Schwarz-Bart, along with a pivot away from the twentieth century into the past of eight centuries earlier. Schwarz-Bart's character Ernie Lévy, who emerges, over the course of generations, in the years leading up to the Holocaust appears to occupy a comparable position in Ouologuem's book to Raymond.[57] Chaulet-Acour also points to borrowings that are similarly not exact but that resonate with passages from the Bible.[58] This is to say that Ouologuem's method is to liberally absorb and make use of myriad and diverse sources, adapted to his own purposes. In other words, Ouologuem's mode of employing pastiche is wide ranging and variable.

Defenders of Ouologuem's novel tend to rehearse arguments for its originality. Seth I. Wolitz, for example, argues that Ouologuem's translations of the excerpts from Graham Greene are tighter and more intense than the original.[59] More recently, Christopher Wise has argued that "the novel itself offers the best possible proof of Ouologuem's originality, an irrefutable testament to both his ingenuity as a man and genius as a writer."[60] What these "defenders" seem to forget is that the term "originality" and the attendant idea of the authorial genius belong to a matrix of power that Ouologuem's novel specifically undermines. By staking their arguments on the prestige and authority of the author, their rhetoric does not ultimately challenge or shift the terms of the plagiarism debate. In fact, if the exception proves the rule, such arguments may actually back investments in the standards of value that maintain the European literary market as a privileged centre of circulation, with peripheral spheres of influence in the former colonies. It is worth noting that Ouologuem personally engaged in the controversy over his alleged plagiarism, alleging that his publishers had revised his manuscript without his permission, excising the citations and references to the works it contained.[61] Whether or not Ouologuem authorized the publication of his novel that removed the excerpts' citations is an argument for legal consideration. The questions I am interested in are less straightforward with broader implications.

Whether we see Ouologuem as a ghostwriter, plagiarist, or collage artist, the idea of ghostwriting subverts the values of authority, property, and originality that underpin the legal and proprietary traditions of European authorship, effectively shifting the grounds for evaluating his work. Through its subversion, he demonstrates that ghostwriting can become a powerful technique of anticolonialism. In his *Lettre à la France nègre*, published one year after *Le Devoir*, Ouologuem elaborates an intriguing writing technique that he specifically recommends to aspiring black writers. He suggests that they can achieve a certain degree of success, manufacturing a popular detective novel as an assemblage of other novels written by famous writers. In a section of the piece titled, "Lettre aux pisse-copie Nègre d'écrivains célèbres," the surrealist technique of the *cadavre exquis* (the exquisite corpse) is applied to the process of creative writing.[62] Already in the title, Ouologuem has slung contempt at his addressees, whom he calls "piss-copying Negroes of famous writers." In a conspiratorial tone Ouologuem goes on to counsel fellow black writers to embrace the practice of pastiche. He prescribes step by step how to borrow and copy from a myriad of sources of previously published detective stories. This gives the prospective ghostwriters (*les nègres*) the ability to draw material for their writings from a virtually limitless archive. Ouologuem considers the marketability of this exquisite corpse as central to the formula:

> Et donc, habilement conçu, bien mené, ce travail de pisse-copie vous permettra: par votre seul mérite, d'avoir à portée de main "Les Milles et Une Nuits" du roman policier – la *Série Noire* en un volume. Mais un volume à un milliard de possibilités, que vous sortirez un milliard de titres.[63]

> And so, should you take this method to heart, assiduous in your application of its compositional techniques, the work that you perform as a ghostwriter will enable you, on your own merits, to write *The Thousand and One Nights* of the detective novel – the entire *Serie Noir* in a single volume. But a volume that is born from a billion possible combinations, extracted from a billion pre-existing titles.[64]

He suggests that not only can this practice exploit the European markets that honour the prestige, authenticity, and originality of a writer, it also has something to say about the nature of the values that underpin these markets. Through Ouologuem's comically irreverent critique, the "original" emerges as something that must be carved out of the texts and flesh from those who have already been brutalized and silenced, an exquisite corpse that paradoxically has the power to materialize before all others.

A Haunted Language

Writing history as an exquisite corpse would mean not having the ability to exert control over the story that is produced through the new assemblage that comes into being through the writer's efforts. Not only would this mean that history could no longer be the univocal expression of the story from the perspective of a civilization that has given itself the prerogative to write it, but that history could not be determined from only one perspective.

Yet Ouologuem's *Lettre*, disparaging the course of history and prescribing the exquisite corpse technique to construct a work of fiction, should not be taken at face value. As one who is deeply aware of the exoticizing trends in the reception of African writers, Ouologuem uses the letter to bait and provoke his audience, Europeans and Africans alike, making a statement about history, violence, and the values that underpin the markets in which African literatures circulate. Hence, we might be tempted to see this letter as an ironic commentary. The letter comically reduces the complex process of writing to a simple surrealist's game, comparing the undertaking of composing a novel to a simple form of arithmetic. As he writes:

> Sous cette forme, chère négraille, pour qui exécute ce travail avec une conscience très lucide de la demande du marché, *être le nègre d'un écrivain célèbre*, c'est se donner, comme une liberté, la clé d'un langage envisagé dans ses puissances combinatoires – mises à la disposition de la clientèle. C'est un peu de l'algèbre, mais de l'algèbre pour petits enfants.[65]

> By adhering to this formula, dear black-rabble, by composing a new work with an eye towards the demands of the marketplace, to become the nègre [*ghostwriter*] of a famous writer, is to liberate yourself: it is a key to unlocking the boldest and most powerful combinations inherent in a language – which may thereafter be placed at your customers' disposal. It's a little like algebra, but algebra for small children.[66]

Among the absurd ironies of this proposition is the idea that black writers must revert to the use of a European device in order to achieve popularity. In contrast, Ouologuem regularly flouts European conventions in his writing, effectively demonstrating how language can become the repository of a history of violence. The significance of the exquisite corpse technique is closely entwined in this letter with the special use Ouologuem makes of the noun "*nègre*" when he writes that the addressee is the *nègre* of a famous writer. Here, Ouologuem exploits the etymological traces of *nègre* within the French language, where it acts as a category for African people, "*les Nègres*," and "*etre le nègre de quelqu'un*" means to be someone's Negro, also carrying the meaning of being a ghostwriter for another writer. Christopher Miller explains: "Ouologuem exploits the double meaning of the word *nègre* in French, where *Negro*, originally synonymous with *slave*, came also to mean (since the eighteenth century) *ghost-writer*."[67] According to Miller, Ouologuem's writing is a "conscious effort to spoil the distinction between original and copy."[68] The double entendre of the term clearly reflects the unwritten history of the unpaid labour of slaves. Reclaiming this rare usage of *nègre* as ghostwriter, Ouologuem draws attention to the way language itself becomes a crypt invested with meanings that shift over time, corresponding to a brutal social history. In this sense, Ouologuem sets himself up as a ghostwriter of the French language, drawing out and making play with the problematic terminology that haunts and courses through it.

Ouologuem invokes the archaic connotation of the word *nègre* as meaning "ghostwriter" in order to satirically draw attention to the brutal history of slavery,[69] relating the residues of this history in the French language to the contemporary labour of black writers looking to appeal to a popular audience. Drawing attention to practices of violence that have become engrained in the archive of the language itself, the *pisse-copie* technique becomes a mockery of the ways African authors can access literary publishing markets. Ironically championing this technique, Ouologuem claims it is a way to gain prestige and to satisfy the requirements of the market for African writing without the need for originality. Yet he also implicitly suggests a need for such subversive techniques to undermine the dominant discourses of writing and authorship, exposing their terms to the histories of violence and colonialism contained within them. This becomes a way to open discourses about writing and authorship onto the histories of violence and colonialism. Here, Ouologuem not only subverts the exploitative traffic in African works of cultural production, but demonstrates how language itself can bear witness to a traumatic history. This usage of *nègre* marks a crypt in which the phantoms of the history of slavery are caught in a shroud of shame and silence, just as his usage of *négraille* carries a message of contempt for the work extracted from anonymous African slaves. Ouologuem's exploitation of these terms is a way of mordantly deploying the colonial patois against the very history of imperialism. His use of such terms in the form of a letter to France underscores his own actual technique of ghostwriting as a response to colonialism and its legacy. His bitter use of these labels calls attention to this history. At the same time, he reinserts the slave within the narrative of African history, a remarkable foil for both the Saifs and the European colonizers, rulers who exploit and absorb the credit of slave labour.

We have seen how Ouologuem's work was condemned as plagiarism after traces of other works were discerned in *Le Devoir.* If we take this together with Ouologuem's satire of the interpenetration of two different forms of theft, the first in the context of unpaid slave labour and the second in the context of uncredited African poets and writers, we will be in a better position to understand the factors contributing to his marginalization within the corpus of world literature. Christopher Wise has argued that "intensive and harmful scrutiny was brought to bear upon Ouologuem in ways unthinkable in cases when European artists have freely borrowed from African sources. For instance, few art historians speak of 'plagiarism' or 'theft' when discussing the paintings of Picasso, Braques, or Mogdiliani."[70] But if we take seriously the need to reconsider Ouologuem's work on its own terms, without limiting it to an imaginary dependence on Western sources, we will have to reread it as an exquisite corpse that incorporates African as well as European sources, demonstrating the intertwinement of the language of power that circulates on both continents in African and European tongues. As George Lang has contended, "I, for one, am also curious about the 'ancient Arabian, medieval, old Portuguese and old Spanish manuscripts' Ouologuem alleges to have incorporated into his work. We in the West have missed an essential point. Ouologuem's plagiarism of Schwartz-Bart, Maupassant, Graham Greene, and Lord knows how many other writers aside, who were the *African* writers Ouologuem targeted?"[71] Three years after Lang's essay, Thomas Hale published his important *Scribe, Griot, & Novelist*, which explores Ouologuem's African sources, including the Arabic chronicles of West African history, *Tarîkh es Soudan* and the *Tarîkh el-Fettâch.* Hale also discusses the influence of oral traditions of storytelling on the writer.[72]

In short, the case against Ouologuem marks an elision of difference across literary traditions. A legal inquest into notions of intellectual property or literary fraud was initiated where there were opportunities for reflection and change. T.S. Eliot's quip that "immature poets imitate, mature poets steal" can do little to preserve a non-European writer such as Ouologuem from his detractors.[73] At stake are conflicting notions of property and prestige. The European literary marketplace is underpinned by values that affect the reception and circulation of African texts. Not only are those who are accused of plagiarism victims of this system of values, but also those who make the accusations. In order to disseminate a counter-history to official sources on the exploitation of Africans by Europeans, Ouologuem creates a model whose centre does not hold, that is unstable, and tears out in all directions. The idea of history as an exquisite corpse may be laughable (and the letter is notably punctuated by Ouologuem's own mischievous laughter), but it also forces us to reconsider the conventions of writing history that we normally accept. Creating a grotesque and fragmentary style without a single author, but that claims a form of collective authorship, offers Ouologuem the opportunity to poke fun at the idea that history can ever be singular, or credit for its events unilateral. In so doing, he subverts and implicitly criticizes those forms of exclusionary violence that prevail in historical narratives.

At the end of *Le Devoir de violence*, Bishop Henry, a friend of Raymond's family and an apologist for Christianity in Africa, discovers the Saif's practice of perpetrating assassinations by means of poisonous asps trained to strike their victims. Knowing full well that the Saif will try to kill him because of his knowledge, he goes to play chess with the Saif. The two philosophize about the game, the nature of power, and the history of the Nakem. Henry says "ce qui importe, c'est que, toute vibrante de soumission inconditionnelle à la volonté de puissance, la violence devienne illumination prophétique, façon d'interroger et de répondre, dialogue, tension, oscillation, qui, de meurtre en muertre, fasse les possibilities se répondre, se compléter, voire se contredire"[74] ("What really matters is that violence itself, the vibrant and unconditional submission to the will to power, becomes a prophetic illumination, a means to interrogate and respond, an on-going dialogue, a tension, an oscillation that, from murder to murder, creates further possibilities of response, fulfillment, and contradiction").[75] The literary space of the novel encompasses the violence done in the history of the entire African continent. What is so subversive about Ouologuem's ghostwriting is that it creates the very possibilities for writing that history against the grain.

The reader does not learn whether or not Henry survives. In the last passages of the book, the attention of the reader is taken away from the chess match between the representatives of political and missionary power in Africa towards a vertiginous insight; namely, that the history of the Saif is the history of Africa: "Jeté dans le monde, l'on ne peut s'empêcher de songer que Saïf, pleuré trois millions de fois, renaît sans cesse à l'Histoire, sous les cendres chaudes de plus de trente Républiques africaines"[76] ("Once cast into the world, one cannot fail to grasp that Saif, mourned three millions [*sic*] times, is ceaselessly reborn to History, under the warm cinders of more than thirty African Republics").[77] The book's topographical imagination reaches out into the world and the histories of oppressed masses with this statement of eschatological return and critique. The further step towards ghostwriting takes this critique of violence into the register of language itself by raising the dead through certain practices that make language a mirror in which is reflected the brutalization and theft of the labour of an entire population.

Disorientation and Horror in Sadeq Hedayat's *The Blind Owl*

> In the light of the smoky oil lamp my shadow, in the sheepskin jacket, cloak and scarf that I was wearing, was stretched motionless across the wall. The shadow that I cast upon the wall was much denser and more distinct than my real body. My shadow had become more real than myself. The old odds-and-ends man, the butcher, Nanny and the bitch, my wife, were shadows of me, shadows in the midst of which I was imprisoned. I had become like a screech owl, but my cries caught in my throat and I spat them out in the form of clots of blood. Perhaps screech owls are subject to a disease which makes them think as I think. My shadow on the wall had become exactly like an owl and, leaning forward, read intently every word I wrote. Without doubt he understood perfectly. Only he was capable of understanding. When I looked out of the corner of my eye at my shadow on the wall I felt afraid.
>
> – Sadeq Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*[1]

In this passage, an unnamed writer embarks into a world of shadows, a space where metamorphoses are customary and the fiends that animate nightmares threaten to make unwelcome revelations, disrupting the order of the subconscious mind. Amid the fear the writer's shadow inspires in him, there is only a vague definition of the borders between reality and dream. Indeed, between the worlds of writing and that of shadows there is an intimacy. The ink that is a medium for the writer's creative spirit, bringing subconscious designs to the page, provides an analogue to shadows. Though more mutable and disorienting, they nevertheless exist in two dimensions and appear between the contrast of black on white. The congealed clots of blood that stifle the writer's cries are evidence of his ill health, bringing his mortality to bear upon the relations between reality and dream, as between writing and shadows. Claiming, at the beginning of the book that "I am writing only for my shadow,"[2] the writer simultaneously denies readers entry from any world outside that of shadows, while burying his feelings of desire and guilt within the medium of a kind of writing that is not static, but that eddies and whirls in a vortex of obscurity and disease.

This character appears in *Buf-e Kur,* the short novel written by the Iranian writer Sadeq Hedayat and published in 1936 in Bombay. The title of the book in English translation is *The Blind Owl*. It is a work that creates a strong impression of mystery and eeriness, a troubling work that has disturbed generations of readers and generated comparisons to diverse sources, including Persian, Indian, European, and American works.[3] Its overall air of mystery and its reliance upon macabre and hallucinatory details and scenes leave the reader with a profound sense of uncertainty as to the true events of the plot. Since its appearance, the work has been variously interpreted either as a "Western" or an "Eastern" novel, according to where certain scholars locate the work and its influences. This has had the effect of structuring the debates around the novel in accordance with overlapping binaries determined by the way its temporality and literary space are imagined.

One of the difficulties in discussing the novel is the rather intricate architecture of its narration. Therefore, I wish to lay out, as best I can, some of the contours of the story at the outset. The book is divided between three male narrators. The two central ones, making up the body of the text, belong to different times and settings yet remain strangely kindred, linked by common obsessions and uncanny resonances.[4] These male narrators are also framed by a third, the figure of a reclusive writer, who, in a brief introductory section, explains he is recording events as well as he can remember, in order to reveal himself to his shadow. Throughout the narrative, it is difficult to determine what constitutes the promised confession of the recluse, since either (or both) of the main narrators may be the expression of this same writer's voice.[5] This creates an effect as in a hall of mirrors, in which the narrators may or may not be reflections of one another. After the recluse's initial address to his shadow, the first main section begins. It is narrated by an artist of sorts, whose work is entirely made up of painting a singular scene on pen cases. This narrator is obsessed by the haunting beauty of a mysterious woman he encounters, mutilates, and buries. I refer to this narrator as "the artist," or "the first narrator." In the following section, which in the original text is offset by quotation marks,[6] we are introduced to the second main narrator. This sexually frustrated man, whom I refer to as "the second narrator," was orphaned when he was young, and his family history remains obscure. He thinks about his dead mother, who was a Lingam temple dancer. He is haunted by the laughter of an old odds-and-ends man who sells him a knife which he then uses to kill his wife in a climactic scene. In the aftermath, his hollow laugh suggests a horrible metamorphosis into the old man. At the end of the novel the reclusive writer wakes to discover an old man in the shadows, clutching a bundle that seems to contain a vase from the first part of the book, who runs away with it under his arm. In the final scene, the recluse looks down at himself, discovering his clothes torn and bloody, crawling with maggots and encircled by blister flies. Underscoring the violent play of shadows, fractured narratives and narrators, the novel ends with a haunting ellipsis, "And on my chest I felt the weight of a woman's dead body...."[7]

According to Jason Mohaghegh, more than its content the publication history of the novel reveals how dangerous the novel's literary space has been perceived to be. As he argues, *The Blind Owl* "is a text that has been systematically forbidden by one regime-type after another since its publication in the middle of the twentieth century." Urging readers to contemplate this suppression, he asks, "why would a literary rant that takes place in such hermetic frenzy [...] with barely any allusion to country or culture but rather loyal to its own otherworldliness, present such a threat to the ruling orders of any/every given moment? Why do such seemingly unrelated thoughts inject fear, paranoia, and hatred among the power-edifices?"[8] While it is not true that the book has always faced the same level of censorship in Iran, with a serial version published in Iran in the 1940s, and other unofficial copies constantly available and more or less openly sold, it is true that Hedayat's work has never found full acceptance for official censors and policers of decency. So why has the book been perceived for so long as subversive?

The Blind Owl creates an aesthetic disjuncture that unsettles its readers' perception of reality and shatters the historical and critical mechanisms they rely upon. The book destabilizes the very realities on which a certain reactionary form of nationalism is grounded. Dredging up the ghosts of an imaginary past, desecrating the crypts carefully laid to rest and memorialized in narratives of supremacy, Hedayat's novel is a horror story that presents characters as outsiders and monsters, through a cracked and diseased mirror reflection of the society that produced them. Driven by aesthetic inspiration and unsatisfied prurient desires, the two narrators of the text, who are distorted reflections of each other, discover the undead spectres of violence and resentment against those who are different, gendered or racialized as others. Filial relations are confused, and the nostalgic drive for the return to the pure past of memory is continually frustrated, precipitating nightmarish circumstances. Both the past, with its glories and great achievements, as well as the nostalgia of the present, are mocked in the haunting laughter of the odds-and-ends man.

The political landscape that provides background for the history of the novel's reception has shifted dramatically over the years since its first appearance. Yet there was also some consistency in the treatment Hedayat's famous novel received at the hands of the administrations in charge of censorship. Anticipating that it would not be acceptable for publication in Iran under the rule of Reza Shah Pahlavi, given that it was likely that it would not meet with the approval of the censors, Hedayat released the first edition in 1936 while he was studying in Bombay. This was a mimeographed, handwritten manuscript that was put into a limited circulation of fifty copies. The first page reads: "Printing and Sale in Iran is forbidden." It was not until after the abdication of Reza Shah and his replacement by his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, in 1941 that *The Blind Owl* appeared as a serial domestically in Iran. It was not until much later, after the revolution in 1979, that the book would be officially banned in Iran. Thereafter, bowdlerized versions appeared, although the complete edition continued to be available on the black market.[9]

Recently, some critics have seen the book as straightforwardly supporting an ideology of "Westernization" and anti-clerical sentiment. Yet Hedayat's choice to limit the circulation of the first edition suggests that he was aware that the book did not support the Reza Shah regime's project of "Westernizing" Iran, but rather was somehow subversive or disruptive of it. Later he would sum up his frustrations as a writer in Iran, saying "in this country a writer loses both this and the other world. All they do to a writer is to sit on him. You'd either have to pawn your pen to the state or be sat on."[10]

Hedayat killed himself in 1951. As he ended his own life, his book was poised to take on a new one. Against the background of a series of political changes in his country, the book was to steadily increase its readership, both in Iran and in translations across the world. His death, which occurred in Paris, preceded Mohammad Mossadegh's appointment as prime minister of Iran by a mere nineteen days. The historic events in his country that were to follow were unseen and unforeseeable for the great writer, including the steps taken by Mossadegh in nationalizing the oil industry; the subsequent CIA-backed coup in 1953, which reconfirmed foreign control of the oil industry and placed further powers in the hands of the authoritarian regime of the Shah and the rise of his brutal domestic security police, the SAVAK; and the Revolution of '79.

In present-day Iran, where the Revolutionary Islamic Republic holds sway, marking its departure from an imperial national history and the semicolonial systems of political influence and foreign interests that attended it, books must conform to ideals upheld by the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution. Works that are anathema to the unity of the nation, that mock or revile nationalism or religion, or that promote corruption are deemed unworthy of publication. *The Blind Owl*, a somewhat lurid book, but certainly without any explicit political message, is regarded as dangerous and has been censored because of an infectious germ it is supposed to carry. Yet could the source of this feared contagion be the very disease that the writer has contracted in *The Blind Owl* and which he mentions in the epigraph to this chapter?

The aesthetic effects of the novel are somewhat different from what the intentions of the author may have been in writing the novel. When an author voices an ideology or prejudice through the medium of one of his characters, the judgment or position must be taken as a fiction in the larger context of the work. Because there is no reliable identity between an author and his characters, this has an important bearing upon the literary space of the novel. Rather than seeking Hedayat's true purpose in writing the book, my strategy in this chapter is to understand how a book can undermine even the very convictions and ideology of its author. The subversiveness of the novel is an effect of its horror. A character who professes his own superiority over the "rabble" in religious, intellectual, and perhaps also racial terms, is depicted in such a way that the reader recoils from him in horror. The disease or canker eating away at his mind is, in part, his violent identifications of supremacy, nationalistic hatred, and misogyny.

Moreover, while it may not explicitly confront imperialism, I argue that the way the novel continues to have effects subversive of unity, order, and good sense undermines the cohesion and supremacy of one society or ethnic identity over another and threatens to unearth the residual forms of imperialism in the present. I refer to this as its decolonial implications.[11] In other words, rather than a book openly hostile to the forces of imperialism, *The Blind Owl* disrupts narratives of ethnic and gendered superiority that structure maps of empire and prop up forms of domination. Finally, the book also challenges certain conventions of post-colonial literary criticism by revealing their reliance upon a set of imaginary binaries in the way space and time are represented and understood. In exploring the topographical imaginary of this work, I analyse its subversive characteristics through its eerie stylistics, its political background, and the way its reception has been framed by audience and critics.

My reading of the novel places emphasis on its complex and international heritage, while drawing attention to the difficulties of methods of interpretation that attempt to afix a work within a clear and single tradition. *The Blind Owl* is not the product of some monolithic tradition or origin. This chapter explores tensions between multiple influences and limited networks of interpretation, translation, and readership. *The Blind Owl* provides an example of the way the binary structures of a certain cartographic imaginary can interrupt more nuanced interpretations. Examining the literary space of the novel in light of its histories of reception in different locales and translations, this chapter attends to the debates that have come at the book from two distinct sides, marking it either as "Eastern" or "Western."

World Literature or Persian Modernism

In contrast to its official censorship, *The Blind Owl* has remained acclaimed in literary circles, both in Iran and abroad. André Breton remarks of *La Chouette aveugle*, the book's French translation, that "if there is any such thing as a masterpiece, this is it."[12] Further underscoring its universal appeal, Ramin Jahanbegloo has argued that Hedayat's work "belongs to what Goethe described as '*Weltliteratur*.'"[13] On a similar note, Michael Beard calls the book a "masterpiece of world literature,"[14] while Anastassiya Andrianova designates it a work of "global literature."[15] Indeed, at first glance, the book appears to have established a significant place within these categories.

Yet how does this framework of universality and global recognition affect our understanding of an aesthetically puzzling work like *The Blind Owl*? What happens, for example, to the concerns, reflections, and criticisms the book expresses in its own cultural, historical, and imaginative idiom? Might calls to confirm its place as a masterwork deserving universal attention sometimes ignore its specific political, cultural, or geographical contexts? The global reception of the novel and the debates over its influences and frames of reference have led some critics to specify and emphasize the author's innovations and critical engagements at the time of his writing. For example, Nasrin Rahimieh hails the book as a key work of Persian literary modernity,[16] while Homa Katouzian describes it as a founding work of Persian modernism.[17] Such critics see the work within its original context through the pioneering changes it wrought in the history of Persian letters.

The book has been translated many times, first into French, by Roger Lescot in 1953, and four years later into English, by D.P. Costello, in 1957. The variety and nuances of the book's translations complicate the already thorny problem of interpreting the way the work reflects or distorts particular temporalities, topographies, and ideologies. The novel depicts certain nationalist sentiments that veer between romanticism and monstrosity. As discussed in the introduction of this volume, I refer to the "literary space" of a work to describe the way works of literature create worlds both through representations and in the course of their reception. Reading for this sense of literary space, I raise questions about the contexts and challenges for understanding a book like *The Blind Owl.*

Perhaps because there is something deeply uncanny about the work, critics continue to struggle with defining the novel's provenance. Yet taking seriously this uncanniness in fact allows it to be read as a deeply hybrid work that responds to both national and international influences. *The Blind Owl* is a book inspired in part by a reactionary nationalism that was a popular fantasy in Iran at the time of Hedayat's writing, yet contains the subversive kernel of its undoing. As the narrator's consciousness unravels, so too does the ideological formation he represents, making the book a deeply troubling, yet also potentially liberating, work.

My method in exploring *The Blind Owl,* as with the works I explore in the foregoing chapters, is not limited to the internal dynamics of the written work. Rather, in examining its representations, I include consideration of the histories of translation and reception the work has produced, beyond the text as a monadic creation of an artist. Such works as those under consideration in this volume are not simply acts of creative genius produced in some sort of rarefied atmosphere called "literature," but rather formations that exist within real and material conditions that are shifting in the process of the work's publication and its aftermath.

Here, the literary space of the *The Blind Owl* may be sketched out by drawing upon previous interpretations, leading up to an exploration of the major binaries within these critical perspectives. Two overlapping trends in the novel's exegesis emerge as defining elements within these perspectives. I call these trends within the critical discourse around the novel cartographic, denoting claims made about the Eastern or Western provenance of the novel, and temporal, relating to the way the past and the present are depicted. In exploring these trends, I argue that the disorientation within the book helps undo these imaginary binaries, or at least blur their distinctions. The reclusive writer's disease, the narrator's acts of sexual violence, and his sense of superiority all have relevance for the gendered and racialized representations within the novel and will offer a way of disentangling *The Blind Owl* from the ideologies of its author, coming to an understanding of the deeply subversive and decolonial dimensions of such a book.

Indeterminacy and Disorientation

The Blind Owl draws its readers into a place of disquietude and claustrophobia, where ambiguity is fundamental and the ground always seems uncertain. It could be argued that more than anything else, the novel's indeterminacy emerges as its defining feature. As Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh states succinctly, "no one knows for sure what happens" in the book.[18] For this reason, since a feature of literary criticism is to contextualize and explicate, the sphinx-like character of *The Blind Owl* provides a major provocation, as well as a stumbling block, to interpretations of the novel. In other words, there is a great deal of disagreement in the literature on the novel as to the events themselves, as well as how they should be interpreted or understood.

Yet this radical sense of uncertainty within the plot is also the engine of the novel's intrigue. The ambiguity, enchantment, and horror provoke us to read and reread the work. The contours of the book and its events seem to unfold in an otherworldly medium. Indeed, summarizing, let alone interpreting, this text is a bit like herding cats. Some critics set as their task the disentanglement of enigmas in the text. For example, readers are confronted by characters who have different lives, inhabit different social milieus, and are engaged in different occupations, yet who are joined together as echoes or doubles of one another, with repeated patterns of tone and expression across the disjointed sections of the book. It is the task of the reader to determine the relation that exists between the first (the artist) and second narrator. In the first pages, we encounter the reclusive writer who frames the text by addressing his shadow as follows:

> In the course of my life I have discovered that a fearful abyss lies between me and other people and have realized that my best course is to remain silent and keep my thoughts to myself for as long as I can. If I have now made up my mind to write it is only in order to reveal myself to my shadow, that shadow which at this moment is stretched across the wall in the attitude of one devouring with insatiable appetite each word I write.[19]

The recluse's effort to reveal himself to his shadow is compromised, then, by the shadow's impalpability and imponderability. Rather than the natural addressee of the writing, it is as if the reader were an interloper. This shadow comes to bear a resemblance to a blind owl, a symbol with multiple valences within Hedayat's narrative. As the form cast by the reclusive writer's presence, it appears as a devouring bird of prey. Yet this creature of the imagination ingests not small creatures of the field, but words and ideas, the dreams and horrors of the recluse captured on the written page. Perhaps there is a further suggestion, based on the fears the reclusive writer expresses of his shadow, that this otherworldly creature will not stop at ravaging words alone, but will swallow them up together with their writer, thus bringing him, too, into the world of shadows.[20] Indeed, death and disease are closely associated with the writing. The owl, a nocturnal creature fully dependent upon its keen eyesight for nourishment, is in this instance bereft of vision. Its blindness must signal its own impending death. While the owl can also be a common omen of death and decay, Deirdre Lashgari points out that in popular superstitions in Iran it is more ambiguous: "an owl perched on a new house is an omen of destruction, but ... an owl on the wall of a ruin is an omen of renewed prosperity and fortune."[21] Mohammad Ghanoonparvar points to the great Sufi work of mystical poetry, *The Conference of the Birds* by Farid al-Din 'Attar, as a possible intertextual source for Hedayat. Ghanoonparvar suggests that the owl is among the birds that do not go along on the spiritual quest for king of birds (the *Simorgh*). The owl refuses because, as he says, "he must remain among the ruins (although he is miserable and suffers) because only there he can possibly find treasures."[22] In this sense, the owl is spiritually blind, for it refuses the opportunity to seek the divinity within. Similarly, the writer is also a recluse, sequestering himself in his own tortured mind.

In the first main section of the narrative, we are introduced to the first narrator, a morose character whose occupation is to paint miniature scenes on pen cases. They are all decorated with the same scene, reproduced exactly by the artist. The recurring tableau, which he finds uninspired yet mysteriously significant, depicts a bent old man squatting under a cypress tree. Facing the man is a girl, offering him a *nilufar*[23] from across a stream that separates them. This representation becomes a template for the doubles and distorted mirror images that will be multiplied over the course of the narrative.[24]

He considers this work ludicrous and stupefying, a means of killing time.[25] As for the time he does not devote to decorating the pen cases, he finds refuge in wine and opium. He is haunted by an encounter with a woman whose name he promises never to utter. This enthralling and devastating encounter occurs on the thirteenth day of Nowruz, the Persian New Year, a day when it is customary to leave the city and go picnicking in the countryside. According to Michael Fischer, "those who fail to vacate [their homes] are said to be subject to attack by evil spirits."[26] On this day, he receives an unexpected visit from a bent old man resembling the male figure in his painted designs, who claims to be his uncle. Upon his arrival, the pen-case artist looks for something to offer his guest. Reaching for the wine he keeps in his room, he suddenly discovers a small window, through which he sees the scene on his pen case covers. He is entranced by the beauty of the girl he sees through the window, her dark hair and particularly her eyes. Hearing the hair-raising laughter of the old man, the artist recoils in terror. When he comes to and goes to bring the wine to offer his guest, he discovers that his uncle has gone. Turning back, he discovers that the window has also disappeared.

From that day on, for two months and four days, he longs for the ethereal girl, increasing his doses of wine and opium, and searching for her form on his evening walks. Upon returning home from one of these walks, he discovers a woman, clad in black, who appears to be waiting for him. She enters his home and lies down on his bed. Watching her sleep, he touches her but discovers that she is dead. Inspired to paint her eyes, he is at first frustrated by his failed efforts, until she opens her eyes for a moment and he is able to capture them.

At this point, without any change in tone, the narrative turns increasingly gruesome and violent. The narrator proceeds to cut up the woman's body, packing it piecemeal into a suitcase. Leaving the house, he comes across a man with a hearse who, like the other characters of old men, resembles the old man in the pen case scene. As the old man digs him a grave, he discovers a vase from the ancient city of Rey, which he offers to the artist. More doubles and mirror images appear once, back home, the artist discovers the spitting image of the woman he has just buried etched into the vase.

The second narration is different from the first in time and setting. The narrators of each part appear to be distinct, yet oddly similar characters. This second narrator becomes obsessed with the thought of killing his wife, who is also his cousin, to whom he refers as "the bitch." According to him, she manufactured a scene in which he is caught returning her kiss and is therefore forced to marry her to protect her honour. Their filial relations are complicated by the fact that the two spouses were raised and suckled by the same woman, the nanny (his aunt), insinuating deeper incestuous ties in the narrator's desire for his wife. She frustrates and spurns his desires, and according to his narration, sleeps with anyone and everyone but him, developing a relationship with an old, grotesque odds-and-ends man. She becomes pregnant. Finally, having been given a bone-handled knife by his nanny, he finds the opportunity to couple with his wife (the room is dark and it is unclear if at first she realizes it is him). Struggling in a violent, passionate embrace, the narrator "involuntarily jerk[s his] hand" that is still holding the knife, killing her by penetrating her flesh with a supplemental phallus.[27]

Because there is a disjuncture between the two long sections of the book, including different settings and spaces, different temporal indices, and different characters, there has been a lot of speculation about the connections between them. It creates a strong sense that time is out of joint. As Marta Simidchieva points out, some critics, including Iraj Bashiri and Hassan Kamshad, "see a relative lack of cohesion between the two parts."[28]

There are quite a number of mysterious uncertainties that arise in the process of reading the novel. For example, are we dealing with the self-same narrator throughout the book? Are we dealing with the thoughts and recollections of an actual murderer? Are the thoughts presented in the two parts of the novel even the representation of a consistent and self-same psychotic character? Is the deranged man attempting to justify the murder through the act of writing? Have we as readers become, then, his accomplices by reading on with fascination and horror?

The Writer's Disease

The fact that the book is often described as one of the greatest works of modern Persian literature, and yet is officially censored in its complete form, is just one sign of the unusual responses the book has received. Yet another aspect of the book's intrigue involves the fate of the author himself. Because Hedayat committed suicide, legends have developed about the author's purported illness, the potential dangerousness of his writings, and insinuations of possible contagion. Much like the historical reception of and responses to Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, the book created a mythic but forbidding air around it that led to efforts at official censorship.[29] For example, Mehdi Abedi reports that after being seen reading one of Hedayat's stories in a library he was warned by the head librarian, "the books of Hedayat make people commit suicide."[30] And if all Hedayat's books were thought to contain such a powerfully destructive germ, the most suspect would no doubt be *Buf-e Kur.* Porochista Khakpour confirms the pervasiveness of the fears around the book in her 2010 introduction to the new edition of the Costello translation when she describes her father's efforts to prevent the book from falling into her hands because "it had caused many suicides in Iran after it was published."[31]

The work begins, like Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*, with the details of the narrator's illness, which "transcends ordinary experience, this reverberation of the shadow of the mind, which manifests itself in a state of coma like that between death and resurrection, when one is neither asleep nor awake."[32] The disorder of the reclusive writer's mind frames the narration in terms of a disease similar to the underground man's affliction of being overly conscious (and therefore overly critical). Yet the disturbance of mind the recluse describes also suggests an interstitial uncertainty. Hence, the narrative medium is itself morbidly reverberating within this original sense of disquiet throughout the text, in spite of ruptures in time and setting. Like the disorienting awakening into a new world that separates the two parts of the book, the transferral between states described by the reclusive writer (death/resurrection; sleep/waking) is characterized by a sudden rift. Moreover, the recluse suggests that division characterizes his interactions with others: "in the course of my life I have discovered that a fearful abyss lies between me and other people."[33] This abyss also creates a sense of uncertainty the reader comes to feel towards the reclusive writer, and each narrator in turn. It is this sense of indeterminacy that produces shadows.

Yet to understand the significance of the recluse's disease in the context of the novel's unique aesthetic effects, an analysis is necessary of the mutability of the novel's characters, their faculty of transfiguration and reorientation in the guise of other characters, and the bizarre narrative echolalia within the text.

Repetition and the Double

Doubles proliferate in *The Blind Owl* to create a strong sense of irreality. As we have already seen in a few instances, many characters, scenes, images, and descriptions are repeated throughout the course of the narrative, evoking for the reader an eerie sense of déjà vu and reinforcing the overall tenor of uncanniness of the book. For example, the serial image painted on the pen cases, the image painted on the vase, or the old man's laughter are all haunting forms of repetition. Part of what makes the book so powerful is this style of repetition that has such a confusing and deranging effect on the reader. Coming across a decription in slightly altered form that they had encountered before in the pages of the book causes the reader to pause and ask herself, "Haven't I read this before? Or am I going crazy?" This feeling only increases as the novel continues, contributing to the idea that the writer's disease might actually be contagious, and that one is getting exposed to it in the process of reading.

Otto Rank, whose psychoanalytic work explores the literary theme of the *Doppelgänger*, describes the encounter with an external projection of the individual as another. This strange, uncanny event, he says, portends the death of the self for the individual undergoing the encounter. This projection stages a conflict between two opposing forces within the psyche, narcissism and the death drive. Within the confrontation, the individual's psychic conflicts are in such strife that a schism actually forms inside the ego, conjuring up the uncanny figure of the double as "an independent and visible cleavage of the ego."[34] If the effect of the reclusive writer's address to his shadow is to make the reader feel like an outsider to the world created within the text, it also situates and encloses the reader within this space where doubles are forged, encounter one another, and risk death. In this reading, the important aspect is not the identity between the doubles that proliferate in the text, but rather the transformations that are facilitated by the shadow images and the haunting effect they exert in the narrative.

The narrator's attitude towards his addressee in the sinister shape of his shadow emphasizes his longing to be united with his double in this form. Yet in order to join the world of shadows, the reclusive writer must also join the literary present of his narration, disappearing from the world of things, into the whirlpool of his diseased thoughts, and perish.

Whether emphasized for its national values or the way it breaks the bounds of national literature, whether seen as the expression of a deranged madman or an existentialist in an encounter with his inner psyche, whether compared to the works of antiquity or modernity, *The Blind Owl* challenges the limits of interpretation. The doubles in the text are basically irreconcilable. For example, the two narrators are not the same, but remain equivocal reflections of each other, just as both are reflected in the reclusive writer, who is, in turn, reflected in his shadow, and the owl into which his shadow transforms. Another example of this can be seen at the end of the book, when the second narrator seems to have transformed into his hated sexual rival, the old odds-and-ends man. After killing his wife, and hearing his own eerie laughter as the other's voice, the narrator says, in the final line of the section, "I had become the old odds-and-ends man."[35] Yet when the narrative shifts to the final section, the reclusive writer discovers an old man emerging from a shadow, who runs off into the night like a thief.

Much like these doubles that are perpetually suggested but left unresolved, the critical reactions the book has received are often characterized both by polarity and a certain sense of bewilderment. Seen from another angle, the doubles in the text are suggestive of the fluidity of identities. The series of metamorphoses have an overlapping and imbricated quality, as between the reclusive writer and his shadow, between the first and second narrator (the pen-case artist and the murder-obsessed misogynist) and between the second narrator and the old odds-and-ends-man. The slippage of these characters into one another, the way boundaries between characters are constantly in danger of dissolving, is a major feature of the way ambiguity and uncertainty are deployed in the novel. The identity achieved between, for example, the second narrator and the odds-and-ends man is premised upon the contingency, rather than its necessity, of this metamorphosis.

Sexual Violence

One of the most disturbing aspects of *The Blind Owl* is the dimension of violence that is sexualized or aestheticized, predominately perpetrated against women. Both the narrators of the first and second parts of the novel commit acts of sexualized violence against female figures in their lives. Given the way the aura of the novel often precedes it, imbuing it with an air of danger and contagion, the problem of the narrators' murders and mutilations of their loved ones presents a stumbling block for critics. The repetition of the violence unites the two parts of the book and is key to recognizing and understanding the monstrosity of the characters' desires.

These acts of violence against women are framed by narrators whose reliability is questionable. Moreover, the uncertainty concerning the narrators' filial relations generates frustrated incestuous desires on their parts that result in violent desires and acts. Some critics, including Leonardo Alishan, have deciphered in the strange, complicated narration and its confused presentation of events and descriptions, the essential feature of the reclusive writer's repression of the crime of killing his wife, buried deep within his subconscious, which helps produce the hallucinated narratives and their strange distortions.

Others, such as Azar Nafisi, argue that this violence is representative of a much wider reality outside the text to which Hedayat is drawing our attention. For Nafisi, Hedayat's narrator is threatened by the women in his life, whom he reduces to polarized images of femininity from classical Persian narratives and resorts to violence because both images frustrate him by their inaccessibility to him. Nafisi identifies three images, "the mother, the beloved, and the whore,"[36] whom the narrator encounters, and with whom he is caught in a desiring-despising complex. Because the male narrators cannot come to terms with their own femininity, or with the complexity beyond the simplification represented in these polarized images, they kill and mutilate the bodies of these women. According to Nafisi, the narrators therefore express the impotence of a common type of male desiring. As she says, "this impotence is symbolic of the inability to confront the new reality imposed on the psyche of a patriarchal society."[37] Moreover, she argues that the narrators blame their own victimhood (being spurned or reviled) on the women who inspire their obsession. Hence, the narrators fail to successfully confront or understand either women or reality itself.

Nafisi's argument is useful because it focuses on what is being done to women in the novel. These women are reduced to tropes that are common, not only in Persian narratives, but rather more widely. Hedayat's novel reflects some aspect of the "Madonna-whore complex," which is the reduction of female characters to polarized archetypes, the first fulfilling the contradictory ideal of the virgin-mother, and the second being characterized by lust and carnal sexual drives. As Sigmund Freud suggested in 1910, such polarity, appearing within male consciousness as a sharp contrast between these feminine roles, conceals the fact that within the unconscious, they signify a united whole.[38] Yet as Nafisi suggests, in Hedayat's book, things are even more complicated, as the virginal and maternal roles are split, making for three distinct female roles: the virgin (the ethereal woman), the mother (the Nanny), and the whore (the "bitch"). Moreover, the nurturing role of the mother is clearly askew since Bugam Dasi, the second narrator's biological mother and the only character who is named, is depicted as a temptress whose only gift to her son is a pitcher of poisoned wine.[39]

Nafisi's criticism is aimed at producing social critique rather than an exegesis of the novel itself. In her hands, the novel becomes about the failure of a dialogue between the sexes in modern Iran.[40] Moreover, she says that the passivity of Hedayat's female characters has wider consequences. She suggests that not only does it have a regressive effect on modern Persian literature, but it also points to what she calls "a fundamental cultural problem."[41] She argues that there is a lack of complex female characters in modern Iranian literature, and that this reflects gender relations on the ground in modern Iran.

The obsessive violence in the novel is certainly presented in such a way as to make readers deeply uncomfortable with the narrator-perpetrators. Yet Nafisi's style of social critique, in which literary examples become reflections of actual gender relations in Iran, has its limits. For example, it risks simplifying a complex narrative that may yet contain a kernel of ambiguity in which we can recognize an even deeper and more effective critique of masculinity. The sexualized violence against women in the novel does not simply reflect a national problem in Iran. If we take the non-realist topography of the novel as an index for the male gaze in Iran, we are foreclosing upon its productive uncertainty. In other words, dialling in too closely or exclusively to cultural ramifications of such a story narrows the literary space of the book. Censuring Iranian society as somehow being representable by a single character's violence and emotional perversion seems a somewhat unfair simplification.

The artist's dispassionate dismemberment of the ethereal woman and the second narrator's sexual predations and homicidal motives isolate these characters, emphasizing the horror and monstrosity of their characters. Moreover, in the novel acts of sexual violence are not entirely reserved for the bodies of women, but are also suggested across different incestuous ties. For example, the second narrator's frustrated desires find a perverse expression in the sexual abuse of a child, the wife's brother (like his wife, the boy is a cousin of his). To understand the deeply incestuous nature of his desire, it is important to note that this child refers to the narrator's wife as "Mummy." It is a scene of seduction and abuse: he begins by giving the child sweet cakes, sits him on his lap, presses the boy's body to him, and kisses him on his lips. The scene is layered by the description of physical and sensual resemblances the child bears towards his sister. Fortunately, the incident is interrupted by the appearance of the boy's father, and the reader is left to interpret the sense of iniquity the narrator feels when being caught in the act: "I could have sunk into the ground with shame."[42] The perversion of the narrator's desire, incestuous, queer, and pedophilic, is yet one more step on the road to the crime of uxoricide in the butchery of "the bitch." Like the scenes of sexual violence perpetrated on the bodies of women, the seduction of the boy evokes feelings of revulsion for the narrator. This is significant because readers gain an ironic distance from which to view the narrator and the sense of superiority he relishes in spite of his uncontrollable impulses and desires. The scenes of violence against women and allusions to incestuous trespass reveal the deep-seated insecurities of the male characters and emphasize the weakness of masculinity both in aesthetic isolation (the artist's world) and relational contexts (the second narrator's world). This theme of violence also undercuts the sense of superiority the second narrator feels over others. While the rabble is depicted as in every way intellectually inferior, any possibility of identifying with this perspective, taken together with the fragile masculinity of the narrator, is broken down. His predations and inconsistencies undermine his contempt and the superiority it offers him.

The Rabble

This sense of contempt, shared across the different narrators' perspectives and also indulged in by Hedayat, is most clearly articulated by the second narrator with respect to the group he calls the rabble. This complex dynamic offers us the opportunity to explore the cartographic imaginary of the novel within the context of Iran and the construction of Iranian identity during the twentieth century. If Hedayat's work is considered here through the subversive qualities of the work, it is not in the sense of containing any explicit or direct form of contestation and criticism. Rather, the decolonial implications of the work must be seen as extending far beyond the original context of the work, to its sphere of influence and the criticism and reception that it has engendered.

The reclusive writer's mode of address (that of a writer revealing himself to his shadow) foregrounds the aesthetics of the writing while also ensnaring the reader, who is an interloper caught between a shadow and the rabble. The *Rajjaleh-ha*, or "rabble," represent a conflictual identity of the masses who are differentiated from the second narrator, and who are not seen to have the same depth of feeling or subtlety of attitude as him. In other words, the rabble is the social mode of being to which he opposes himself. This includes the greedy and lecherous multitudes. He describes them in this way as he passes them on the street: "I wandered without set purpose among the rabble-men as they hurried by, an expression of greed on their faces, in pursuit of money and sexual satisfaction. I had no need to see them since anyone of them was a sample of the lot. Each and every one of them consisted only of a mouth and a wad of guts hanging from it, the whole terminating in a set of genitals."[43] The narrator's sense of significance comes at least partly from the contempt he feels towards the undifferentiated horde who are servants to the functions of their bodies. Their religiousity is another feature of the characterization given to the rabble, as masses leading lives of unquestioning devotion. This narrator is clear in his contempt for all the trappings of their systems of belief:

> I had no use, not only for prayer books, but for any sort of literature that expressed the notions of the rabble. What need had I of their nonsense and lies? Was not I myself the result of a long succession of past generations which had bequeathed their experience to me? Did not the past exist within me? As for mosques, the muezzin's call to prayer, the ceremonial washing of the body and rinsing of the mouth, not to mention the pious practice of bobbing up and down in honour of a high a mighty Being, the

> omnipotent Lord of all things, with whom it was impossible to have a chat except in the Arabic language – these things left me completely cold.[44]

The second narrator claims that the past exists within him. This may be an oblique allusion to the awakenings that create breaks in the narrative, accompanying the transition between the parts of the book and their narrators. Yet it is certain that his way of leaning on this ethno-historical imaginary of the past, of which he claims he is a repository, is a deliberate and flawed perspective. He wants to imagine himself as the product of past generations, with all of their glories and failures. At the same time, he wishes to divest himself of Islam, the unwanted religious tradition that occupied these generations. Moreover, this passage emphasizes the derision and scorn the narrator feels for the Arabic language. Yet the second narrator, whose narration is recorded in Persian using the Arabic alphabet, is unwittingly scorning the very medium upon which he depends to reveal himself to his shadow. Like the prayer book that is supposed to mediate between the rabble and their God, the narrator sees Arabic as a meaningless prop for the religious. The superiority complex which he builds upon these faulty foundations defines his character and his actions towards the other characters in the novel. It also leads him to blasphemy and delusions of grandeur, at one point sensing his superiority not only to the men of the rabble, but also "to nature and to the gods – the gods, that product of human lusts. I had become a god. I was greater than God, and felt within me the eternal, infinite flux."[45]

Cartographic Interpretations

The critical dialogue about the origins and influences of *The Blind Owl* is part of the literary journey it has made. Yet this dialogue is overlaid with other, more ideological, concerns about social and cultural influences in Iran. Therefore, the claims about the writer's own imagination are rarely innocent of associations entailed in modern Persian literature of the idea of "the West." Critics have long noted the "Western" aspects of the book, and several studies have been devoted to the role that earlier writers from Europe and the United States, such as Rilke, Kafka, Poe, Sartre, have played in Hedayat's education as a writer and in his developing the form and content of *The Blind Owl.*

Hedayat attended schools in Iran, and abroad in Europe, studying in Belgium and France. Later, when he published *The Blind Owl,* he was living abroad and studying, this time in India, where he was reading and researching ancient Iranian literature. At the time, modernism and existentialism were ascendant in many parts of Europe, while in Iran literature was undergoing a shift from the once-ubiquitous classical poetic forms towards a more accessible, realistic mode of narrative often associated with short story writers like Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh. An important writer and contemporary of Hedayat's, Jamalzadeh advocated, as early as the 1920s, for the simplification of writers' language in order to provide "the common people the benefit of learning and knowledge."[46] Taking cues from the achievements of this transformation in Persian letters, Hedayat also used language in a relatively accessible way, compared to classical traditions of Persian poetics, which relied upon the reader's familiarity with elite structures of linguistic symbolism and evocation. Yet the tone and textures of *The Blind Owl* seem designed to set this accessible language within a most inhospitable atmosphere.

The shifts that were taking place in these different literary spheres have prompted critics to claim that Hedayat's writing reflects one of these traditions or the other. Hedayat brought Persian aesthetics into conversation with modes of writing that were popular in Europe and America, but does this mean he should be framed as a "Western" author? The international range of his travels has been interpolated in these discussions to support critics' claims. For example, Michael Fischer points to the French surrealists in order to classify and situate Hedayat's novel in literary company: "much like André Breton, Hedayat deploys surrealist techniques to explode a world grown dead through convention, through religious rigidity, and through political corruption."[47] Fischer argues that surrealism had been disseminated across the world, and so could be adapted and taken up by Hedayat in Iran. Yet to bring surrealism to Iran required adapting its techniques in order to create "a Persian style of surrealism."[48] In spite of this, Hedayat has often been defined by his European influences alone.

While Hedayat was deeply influenced by many European authors, his acquaintance with literature is irreducible to this influence, and the impact on his writing of the time he spent abroad tends to be overly emphasized in the criticism. It is important to remember his own Persian literary and folkloric interests, his linguistic pursuits, the references to other writers in his writing, and the medium of his writing itself. As Beard writes, "If Hedayat's ideas were unorthodox, they were indigenous, and his experiences abroad seem not to have changed them."[49] Moreover, modern Persian literature ought not be defined by the standard of European definitions of literature. As Rahimieh argues, "it is generally assumed that he came to know 'literature' in Europe. It is often neglected that Hedayat's stay in France bore no fruit and that, discontented with his earlier ambitions, he returned to Iran."[50] The fact that Hedayat studied in a French school in Tehran and studied for a time in Belgium and France does not mean he picked up his literary aesthetics from European sources alone.

It is useful to see in Fischer's or Nafisi's readings a particular way of politicizing the novel. As Michael Beard suggests in "Influence as Debt: *The Blind Owl* in the Literary Marketplace," the relations of influence between European and Iranian writers can be a sensitive issue.[51] He goes on to emphasize the difficulties with describing these relations in ways that limit the idea of the writer's achievement and creativity by defining them through the idea of a writers' "debts" or influences. Against this strain of criticism, which characterizes a good deal of the criticism around *The Blind Owl*, Beard argues that "Hedayat is by no means a derivative writer, and none of the processes of 'borrowing' or 'influence' in *The Blind Owl*, observed closely, compromise his stature."[52] Moreover, because Hedayat is a writer who breaks with set patterns and negotiates between discordant generic models, his writing is "of particular importance to the esthetics of modernity."[53]

For some, the practice of searching out sources of influence can lead to a reductive understanding of the aesthetics of the work. As a writer with his own vexed relationship to Iran as well as to Belgium and Paris (where he regarded his own efforts to live, receive an education, and work as failures), Hedayat's exilic creativity has often been noted. Moreover, since Hedayat first published *The Blind Owl* outside of Iran, the book may be understood as being the product of an exilic imagination. This provides an interesting perspective, since it does not tie the novel down to a single, fixed tradition. As Beard has argued, *The Blind Owl* "puts into question the very notion of national literature."[54] Rather than diminishing his achievement in writing *The Blind Owl*,[55] I hope to expose the strange situation with which writers such as Hedayat are often faced. Having adopted certain generic constraints in order to reflect on both European as well as non-European forms and modes of representation, Hedayat's work is sometimes restricted to a single dimension of this complex enterprise by critical trends and modes of interpretation.[56]

Many critics have pointed to European and American authors that Hedayat read (mostly in French or in French translation) and by whom he was influenced.[57] They have noted literary precursors to Hedayat that include Franz Kafka, Rilke, Edgar Allan Poe, Jean-Paul Sartre, Gérard de Nerval, and E.T.A Hoffmann. Comparisons to such authors mark one of the many trends within Hedayat criticism, sometimes leading to the simplified perspective that Hedayat was basically a Westernized writer who imported foreign literary perspectives and styles to Iran. For example, Lescot, the French translator of the novel, describes the book as an example of "certain Iranian authors who, under the influence of the Occident, felt the need to liberate themselves from their heritage and accustom themselves to a more modern art."[58] As Andrianova argues, "It is difficult not to see in this comment covert signs of Eurocentric discourse to which the 'Other' is relational, which tells us more about 'l'Occident' than it does about the subject it purports to describe, and which, while ostensibly praising the 'Other,' manages to pay it a backhanded compliment."[59] This backhanded gambit concerning non-Western writers is variously played over the indebtedness of the achievements, cultural and literary, of these writers to "the West." This perspective reflects a prevailing ideology that ignores the complexity at stake in literary production.

Here we can see how easily the idea of influence goes awry in the practice of interpreting the work of an Iranian writer. The imaginary maps that separate the "Western world" and its sphere of influence from the "Eastern one" that absorbs this influence marks an imaginary cartography based upon the binary thinking embedded in orientalism. It is similar to the sort of reductionism that Edward Said criticized in his work *Orientalism*, and it demonstrates the problems of literary interpretation when it comes to understanding a work of literature from the Middle East.

Hoping to offset these trends, Andrianova argues for a mode of reading works such as *The Blind Owl* that would be neither exclusively Western nor non-Western, but that would find a middle way between foreignness and familiarity.[60] Yet even within this sensitive framework, the critic identifies ideas and tropes that seem to her to come from "the West": "Indeed, *The Blind Owl* starts to sound more familiar – that is to say, more 'Western' and 'European' – once we notice Hedayat's engagement with Gothic tropes such as entrapment, masochism, mystery, hallucination, unreliable narration, and the uncanny."[61] As surprising as it may seem, because such tropes are familiar to Western readers of the gothic genre, the critic sees their provenance as the West, the implication being that "the East" does not produce such tropes. This shows how easy it can be, even for a sensitive reader like Andrianova, to fall into the very groove that her critique seeks to undermine.

The difficulty with this kind of interpretation, although for the most part it seems sensible and even-handed, is that it tends to fall back upon the categories it means to undo. In other words, by seeking the true identity of the book somewhere between "East" and "West" (either substitutable for "foreign" and "familiar") it tacitly accepts the reality of the binaries in the cartographic imagination, while reinforcing the identity of these faulty categories.

Of course, this problem is not isolated to Hedayat's novel, but encountered wherever comparisons between "Eastern" and "Western" cultural productions are made. Beard has suggested that "once we begin to look at the treatment of the term 'West' in Middle Eastern writing, a kind of Heisenberg uncertainty principle enters the system. Our perception of the issue becomes part of the subject."[62] This word of caution is useful, taking into consideration the history of *The Blind Owl*'s reception.

In her article "A Comparative Post-Colonial Approach to Hedayat's *The Blind Owl*," Yasamine Coulter takes such binary thinking further by arguing that the novel is a reflection of intellectual colonialism of European thoughts, ideas, and styles in Iran. Premising this argument on the idea that the novel form is a Western product that has only recently been imported to the Middle East, Coulter sees the narrator as an orientalist and colonialist. Her reading emphasizes important aspects of the book, such as the jettisoning of tradition and the effort to find new art forms. Yet it fails to see these themes as part of the novel's reflection on the uncertainties of perspective and artistry. While the narrator's tone of superiority does share similarities with Edward Said's conception of an orientalist, they are not the same.

Coulter's main frame of reference is post-colonial theory, which she employs to criticize what she sees as the importation of colonial attitudes: "The narrator in *The Blind Owl*, because he voices his disgust for his fellow Iranians, therefore insinuates that he is a 'modern' Iranian, and it is evident that he is an Easterner who inadvertently strives to be like a Westerner [...] The narrator's behaviour parallels that of a colonised subject who desires to prove his worth by mimicking the colonial class."[63] But this conclusion neglects the real possibility that expressions of superiority, contempt, or racism in Iran may be tied to other influences and histories than the West. Coulter's reading risks reducing the social and cultural complexity of these ideological structures by mapping ideas of superiority and inferiority onto the framework of a limited and oppositional cartographic imagination. My own argument is that rather than a text that reflects colonial influence, *The Blind Owl* undermines the narratives of superiority and dominance that prop up such influences, and may therefore be properly called subversive.

In contrast to Coulter's findings, the second narrator's sense of superiority over the rabble does not simply come from "the West." Rather, it has a genealogy that gives priority to ancient pre-Islamic Persian culture. This involves an imagination of that culture as a high-water mark whose magnificence has since been eroded by the Arabs who brought Islam to Iran. Now, Coulter suggests that the narrator cuts himself off from traditions altogether.[64] Yet this is suggesting the impossible: that such a disavowal could ever be complete. Her suggestion is not confirmed by the text, wherein traditional Persian art forms are very much alive, from the artist's miniature scenes, to the painted vase, to references to Omar Khayyam's poetry.[65] In other words, traces of the disavowed past are preserved in aesthetic forms, even as social or religious forms are repudiated by the second narrator. Moreover, the second part of the narrative is set in a bygone era in the ancient city of Rey, far removed from the contexts of modernity, including the project of European imperialism (which occurred largely outside of Iran). Rather than proving the effective excision of the unwanted contributions to his culture, the efforts of the narrator to eliminate Arab influence demonstrate his own conflicted identity.

Yet the position of the author with respect to these influences is perhaps even more complicated. It is true that an orientalist tradition originating in the West sought to distinguish Persian culture from its Arab influences, and that Hedayat took up the mantle of this kind of thinking. Some critics, building upon Coulter's essay, have argued that like his narrator, Hedayat too was an orientalist.[66] Yet even beyond the problems already stated with deeming the narrator an orientalist, such arguments risk losing sight of the ironic distance between author and narrator.[67] Hedayat's sense of cultural superiority must be treated on its own terms by exploring the contexts of his writing through both the popular attitudes he shared in as well as the iconoclastic ideas he embraced.[68] My criticism of Coulter's reading of the novel is that it has a flattening effect on the dynamics of isolation and superiority exhibited by the narrator. It also fuels other binary narratives of Hedayat as an orientalist rejecting natives of Iran as inferior others.[69]

Such readings of *The Blind Owl* as Coulter's miss an opportunity to read the book on its own terms and understand the author as cultivating a complicated and flawed relationship to his world. Of course, both Hedayat and his narrator search for an unadulterated pre-Islamic culture of Iran that does not exist except in an imagined past. Coulter sees a dialogical relationship between "the West" and "the East" played out in the novel through the feelings of contempt the narrator expresses for his fellow Persians. But this is an interpolation. It is a globalized interpretation in the bad sense: it reduces the nuance of the original attitudes of the characters by reframing it onto salient cartographic binaries.[70]

East or West, Past or Present: The Imagination of Iran

Adding further complexity to the already difficult problem of how space is treated in the novel, time in *The Blind Owl* is out of joint. This introduces a layer of distortion to any discussion of the way time is imagined both within the novel and through its reception. There are distinct fictions about the past and the present that stem in part from grand historical narratives that were popular during the time Hedayat was composing his novel. These narratives included the picture of a romanticized past of pre-Islamic Iran, and a mouldering, decadent modernity of the present. The Iran of this present was imbued with a sense of moral decay, but also the drive to "catch up" with developed Western nations, politicized by Reza Shah's programs of modernization.

Hence, critics have long sought out ideas of modernity and modernization within the novel. Hedayat was, indeed, working to "modernize" Persian literature. Yet, at the same time, the book appears at a particular moment in Iranian history when there was a heavy symbolic burden placed on the idea of modernity. Often associated with the cultural and economic influence of Europe and the United States, the idea of modernity, even if a somewhat vague idea, is important to the way the novel is read and interpreted in Iran. To place Hedayat's aesthetic anomaly in its own historical context, it should be understood that he was looking for a way forward in modern Persian literature that dispensed with centuries of Arab and Islamic influence. As Nasrin Rahimieh has argued, Hedayat's rejection of the Arab and Persian Islamic cultural sources, while simultaneously looking to the West for sources of cultural innovation, reflects his contradictory ideology.[71]

The writer's disease, the germ of contagion long associated with the book, has raised questions about the source of this disorder. Sometimes it is discovered within the East/West binary, but given a developmental trajectory. A famous intellectual discussion of disease in Iran has had a significant impact upon interpretations of the novel because of similarities noted by some critics. This disease concerned the hegemony of Western influence within the country. *Gharbzadegi*, or "Westitis,"[72] was a term first coined by Ahmad Fardid in the 1940s and popularized by the important Iranian cultural critic Jalal Al-e Ahmad after the publication in 1962 of his book under the same title. Al-e Ahmad defines the idea as a kind of poisonous infection that comes from outside of the organism:

> I speak of "occidentosis" as of tuberculosis. But perhaps it more closely resembles an infestation of weevils. Have you seen how they attack

> wheat? From the inside. The bran remains intact, but it is just a shell, like a cocoon left behind on a tree. At any rate, I am speaking of a disease: an accident from without, spreading in an environment rendered susceptible to it. Let us seek a diagnosis for this complaint and its causes and, if possible, its cure.[73]

For Al-e Ahmad, Persian writers who laid claim to Western literary forms such as the novel have created a sense of distance from traditional forms, resulting in a disorder within Persian letters. He argues that the use of Western writing techniques, or the selection of Western literary forms, "at the same time as they indicate a new birth in Persian literature, have engendered a feeling of alienation."[74]

This notion of disease redefined Hedayat's reclusive writer's disturbed mental state after the fact, allowing readers to project this particular sort of illness onto him. Many readers of Hedayat see him as a writer who has succumbed to Westitis. Yet Al-e Ahmad himself, whose own reading of *The Blind Owl* is sympathetic and imaginative, did not accuse Hedayat of being under the spell of *gharbzadegi*. Instead, he remakes the book to suit a particular politics, reading it as a reflection of the anxieties of Iranians living under threat from spies and the secret police during the regime of Reza Shah. As he says, "*The Blind Owl* is the echo of a nation in a period of dictatorship" and "an indictment of the government of the day."[75] This political reading is useful in understanding what appears to be Hedayat's uneasiness with publishing the book in Iran under the Shah's regime.

Yet Al-e Ahmad does not conclude his interpretation there, but goes on to develop a rather fanciful portrait of the author. Al-e Ahmad, for whom Islam represented the major cultural expression in Iran that was not infected by *gharbzadegi*, ultimately fashions Hedayat as a believer in the soul, its immortality, and its resurrection.[76] Yet it is precisely this question of Hedayat's own attitude towards Islam that has generated significant critique, and upon which hinges the problem of understanding his incomplete repudiation of this part of his cultural heritage.

Racializations, Filial Foreclosures, and the Narcissism of Petty Differences

Hedayat's own perspective is marked by certain undeniable prejudices, and it is important to understand his own sense of identity, since it has curious reflections in the second narrator's position vis-à-vis Arabs and their influence on Persian culture. Whereas in the fictional character, ideas of superiority and exclusivity are ironic given his penchant for perpetrating violence and inspiring horror. Yet an author's relation to the complexes of his characters can be rather more problematic. In the late nineteenth century, Hedayat's great-grandfather was an intellectual support to the ruling class, being a tutor to the princes of the Qajar monarchy. The nostalgia for ancient imperial Persia as well as the romantic nationalism and the search for pre-Islamic cultural roots that went with it has been described by many critics as a "Western" project. This is how Hedayat was remade as a "Western" writer. Like any writer, Hedayat was affected by the ideologies of his time, yet the solitude in which he wrapped himself, and which he associated with both superiority and failure, inspired in him an idiosyncratic sense of malcontent that contributes to the more critical and ambiguous representations within his oeuvre. This accounts for why these critical representations exist alongside other works of unambiguous criticism that serve the function of anti-Islamic propaganda.

Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi has very effectively criticized what he calls the nationalist memory project in Iran. He claims that it was configured in the nineteenth century and informed by a "neo-Zoroastrian identiary narrative" that dated from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century seeking to "dissociate Iran from Islam."[77] As its momentum grew during the first half of the twentieth century, this project began to branch out, drawing upon racial theories that were then popular in Europe. As Tavakoli-Targhi writes, "informed by European fascism, racial and linguistic purity were the key elements of the national and cultural revivalism of the 1920s and 1930s. The enthusiasm for the 'renewal of ancient glory' (*tajdid-e azemat-e bastani*) was coupled with anti-Arab zealotry, a distinctly Iranian form of anti-Semitism."[78]

In Tavakoli-Targhi's view, Hedayat was very much part of this anti-Semitic fervour. His intention to represent the grandeur of the pre-Islamic imperial culture, while dismissing Arab and Muslim contributions to this culture, even insinuating that Muslim piety masked criminality, is, according to this view, clearly reflected in his writing. As he writes:

> The recovery of ancient grandeur and purity constituted foundational concerns for Sadiq Hedayat (1903–1951) and for many of his contemporaries. Informed by an Aryanized account of Iranian history, like other nostalgic nationalists of the 1920s and the 1930s Hidayat [*sic*] scapegoated the Arabs as the destroyers of Iran's ancient grandeur. He called them the corrupters of pure Iranian blood, who through miscegenation left behind "filthy Semites" (*kesafat-ha-ye sami*) who were held responsible for the dissemination of "cheating, treason, thievery and bribery."[79]

Hedayat's loyalty to the nationalist memory project and the narratives it produced aligns him with an exclusionary ideology with deeply racist undertones. This involved the attribution of undesirable characteristics within Persian culture to outsider influences. As Tavakoli-Targhi suggests, "believing in the original purity of Iran and the rationality of Zoroastrianism, like his protofascist contemporaries, Hedayat viewed the entrenchment of superstition in Iran as a product of Greek invasion, Roman proximity, Jewish migration, and Arab conquest."[80] Indeed, Hedayat's works like "Parvin, the Daughter of Sassan" and *Mazyar* are often cited as offering mournful depictions of the Arabs' defeat of the Sassanians, and the domination of Islamic, Arabic, and Arab traditions over the Indigenous culture of Iran.

Yet even as Hedayat wrote in the service of this nationalist memory project, this does not mean that Hedayat's writing may not slip out, at times, of its author's ideological bind. Indeed, it may do so implicitly or ambivalently, as some critics of *The Blind Owl* argue. Facing what Houra Yavari has called a crisis of self-identification, Iranians of Hedayat's time "turned to Iran's distant past to appease their sense of fragmentation through its perceived innate cohesiveness. The emergence and development of a nostalgic image of an idealized pre-Islamic Persia was a part of that identity construction."[81] With the events of the early twentieth century this nostalgic glorification of ancient Iran took on new dimensions. As she writes:

> Persia's glorified past – the illusory nature of which was to be revealed only later – had ... colonized the present of the period, and subsequently developed a quasi-religious status; one that carried with it the promise of redemption. The engagement of the intellectual elites of the period in a discourse of origins and centers was in line with the mostly philologically based orientalist enterprises of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[82]

In this sense, Hedayat's own romantically nationalistic perspective was not exceptional, but very much part of the currents in Persian literature at the time of his writing. As Yavari continues, "Hedayat and his contemporaries found themselves trapped between a past that they yearned to recapture and a present that they wished to change. Nostalgia pervaded the period's literature, both poetry and prose."[83] Yavari ultimately suggests that understanding the context in which the book was written is key to how *The Blind Owl* can stand as both the representation of this nostalgic nationalism as well as its critique: "published only a few years before the Allied occupation of Iran, the subsequent exile of Reza Shah (r. 1925–1941), and the symbolic end of a romantically nationalist phase in contemporary Persian history, [*The Blind Owl*] may thus be read not only as Hedayat's elegiac meditation on the glorified pre-Islamic past of Persia, but further as his rather jarring statement on the absurdity of its retrieval."[84]

Michael Fischer largely confirms Yavari's way of understanding this message. He sees Hedayat as making use of the past in order to critique the present. As he suggests, "Although decay and misery existed in the past as well, the past's beauty can flicker into life (like the narrator's fantasy about his wife's corpse); whereas in the present even the potential carriers and reworkers of culture (the narrator himself) are undergoing decomposition."[85] For Fischer, it is "the failure of the narrator to sustain this creativity which Hedayat bemoans."[86] Ultimately, he argues that "Hedayat's story is of a lover of Iran despairing over Iran's cultural decay, searching like an alley dog among the refuse for valuable tidbits."[87]

The Blind Owl, produced within a complex international context, has multiple cadences, characters that transform into others, and expressions of disavowal of sexual desires and sadistic impulses. It is a story about the search for a satisfying aesthetic-productive mode and sources of inspiration, yet it is also about the failures of a diseased mind caught in a space between writing and shadows. This position of disease determines the narrator's relation to the rabble, through which the Arab and the devout Muslim are derogated and despised. It would be dangerous to downplay the hateful attitudes of the narrators, but it would also be a simplification to identify the fictional perspective with the author's, however similar they may seem. It is quite a different matter to encounter an ideological position within a fiction than in the views of a historical person.

Ultimately, Hedayat was persuaded by popular racial theories and the ideology of the nationalist memory project, as Tavakoli-Targhi argues. Yet he was not exactly at home with demagoguery, and seemed to feel an increasing sense of repudiation and failure towards his experiences as a writer both in Iran and abroad.

The sense of futility with this state of affairs was not only reserved for the political situation at home, but increasingly as Reza Shah's technocratic and authoritarian regime drew upon the nationalist memory project, Hedayat seemed to grow more ambivalent about its foundations. As Hedayat was writing *The Blind* Owl, he was very much engaged with the project, having travelled to India for the purpose of studying pre-Islamic Persian literature. Yet his engagement with the new Iranian nationalism did not translate into his total adoption of the popular ideology laid out by Tavakoli-Targhi, neither in its connection to an Iranian memory in common with the Germans, nor in the thrall into which the fascist populists sent millions of Europeans. Even if he had implicitly accepted the nationalist beliefs about his Iranian racial and cultural superiority over Arabs and Islamic beliefs, he was not one to embrace the racist populism in Europe that drew upon these ideas while celebrating the heritage of the Aryans. It is telling that in 1937 Hedayat wrote in a letter to Mojtaba Minovi, saying "you're talking just like everyone else, that just because Goebbels describes Hitler as the genius of all times, everybody should believe it and praise Hitler. But I say, they should spit on the face of Goebbels and Hitler both."[88]

The Message of Kafka

All of the fantasies and false imaginaries built up around Iranian history and identity during this period are reflected in Hedayat's writing in the form of tensions that exist between worlds. For example, there are tensions between the imagination of history and that of the present, between dream and wakefulness, shadows and writing, criminality and art. These tensions are represented by Hedayat in such a way as to suggest to the reader the imminent collapse of one world under an extraordinary sense of pressure and the promise of another. It is with respect to this imminence that the influence of Kafka may be discerned in Hedayat's writing. Hedayat's admiration of Kafka is well known. Hedayat finds a source of inspiration in the Czech writer that clearly haunts his writing. Yet more is at stake in this encounter than a disinterested interpretation of an author's works or simply the influence of one writer upon another. Rather, there is a psychic and literary confrontation that reveals the slippery and ambiguous subversion in Hedayat's own work. Hedayat depicts Kafka as a fellow iconoclast and atheist. His love of Kafka reveals a wish to dissociate religious belief and ethnic belonging. He sees this dissociation reflected in Kafka because he feels him to be a kindred spirit. Hedayat's own repudiation of Islam and resentment of Arab influence upon Persian culture is part of what prompts his interested reading. If Hedayat read Kafka in a peculiar way; that is, if Hedayat saw in Kafka a fellow traveller even against certain conflictual evidence, in so doing he anticipates one of the major methodologies used to decipher his own writings. Hedayat writes:

> This world is not fit for living. It is stifling. That is why [Kafka] goes in search of "the land, and the air, and the law" which can accommodate a decent life. Kafka believes that this false, ludicrous, and hypocritical world should be destroyed and on its ruins a better world be constructed.

> If Kafka's world is adrift in futility, it is not to be embraced with open arms. On the contrary, it is a sinister world. One feels that Kafka has an answer, but this answer is not given. In his unfinished works the essence is not uttered.[89]

As Nasrin Rahimieh points out in "Hedayat's translations of Kafka and the logic of Iranian modernity," Hedayat translates Kafka's message into his own idiom, revealing how a dynamic and isomorphic process can pass under the aegis of what we normally think of influence to be, namely, a one-way street. Transforming both source and target material, Hedayat understands Kafka as saying that in order to make progress the world must be destroyed. The rupture that Hedayat says Kafka calls for seems to be an effect of his own desire replicated from his earlier work of criticism and interpretation on Omar Khayyam. According to Rahimieh, "In spite of vast differences between Khayyam and Kafka, Hedayat uses exactly the same language to describe their world views in his appraisal of their works: 'Khayyam wanted to destroy this ridiculous, sordid, gloomy and funny world and build a more logical one on its ruins.'"[90] Rahimieh sees the connection as stemming from Hedayat's own convictions, which he sees reflected in his literary heroes. For example, in seeking non-conformity in the writers with whom he feels kinship, Hedayat discovered in them a similar sense of anti-religious solitude to his own. Because Hedayat hated Islam and its influence in Iran, he interpreted Kafka as likewise harshly rejecting his Judaism. Yet what Hedayat could not see was that Judaism, which defined for Kafka a religious tradition as well as an ethnic and communitarian identity, could never be entirely renounced. Hedayat, who tried to renounce the Muslim heritage of his culture, was caught in an ideological fantasy that likewise could never be complete.

Moreover, Hedayat saw in Kafka a linguistic innovator as well as a literary one. As Rahimieh writes, "Hedayat is also sensitive to Kafka's mixed linguistic heritage in which we find a parallel to his own efforts to draw Persian away from its Arabic domination. He knew that Kafka's German was always set against Yiddish and Czech. Kafka's choice of language and literary heritage becomes yet another symptom of his alienation. Like Hedayat, Kafka had to find a new medium of expression for his literary creations."[91] Interestingly, Hedayat also discusses the difficulty of translating Kafka due to issues of style and rhythm. Yet we know that Hedayat read Kafka in French translation and did not have access to Kafka in the original German.

The style and aesthetics of *The Blind Owl* are subversive. This is why the book is so disturbing: anything truly subversive does not sit well or resolve its tensions but rather troubles and disquiets. Hedayat can be seen pushing against the stringencies and the censorship of Reza Shah's regime, which relied heavily upon conventional spatial and temporal binaries and promoted British and Russian economic interests in Iran. While Hedayat adheres to the nationalist fervour for a pre-Islamic Iran, nevertheless he creates a literary figure of monstrosity, which implicitly calls for a critique. Even his turn to ancient Iranian sources (undermined though it is by its romantic nationalism), reflected in the pen-case artist's search for inspiration, can be seen as a rejection of the imperial interests and influences of England and Russia. Moreover, the failure of this search, indicated by the artist's cracked consciousness, suggests the wider failure of such ideologically motivated quests for cultural purity and superiority.

Hedayat's narrators are monstrous representations and outgrowths of ideological nostalgia. The confusion inspired by their own misshapen family trees, the fact that they are neither fully present in any time or place, inspires them to search among the ruins of history for a principle of perfection and beauty upon which a new world might be founded. Yet the search is broken off, ending in failure, and resulting in the gory acts of violence that are repeated across the narrative. They are misanthropic, misogynistic, Islamophobic, and anti-Semitic. Their disorientation with respect to their filial relations provides an artificial prop for these attitudes. Justifying their exclusionary perspectives by virtue of a false sense of superiority and contempt, they are also condemned and transformed in the process. It is the reader's task to discover the failure of the process itself.

Hedayat's literary works may be both Eastern and Western. They may reflect a perspective with exclusionary aims, seeking to excise unwanted yet necessary influences, while also demonstrating the limitations of such perspectives. Rather than being modelled upon "Eastern" or "Western" literary precedents, *The Blind Owl* is a hybrid work of literature that transcends these precedents, creating the disorientation of the very binaries by which it has been defined.

Chapter Five

Orality and the Space of Translation in the Pima Ant Songs

How do literary works that represent spaces, especially contested ones, also become caught up within disciplinary spaces or get relegated to spaces of neglect? In chapter 3, I examined how oral and non-European sources of Ouologuem's pastiche novel, *Le Devoir de violence*, were overlooked as discussions raged on the subject of his European and American sources. This followed patterns of neglect for oral stories and sources in non-European languages more generally. In this chapter, I explore an oral Native American work of song, referred to as the Ant Songs, through the idea of its literary space. This must be understood in the context of institutional forms of omission in the academy. It is my belief that works of oral production are unjustly disregarded in literary studies, and that works like the song cycle addressed in this chapter can illuminate the contingency of the maps of empire that have come to inform even those works we regard as admissible and recognizable as literature, as well as help to define the national boundaries of the United States and its literary voices.

The work under consideration is an oral work that has been transcribed and presented as a work of poetic art in written form. This chapter assumes that oral works such as the Ant Songs have literary and artistic value. I believe they can be seen and read as contributing to a more diverse and complex understanding of world literature. The Ant Songs exist across a diverse set of media and cannot be attributed to any single author. I wish to consider why works of oral production like the Ant Songs have often been neglected by literary studies, raising questions about the mutual intelligibility of oral and written cultures, particularly in a settler-colonial context such as the United States.[1] In short, just as maps record territorial claims for posterity, writing carves out literary cartographies, leaving the less visible but highly dynamic topographies of orality stranded in literary limbo.

Addressing the difficulties that arise in the translation of works from an oral performative original into written English, this chapter showcases a work that challenges the norms of conventional literary scholarship and that has its own built-in topography that connects its poetics to the territories around the Gila River, which runs through present-day Arizona, the Northern Sonoran Desert, and beyond. In other words, the space described by the songs may challenge the maps of the American empire that overlay, and sometimes suppress, other understandings of this space. The fact that the Ant Song cycle is currently relegated to specialized ethnographic and ethnomusicological studies drives home the urgency of re-examining works that have a strong sense of belonging to language communities that have broader implications for epistemology, literary studies, and territorial forms of belonging.

The discovery that songs participate in poetic expression, or the idea that literary studies should consider oral, musical forms alongside written ones, is not a new idea. Songs and performances are some of the most important modes of expression for cultures around the world whose history has not been written down but entwined with oral expression and commemoration. In the latter half of the twentieth century, several Euro-American authors have acted as collectors, interpreters, and purveyors of the ethnopoetics of Native American oral works. Jerome Rothenberg, Dell Hymes, and Dennis Tedlock are prominent examples of scholars promoting Indigenous works that were traditionally expressed in an oral medium, into written English in poetic form. These scholars' work has allowed some Native American oral works to find a wider audience and garner critical attention. Yet such efforts have also been criticized, by Jace Weaver and others in the American Indian Literary Nationalism circle, as enriching American settler culture through its appropriation of Indigenous literary forms. While the arguments I make in this chapter risk the same problem, this effort is entwined with a reading of the Ant Songs as decolonial, as having a spatial dimension that interrupts and unsettles the cartographic imagination of American settler culture.[2]

The Ant Songs are considered social dancing songs, and are celebratory, as opposed to songs that are performed with a more specific purpose in mind (such as diagnosing or curing sickness, foretelling rain, etc.). They are accompanied by rhythm instruments, such as rattles, and are traditionally sung during all-night social events, with breaks for resting and socializing. The dancing takes place in circling lines of men, women, and children, who hold hands and stomp, moving in a counterclockwise direction as the dancing proceeds.

The Ant Song cycle that is explored in this chapter is made up of thirty-one songs, each of which is short, lyrical, and full of movement and emotion. It is an abbreviated performance that easily fits onto a thirty-minute cassette tape. Many contain spatial or topographical references to the area traditionally traversed by Native Pimas. They are the product of dream journeys and are said to have been composed not by humans but by spirits or human-animal hybrids. This leads J. Andrew Darling to argue that "song and power acquisition through dream journeys to spiritual places recapitulate travel and cosmo-geography and underlie the relationships between the ideology of travel and the actual trails that certain songs or song series may represent (or the journeys they entail)."[3]

The songs describe their own starting, and in the first songs, there are clear geographical markers to indicate where the first-person character represented by the song is located and where she is moving.[4] In fact, this movement renders a kind of topographical guide to the singers and audience of the songs, if they are familiar with the territory, indicating the mountains and rivers and fields that make up the region. The main character runs from place to place, has beautiful and painful experiences, and speaks to people she loves. As night descends in the middle of the cycle, there is the suggestion that she dies and becomes a ghost ("My heart separated dies [...] here I leave you, Eastward running [...] I'm Ghost Woman"). Yet she continues to move and run about, eventually encountering the space of the dance, where the wind recedes and she ascends into the clouds.

Attending to difficulties that arise for the translation of the Ant Songs in this chapter, I will use "the space of translation" to denote a set of processes that involve the transference of material not simply from one language to another, but between one culture and another, as well as between the modes of understanding and interpretation within the aesthetic frameworks at play between these linguistic and cultural contexts. The Ant Song cycle, like so many other works of oral production, tends to be sidelined by literary studies because of its non-conformity to the norms of this discipline. Yet for the same reasons, its study can raise awareness of the diversity of literary forms and media, including oral expression and recording technologies, and change our ways of understanding authorship and representation, as seen in chapter 3.

Ant Songs as Orature

A cassette tape recorded sometime in the early 1970s contains a performance of Andy Stepp and Claire Seota's rendition of the Akimel O'odham Ant Songs. These songs make up a single cycle of songs that are a form of memorialization, shared among singers, performed on special occasions, and passed from generation to generation. The tape, which seems to have circulated among several custodial hands in the northeastern reaches of the Sonoran Desert before landing in Donald Bahr's, is one of the primary texts informing Bahr's work *Ants and Orioles: Showing the Art of Pima Poetry.* His book, a mix of anthropological, linguistic, and literary methodologies, gives the strong impression that a great work of song is at stake here. Yet the performance on which his analysis is fixed becomes a supplement, an ancillary representation that emerges through an act of translation and interpretation.[5] I follow the Ant Songs passing through different media as they were performed, recorded, copied, exchanged, translated, interpreted, and translated again. In each of the moments of circulation and transference, the songs have a different impact and context, each of which illuminates particular formations of history and power that are essential to an understanding the life of the Ant Songs.

This is a life of metamorphoses. Richly layered, the work provides material for study on many registers, all of which need to be articulated along with the histories that influence and inform them. Yet problems of access, translation, and interpretation arise when we stop to consider who is reading it and in what contexts. The songs may be brought into classrooms for discussion, but the process of explication is different depending on place and audience. For example, in a classroom in the Gila River Indian Community, made up of Native Akimel O'odham students studying their cultural heritage, the songs would impart different impressions and meanings than in, say, a class of mostly non-Native students reading the work from a comparative literary perspective. In other words, contexts matter.

I myself am not O'odham. I came to study Akimel O'odham language and culture beginning in 2005 after striking up a friendship with Virgil Lewis, an Akimel O'odham elder who was living and teaching in Los Angeles at the time. I met him at UCLA through mutual acquaintances including Dr Pamela Munro and Marcus Smith who were working with Lewis on Akimel O'odham linguistics research and language preservation. Together with this group, I collaborated on a book project of a practical grammar of the language, *Shap Kaij!*, published in 2007 by UCLA Academic Publishing.[6] This experience directed my research on the Ant Songs to the Gila River reservation in Arizona for the first time, where Akimel O'odham is still spoken. I have Lewis to thank for introducing me to the Ant Songs, and for inviting me to his own group's performances of O'odham songs. His attentiveness to song norms has both inspired and informed the critical questions regarding translations I explore below.

Donald Bahr is a translator and interpreter of the Ant Songs. As an anthropologist, he has spent decades learning about the related cultures of Akimel O'odham and Tohono O'odham. In his book projects, he shares authorial credit with his Native informants. As far as Bahr knows, and as far as I have ascertained, the Ant Songs are no longer performed, but exist solely in the form of the cassette tape that Bahr received with a request for translation from a Catholic priest who did not personally understand the songs.

"Akimel O'odham" means the River People, referring equally to their language, culture, and community.[7] The Akimel O'odham, also referred to as Pima, are Indigenous to the region that is now southeastern Arizona and northern Mexico. A characteristic of the Ant Songs is that they follow a geographical itinerary with reference to particular sites and landmarks in traditional O'odham lands. This suggests an alternative topography, one of lived experience, traversed in communal memory and imagination. This may be contrasted with the cartography of the United States, which grew up out of agreements by people thousands of miles away from the region and imposed upon populations already living there. The first-person character in the songs describes their odyssey across this space as an experience in which they are subject to emotions and forces greater than him- or herself.[8] Thus, we hear that the main character is thrown about by the wind and by waters that spurt from below. He or she runs to and fro, eastward and westward, north and south, singing all the way. Women and birds, clouds and earth all seem to be engaged in a kind of frantic movement, and the character suffers the torments of dizziness, drunkenness, the loss of loved ones, bewilderment, and even death. Yet a strong sense of wonder emerges in the midst of the whirlwind in spite of the descriptions of being wrenched from place to place. Within the song cycle, the topography of the landscape is described in great detail, situating the unfolding experiences of the narrating character in a local territorial setting with which Native Pima listeners are familiar. It describes contours of mountains, wildernesses, flowering hills, the edge of the world, and movements in different directions. It also records the passage of time through changes in atmospheric and tectonic events, including the wind, clouds, a rainbow, and earthquakes. These details form the topographical and temporal dimensions of the song cycle and reflect the emotional states the main character is undergoing in these particular places and moments.

American Colonialism and Native Literature

In her book *The Common Pot*, Lisa Brooks takes a place-centred approach to studying Indigenous materials of the American northeast. Her method demonstrates how orature and poetry can act as political and legal documents. In the case of the Ant Songs, the geographical register traverses modern-day state borders between Mexico and the US as well as the disjointed boundaries of the reservations that circumscribe Akimel O'odham communities (including the Gila River and Salt River reservations). Thus, these songs could prove relevant for contemporary political claims to land rights in territories memorialized in the songs as part of the traditional world of the Akimel O'odham.

Brooks prioritizes Native voices, building on the decolonizing methodologies developed in the work of Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Approaching early Native American writing, Brooks argues that the stories contained therein can teach us about the epistemologies and place-worlds of the people who created these representations, including political, technological, and social responses they contain or suggest. As she says, "The more the early writings come to the surface, the more we can see the deep waters of this long-standing and intellectually potent tradition."[9]

I would like to bring Brooks's literary-geographical analysis to bear on the Ant Songs, while thinking about the changing contexts of the songs through their translation into English.[10] How can we understand the transmission of place-worlds (or topographies) between two languages whose speaker-communities are separated by a gulf in cultural understanding as well as by present-day cartographically inscribed borders whose demarcations were created during the history of American colonialism, including national borders as well as those circumscribing sovereign cultural and political spaces, such as reservations in the United States?

In his introduction to *The Raven Steals the Light*, Robert Bringhurst calls attention to the way territorial maps of conquest overlay and deceptively stand in the place of the conquered nations they encompass. He calls attention to "the white man's maps, where every islet and scrap of land, inhabited or otherwise, sits now in the shadow of somebody's national flag."[11] These maps rely upon the dominance of a limited cartography which ignores rights and claims to territory that preceded it. It also creates a palimpsest, not entirely unlike the kind of writing explored as palimpsestic in chapter 3, of cultural practices, territorial claims, and sovereign rights.

If works of orature like the Ant Songs provide alternative representations of place-worlds, through regional topographical references, these maps may be challenged on a number of levels, not least among them being political and aesthetic. As J. Andrew Darling writes, "through song performances social spaces are created in the form of journey imagery, which can be enacted in whole or in part on the ground by following well-used trails. In effect, certain song cycles act as a form of cognitive spatial geography."[12] This geography that makes up the itineraries of traditional Pima song cycles like the Ant Songs has been suppressed by their representation under somebody's national flag. Yet the space of these travels cuts across the Northern Sonoran Desert, reaching all the way to present-day California in the west. In other words, the region marked by the spiritual antecedents of the Pima in the songs is much greater than the small territories marked out as reservations. Moreover, present-day boundaries such as the border with Mexico interrupt the traditional movements reflected in song cycles such as this one, and are an important part of Pima oral history.

Bahr's translation is not just that of song words from Akimel O'odham into English, but also a translation of experiences, perspectives, and orality into writing. And it is important to note that the Ant Songs were recorded around the time when the American Indian Movement was gaining traction and demonstrations raising popular consciousness about the colonial history of Native peoples in the US were being held. When such a work appears in translation, what are the conditions it is exposed to? How is it read and interpreted? How is it categorized and periodized? Why has it been, along with other oral Indigenous works, marginalized, particularly as it is a work with important literary and political implications?

Power and Translation

The current parameters of the evolving canon of world literature are not highly amenable to including oral forms of cultural production. As Robert Bringhurst reminds us, "Canada and the USA, in spite of persistent attempts to define and describe and reshape them more narrowly, are richly polylingual, polycultural societies with ancient and indigenous foundations."[13] Taking aim at the continuing marginalization of Native studies, Brooks has called for an imaginative transformation of American studies and the cultural connections between the United States and Native literature and history. I would argue that Brooks's call is particularly urgent today in the United States. But her critique of American studies may be extended to world literature. Studies of world literature often crudely neglect major Indigenous writers, and when they are incorporated, it is usually through work originally composed in European languages.[14] Yet Indigenous voices from across the globe call for the re-examination of imperial histories and policies.

Recently, Chadwick Allen has proposed that Indigenous studies go global by developing analyses that cross cultural and geographical boundaries. Drawing on transnational cultural criticism, while interpreting works of Indigenous production, Allen offers a "trans-Indigenous" methodology that explores how Indigenous experiences in Native American and Australian Aboriginal contexts converge and deviate. Allen's research emphasizes that Indigenous works of orature like the Ant Songs must be understood both as coming from a particular cultural context, but also as a work in translation, open to new contexts and audiences.

When considering works translated from Indigenous languages into English, it is important to consider how translation itself is an uneven practice and can perpetuate the "inequality of languages."[15] Language inequality is not inherent, but emerges through a structural unevenness that helps determine what languages are translated and what languages they are translated into. These patterns of unevenness in the translation and dissemination of works, while tending to reproduce themselves, are not altogether static. Here it is important to consider how translations of songs from a Native American into a European language are loaded with historical weight, namely the imposition of violent forms of settler colonialism perpetrated by the latter community of speakers against the former.

Because English continues to have a hegemonic relationship to Akimel O'odham, the history of settler colonialism has an important relevance to the translation of the Ant Songs. Arguing that colonialism continues to influence modes of aesthetic valuation, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o writes:

> Aesthetic feudalism, arising from placing cultures in a hierarchy, is best seen in the relationship between oral and written languages, where the oral, even when viewed as being "more" authentic or closer to the natural, is treated as the bondsman to the writing master. With orality taken as the source for the written and orature as the raw material for literature, both were certainly placed on a lower rung in the ladder of achievement and civilization.[16]

In contrast with prevailing sentiments that an original text retains superiority over its translated versions, orality tends to be paradoxically considered less sophisticated than the writing it inspires. Hence, the written translation of the Ant Songs runs the risk of being seen as somehow superior to its oral counterpart. This would have the consequence of their poetic presentation in written translation (in Pima or English) eclipsing their modes of delivery and performance. It would also mean that any consideration of the original songs would seem superfluous, and by extension further engagement with Akimel O'odham would not be regarded as necessary to read and interpret the songs. Moreover, it would mean that the work of two Native Akimel O'odham singers would be overshadowed by a work of a non-Native ethnographer like Bahr. Such consequences of the bias against orature must be understood in the context of the history of colonial violence between Europeans and Native Americans that very explicitly targeted the language itself. The Indian boarding school program that began in the second half of the nineteenth century, in which Native students were cruelly exposed to a program of education that aimed to displace and erase Indigenous languages is just one salient example of this violent history.[17]

The written form, like the palimpsestic maps of the burgeoning American empire, was a highly visible counterpart to oral forms and their ways of expressing knowledge, experience, and belonging. Orality has been methodically delegitimized through the manifest assertion of visual forms of writing and mapping as authentic. These maps that determined how space was imagined also had very different consequences for the people who were subject to the colonization of this space. Yet orality has its own less visible ways of imagining topography, memorialized through stories and songs but realized through imagining space differently.

With this in mind, the recent critical concept of orature helps flesh out the stakes involved with reading the Ant Songs in translation. Orature originally emerged as a critical call for decolonization in African universities in the late '60s, originally coined by Pio Zirimu.[18] Emerging from this context, orature raises critical questions about translation, since it challenges the hegemony of writing over orality. Thus, it encourages scholarship to consider oral works on their own terms.

Akimel O'odham songs tend to be highly ambiguous in their syntax and semantics. The words they contain are made strange, sometimes becoming unrecognizable even to the singers themselves. Their oral dimensions include performative disciplines, idiomatic tokens, and ornamentations such as face and body gestures, rhythm and syncopation, instrumentation. They also may involve norms concerning the time of day and season of the performance, the intentions of the singers as well as the listeners, the gender of characters and singers, and the participation of the audience. Yet because Bahr was working from a cassette tape, and did not have direct access to Stepp and Seota's original performance, many of these elements are not discussed in his translation and interpretation. Because he could not access the original performance, but had to rely on the sound of disembodied voices coming out of a cassette player, and because of the time, space, and experiences that separated this non-Native translator from the Native performers of the work, intercultural transference comes deeply into play through translation and interpretation.[19] In the absence of the living performers, the voices echo back to the translator like ghosts from a machine, and like ghosts, their absence haunts the translation.

Indigenous Orality on and off the Reservation

Recent calls for Native literary sovereignty, which argue that Native peoples must reclaim their own literary territory, offer an exciting horizon for Indigenous works of orature, and demonstrate the extent to which context and audience affect the meanings and possibilities opened up in the act of interpretation. It also raises questions about the extent to which non-Native critics' engagements with such works has mirrored the history of colonialism.[20]

This history is reflected in the processes of extraction, translation, and transferral of authority in many works that are communicated to non-Native by oral, Native sources. Bahr's reception and translation of the Ant Songs is also a history of a non-Native author gaining knowledge, inspiration, and credit from a work of Indigenous production. But to think of the translation of the Ant Songs as simply replicating colonialism obscures the possibility of reading something else through them. I argue that the songs are an exceedingly complex site of contact and encounter where history operates as a condition for translation, but not its determining cause.

Sophie McCall's work offers a nuanced model for thinking about Bahr's text. Moving away from a strict Native/non-Native binary, she stresses how colonial dynamics involved in works of orature recorded by non-Natives become dense and intricately layered texts. Arguing against Jace Weaver's strong conclusion that Native American literary studies should turn away from such works of orature because "an attempt to critically engage with orature will necessarily lead to 'continuing colonialism,'"[21] McCall stresses the agency and authority of Native informants.[22] In other words, power is by no means a one-way street in collaborative narratives: "Power relationships are volatile and shifting, influencing cross-cultural negotiation in unpredictable ways."[23]

Power dynamics at work within written documentation of Indigenous oral productions thus do not resolve into clear-cut historical representations. Rather, as McCall suggests, these documents act as palimpsestic sites providing signals for how to understand the multiple mediators at work in the translation. Therefore, in approaching the relevance of a text like the Ant Songs to its oral antecedent, it is necessary to confront the ways in which the translation and interpretation of Native voices and expressions can go awry and lead to misappropriations across shifting historical contexts.

Ruth Benedict, an early twentieth-century ethnologist, illustrates the danger of this kind of transference, resulting in a disregard for their complexity. She studied Native American groups of the American southwest and the Great Plains, dividing them into two groups: Dionysian and Apollonian cultures (defining Akimel O'odham culture as Dionysian).[24] But it must be recalled that Greek culture embraces both. By domesticating and reducing the complexity of Native cultures in this way, Benedict's interpretive acts of transference perform a kind of subterfuge that allows Eurocentric epistemologies to ignore their own contingency and avoid introspection in the wake of colonialism.

Another early twentieth-century researcher exposes perhaps even more clearly the problems of cultural translation where intercultural transference is powerfully at work. This researcher, a collector of Akimel O'odham stories, J. William Lloyd, provides the following description of his process:

> My interpreter was eager and willing, and well-posted in the meaning of English, and was a man of unusual intelligence and poetry of feeling, but was not well up in grammar, and in the main I had to edit and recast his sentences; yet just as far as possible I have kept his words and the Indian idiom and simplicity of style. Sometimes he would give me a sentence so forceful and poetic, and otherwise faultless, that I have joyfully written it down exactly as received. I admit that in a very few places, where the Indian simplicity and innocence of thought caused an almost Biblical plainness of speech on family matters, I have expurgated and smoothed a little for prudish Caucasian ears, but these changes are few, and mostly unimportant, leaving the meaning unimpaired. And never once was there anything in the spirit of what was told me that revealed foulness of thought. All was grave and serious, as befitted the scriptures of an ancient people.[25]

Struggling with the incongruity of white American and Pima cultures, Lloyd censors the sexually explicit details of these stories, effectively flattening and sanitizing them.[26] In Lloyd's practice, as in Benedict's approach, we can recognize the sort of extractive practices of white American culture in relation to Native American cultural practice and production that have been widely criticized by Native authors.[27]

Lloyd's space of translation is quite complicated. His writing is meant to "cover over" or remap the oral original. The "ears" of his intended audience, his "Caucasian ears," are not hearing anything. Rather, they represent the aural justification for his suppression of the oral stories he himself heard with his own ears, words from the mouth of his "eager and willing" interpreter, Edward Hubert Wood, who was translating into English stories his grand-uncle was recounting for Lloyd. Thus, the aural metaphor of prudish ears is a metonym for the readers of the written record Lloyd took it upon himself to edit. Benedict's space of translation, on the other hand, maps recognizable categories onto oral cultures foreign to her, thereby domesticating them while also simplifying them and smoothing out irregularities. This "cultural" form of mapping is a familiar practice of knowledge production in settler colonial contexts.

Ethnographic accounts of non-written cultures from the mid-twentieth century tend to place a great emphasis on the technology of writing in the development of culture.[28] However, oral traditions in contact with written cultures challenge the definitive idea that writing is a superior mnemonic technology to orality. Accordingly Bahr insists that singing provides "the most rigorous way for oral peoples to memorize stretches of language."[29]

William Blackwater tells a story about Elder Brother, a figure in Pima mythology[30] who is both a kind of mischievous shaman and a creator, in which he re-animates a group of corpses that had been dead for so long that they had become skeletons and could not remember how to speak or where they lived. Cleverly, Elder Brother decides to give them ink and a writing pen, telling the skeletons, "This is the way you shall talk to each other." The skeletons wish to stay among the O'odham, but Elder Brother tells them: "No, I have given you a way to talk to each other. You must go to the east."[31]

Blackwater explains the meaning of the story as follows: "That is why whatever a white man hears, he can't put it into his mind. He can only remember it when he writes it down. Even when he sings, he has to sing out of a book."[32] According to Blackwater, writing is not superior to oral forms of representation because writing has to mediate between the voice, the mind, and the hand. In oral culture, the mediating supplement of the pen is superfluous. This not only shows orature to be a sound alternate to writing as a technology for memorializing cultural productions, but also offers a significant challenge to the widely held belief in written cultures that writing is a superior technology to the oral medium for recording cultural memory.

In discussing the relationship between orality and writing, it can be easy to make the mistake of seeing them as adversarial modes of production. Despite residues of colonial thinking that would suggest otherwise, orature and written literature are not aesthetic rivals. Christopher B. Teuton's work goes a long way towards a non-hierarchical relation between oral and literary objects of critical study. Unworking the associations that have come to attend the study of orality, particularly through the work of Walter J. Ong, Teuton offers an alternative to binary modes of thought that divide the world into oral and literate cultures.[33]

Moreover, defining cultures with reference to the modes of aesthetic memorialization that they employ ignores the complex interactions between orality and writing and between oral and written cultures. The history of settler colonialism in the United States has had a large part to play in the marginalization of oral aesthetic forms in Indigenous societies. Writing, considered the intimate property of the colonizing forces, came to dominate, just as maps redrew the complex set of relations between Indigenous communities and outsiders. The campaigns against Indigenous languages in the United States suggest that the state saw oral traditions as a powerful threat to its own sovereignty. Against these forms of thought, Teuton argues: "Oral discourse in Native novels ... may act as a critical intervention in a graphically dominated postcolonial context, offering models of how to engage and interpret the social narratives that affect characters and, by extension, readers."[34] I would suggest that this is also true of the oral "discourse" of the Ant Songs.

Dream, Cadence, and Ambiguity

Works of orature, then, are inseparable from their performance and ritual recitation in Akimel O'odham culture. Orally transmitted from generation to generation, the Ant Songs represent a collaboration of many more voices and individuals than those accredited by name. Yet these lines of transmission have been broken since it seems the songs are no longer performed. And their resuscitation through Bahr's translation does not so much mark a return or recovery than it raises questions about the gaps, losses, and alterations that the work acquires through its transformation into new mediums and forms.

Bahr's rendering of the Ant Songs is the result of a collaboration between himself, his Native informant Lloyd Paul, and the singers Andy Stepp and Claire Seota. Yet Bahr and the singers never met each other. In fact, the performers were dead before Bahr and Paul began the translating process. It is unclear why the songs were first recorded, but Bahr conjectures that they were recorded to preserve them.[35] The intermediary between the performers and the translator, the cassette tape, offers only clues to the meanings of the songs that can be conveyed through sound.

Because time and experience separated Bahr from the performance and performers of the Ant Songs, his engagement with them becomes a kind of supplement for an impossible recovery, a marker of loss as much as the discovery of a lost cultural heritage. The translation inevitably suffers from limitations imposed by the circumstances by which the songs came down to Bahr, just as the written form has a flattening effect on the multidimensional dynamics of oral performance. Yet a close reading of the translation will reveal it to be a creative as well as an interpretive act.

The Ant Songs are a kind of animal song, of which there are many in Akimel O'odham. Animal songs like the Ant Songs are held to be gifts from animal spirits to singers in their dreams. Such songs are "said to be aimed primarily at spirits. While humans listen in on them, this is incidental to their purpose."[36] If this is true, then they both issue from and are addressed to spirits; they make use of the medium of the singer's voice, but are not designed for our ears. Like Bahr, we are merely the interlopers of the songs. Issuing from dreams, they speak not to humans but to spirits communicating through the medium of the singer. Under such conditions, the singer does not exercise ascendancy over the voice that he recognizes as his own. He stands outside of its address. According to Bahr, the authors of these songs "are spirits, persons who come to people and accompany them in dreams, spirits because they are *met* spiritually. They live in the shadows and crannies of today's world, especially in the natural, wilderness world; and many if not all are said to have preceded the Pimas in this world."[37]

Bahr transforms the Ant Songs while also conveying something of their music, poetry, and cadence. It may be difficult for us to understand the meaning of every line, but as with any song, it is also important to grasp its musicality and broader significance. This presents challenges for interpretation. As Bringhurst argues, "reading works of oral literature is more like reading musical scores and narrative paintings than it is like reading books."[38] In order to offer as close a translation as possible, Bahr documents what he calls the steps of translating the songs recorded on tape, from sound parts into ordinary Pima, and then into English, and finally he manipulates both Pima and English so that the transliterations partly reflect the intonation and phraseology of the songs, "skewering" syllables to create a "shishkabob" structure.[39] This structure is highly visual. In order to demonstrate what is at stake in this structuring, I have placed Bahr's transliteration of a Lizard Song sung in Akimel O'odham alongside that of its English translation below.[40] The song was sung in both languages by Philip Lopez:

*	*
DAñegeWAI noMI ye	AI meLumineME e
dañegewai nomi ye	ai melumineme e
dañegewai nomi ye	ai melumineme e
dañegewai nomi	ai melumineme
cPI he dai wo ha so ñju	eNO ba di ka nduNEtin tu i
dañegeWAI nomi ye	ai melumineme e
dañegewai nomi.	ai melumineme.
*	*

Reading the transcription on the right-hand side (the second rendition), it may not seem immediately clear that it is in English. This is because the phonography has been altered to reflect the rhythm, stress, and intonation of the song style. The following is given in what Bahr calls "quiet translation," reflecting the song's meaning of the second rendition without the phonographic adaptation:

I'm aluminum.
I'm aluminum,
I'm aluminum,
I'm aluminum,
And nobody can do nothing to me.
I'm aluminum,
I'm aluminum.

As can be seen in the phonography above, the songs are not easily understood and interpreted. This is because, like the difference in English between the lines "ai melumineme/ eNO ba di ka nduNEtin tu i" and "I'm aluminum / And nobody can do nothing to me," the sounds of Pima songs do not always have one-to-one correspondences with normal Akimel O'odham words. While the disjunction between the sounds and the interpreted words sets Bahr's translation at a further remove from the songs and their performance, it has an important role in defining the unique aural and aesthetic quality of Pima songs.

In the course of his book, Bahr illustrates some of the difficulties of translating the songs from oral performance in Pima to written English.

In some of the most compelling moments in *Ants and Orioles*, Bahr registers the inadequacy of English to capture the full ambiguity of the original songs. For example, Bahr admits that "because the songs stand at a remove from the spoken native language, there is ... a problem of having something to be literal to."[41] While Bahr believes that their translation, however deficient, together with his criticism, can bring readers to a closer understanding of the aesthetics of the poetic oral tradition in Pima, he acknowledges that there are problems with the translation.

Bahr describes the frustrations of having to choose particular English words to correspond to the highly suggestive Pima song words, which it is important to keep in mind are not always clear. As Bahr writes, "the 'literal' word sequences are barely readable in English. *Maddeningly ambiguous,* they point in several connotative directions at once, and one can say that they point nowhere in concert, that is, they are not tuned to guide the reader to a particular reading of the poem."[42] This also makes things difficult for interpretation. Words and sentences are not always clearly recognizable. For example, extra syllables are often added to words, especially at the end of a phrase, so that it can be difficult to identify them.[43] The most conspicuous challenge of translating Pima songs comes from their strange grammatical complications and exceptions that do not conform to the normal rules of Pima grammar. With no direct access to the singers, Bahr's translation is a tremendously difficult task, given the transformations of sounds in a song, and the uncertainties that trouble a translator listening to voices that reach him through the medium of a recording across time and space.

Of course, then, there are issues with the process of translation and reception of oral works such as the Ant Songs. Yet such issues do not justify their neglect. Problems with translation and reception can arise in reading written works as well as oral ones. Facing the challenges that arise from the study of orality and orature enriches rather than detracts from any critical conception of literary production.

Signifying Ants

The question may be asked, why, precisely ants? When one thinks of song creatures, one may typically think of birds or crickets, but rarely of the small, industrious, and highly social insects that are at the root of the songs before us.

In his translation, Bahr is quite explicit about his interest in the mythic Ant-People who are supposed to be the originators of the songs;

this has an effect on the translation and lends it a lurid sense of both fascination and discovery:

> The Ants and the other song sources are not today's animals, etc., but are hazily ambiguous beings between today's animals and humanity. Psychologically they are like humans, but they are physically indistinct. When I once directly asked Paul what he thought the "Ant-people" looked like, he said, "like people but with big heads. He was more forthcoming in this remark than are the songs, which only use the word "ant" once (in song 29) and can hardly be said to dwell on antness. The "I's" of the songs, who must be taken as the persons who first enunciated them, are silent about their own physical appearance, but are quite free in telling about their interests and moods, which seem human.[44]

One of the main claims of Bahr's interpretation of the songs is that the first-person narrator in the Ant Songs is the voice of an Ant-person or spirit who visits the dreamer and makes a gift of the song. In the songs, we encounter this character in a number of states, conditions, and experiences. For example, we hear:

> 9. Bitter wind
> Here run up and
> Away far
> Take me.
> Poorly treat me,
> My heart separated dies.
>
> 10. Does your singing speak?
> I'm doing but dead
> And wander here.
> Long Mountain
> There manically calls
> Behind I circle,
> Suddenly dizziness
> Makes lines back and forth.[45]

According to Bahr, the first-person characters somehow "partake in antness." However, he readily admits that "the 'I' could be the dreamer,"[46] meaning the original Pima person who received the song in a dream. His argument is premised on three points. First, that the songs represent only portions of the dreams dreamt, for example only those moments when the Ant-person was singing. Second, that the psychology of the song is that of the Ant-person and therefore the language emphasized by the song is the language of another. And third, when a "you" is addressed, it is the dreamer who is being interpellated and this in terms of prophetic speech.

Bahr's interpretation that Ant-people are referenced by the first-person singular pronoun of the songs speaks to his desire to hear their voices, and perhaps also to speak their language. Through their songs, the ants cause meaning as well as mystery to enter the world. According to Bahr, the ants are mythological spirits that give rise to signification. In the somewhat opaque form of the song, a dream gift has been presented to the singer. However, this gift is something of a subterfuge, since as Bahr shows, songs are not only given by spirits but also addressed to them. The singer is a living medium, and her voice the vehicle of a conversation from which she is all but excluded, except in dreaming and singing.

When Bahr, faced with Paul's scepticism about his search for the ants in the songs, tenaciously maintains that "still, I hold that there must be something antish to Ant songs,"[47] should we follow him in this desire to identify their ant-character? And how does Bahr's desire for the spirituality of these mysterious signifying ants affect his translation? Bahr follows the Ant-people across the boundaries of Pima and English, orature and written literature, dream and waking life. The antishness of the Ant Songs, the condensed image of the Ant-people, who might look "like people but with big heads," is a lure to translation and dream interpretation proposed by Bahr.

Human-animal hybrids are commonly found in many native traditions of the Americas (and across the world). Discussing their appearance in stories and artwork of the Natives of the Pacific Northwest, specifically the Haida, Claude Lévi-Strauss writes that these beings, neither human nor animal, are both at once. He writes: "as the poet says, these beings cast upon us a familiar eye and take us back to the time [...] when animals could take on human form and knew the manners and the language of humans perfectly well."[48] These hybrids have a determining role to play in the history of people, acting out important events in their early history or even, like the Ant-people, during creation.

Given Bahr's keen interest in the Ant-people of the songs, it seems quite surprising when he writes: "Paul and I have not heard any myth about ants or Ant-persons."[49] Only a couple of years later, Bahr would publish his *O'odham Creation & Related Events*, which mentions ants or hybrid human-ant characters several times.[50] Moreover, in Pima stories of creation the very first terrestrial creatures created by *Juvet Maakai* ("Earth Doctor") (the primordial creator of the first celestial bodies and living beings) are ants. Their existence even predates the formation of the sun.[51]

Ants play an important role in the mythic imaginary not just in Akimel O'odham culture, but in Native cultures of the American southwest more generally. Depictions of Ant-people are widespread across the southwest in caves, on pottery, and textile work. Hopi, Navajo, and Apache communities share stories about Ant-people.[52] While the stories are not all the same, it is significant that these characters make appearances across lines of cultural difference.[53]

Thematically, the early parts of the Ant Songs portend some of the darker and more dreadful aspects of the whole. Yet, this part retains an overall theme of flourishing growth, of flowering, even if strong winds and spurting waters augur the death and decay of the narrator. This can be seen in the following two non-consecutive verses from the songs:

4. Westward the world flowers,
Westward the world flowers,
And I run through.
Everywhere flowers,
The here below
Lying world manic flowers.

8. Broad mountain stands.
There below, waters primed to spurt.
And I below there go,
On stick's end cling:
Stick glitters,
Then enter.[54]

In these moments, it seems as if the narrator is as substantial as a seed, tossed about by the forces of nature. The experience of clinging to a stick to save oneself from waters spurting up from below recalls the story of the flood in Akimel O'odham mythology, in which Earth Doctor directed the animals to save themselves by climbing onto drifting logs.[55] In these early songs (songs 2–3) there is little to prepare the listener for the coming anguish and decomposition. The flowers in the next song are still green, and the itinerant movement of the song is westward. Yet there are clues that things will soon become increasingly rotten. The central themes of the Ant Songs seem to be dread and vexation, or in Bahr's words, "hostile," "terrible," and "morbid" truths.[56] Bahr categorizes the parts of the songs into three main groups characterized alternatively by manicness, dizziness, and death.

Finally, he interprets one of the last songs as "a plea, or a taunt, for the art,"[57] arguing the song has a self-referential quality. He translates this song as follows:

I'm sick,
I'm sick,
Land below wandering.
In it my flower,
Already dead.
Oh-oh, oh-oh,
I'm sick,
East toward
I run.[58]

The topography of Akimel O'odham land is suggested here, but there is also the powerful presence of death and the abstraction of space. Bahr suggests that the narrator's flower may be a reference to the songs themselves. If this is so, then the easterly direction to which the "I" seems irresistibly drawn may portend the destiny of the songs to die, whether through forgetting or through abstraction in writing, destinies that are perhaps suggested in this expression of anguish. And perhaps if it were not for the recording device employed by Stepp and Seota, the songs would, indeed, have died.

Yet to read this song less metonymically, the now-dead flower could also be a reference to the flowers that come up earlier in the song. A word that repeatedly appears in the songs is transcribed by Bahr as "*wa:m.*" This word becomes something of a refrain, especially when the first-person character sings of their anguish and where dreadful experiences are foreshadowed. Bahr translates this word as "manically," and says that "*Wa:m*, an adverb, means that someone is doing something 'excessively,' 'too elatedly,' 'too overbearingly.'"[59]

Yet when I consulted Virgil Lewis about this, he felt that the use of *waam* in the song was quite odd, suggesting both that it seemed out of place and that it was not what he thought of as a song word. Besides, the sound "*w*" usually sounds more like a "*v*" in Akimel O'odham pronunciation. Is it possible that Bahr, transcribing the songs from a cassette tape, misheard this word?

Bahr admits that according to his interpretation of song 3, "the word itself [*waam*] is unnecessary."[60] This seems like a very strange statement to make after Bahr has already emphasized the rigorous usage of language in the songs. O'odham songs provide, as mentioned above, "the most rigorous way for oral peoples to memorize stretches of language,"[61] being works of collective memorialization in their crystallized form. Furthermore, in this case (and at several other points in the song), Bahr translates the adverb as the adjective "manic," in order to make the word fit better with the sense of the lines.

Lewis suggested the possibility that instead of *waam*, the word sung may have been *'uam.* In Akimel O'odham, *'uam* can carry several meanings which would fit in the different positions where Bahr has *waam.* It can mean "yellow," (Mathiot),[62] "soiled or dirty; polluted; vile,"[63] or "nasty." At different times in the song, the singer uses this word to describe the song, its telling, and the flowers that grow all around Greasy Mountain. Given that the song is about very unpleasant experiences – being stripped away by the wind, having one's heart die, dying, parting from one's loved ones, running from arrivals to departures, getting sick, going crazy (*nod:agig*),[64] unbearable feelings, and so on – it does not seem far-fetched to say that if we take the emotions it evokes as centrally descriptive, that it is a *'uam ñe'i*, a nasty or vile song, or at least a song about nasty things.[65]

Furthermore, *'uam s-hiosim*, or "yellow flowers," seems to make more sense than "manically flowers," especially since in an earlier verse, the song has already called attention to the colour of another set of flowers, *cehedagi hiosig*, or green flowers. In the spring, bright yellow flowers, including yellow poppies, do in fact grow all around the area surrounding Greasy Mountain, a sacred site for the Pima (also called South Mountain). The fact that much of the song is concerned with organic growth, decay, and death could account for that change in the colour of the flowers from green to yellow, also suggesting a movement from new growth to the bloom of life (and anticipating the movement to death and decay).

This reading would open the possibility, without foreclosing the interpretation given by Bahr, that the song's *'uam*-ness foreshadows and expresses the experiences of the "I" character. This would untangle the knots of Bahr's interpretation where he tries to categorize the Ant Songs based on his tripartite schema of manic, dizzy, and death songs. The early songs that Bahr feels are manic may just be foreshadowing the nature of experiences to come in the later songs. It would also account for why the word Bahr hears as *waam* also shows up in some of the songs about going crazy and dying. Finally, this would mean that to Bahr's contention that "later songs 'answer back' to discontiguous earlier ones" would have to be added that elements of earlier songs also foretoken later songs.

These kinds of questions demonstrate how the translation leads us back to the original language. Moreover, they emphasize the way oral forms, by way of their transliteration and translation, are open to misfirings and misrecognitions. Bahr's work on the Pima Ant Songs is a profound effort to engage in a literary translation of orature. It demonstrates the porous texture of such a translation and illuminates the impossible horizon of translating orature and, at the same time, the value of efforts to do it anyway. The influence of historical and political factors on a translation, the media through which it passes, as well as the translator's own cultural perspective all contribute to this texture. We can gain a great deal from reading the slippery and sticky palimpsests suggested by the translation of the Ant Songs. Perhaps one of the most important lessons this can offer is that there is no final or authoritative version of a translation. Singers participate in creative performances and adaptations, disseminating the work that was authored within a dream. This challenges us to think about authorship differently than we might be used to. Rather than having a single source, the Ant Songs have multiple sources and different adaptations, and these can change over time.[66]

The orality of the Ant Songs contributes to a critical set of questions about conventional and received ideas about authorship. Instead of insisting upon the notion of an author as the singular originator of literary works, it may prove more fruitful to explore creative production as a process that never exactly has a single root or medium. This can also be seen in the foregoing chapters and their examples of literary influence, forgery, and pastiche. Rather than conforming to prevailing practices that insist a work is the sole product of its progenitor, whose personal genius is reflected in it, my reading of the Ant Songs stresses the communal and ambiguous elements of the creative process. Recall the Benjamin quote, cited in chapter 3, that the works of art that we value most highly "owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries."[67] Literary studies should not forsake this insight, nor the insights that can be found from examining orature. Rather, it has an opportunity to incorporate it into a more nuanced and complex understanding of creative oral production and its place in the world.

An unexpected twist of Bahr's translation is that it led to yet another translation, this time from English to English. Dave Bonta, a blogger, has taken parts of Bahr's translation (songs 21, 22, 28, 30, and 31) and rendered it anew in a more classical poetic mode. Alluding to his process, Bonta says: *"Bahr's detailed commentary gives the patient reader sufficient tools to turn his transliterations into something resembling poetry."*[68] Interestingly, where Bahr translates the exclamation "*haiya*" as "oh-oh," Bonta reinserts the sound quality of the original cry: "*ai-ya.*"

Bonta's attention to reworking the songs' translations (even apparently without a working knowledge of Pima) is an example of how orature is not an artefact frozen in time but continues to be part and parcel of our contemporary moment and its new technologies of transmission. As in the case of the Ant Songs, translations can end up passing through a cornucopia of media and interlocutors, becoming infused with holes, musings, associations, and play along the way.

While offering non-Native speakers an opportunity to destabilize and unlearn any notions that they may have that there is anything "primitive" about oral cultures and orature, the translation of the Ant Songs also demonstrates an appeal that crosses contexts of topographies and audiences. Many aspects of the Pima Ant Songs remain untranslatable. Their translation highlights the effort within a literary form to capture the rhythm and poetry of the songs. Yet readers have to keep in mind that the idea it does offer remains incomplete. Given that this untranslatability unfolds across a complex history of erasure and power dynamics, the study of the Ant Songs can have a significant impact on literary studies and ways of mapping imperial spaces. The space of movement represented in the Ant Songs is different, older, and more embodied than the maps of American settler society that chart these spaces as the borderlands between Arizona, California, and Mexico. These relatively new borders limit traditional itineraries both imagined (in the Ant Song cycle, for example: the dancers and singers do not actually follow the itinerary described by the song, although they would have known how to) and real, as in ancient habits of crossing these spaces for myriad reasons, including the visiting of relatives in the north or south, or collecting salt from the salt flats in Baja California. Given that anti-imperial and post-colonial scholars of literary studies have focused on parsing out the histories and legacies of Eurocentric epistemologies, more introspection remains necessary. Critically confronting the neglect of orature within world literature demonstrates not only the graphocentric world view that underlies it, but also the need to think otherwise. Less visible topographies can and should be seen to challenge the maps of empire that assert themselves as the paradigm that organizes literary space and our imaginations.

Decolonizing Literary Space

> Sometimes, by taking up the problems of the Other, it is possible to find oneself ... Because the thought of errantry is also the thought of what is relative, the thing relayed as well as the thing related. The thought of errantry is a poetics, which always infers that at some moment it is told. The tale of errantry is the tale of Relation.
>
> – Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*[1]

In the process of its composition, dissemination, and reception, does literature create a particular kind of space, whether real or imaginary, around itself? And if so, what sort of space is implicit in the idea of a "world" literature?

In this book, I have engaged with literary space as a critical mode of understanding the way the world is divided, and how literature is unevenly distributed across its divisions. My focus has been on the period of the mid-twentieth century, at a moment when imperialism was unravelling on a grand scale. As movements for nationalization and liberation were spreading across the colonized world, they gave rise to reappraisals in the cultural sphere. Among the questions raised in this process was how their experiences struggling against oppression might relate to one another, across different spaces and experiences of colonialism. As newly liberated states came into being, the geography of the "world" as a set of spatial representations and relations also had to be challenged. And as this representational form of the world was undergoing transformation, new rubrics also emerged for reading world literature.

I have focused on works that engage critically with imperialism through its settler-colonial, extractive, and neocolonial forms. The works I have explored in the preceding chapters lay claim, from the segmented literary spaces of colonialism, to ways of writing often associated with the colonial metropole (such as the use of modernism in chapters 2 and 4, or the use of postmodernism and pastiche in chapters 1 and 3). In the last chapter, the translation of an oral work of song was shown to challenge settler-colonial maps as well as conventional understandings of literature and authorship. These works reshape and repurpose writing styles, interrupting received conceptions about authorship, and offer possibilities for thinking otherwise than through the status quo. They challenge the generic partitions between older European forms and media and more recent innovations and subversions from the colonized world. Furthermore, there is no reason the study of literature cannot be integrated with non-written orature (such as in the way Laye and Ouologuem incorporate orality in their works, discussed in chapters 2 and 3, and the Ant Songs in chapter 5) to develop a much richer and diverse world literature.

The literary imagination creates feedback, critical and affective, between the world of the work and those who experience it. Bringing works that reflect on different regional colonial histories into relation with one another, my book has considered the challenges facing authors in the shared moment of the mid-twentieth century. By concentrating on the figures, expressions, and poetic modes of these works, something comes into focus about how literary space may be contested and reclaimed. These pieces all have a life outside of the written text, connecting them with other cultural productions, and drawing them into a complex network of poetic relations. My attention to the "literary space" of these works allowed me the two-pronged approach to the space of the text and the worldly space of interpretations and criticism outside the text.

These works emerge into oppositional contexts and give rise to debates on Eurocentrism, authorship, literary influence, provenance, and the space of literature. These debates demonstrate the challenges these works face with respect to their categorization in any pre-established literary place or genre. Each of the works enacted different forms of subversion. In the first chapter, orientalism is the main object of subversion, with implications for nationalism and the superiority of the state. In chapters 2 and 3, I focused on works that effected subversions of publishing markets and forms of colonial authority. In chapter 4, the supremacy of an ethnic identity comes into friction with the monstrosity of the central character, creating an experience of repulsion in the act of reading that undermines readers' libidinal investments in his character. In the last chapter, the Ant Songs were read in the context of their possible subversion of American settler cartographies and epistemologies. These subversions are not of the same kind, nor do they operate at the same level. Yet they help call attention to the maps of empire and different strategies to redraw or elide them.

The liberation movements of the twentieth century helped produce a shared sense of solidarity across historically and geographically different contexts and experiences of colonialism. Such broad-based collective affiliation remains intact in many forms and may be seen as reconfigured in recent discourses around the "Global South."[2] While there are important differences between the impact of cartographic imaginaries in Iran, Palestine/Israel, West Africa, and the United States, there is also much to be gained from considering these contexts in conjunction. These representations offer a topography of the shifting imaginaries at the twilight of colonial empire.

Mappings of the Global

Just as world literature provided an impetus for the remapping of national literatures, the post-colonial moment creates new structures for reframing world literature. The notion of global literature and new modes of reception (e.g., through networks of digital transmission) will continue to affect and alter how works of literature are received. The idea of the global is an increasingly trendy way to reframe and remap literary studies. My attention is particularly drawn to this as someone who teaches literature in a Global Studies program.

The world itself, whether conceived of as an international milieu, a planet, or a globe, may be more realistically seen as topographical, relational, and in flux than as a strictly mappable entity. Pictorial and cartographic models of the world are composed of lines that run flat. Today, rewoven to fit a spherical form, the lines become skewed to reflect the non-linearity of the globe, and in addition to national borders attention has been drawn to the surfeit of networks woven between them.

The impact of these changes is highly significant for literary studies. With the development of world literature and, most recently, what some writers have called "global literature,"[3] the way the world is spatialized and popularly imagined deeply affects issues of context, dissemination, and reception. Just as, according to Pascale Casanova, "literary authority and recognition – and, as a result, national rivalries – came into existence with the formation and development of the first European states,"[4] the reconfiguration of global space changes how relations of power are conceived in literature. Taking on increasingly geopolitical implications, world literary studies must come to terms with its newly reorganized topographies, even while it remains haunted by cartographic signs and symbols.

In her recent work on the effects of globalization on the humanities, Gayatri Spivak considers this new cartography of the global and contrasts it with what she calls the planetary. She describes what she sees as a problem with the contemporary obsession with discourses of globality in the following terms:

> Globalization is achieved by the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere. It is not too fanciful to say that, in the gridwork of electronic capital, we achieve something that resembles that abstract ball covered in latitudes and longitudes, cut by virtual lines, once the equator and the tropics, now drawn increasingly by other requirements – imperatives? – of Geographical Information Systems. The globe is on our computers. It is the logo of the World Bank. No one lives there; and we think that we can aim to control globality.[5]

Spivak's vision of electronic capital, redefining forms of financial exchange, racing along lines made up of fibre optic cables, within electronic information systems of virtual exchange, is a dangerous figure. The global always seems to raise the spectre of the same abstractions and erasures that older cartographic models of space created. The main factor that differentiates the two is speed. The global implies the movement of information, goods, and people at high velocity. Yet it is the very replication of the older cartographic structures, stretched over a spherical canvas, that lulls us into imagining that these virtual technologies, with their mapping and security systems, represent something new or that it can be kept under control. Globalization creates peripheries that are both contingent and dependent upon metropolitan centres, distinguished from them by the quantity of their amassed capital. This kind of unevenness does not make for an equal playing field for the study of literature. Yet by thinking in opposition to the uneven structures that operate within the economic regime, there are ways to understand literature without excluding the so-called peripheries. Writers and artists are always responding to the misconceptions of power that exclude or dismiss them. For example, we can see new forms of friction, reflection, and subversion of historical forms of dominance and oppression in works of decolonial fiction, such as those works addressed in this book.

The global market plays an important role in organizing the space of world literature and the fields of study around it. As the process of globalism develops, forms of communication and information join in the commodification process and require circulation just like material goods. Not surprisingly, these forms, including literature, often circulate in the same economic networks that have been developed and secured by material-capital exchange markets. Under the broad rubric of the global, these networks generate new peripheries that become increasingly neglected and opaque. Globalism in this sense is eminently relevant to how works of literature are imagined, evaluated, and disseminated.

Thus the global, as a new way of charting space, employs its own cartographic imaginary, one in which ideas, people, and things circulate at ever-increasing rates. The lines of transmission drawn by it are not only those of actual borders (national and economic), but also the vectors signalling various flows. The built-in demand for efficiency suggests that these vectors should represent the shortest distance between two points. The historical flows from "periphery" to "centre" are not eschewed. Within this framework, literature itself must be made to conform and speak to a certain established cosmopolitan standard. The global tends to naturalize and fix boundaries while flattening the layers and contours of territorial space onto the surface of its spherical shape. The works from the mid-twentieth century that I read in this book, produced at a time when the hegemonic world view of colonial imperialism was crumbling and that of globalization was ascending, never seemed to find a secure and stable place in the corpus of world literature. Yet they may be able to illuminate those problematic aspects of world literature that are reasserting themselves now that scholars find themselves pressured to rethink their work in terms of "the global." They open up a discussion about spatial logics of literature that are reasserting themselves around these pressures to consider the "global context" of literary studies.

If there is such a thing as a global system of literature, its material archive is deeply marked by the European Enlightenment project, with its roots in the early colonial period. Casanova posits a global system of literature, whose broad field of reference includes literary discourse, translation, reception, and recognition. Prizes, publishing houses, marketing centres, cinematic adaptations, and book reviews all represent nodes within this global system. The system she refers to is still grounded in a network dominated by European cultural institutions of literary recognition and all of the works she considers in her book are European literary productions. Yet within this system, the various forms of recognition distributed from its centres have wide-ranging implications for how unbalanced and uneven it has become. In other words, the effects of globalization are neither emancipatory nor palliative for literary studies. Economic inequalities are translated into obstacles to dissemination and access.

As an antidote to the false inexorability of the global, Édouard Glissant depicts the universe as relational in its very essence, stressing the contingency of history and suggesting the advantages of struggles for diversity within literature and literary studies. Glissant demonstrates that alongside overt political struggles against colonialism and its residues, literary and symbolic efforts may also be necessary to contend with the hierarchies that remain alive in the post-colonial world. Because literature and poetry are not the sole property of any centre or metropole, Glissant suggests that by their very nature, they are part of the connective tissue that makes up the diverse and relational fabric of the world.

Decolonizing Literary Space

The Native American, Middle Eastern, and African works explored in this book have challenged the vestiges of a cartographic imagination that are still present as new designations of cultural space emerge. Considering the transformation of space in representations and readings around the events of liberation from colonial rule, this book has sought to ask whether we may be able to understand the ambiguous questions of territory and identity as ideas haunted by the nation form and colonial histories.

As I was writing this book, I found myself preoccupied by how many post-colonial critics have found it useful or necessary to reconfigure or complicate spatial models in the process of thinking critically about relations of power and identity formations. Simon Gikandi, Lisa Brooks, Chadwick Allen, Steven Salaita, Wai Chee Dimock, Gayatri Spivak, Anna Tsing, Pheng Cheah, and Edward Said are just a few examples of critics whose work has been important to my thinking here. The uneven relations between imperial powers and their so-called peripheries that were set up during colonialism are neither natural nor necessary. Even if, as Gikandi suggests, the old spatial configurations of the colonial era have now given way to uncertainties about how to deal with the growing complexities of post-colonialism, there remain dangers that the cartographic logics under colonialism will reinstitute themselves in new forms.

In an age of digital technologies and globalization, the ubiquity of maps, in GPS tracking devices and Google Earth systems for example, has been accepted as a part of life. We are mapped by the data we produce for others, from the tracking of our purchases to the places we travel. As Anders Engberg-Pedersen suggests, "we live the map."[6] The topography of world literature is not simply a continuation of these logics, but rather a way to explore literary space and imagination in a more textured and complex way. By attending to the textures and relations in a topographic analysis, readers are offered a more extensive exploration of networks of readerships, intellectual and activist solidarity formations across media, and new constructions of decolonial struggles.

One thing that has become clear in the twenty-first century is that the period of liberation movements across the globe, holding great promise for the new national formations, did not do much to stymie the disparities between those historically enfranchised and disenfranchised. As long as European writing is seen as the primary source code for regional forms of writing from formerly colonized places and peoples, even those that directly address European ideas, forms, and genres, the norms and perspectives that see literature as a European precedent will be reinforced rather than challenged.

This book has explored how residual forms of imperialism become coded in the space of the world around us and in diverse forms of literary representation. I have been occupied with texts that are hybrid, that are modern and potentially decolonial, that face pressures and expectations from publishers and readerships to fit into a mould to which they do not entirely conform. This is rooted not simply in "anxieties of influence,"[7] but rather in a much more complex set of strategies for creating and recreating possibilities for literary space. This means returning again and again to the difficult work of reading this space, by exploring the maps and networks that have become overlain and confused with territories of encounter and transformation that challenge us to think otherwise.

Notes

Introduction: Cartography and the Space of World Literature

1 Borges, *Collected Fictions*, 325.
2 The same theme is explored in Lewis Carroll's *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, in which the scaled map is never unfolded.
3 Branch, *The Cartographic State*, 3.
4 For example, see Avtar Brah's *Cartographies of Diaspora*. Brah offers a very readable cartography of the politics of intersectionality, exploring how gender and race may relate to oppositional politics. Yet her argument hangs upon the very mode of representation, the map, in which intersectional identities are made representationally static rather than interrogative.
5 For an exploration of the development in cartographic representational forms during Spanish imperial expansion, see Padrón, "Hybrid Maps."
6 Highfield, *Imagined Topographies*, 4.
7 The phrase is from Bill Ashcroft's study of post-colonial literature, *The Empire Writes Back*.
8 Habībī, *The Secret Life of Sa'īd: The Pessoptimist*, 101; [130].
9 See chapters 3 and 4.
10 Thomas, "African Cartographies in Motion," 313.
11 Ibid., 303.
12 Dünne, "Map Line Narratives," 361.
13 Mufti, *Forget English!*, 245.
14 Said, "History, Literature, and Geography."
15 Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, 4.
16 Said, "History, Literature, and Geography," in *Reflections on Exile*, 471. Critical geographers like David Harvey have made the raising of this consciousness part of their intervention in socio-historical thinking.

17 In spite of this, important arguments suggest older conceptions of world literature going back to antiquity (see Kadir, "To World, to Globalize"; Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*).
18 Goethe, *Conversations of Goethe*, 165.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 160–8.
21 Bermann and Wood, *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*.
22 In the course of the famous passage, Goethe facetiously derides the Nibelungen, the German epic with oral roots, pointing out that it should not be considered a source of inspiration for fellow German writers who embrace the horizon of world literature.
23 Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*.
24 For an inquiry into the practice of "worlding" in literary studies, its practitioners, and its implications for power relations in the twenty-first century, see Kadir, "To World, to Globalize."
25 Turchi, "*Maps of the Imagination*," 37.
26 See Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*.
27 Kadir, "World Literature," 295.
28 Ibid., 304.
29 See Radhakrishnan, *Theory in an Uneven World*.

1. A Portmanteau of the Nation in Imīl Habībī's *The Pessoptimist*

1 Maps are still produced today that ignore the reality of the state of Israel. There are also maps that represent "Eretz Israel" as erasing the spaces of Palestine altogether. Such problems of territorial representation have supplied titles with allusions to the potential harm of cartography to recent anthologies of Palestinian writing in translation, such as *Victims of a Map* and *A Map of Absence.*
2 See Mitchell's reading of the photograph by Jean Mohr in his *Landscape and Power*, 27–30.
3 See Weizman, *Forensic Architecture.*
4 The United Nations Conciliation Commission estimated the number of those who fled to be over 700,000. "U.N. General Assembly Official Records," 1950.
5 See Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois uses double consciousness to describe the experience of black Americans who see themselves through the lens of the dominant society, in which one feels a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (2). In this chapter, I extend Du Bois's analysis to the Palestinian Israeli's experience of similarly learning to see oneself in this two-fold way.

6 Habībī, *The Secret Life of Sa'īd*, 162; [207]. For citations in Habībī's novel quotes are given from the English translation first (Habībī, *The Secret Life of Sa'īd*), and from the Arabic original in brackets second (Habībī, *Waqā'i' al-gharībah*).
7 Ibid., 4; [14].
8 Ibid., 163; [208].
9 Brenner, *Inextricably Bonded*, 159.
10 Habībī was an editor at *Al-Ittihad,* the long-standing Arabic-language Communist newspaper in Israel, which the editors of *Al-Sinara* may have perceived as a rival.
11 Bilsky, "The Habibi Libel Trial," 617–18. On "double consciousness," see Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk.*
12 Scott, "The Miracle," 11.
13 Ibid., 18.
14 Ibid., 17.
15 Habībī, *The Secret Life of Sa'īd*, 134–5; [177].
16 Habībī was also from Haifa. His gravestone in Haifa reads "Imīl Habībī – Remained in Haifa."
17 Habībī, *The Secret Life of Sa'īd*, 106; [135].
18 Rose, "Chroniclers of Pain."
19 For an argument that makes a reading of Sa'īd as a trickster character, see Salaita, "Reimagining the Munificence." See also Jayyusi's introduction to the English translation of the book.
20 Edward Said compares Habībī with Aesop, al-Hariri, Kafka, Dumas, Rabelais, Joyce, and Walt Disney (Said, *Reflections*, 321.); Salma Khadra Jayyusi makes comparisons with Ibn al-Muqaffa', Al-Hamadhani, Al-Hariri, and Jaroslav Hašek (Habībī, *The Secret Life of Sa'īd*, x); and Ibrahim El-Hussari mentions the connection to Jonathan Swift (El-Hussari, "Foolery as a Means to Personal Safety").
21 Compare Abisaab, "Breaching the State's *da'wâ*," which gives precedence to influences from the maqāmāt and wider literary fusha traditions, and Sessona, "The Rewriting," which stresses the influence of the Arabian Nights and folk storytelling traditions.
22 See for example Hasson, "Frontier and Periphery," 146–66.
23 Freud, *The Joke,* 221–421–4. Broken humour is a variant of gallows humour.
24 Earlier in the novel, the stake features prominently in one of Sa'īd's nightmares.
25 Habībī, *The Secret Life of Sa'īd*, 77; [102].
26 Ibid., 159 (repeated from p. 39); [205, 54].
27 Ibid., 30–1; [44].
28 Ibid., 65; [82–3].

29 Ibid., 52; [67–8].
30 Ibid., 53; [69]. Later in the novel, after Sa'īd settles down with a family, he teaches discretion, above all else, to his son, Walā'. I return to the effect this has on his son further on.
31 Ibid., 38; [52–3].
32 See Abu El Haj, *Facts on the Ground.*
33 Habībī, *The Secret Life of Sa'īd*, 69; [90]. Compare Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 7, 579–81.
34 Habībī, *The Secret Life of Sa'īd*, 71; [93].
35 Ibid., 114; [146].
36 Ibid., 89; [114].
37 Ibid., 89; [114].
38 The interlocutor here being the same "my dear sir" of the quoted passage: the unnamed narrator to whom the letters that make up the novel are addressed.
39 Habībī, *The Secret Life of Sa'īd*, 89; [115].
40 See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish.*
41 Habībī, *The Secret Life of Sa'īd*, 52; [67–8].
42 Ibid., 89; [115].
43 Ibid., 97–8; [126].
44 Ibid., 110; [139–40].
45 Goux, *The Coiners of Language*, 159–60.
46 Ibid., 156.
47 Ibid., 163.
48 This is similar to Ellison's exploration of the trickster B.P. Rhinehart in *Invisible Man* in his essay "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke."
49 Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy.*
50 Habībī, *The Secret Life of Sa'īd*, 101; [130].
51 Levy, "Exchanging Words," 106–27.
52 In view of Bentham's blueprint for the panopticon, "visibility," Foucault observed, "is a trap" (Foucault, *Discipline*, 200).
53 Habībī, *The Secret Life of Sa'īd*, 98; [126].
54 Ibid., 100; [129].
55 Sessona, "The Rewriting," 40.
56 With a wink to the reader, Sa'īd calls this part of "my loyalty bit." (Habībī, *The Secret Life of Sa'īd*, 120; [155]).
57 Ibid., 122; [157].
58 Tausk, "The 'Influencing Machine,'" 198–9.
59 Ibid., 199.
60 Debord, *Comments,* 81.
61 See Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy.*
62 Abisaab, "Breaching the State's *Da'wâ*," 3.

63 Habībī, *The Secret Life of Sa'īd*, 62; [79]. cf. the allonyms in another Palestinian novel (by a Lebanese novelist), Khoury, *Bāb al-Shams*.
64 This is meant with all of the false logics of aggregation that these terms imply.

2. The Literary Space of Authority in Camara Laye's *Le Regard du roi*

1 King, *Rereading Camara Laye*, 51–2.
2 The boys are brothers, but it is unclear whether they are twins, or whether their resemblance is just an effect of Clarence's perspective, in which they are interchangeable.
3 Wainaina, "How to Write about Africa," 92.
4 See Baker, "Necropolitical Violence."
5 Irele, "In Search of Camara Laye" 123.
6 Conrad, *Heart of Darkness,* 4.
7 Wainaina, "How to Write about Africa," 93.
8 Achebe, "An Image of Africa," 788.
9 Ibid., 792.
10 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 22.
11 Ibid., 29.
12 Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, 271.
13 Ngũgĩ, *Moving the Centre*, 6.
14 Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind*, 76.
15 Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 36.
16 Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind*, 16–17.
17 Ngũgĩ, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, 81.
18 Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 71.
19 Ibid., 3.
20 Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, 268.
21 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 23.
22 Morrison, "Introduction," xx.
23 Laye, *Le Regard du roi*, 12.
24 Laye, *The Radiance of the King*, 8.
25 Laye, *Le Regard du roi*, 81; Laye, *The Radiance of the King*, 86.
26 Blades, "Bellow's Latest Chapter," 1994.
27 Irele, "In Search of Camara Laye," 122.
28 Soyinka, "From a Common Back Cloth," 387–8.
29 Laye, "Kafka et moi," 37; Lee, *Camara Laye*, 46.
30 Irele, "In Search of Camara Laye," 118.
31 King, *Rereading Camara Laye*, 36.
32 Ibid., 51–2.
33 Harrow, "Review," 172.

34 King, *Rereading Camara Laye*, 57.
35 Harrow, "Review," 174.
36 Qtd. in King, *Rereading Camara Laye*, 31.
37 Ibid., 41.
38 Irele, "In Search of Camara Laye," 123.

3. Imperial Palimpset or Exquisite Corpse: Yambo Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de violence*

1 Reproduced from *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation* by Jacques Derrida, translated by Peggy Kamuf, edited by Christie McDonald and Claude Levesque, copyright 1985 by Schocken Books Inc., p. 53
2 Binyavanga Wainaina brilliantly satirized Africanists' conventions of writing in his "How to Write About Africa," 92–95.
3 The disdainful phrase, "show me the Zulu Tolstoy," is recorded in Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 25.
4 This can be seen, for example, in the condescending title of Charles Larson's *The Emergence of African Fiction.*
5 See also Kate Highman's discussion of the allegations of plagiarism in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (Highman, "(Dis)Avowals of Tradition").
6 Devlin, "Echoes of Graham Greene Halt Prizewinning Book," 1.
7 At the time Ouologuem was writing, publishing houses were owned and operated by French publishers and African works received very limited circulation in Mali, as schools and textbooks were all in French and were sent from France.
8 Aiming this barb at a hero of *négritude* was an implicit attack on what Ouologuem saw as the movement's liberal self-exoticism and suggests a turn towards a critique of solidarity that fraternizes with adventurers and exophiles seeking the authentic African object or experience. See also Ouologuem's *Les mille et une bibles du sexe.*
9 See, for example, Huggan, *The Post-Colonial Exotic,* 44–5.
10 Ouologuem, *Le Devoir de violence,* 189; Ouologuem, *The Duty of Violence,* 191.
11 This offensive term has been translated variously as "nigger trash" and "black rabble." It may have been borrowed from Aimé Césaire's coinage in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. See Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, 31.
12 Ouologuem, *Le Devoir*, 125.
13 Wise, *Yambo Ouologuem Reader*, 127.
14 Mbembe, *On the Postcolony,* 201–2.

15 Ibid., 104.
16 If it is not already clear, there is a parallel here with Ouologuem's technique of ghostwriting, which ultimately insists upon the figure of the *négre* as a true, uncredited writer (of the prospective detective stories). The inclusion of the *négraille* in his fictional history of a West African empire, then, also insists on writing history against the grain by pulling back the veil that allows the credit for their labour to go to the rulers (the Saifs), or in the context of colonialism, to European colonizers.
17 Ouologuem, *Le Devoir*, 125.
18 Wise, *Yambo Ouologuem Reader*, 127.
19 Appiah, *In My Father's House*, 246.
20 Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 135.
21 Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 256.
22 Nwoga, "Plagiarism and Authentic Creativity in West Africa," 38.
23 Irele, "In Search of Camara Laye," 122.
24 An example of this may be found in renditions of the Epic of Sundiata.
25 Yet as Maryse Condé emphasizes in *La Civilisation du Bossale*, African folk traditions, in the form of riddles, proverbs, and tales were the forms of African diaspora literature that survived the slave trade in the Caribbean, along with certain ritual forms, rather than heroic epics such as the Sundiata.
26 Irele, "In Search of Camara Laye," 122–3.
27 Foucault, "What Is an Author?," 222. See also Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 49–55.
28 Kilito, *The Author and His Doubles*, 63.
29 There has been speculation over whether some of this enthusiasm for the novel was related to its focus on violence perpetrated by Africans against other Africans (see Wise, *Yambo Ouologuem*).
30 Galey, "Un grande roman africain."
31 Ouologuem, *Bound to Violence*. The statuette on the cover is a Dahomey figurine, titled "God of War."
32 Ouologuem, *Le Devoir de violence*, 22. This term echoes Michel Leiris's *L'Afrique Fantôme*.
33 Kilito, *The Author and His Doubles*, 50.
34 Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, 5.
35 Ibid., 7.
36 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 122. Italics in the original.
37 This is how Kathyrn Hume summarizes her position in Hume, "The Voice of Kathy Acker," 485.
38 Levin, *Africanism and Authenticity*, 129.
39 See, for example, Andy Stepp and Claire Seota's position with respect to the Ant Songs in chapter 5.

40 Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 68.
41 Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 161.
42 Spivak, "Ghostwriting," 70.
43 Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism*, 165.
44 Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, xx.
45 Freedgood, "Ghostly Reference."
46 Johnson, *Caribbean Ghostwriting*, 132.
47 Like the unburied, unmourned victims of the slave trade whose remains were swallowed up within the Atlantic Ocean that Édouard Glissant conjures in "The Open Boat."
48 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 37.
49 Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, 175.
50 Freud, "A Note upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad,'" 211–16.
51 This work might be said to have exerted its own ghostly influence over its author, who describes it as an alien creation (Freud, *Moses and Monotheism,* 133) that "haunted [him] like an unlaid ghost..." (131–2).
52 Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 52. "Entstellung" refers to distortion, defacement, deformation.
53 As Freud writes: "What has been deleted or altered in the written version might quite well have been preserved uninjured in the tradition. Tradition was the complement and at the same time the contradiction of the written history. It was less subject to distorting influences – perhaps in part entirely free from them – and therefore might be more truthful than the account set down in writing. Its trustworthiness, however, was impaired by being vaguer and more fluid than the written text, being exposed to many changes and distortions as it was passed on from one generation to the next by word of mouth. Such a tradition may have different outcomes. The most likely event would be for it to be vanquished by the written version, ousted by it, until it grows more and more shadowy and at last is forgotten. Another fate might be that the tradition itself ends by becoming a written version" (ibid., 86).
54 Wise, *Yambo Ouologuem Reader*, 5.
55 These are passages Eric Sellin holds up as incriminating evidence in two of his articles on Ouologuem in the 1970s (see Sellin, "Ouologuem's Blueprint" and "The Unknown Voice").
56 Author's translation.
57 Yet if the genealogy is the consistent principle, Lévy's analogue could also be the Saif al-Heit.
58 Chaulet-Achour, "Writing as Exploratory Surgery," 102–3.
59 Wolitz, "L'Art du plagiat," 132.
60 Wise, "Preface," viii.

61 See Whiteman, “In Defense of Yambo Ouologuem” and Ouologuem’s “Interview with Linda Kuehl,” 311–14.
62 Ouologuem, *Lettre à la France nègre*, 168.
63 Ibid., 177.
64 Ouologuem, “A Black Ghostwriter’s Letter to France,” 304.
65 Ouologuem, *Lettre à la France nègre*, 176.
66 Ouologuem, “A Black Ghostwriter’s Letter to France,” 304.
67 Miller, *Blank Darkness*, 225.
68 Ibid., 228.
69 Specifically addressing France and satirically deploying the French language, Ouologuem’s *Lettre* marks language with the trauma of history. Yet, of course, the shameful history of slavery is by no means confined to French imperialism.
70 Wise, “Preface,” xv.
71 Lang, “Text, Identity, and Difference,” 397.
72 See Hale, *Scribe, Griot, and Novelist*.
73 Eliot, “Philip Massinger.”
74 Ouologuem, *Le Devoir*, 199.
75 Wise, *Yambo Ouologuem Reader*, 199.
76 Ouologuem, *Le Devoir*, 207.
77 Wise, *Yambo Ouologuem Reader*, 208.

4. Disorientation and Horror in Sadeq Hedayat’s *The Blind Owl*

1 Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, 139–40.
2 Ibid., 19.
3 Now also Chinese and Japanese ones as well: see Beard, “Influence as Debt.”
4 The two narrators are often understood by critics as the same character, but there are significant differences between them. For example, Katouzian reads the second narrator as a previous incarnation of the first (Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*, 114).
5 For the sake of clarity, I use the term “recluse,” or the qualifier “reclusive” throughout this chapter to distinguish this character of a writer from Hedayat himself. When the term “writer” is used without this qualifier, I am either referring to Hedayat himself or other writers, or else exploiting an ambiguous or suggestive connection between the author and the recluse.
6 See Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, tr. Noori.
7 Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, 146.
8 Mohaghegh, *Silence*, 75–6.
9 A heavily censored edition appeared in 1993.
10 Hedayat, “Sadeq Hedayat’s Centenary,” 19.

11 Iran was never colonized in the way the other regions discussed in this book were (e.g., Palestine, Guinea, Mali, and the United States). Rather, foreign powers found it sufficient to create spheres of influence within Iran through which they could exert influence and control. At other times, as in 1953, foreign powers worked to install regimes that would be loyal to them. Hence, the decolonial implications relate to how the literary space of the novel challenges the logics of racial supremacy and nationalist expansion that were inherent in imperialism.
12 Quoted in Mohandessi, "Hedayat and Rilke," 211.
13 Jahanbegloo, "Hedayat and the Experience of Modernity," 137.
14 Beard, *Hedayat's Blind Owl as a Western Novel*, ix.
15 Andrianova, "A *Nilufar* by Any Other Name," 215.
16 Rahimieh, "Review of *The Blind Owl,*" 107.
17 Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat.*
18 Mohaghegh, *Silence,* 73.
19 Hedayat, *The Blind Owl,* 18.
20 Existing in the opaque dimension of shadows, if this otherworldly creature is blind, the fate of the writing is not to be read.
21 Lashgari, "Absurdity and Creation," 48.
22 Ghanoonparvar, "*Buf-e Kur* as a Title," 69.
23 A flower that has been translated variously as "morning glory" (Costello), "lotus" (Johnson), "lily" (Bashiri), "water lily" (Rahimieh), "*capucine*," (Lescot), "nasturtium" (Andrianova).
24 The scene is one familiar to Iranian readers. According to Beard, "in the Persian miniature tradition an old man with a young woman is traditionally a picture of the legendary Shaykh San'an, the Sufi leader who falls in love with a Christian girl in the parable from Farid al-Din 'Attar's *Mantiq al-Tayr* (The conference of the birds)" (Beard, *Hedayat's Blind Owl as a Western Novel*, 232). Ghanoonparvar has even called it a (successful use of a) cliché of the Persian miniature tradition (Ghanoonparvar, "*Buf-e Kur* as a Title," 38).
25 Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, 22.
26 Fischer, *Mute Dreams, Blind Owls, and Dispersed Knowledges*, 185. Among Hedayat's interests was the study of folk wisdom and superstitions. As Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi explains: "Hedayat viewed the recovery of indigenous ancient culture as a scenario for the rejuvenation of Aryan Iran. This in part explains his interest in folklore and the origin of popular beliefs, customs, and superstitions" (Tavakoli-Targhi, "Narrative Identity," 115). Hedayat's aversion to what he saw as petty superstitions notwithstanding, the role of superstitious thinking has an important role to play in *The Blind Owl*, especially in the narrator's thinking (see further Andrianova, "A *Nilufar* by Any Other Name," 222–3).

27 Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, 143.
28 Simidchieva, “Sadeq Hedayat and the Classics,” 24.
29 See Phillips, “The Influence of Suggestion on Suicide.”
30 Abedi and Fischer, *Debating Muslims*, 252–3.
31 Khakpour, “Introduction,” 2.
32 Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, 17–8.
33 Ibid., 2.
34 Rank, *The Double*, 10.
35 Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, 144.
36 Nafisi, “The Quest for the ‘Real’ Woman,” 989.
37 Ibid.
38 Freud, “A Special Type of Object Choice,” 44. In Freud’s essay, the complex is defined more simply by the archetypes “mother” and “harlot” (rather than “Madonna” and “whore”).
39 The wine, which is an important symbol in the novel, bears several intimations. It is an ancient Iranian symbol in classical poetry and art. In this context, it may symbolize love, ecstasy, or unification with the divine. Yet in *The Blind Owl*, the wine, a gift from the absent mother, is poisoned. It offers its imbiber death and oblivion.
40 Nafisi, “The Quest for the ‘Real’ Woman,” 990.
41 Ibid., 991.
42 Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, 95.
43 Ibid., 89.
44 Ibid., 104–5.
45 Ibid., 129.
46 Daragahi, “The Shaping of Modern Persian Short Story,” 111.
47 Fischer, *Mute Dreams, Blind Owls, and Dispersed Knowledges*, 195.
48 Ibid.,10.
49 Beard, *Hedayat’s Blind Owl*, 22.
50 Rahimieh, “A Systemic Approach to Modern Persian Prose Fiction,” 16.
51 Beard, “Influence as Debt,” 68.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Beard, *Hedayat’s Blind Owl*, xi.
55 Strangely, Iraj Bashiri criticizes Hedayat’s book for lacking originality, arguing that “the running narrative of the book does not have any claim to entertainment, neither has the author made any attempt at creation of life-like characters, a substantial plot or an original story” (Bashiri, “Is the Blind Owl a Novel?,” 142). Bashiri does, however, offer the interesting comparison of Hedayat’s novel to a song (139). Similarly, Mohaghegh has argued, “its true genre is less that of the novel than one of incantation and trance-writing” (Mohaghegh, *Silence in Middle Eastern and Western Thought*, 72).

56 The issue of literary influence comes up again and again in the following chapters, as the discovery and location of influences plays a major role in the histories of reception of the works I examine in them. Note that Hedayat is not accused of plagiarism or forgery, as we saw in the case of two authors whose work I examine in chapters 2 and 3.
57 See Beard, "Influence as Debt"; Johnson, "The Blind Owl, Nerval, Kafka, Poe and the Surrealists"; Mohandessi, "Hedayat and Rilke"; Zarei, "Axes of Evil Live Evermore."
58 Lescot, 9. Qtd. in Andrianova, "A *Nilufar* by Any Other Name," 222.
59 Andrianova, "A *Nilufar* by Any Other Name," 222.
60 Ibid., 232.
61 Ibid., 218–19.
62 Beard, *Hedayat's Blind Owl*, 224.
63 Coulter, "A Comparative Post-Colonial Approach," 5.
64 Ibid., 6.
65 See Bogle, "The Khayyāmic Influence in *The Blind Owl*."
66 See, for example, Mahmoodi, "The Construction of Self."
67 Arguments such as Mahmoodi's implicitly dismiss Hedayat's "Western" influences as "colonialists" or "orientalists," rather than attending to their complex relation to the topographical imagination that was popular in their own time and place of writing. It may be useful to recall, for example, Franz Kafka's own vexed relation to the crumbling Austro-Hungarian empire and the German language in which he wrote to point out the problem of such assumptions. Moreover, while Hedayat's intellectual and artistic formation was indeed influenced by Kafka, Sartre, and others, it also has significant non-Western influences.
68 For example, Hedayat sees his own contempt for Islam reflected more in Omar Khayyam, a fellow Persian, than in any of the European authors he read (see Rahimieh, "Hedayat's Translations of Kafka"). Hedayat's reading of Khayyam is provocative but unorthodox, emphasizing the fact that it is an interested interpretation.
69 See Mahmoodi, "The Construction of Self." Mahmoodi's argument is also flawed because it conflates the rabble despised by the narrator with the separate concept of "the natives." In other words, he projects onto Hedayat's narrator a settler-colonial status that is nowhere evidenced in the novel.
70 In contrast, Marta Simidchieva sees Hedayat as an inheritor and reformer of Persian poetics. She suggests that the 1979 Revolution in Iran has played a significant role in shifting the terms of the debates around Hedayat, with the dominant perspective seeing the book as an example of the decadence of Western influence (Simidchieva, "Sadeq Hedayat and the Classics," 22). In other words, politics play an important role in framing and reframing literary aesthetics.

71 Rahimieh, "Hedayat's Translations of Kafka," 126.
72 The term has also been translated variously as "Occidentosis," "Westoxification," "West-struckness," "Plagued by the West," and "Euromania."
73 Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 27.
74 Ibid., 97.
75 Al-e Ahmad, "The Hedāyat of The Blind Owl," 35, 36.
76 Ibid., 41.
77 Tavakoli-Targhi, "Narrative Identity," 108–9.
78 Ibid., 113.
79 Ibid., 107.
80 Ibid., 115. As Tavakoli-Targhi argues, the nationalist memory project helped legitimize Reza Shah's reign, creating a shared German and Iranian Aryan memory, with devastating effects for Jewish communities in Iran (ibid., 118).
81 Yavari, "Present in the Past," 44–5.
82 Ibid., 45.
83 Yavari, "Present in the Past," 46.
84 Ibid., 54.
85 Fischer, *Mute Dreams, Blind Owls, and Dispersed Knowledges*, 183.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid. Fischer is searching for an implicit meaning of Hedayat's fiction that does not reduce his stories to the cultural chauvinism of the author. This requires Fischer to interpret the narrators of the novel as model failures of a certain kind, offering us examples of how Iranian culture has already or may always go astray. This interpretive line is clear when he writes that the owl's cry "seems to be: wake up, disentangle this nightmarish condition, establish a coherent relation with one's childhood and cultural origins of self, so that one can deal in a healthy manner with others (of the opposite sex, of other-world cultures)" (183).
88 Qtd. in Jahanbegloo, "Hedayat and the Experience of Modernity," 140.
89 Qtd. in Rahimieh, "Hedayat's Translations of Kafka," 264.
90 Ibid., 264.
91 Ibid., 266.

5. Orality and the Space of Translation in the Pima Ant Songs

1 For an exposition of the cultural criticism on settler colonialism, see Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present*.
2 Risking ethically complicated entanglements need not be read exclusively as an appropriation, but could also be seen as a way of challenging the historical limits of literary study.
3 Darling, "O'odham Trails and the Archaeology of Space," 4.

4 These sites include Dead Field Mountain, Greasy Mountain, Iron Mountain, Woman Bringer Mountain, Broad Mountain, and Long Mountain.
5 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 200, 281.
6 Munro et al., *Shap Kaij!*.
7 Some linguists will lump Akimel O'odham together with the Tohono O'odham, referring to the language group simply as O'odham.
8 Bahr's interpretation forecloses on the possibility that this character is female. My reading of the songs challenges this assertion and reopens the question of the gender of the main character.
9 Brooks, *The Common Pot*, xxxiii.
10 For a reading of the way space is organized and perceived in another set of social dance songs translated by Bahr (the Oriole Songs), see Darling, "O'odham Trails and the Archaeology of Space".
11 Bringhurst et al., *The Raven Steals the Light*, 15.
12 Darling, "O'odham Trails and the Archaeology of Space," 4–5.
13 Bringhurst, *Everywhere Being Is Dancing*, 11.
14 See, for example, works by Leslie Marmon Silko, N. Scott Momaday, and Louise Erdrich.
15 Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 156.
16 Ngũgĩ, *Globalectics*, 63.
17 Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*.
18 See Ngũgĩ, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, 105–28.
19 See Schwab, *Imaginary Ethnographies.*
20 See, for example, Acoose, "*Honoring* Ni'Wahkomakanak."
21 Qtd. in McCall, *First Person Plural*, 6.
22 Ibid., 8.
23 Ibid., 8.
24 Benedict writes that "Intoxication is the visible mirroring of religion, it is the symbol of its [Dionysian religion's] exaltation, the pattern of its mingling of clouded vision and insight. [Pima] Theory and practice are explicitly Dionysian" (Benedict, qtd. in Bahr, *O'odham Creation and Related Events*).
25 Lloyd, *Aw-aw-tam Indian Nights*, 8–9.
26 Contradictions in attitudes towards Native Americans are regularly connected to how cultural knowledge is disclosed: the audience to whom such knowledge is addressed is not always clearly stated, but implicitly suggested and framed by "cultural translation." In the American context, these contradictions have been articulated and explored through examining ideologies of the "noble savage" or the "Vanishing American" (See Deloria, *Playing Indian*).
27 See ibid.

28 See, for example, "A Writing Lesson," in which Lévi-Strauss purports to bring the gift of writing to the Namikwara in the Amazon.
29 Bahr, *Ants and Orioles*, 174.
30 In using this term, I am in agreement with Bahr's approach to myth. He sees as mythological those stories that are retained and believed and that are immune from proof or disproof (Bahr, *Ants and Orioles*, 26).
31 Bahr, *O'odham Creation and Related Events*, 68.
32 Ibid.
33 Teuton, "Applying Oral Concepts to Written Traditions," 195.
34 Teuton, *Deep Waters*, xx.
35 Bahr, *Ants and Orioles*, 6.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 66.
38 Bringhurst, *A Story Sharp as a Knife*, 15.
39 Ibid., 41. According to E.N. Anderson, Bahr's style in representing the chant-like rhythm of the syllables is a translation style used in the work of Dennis and Barbara Tedlock, Jerome Rothenberg, and others (Anderson, "Native American Cultural Representations of Flora and Fauna," 378).
40 I have chosen to include the Lizard song because (a) it is short, (b) it clearly represents the shish kabob structure employed by Bahr to show rhythm and cadence, (c) Lopez offers an English translation in song form, and (d) it has very short lines, lending itself readily to juxtaposition.
41 Bahr, *Ants and Orioles*, 191.
42 Ibid., 192; my emphasis.
43 Ibid., 144–5.
44 Ibid., 67.
45 Ibid., 33–4.
46 Ibid., 68.
47 Ibid., 93.
48 Bringhurst and Reid, *The Raven Steals the Light*, 10.
49 Bahr, *Ants and Orioles*, 70.
50 Bahr, *O'odham Creation and Related Events*, 62, 67, 169.
51 Ibid., 5. In this study there is not space to fully go into what motivates Bahr's statement about the dearth of myths about ants. However, we can suggest tentatively here that the fact that he seems to ignore the presence of ants in Akimel O'odham orature, only acknowledging it later, demonstrates that the attention of the translator can become diverted by their own ideas, such as what constitutes an ant or an Ant-person.
52 For research on Ant-people in Apache stories, see Opler, *Myths and Tales of the Chiricahua Apache Indians*, 68. For the Hopi: Lynch and Roberts, *Native American Mythology A-Z*, 48–9. For the Navajo: Rogers, *Debugging the Link*

between Social Theory and Social Insects, 55. One source suggests that the Ant-people can be seen much farther afield in eastern Canada, but this seems highly speculative and based on little more than the visual resemblance of a petroglyph to an Ant-person (see Olsen, *Sacred Places, North America*, 306).

53 In an essay on comparative mythologies, Bahr shows how mythologies of neighbouring tribal communities have influenced each other. He holds that in at least some of these instances, the mythology of one group is the parody of another (see Bahr, "Mythologies Compared," 1998).

54 Bahr, *Ants and Orioles*, 32–3.

55 See Thomas Vanyiko's telling of the events of the flood (Bahr, *O'odham Creation and Related Events*, 11).

56 Bahr, *Ants and Orioles*, 88; 93.

57 Ibid., 103.

58 Ibid., 37.

59 Ibid., 82.

60 Ibid., 88.

61 Ibid., 174.

62 Mathiot, Dictionary of Papago Usage.

63 Saxton, *Dictionary*, 59.

64 Bahr translates "*no**d**agig*" as dizziness, classifying a number of songs as being about dizziness. See Bahr, *Ants and Orioles*, 34–5, 80–103.

65 While there are indications that all of the painful, vile, and nasty experiences create the possibility of continuing growth and movement, the primary focus of the song seems to be the very painful experiences of the singer.

66 For example, Stepp and Seota's Ant Songs can be compared with the rendition of "The 'Cowboy' Ant," a far more recent recording that reflects a history of interaction with white settlers (Haefer, "The 'Cowboy' Ant").

67 Benjamin, "Theses," 256.

68 Bonta, "Five Songs from a Circle Dance."

Afterword: Decolonizing Literary Space

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2 Of course, the idea of the Global South is not necessarily meant to designate the area south of a particular latitudinal cut-off point. Rather, it is a designation that calls attention to the relative concentrations of wealth in the northern hemisphere and uneven economic relations, while also serving as a call to solidarity in the experiences of formerly colonized

peoples. Yet this term, much like earlier discourses on the "Third World" for which "The Global South" was a corrective, also needs to be critically considered in view of the cartographic imaginary it evokes.

3 See, for example, the works of Shameem Black or Adam Kirsch.
4 Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, 11.
5 Spivak: *An Aesthetic Education*, 338.
6 Engberg-Pedersen, *Literature and Cartography*, 3.
7 Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*.

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Cultural Spaces

Cultural Spaces explores the rapidly changing temporal, spatial, and theoretical boundaries of contemporary cultural studies. Culture has long been understood as the force that defines and delimits societies in fixed spaces. The recent intensification of globalizing processes, however, has meant that it is no longer possible – if it ever was – to imagine the world as a collection of autonomous, monadic spaces, whether these are imagined as localities, nations, regions within nations, or cultures demarcated by region or nation. One of the major challenges of studying contemporary culture is to understand the new relationships of culture to space that are produced today. The aim of this series is to publish bold new analyses and theories of the spaces of culture, as well as investigations of the historical construction of those cultural spaces that have influenced the shape of the contemporary world.

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